

The problems and outcomes of the industrial land redevelopment in Visegrad countries

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Abstract

The aim of the paper is to address the problems of Brownfield redevelopment Visegrad countries (Poland, Slovakia, Czech Republic, and Hungary) and to show the progress in the solutions of these problems in the recent years.

The problem of brownfield redevelopment has a different scale and nature in Slovakia as well as in other Visegrad countries in comparison with West European countries. In the later countries, the brownfields are less frequent and they are less encumbered by bureaucracy and risks. The real estate markets are better developed and they are able to recycle sites whose prior use has become obsolete more easily [1] especially in very good locations.

The majority of cities in Visegrad countries have many underused industrial land countries due to their historical development and changes that followed during the transition to a market economy.

During the socialist times the absence of land and real estate markets had influenced negatively the structure of socialist cities [2]. Densities and land allocation between different uses – mainly industrial and residential use – were not reflecting demand from consumers but were mostly based on administrative decisions aiming at minimizing input rather than maximizing values [3]. The industrial zones and parks occupied more space than the analogic zones in West European countries. Moreover the central planning systems made the companies' relocation the difficult process, and so the socialist enterprises often occupied the very good urban locations suitable for more proper development [6].

The economic opening of the Central and Eastern European countries exposed these countries to the global competition. Often the local industry was not able to retain its position in the national markets and the factories were closed. The privatization did not enable to stop this process. Some of the privatizers were motivated by asset stripping, and not by continuing the business operations. The foreign investors were not usually interested to buy old factories, but preferred to build on the greenfields.

The local and national governments actively cooperated with the investors in removing the barriers for the Greenfield development, because the new jobs were very much needed for economic development and political stability. Thus the number of brownfields grew substantially in the middle of 1990-ties.

During the transition period, the real estate markets emerged. The developers have found that the redevelopment of the well positioned brownfields could be quite profitable business. Thus some of the derelict areas were redeveloped based on the market initiatives. Often the redevelopment was quite patchy; some new buildings co-exist with older deteriorated properties, while the parks or other facilities are missing. The free real estate market does not, however, motivate to redevelop the brownfields, which are seriously contaminated, not very well located, and where the industrial cultural heritage should be preserved (see e.g. [7]).

Today's a very important issue remains how to deal with the complex process of brownfield regeneration. It is necessary to define a new planning strategies, processes and legal statutes for redevelopment of sites which are different from those used in the past. Many developers are focusing to physical and financial obstacles and overlooking the fact that brownfield sites have unique location and huge potential which can be obtained from their redevelopment.

The most noticeable problems of abandoned industrial sites in Central Europe is that, until recently, there was the lack of available data describing the extent and nature of brownfields. Such information is essential for the development of indicators on the development of brownfields, for example their changes in time, scope, location and type. The situation is changing now and the Visegrad countries are now filling the brownfield databases (including the data describing their contamination) in their countries. Also the Brownfield development strategies are being developed which aim to reduce the number of Brownfield sites and agricultural land for building on Greenfield, prioritize the process of Brownfield regeneration, improve the environment by removal of old ecological burdens, stabilize the necessary resources to create a financial framework for the Brownfield redevelopment, establish the functional communication platform to ensure the regeneration of Brownfield, use the Brownfield regeneration as one of the instruments for the gradual reduction of regional disparities, to use foreign direct investment inflows for regeneration of Brownfield, design the measures to prevent emergence of new Brownfields, promote the redevelopment of Brownfields through maximum support and cooperation of private business or public administration using the European Regional Development Fund, Regional Operational Programmes and other economic, environmental or urban programmes and subsidies, build a sufficiently large informational base for potential developers in V4 countries, - preserve industrial heritage of former industrial sites and raise awareness of the need to carefully manage industrial heritage assets to stimulate indirect economic benefit, develop specific policy guidelines for preservation and re-use of industrial heritage potentials in Brownfield regeneration (see also [4] and [5]).

The new initiatives are relatively recent and they are developing. Moreover the economic crisis has decelerated the brownfield regeneration, and so it is not easy to evaluate their efficiency.

The responsibility for the Brownfield issues in Visegrad countries should be clearly defined at the national level, and certain responsibilities should be delegated to the regional level. There must be clearly defined units at ministries with appropriate communication and accountability.

The large extent of the brownfields in most major Central European cities is the important land reserve for the future. The supply of the brownfield land may be sufficient for the city developments maybe for several decades. By redeveloping such localities, the further urban sprawl and the development of the unsustainable transport mode could be prevented.

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