



REVITALISATION OF AREAS OF CONVERSION

The European landscape has changed significantly over the last fifty years. The ongoing restructuring of European business and the increasingly pervasive influence of globalisation has led to considerable changes in European industrial activities. In particular, significant impacts are seen in the downsizing of enterprises, in the loss of a number of historical industries and in closing several industries and mines in Europe. Growth in other service industries and transformations in the urban lifestyle have also led to significant changes in land use.

During this time of land use change, the creation of urban distressed areas and brownfields and poor land management practices have led to urban decay, deprivation and social conflicts. Tackling the roots of the problem that relate to unsustainable land management and in particular brownfields and other urban distressed areas is a challenge, and the importance of this task should not be underestimated. The economic, social and environmental burden of getting Europe's land use strategy wrong could be catastrophic.

Finding solutions for brownfield sites and other urban distressed areas is an increasingly important part of the search for effective policies that are aimed at ensuring a sustainable future for land and cities in particular. The brownfield agenda is therefore an essential component of the work taking forward the "Sustainable Urban Development in the European Union: A Framework for Action" and the 6th Environment Action programme of the European Community. The most significant brownfield and other urban distressed areas challenges are linked to firstly understanding the complexity of regeneration process and then applying this knowledge to find sustainable solutions for the sites that link to regional strategies, but also taking account of the wider dynamics of the overall area of conversion. In terms of characteristics, some of the most problematic brownfield sites and other urban distressed areas have poor infrastructure and have disadvantaged and possibly fragmented local communities. In terms of physical conditions, these types of sites include: harbours and ports, rural mining and landfill areas, railways, military sites, chemical works and increasingly, degraded housing estates. These areas may have one or more of the following demographic or socio-economic issues: an ageing population, poor health status within the population, low employment levels, few amenities and lower than average incomes.

Besides the effort to introduce the results of the European research projects in the field of revitalisation of conversion areas the economic, environmental and social dimensions of sustainable development have been in the background of research work, characterised as follows:

- **Economic dimension:** Mobilising human resources, using existing sites and infrastructure to modernise and improve the urban fabric. Generate economic growth in urban quarters and areas of conversion, increase public and private income
- **Environmental dimension:** Cleaning up, restoring previously used land. Placing brownfields and other urban distressed areas revitalisation at the forefront of regeneration strategies and using this programme as a driver for the clean-up of contaminated land. Reducing land consumption and urban sprawl by encouraging sustainable brownfield regeneration projects.
- **Social dimension:** Ensuring the long-term sustainability of brownfields redevelopment by including socio-cultural dimensions. Mobilising communities to ensure representative and equitable sustainable development which may reduce the potential for subsequent decline and recreation of brownfields, improving the quality of life in cities.

Taking into account the complexity of these urban and land use problems, brownfield regeneration and revitalisation of conversion areas should consistently be part of a coherent spatial and strategic land use management approach, particularly with respect to the wider issues of the above mentioned dimensions of sustainable development.

The results of the European projects INTERREG III B CADSES "Rehabilitation & Development in European Mining Regions", LUDA "Improving the Quality of Life in large Urban Distressed Areas" and CABERNET "Concerted Action on Brownfield and Economic Regeneration Network" and the results of the case studies in these projects are the examples of good practice in the field of revitalisation of brownfields and other areas of conversion.

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