Science for Environment Policy

Brownfield best practices drawn from German and UK projects

Two 'best practice' case studies of brownfield regeneration in Germany and the UK have been analysed by researchers. Liverpool's and Cologne's two flagship waterfront developments were chosen in order to provide insights for other redevelopment projects. The assessment demonstrates that, if correctly managed, brownfield sites can help stimulate economic development in poor areas.

Brownfield regeneration is a key policy objective to help cope with rising populations in urban areas in some parts of the EU. In 2005, 500,000 hectares of brownfield land were estimated to be available for development in Europe.

The researchers say that, despite substantial investment in brownfield regeneration in Europe, more holistic approaches and best practice guidelines are still needed. Interested in how brownfield regeneration could lead to economic growth and the creation of sustainable communities, they compared brownfield regeneration policy and practices in the UK and Germany, focussing on two case study waterfront sites of similar size and type: King's Waterfront in Liverpool and Rheinauhafen in Cologne.

To assess the sites, they surveyed local residents, collected information from stakeholders including city councils and developers, and conducted a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis for each site.

King's Waterfront is situated in one of the UK's most deprived areas. Previously a deserted car park, £390 million (ca. €560 million in 2005) of investment from EU and UK-based public and private sector partners has enabled redevelopment of the site into an office, retail, leisure and community space. The redeveloped site is expected to create 2,200 new jobs and millions in visitor spending per year. The central area and conference centre has good green credentials, including low carbon emissions and rain water harvesting. However, transport options are considered to be limited.

The Rheinauhafen site incorporates housing, offices, museums, leisure and retail units and a car park and was redeveloped at an estimated cost of €650 million, with funding largely provided by the EU's NORISC[1] project and private investors. Regeneration of the site is expected to create 2,500 new jobs and greatly boost the image of the area, which was once considered an eyesore. Some old buildings have been restored rather than replaced, which has helped make the development more sustainable whilst retaining some of the site's heritage. The site also incorporates a flood protection system. However, houses are not considered affordable.

The researchers' comparison finds that both sites are mixed use, attractive, sustainable and respectful of their heritage. They serve as catalysts for economic growth, but have limited housing types. Renewable energies have not been well implemented in either development and benefits for local neighbourhoods are limited.

Key differences between the sites include types of funding and the more innovative, recycled architecture at the Rheinauhafen site. Based on their study, the researchers say that brownfield regeneration practice is advancing the objective of 'urban renaissance', and King's Waterfront and Rheinauhafen provide examples of best practice, but that the uniqueness of each site means there is no single recipe for success.

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1.http://ec.europa.eu/research/environment/newsanddoc/article_1442_en.htm