

Science for Environment Policy

Landscape quality plays important role in brownfield regeneration

A new study from Belgium has gathered community views of brownfield regeneration. Results indicate that the often overlooked aspect of landscape quality, such as green spaces, visually-attractive areas and cultural heritage, is important in people's opinions of brownfield regeneration schemes.

There is growing interest in brownfield regeneration across Europe, but it tends to focus on economic factors, such as job opportunities and commercial uses, and not the ecological, historical and visual properties of these sites. When regeneration programmes do not integrate local community views about perceived quality of the [landscape](#), a lack of acceptance and thus negative public reactions are likely to result. For brownfield regeneration projects to be effective, they should explore community views and consider all the functions that regenerated sites can perform, in addition to mere economical functions.

The study adopted an approach from Landscape Preference Studies (LPS) to assess the public perception of landscape quality. This typically consists of surveys, questionnaires or interviews using photographs or computer visualisations to investigate public preferences.

Data on public perception of six regenerated sites in Belgium were collected from 460 respondents who lived locally to the sites. Three of the sites were economically-orientated, functioning as commercial projects and industrial parks, but remained underused. The other three sites were fully regenerated, but had a broad range of proposed land uses, including recreational, commercial and residential, as well as economical.

In part of the survey, respondents were asked to compare the three fully-regenerated sites with two German sites in the Ruhr area. One of these German sites (Duisburg) was 'conservationist', whereby development preserves old features of the site; in this case, disused blast furnaces were conserved and integrated into a large green space. The other German site was 'interventionist', with more focus on introducing modern features; on this site, modern buildings were mixed with some industrial remains.

Results indicate that community attitudes to brownfield regeneration projects are not automatically positive, especially for sites that have remained unused for a long period and are negatively perceived as 'empty' or 'inert', despite remediation.

Landscape quality, in terms of the site's attractiveness and presence of green space, was seen to play an active role in community appreciation of the sites, suggesting that these features deserve more attention when planning brownfield regeneration projects. In particular, introducing nature and vegetation is likely to lead to more positive views of regeneration.

There are interesting differences in views on conservationist and interventionist approaches to brownfield regeneration. It appears that industrial features have heritage value for some members of the population, such as young, skilled workers in the health/social or creative sector. However, retired residents reacted negatively to a post-industrial landscape. This indicates that the preferences of different populations need to be understood to help guide redevelopment. The researchers suggest that the LPS framework is helpful in understanding community expectations in order to inform brownfield regeneration projects that consider the many functions of sites.



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