Brownfield redevelopment in the EU

BRUSSELS, 5 APRIL 2019

Objective of the conference

With this conference, the European Commission aimed to promote brownfield redevelopment as a solution to limit urban sprawl, land take and soil sealing. During the day, inspiring policies, challenges and good practices for brownfield redevelopment were presented by European, regional and local stakeholders and the potential offered by EU funds was explored.

Policy can enable brownfield redevelopment

After the welcome address by Witold Stepien (European Committee of the Regions) and Humberto Delgado Rosa (DG Environment), Bernard Vanheusden (University Hasselt) presented the mechanisms behind brownfield redevelopment and the opportunities it provides for sustainable urban development. He pointed out the need for an adequate policy framework at all levels, for publicly accessible inventories and for the integration of soil protection into spatial planning. Svetlana Chovancova (DG Environment) continued by giving the state of play in the management of contaminated sites in the EU and the challenges ahead. Santiago Urquijo (DG Environment) and Sander Happaerts (DG Regional and Urban Policy) presented the priorities and the eligibility criteria of the LIFE programme and the Cohesion Policy, and the funding opportunities for the remediation and redevelopment of brownfields that are available through these channels.

The perspective of the industry and the public authorities

Johan De Fraye (NICOLE network) gave an inspiring talk on the drivers, barriers and risks that industrial stakeholders face when confronted with soil contamination. Multi-stakeholder engagement, clarity on the liabilities and considering brownfield redevelopment in the broader context of land stewardship are crucial to tackle the problem. Dietmar Müller-Grabherr (Common Forum on Contaminated Land) shared the views and experiences of the public authorities competent for soil contamination and remediation. He explained how the remediation paradigms have shifted during the last decades and evolved towards strategic land management and circular land use. Brownfield redevelopment often leads to uncertainty. It is crucial to reduce the risks as much as possible by providing sufficient data and information, by proactive planning and by guaranteeing legal certainty through 'learning' policy instruments. Communicating transparently and cross-sectoral cooperation contributes to the reconciliation of the different stakeholder interests.

From problem to opportunity

Policy guides practice. A conference on brownfield redevelopment would not be complete without best practices and success stories.

- Johan Ceenaeme (Public Waste Agency of Flanders, OVAM) presented the **Flemish approach** by showcasing the remediation of a former manufactured gas plant site in Ghent. This brownfield with complex and multiple contaminations, big legal and financial risks and the involvement of multiple stakeholders was successfully redeveloped into housing, green and public infrastructure through a tiered approach and a public-private partnership that included the city, the developer and the contractor.

- Maija Rusanen (Union of the Baltic Cities) presented the outcomes of the **Baltic Urban Lab**, a project funded by Interreg Central Baltic that developed and tested integrated planning and partnership models on contaminated sites in Estonia, Finland, Sweden and Latvia. She explained how brownfield redevelopment can benefit from Public-Private-People Partnership (4P) models, integrated planning, stakeholder involvement and transparent communication.

- Christine Lafeuille (Métropôle Européenne de Lille) explained how **Lille** aims to preserve agricultural areas and to limit urban sprawl by renewing urban areas and redeveloping brownfields. The regeneration of contaminated sites is part of a broader land strategy that uses tools to map and visualize brownfields, monitors available land reserves and respects the different functions of the soil.

- Heidi Uttenthal Bay (**Copenhagen capital region**) pointed out that it can be challenging to comply with all legal requirements, to deal with the tight schedules, to have a full picture of the contamination and to collaborate successfully with all stakeholders. Granting permits to build on contaminated sites allows efficient use of the available land and to fulfil the need for healthy and comfortable living. Brownfield redevelopment is only one instrument in a broader toolbox.

- Marta Rodrigues (Portuguese Directorate-General for Spatial Planning) shared her experience with a large brownfield site with oil refineries, harbor installations, illegal slums, landfills and scrap metal yards in **Lisbon** that was redeveloped to host the World Expo 1998. After the establishment of an urban development plan, difficult negotiations with stakeholders, and a complex remediation, the area was transformed into a multi-functional site, which supported urban growth without increasing soil sealing.

- Petr Koudela (Lower Vitkovice) explained how a heavy industry site in **Ostrava** (Czech Republic) was successfully redeveloped into an award winning, lively, multifunctional area that revived the whole region and provides space for recreation, creative industry, sports, education, science, culture, etc.

- Alessia Porcu (City of Venice) presented **GreenerSites**, a project with partners from Italy, Germany, Poland, Croatia and Slovenia that is funded by Interreg Central Europe. GreenerSites brings together several municipalities and regional agencies to improve the environmental management of brownfields and to create cleaner, healthier and livelier Functional Urban Areas. The project invested in the training of hundreds of public servants, in the testing of innovative tools, strategies and remediation methods, and in the establishment of strategic urban action plans.

Conclusions on barriers and solutions for brownfield redevelopment

BARRIERS FOR BROWNFIELD REDEVELOPMENT	SOLUTIONS TO OVERCOME THE BARRIERS
Financial barriers •High cost of soil investigation, remediation and brownfield redevelopment •Low demand and value of the land •Relatively long time span of a brownfield project •High uncertainty and financial risks compared to greenfield redevelopment	**Financial solutions** •Proactive planning including a feasibility study with assessment of different scenarios •Phased approach to spread the financial burden •Subsidies and tax reduction •Loans •Environmental insurance
Environmental and technical barriers •Unclear view of the contamination •Complexity of the geology and the contamination (e.g. multiple or emerging contaminants) •Absence of cost-effective and sustainable remediation techniques •Circular use of contaminated or clean soil •Presence of residual contamination	**Environmental and technical solutions** •Invest in high-quality environmental expertise •Sufficient soil investigations to develop a good conceptual site model •Investments in research and development •Consider temporary use of the site •Risk-based and sustainable remediation •Soil manager to coordinate the reuse of soil •Integration of the cultural heritage in the project
Legal and regulatory barriers •Unclear or complex (transfer of) liability •Inadequate, conflicting or changing legal frameworks •Compliance with polluter pays principle (e.g. orphan sites) •Unnecessary conservatism and precaution •Absence of cooperation or vision of public authorities	**Legal and regulatory solutions** •Definition of liability in contracts or legislation •Robust and coherent regulatory framework provides legal certainty •Integration of soil protection in land-use planning •Incentivising taxes •Development of a common, long-term and integrated vision •Land stewardship
Barriers in the interaction with stakeholders •Complex or changing ownership •Multiple and conflicting interests of the stakeholders •Negative image and perception of brownfields •Nuisance for neighbourhood during the redevelopment of the brownfield •Lack of knowledge and information	**Solutions for stakeholder involvement** •Public-private partnership (4P = PPP + people) •Stakeholder involvement and multi-disciplinary cooperation from the start •Transparent communication •Visualisation of current and future situation •Public brownfield inventories and data sharing •Training and capacity building •Guidelines and protocols •Decision support tools and design solutions