



Photo: Henri Saarinen

Redeveloping brownfields in the Central Baltic region

There is a high demand for redeveloping brownfield areas to make European cities grow in a more sustainable manner. As brownfield areas are often located within the urban structure, redeveloping them reduces the need to use green areas for new developments, and creates more compact cities. Remediating contaminated land in former industrial sites or harbour areas will also reduce environmental risks. This policy brief gives an overview of challenges for brownfield redevelopment in the Central Baltic region and is published as part of the Central Baltic INTERREG Baltic Urban Lab project.

There is an increasing interest in brownfield redevelopment in Europe, where many countries and cities are experiencing rapid urbanisation. It is predicted that by 2020, approximately 80 per cent of Europeans will be living in urban areas, which means that more land in and around urban areas will need to be de-

veloped for housing and other purposes. Utilising brownfield sites is a means of avoiding urban sprawl and ensuring access to green space, as it provides an alternative to urban development on greenfield sites and in rural areas.

The issues of land ownership and the technical and financial difficulties

of remediating contaminated land are some of the main challenges involved in brownfield redevelopment. The fact that brownfields are often situated in attractive urban areas close to a city centre and existing residential areas increases the range of actors with an interest in developing these areas. »

» Public-private partnerships, involving cooperation between municipalities, landowners and developers, are often considered to be particularly useful in brownfield regeneration projects. The fact that its financial resources are limited is primarily what encourages the

public sector to involve private actors in various arrangements. The European Union (EU) supports brownfield redevelopment, in particular through its European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), both through national ERDF programmes and the INTERREG and

URBACT programmes. For example, the Central Baltic INTERREG programme funds projects that “regenerate and decontaminate brownfield sites”. Moreover, the EU Roadmap to a Resource Efficient Europe states that by 2050, there should be no net land take.



The Inner Harbour area in Norrköping was originally a harbour with various industrial activities. Now, it is one of the pilot sites in the Baltic Urban Lab project, and the municipality of Norrköping is planning to redevelop it into an attractive area with housing, workplaces, public and private services, a marina, and new canals. Photo: Municipality of Norrköping



Riga City Council is initiating a process to redevelop an underused area around the Mūkusalas street in connection to the city center. Riga City Council's work in the Baltic Urban Lab project includes, among other things, organizing workshops to co-create ideas for the redevelopment. Photo: Riga City Council

Promoting brownfield redevelopment in the Central Baltic region

This section presents the main lessons learned on promoting brownfield development in the Central Baltic region, as well as the main challenges of brownfield redevelopment in the Central Baltic context. The review is based on the country reviews published in the Baltic Urban Lab Working Paper “Planning Systems and Legislation for Brownfield Development in the Central Baltic Countries”.

National policy approaches to brownfield redevelopment

The countries in the Central Baltic region address brownfield redevelopment primarily through environmental policy and through policies on urban development and planning. Findings from the country overview conducted in the Baltic Urban Lab project show that integrated national approaches combining environmental soil management with urban development are rare in the Central Baltic region. This may pose a challenge for brownfield redevelopment in the region, as there is a need

for more integrated or holistic approaches to promote cooperation between engineers responsible for the soil remediation issues and the urban designers.

According to earlier research¹, the lack of a coordinated national policy approach on brownfield redevelopment has been identified as a challenge, especially in Estonia and Finland. In these countries, the lack of a national policy approach has also been linked to the lack of knowledge of the scope and nature of brownfield areas, as the lack of knowledge may hinder the development of policies to address brownfield issues.

In Sweden, the country's national authorities have actively published various brownfield redevelopment guidelines for local authorities and conducted brownfield inventories. The national authority responsible for urban development issues (the National Board of Housing, Building and Planning) and the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency cooperate across their sectoral areas to support municipali-

ties working with brownfield issues in a more integrated manner. In 2015, Finland also published a national risk management strategy for contaminated land that mentions the need to ensure that the environmental risk management and land use planning support each other; this may be a step towards a more integrated approach to brownfield redevelopment.

Financial support to brownfield development

Financing, especially for the remediation of contaminated land, is another key issue because remediation costs are high. There are no major funding programmes in the Central Baltic region targeting integrated brownfield redevelopment, but there are different funds available for both environmental and urban development purposes that are used in brownfield development projects.

In Finland, for example, municipalities can receive funding for the remediation of land from two state programmes,

as well as funding for the redevelopment of brownfield areas from various state programmes that focus on issues such as smart city development. In Sweden, the county administrative boards can apply for funding for the remediation of contaminated land from the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency. In 2016, the Swedish Government also established a fund to which municipalities can apply for the remediation of contaminated land when the purpose of this is to build housing. This approach can be seen as a way of utilising brownfield redevelopment as a way to simultaneously address two policy goals that are high on the agenda in Sweden, i.e. the lack of housing and the national environmental objective of a “non-toxic environment”.

Especially in Estonia and Latvia, the ERDF has been essential in enabling brownfield remediation and redevelopment. In these countries, there is a lack of financial support for the remediation of land and brownfield redevelopment. In Latvia, there is a lack of public funding at all levels of government, and brownfield redevelopment projects are highly dependent on European funds or private contributions from landowners and developers. Estonia has some existing funding programmes, but this funding is limited. Another challenge in Estonia is that it is not clear whether municipalities or private landowners are responsible for funding the remediation of land, which can prevent redevelopment processes from happening.

Roles and responsibilities

The country overviews prepared in the Baltic Urban Lab project show that especially in Estonia and Latvia, unclear roles and responsibilities between actors are a challenge for brownfield redevelopment. In Estonia, it is for example unclear whether the public authorities or the private landowners should be the bodies with principal responsibility for brownfields. In some cases, the municipal authority considers the redevelopment of brownfield sites to be the responsibility of the landowners; however, landowners are unlikely to redevelop a site if this is not economically beneficial. This leads to potential conflicts between private landowners and the municipality².

In Finland, in turn, cooperation between public actors and landowners in urban planning is included in the Land Use and Planning Act, which describes methods for cooperation between the municipal planning authority and landowners early in the planning processes. In Sweden, national authorities appear to have focused on promoting collaboration between local actors working under the Planning and Building Act and those working under the Environmental Code. This is done to make planning processes more efficient, and also to avoid expensive surprises in the planning process if the need for the remediation of contaminated land is noticed at a late stage. There are also guidelines that help to identify who is economically

responsible for remediation, or how responsibilities should be clarified in unclear cases.

Land ownership structures can have a great influence on the implementation of brownfield redevelopment projects as they impact how responsibilities between actors are divided and who can initiate and steer development processes. There is a major difference between the former Soviet countries of Estonia and Latvia and the Nordic countries of Finland and Sweden when it comes to land ownership as a factor influencing urban development. In both Estonia and Latvia, large-scale land reforms took place in the early 1990s, with most of the land being privatised. Finland and Sweden, with their tradition of strong municipalities with a high level of autonomy, have high proportions of land under municipal ownership, and in these countries, land acquisition has been a central urban development tool for many growing municipalities. The land ownership situation and municipal autonomy in the Nordic countries enable municipalities to steer land use policy and planning more easily, and consequently, also brownfield redevelopment. In comparison, in Estonia and Latvia land ownership is often fragmented, the share of private land ownership is high, and urban development is more driven by private developers.

The City of Turku has decided to redevelop the Itäharju-Kupittaa area into a new campus and science park. The area is located just outside the city centre and next to several universities and an existing science park. In the Baltic Urban Lab project, the City of Turku tests new methods for early involvement of different actors in the redevelopment project. Photo: Suomen ilmakuva Oy



Policy considerations

Estonia

- Brownfields are mainly privately owned, which means that close collaboration is particularly important between public authorities, private landowners and developers
- There is a need to clarify the responsibilities of municipalities and private landowners
- More knowledge about the extent of existing brownfields is needed³

Latvia

- Complex and fragmented ownership structures of former industrial territories is a challenge
- Clearer legislation concerning cooperation between public and private actors is required
- Brownfield redevelopment is currently dependent on EU funding and contributions from private actors

Finland

- The lack of a shared national policy approach to brownfield redevelopment may slow the development process down
- There is a need for a better national overview of existing brownfield areas
- Limited funding for brownfield redevelopment is a challenge in Finland⁴

Sweden

- Need for improved cooperation between sectors within municipal organization
- Need to further develop the coordination of soil management and planning to ensure the systematic use of available subsurface information in planning processes⁵

The Baltic Urban Lab project

The Baltic Urban Lab project improves urban planning by developing and testing new integrated planning and Public–Private–People partnership models for the regeneration of four brownfield sites in [Norrköping](#), [Tallinn](#), [Turku](#) and [Riga](#). The project identifies and promotes existing good practices for brownfield regeneration and facilitates learning and the exchange of experiences between planners and experts in the Central Baltic region.

The project is co-funded by the INTERREG Central Baltic programme 2014–2020. It is led by Union of the Baltic Cities Sustainable Cities Commission and the other project partners include the city administrations of Riga, Tallinn, Turku and Norrköping, University of Turku and Nordregio.

More information:

<http://www.balticurbanlab.eu/>



European Union
European Regional
Development Fund



Endnotes:

¹ Ramboll (2015). Käytöstä poistuvien ja vajaa-käyttöisten teollisuusalueiden uusiokäyttöä koskeva esiselvitys. Available at: <http://www.ramboll.fi/>; Tintera, J., Ruus, A., Tohvri, E., Kotval, Z. (2014) Urban brownfields in Estonia: Scope, consequences and redevelopment barriers as perceived by local governments. Moravian Geographical Reports Vol 22, 4/2014. Available at: <https://www.degruyter.com/>.

² Tintera, J., Ruus, A., Tohvri, E., Kotval, Z. (2014) Urban brownfields in Estonia: Scope, consequences and redevelopment barriers as perceived by local governments. Moravian Geographical Reports Vol 22, 4/2014. Available at: <https://www.degruyter.com/>.

³ Interviews; Tintera et al. (2014); Klamp, T.R. (2015) Kohaliku omavalitsuse tegevused pruunaladele linna ruumi kvaliteedi tõstmise eesmärgil kolme Eesti linna näitel. Tallinn College of Tallinn University of Technology. Available at: <https://digi.lib.ttu.ee/>.

⁴ Ramboll (2015). Käytöstä poistuvien ja vajaa-käyttöisten teollisuusalueiden uusiokäyttöä koskeva esiselvitys. Available at: <http://www.ramboll.fi/>.

⁵ Norrman et al. (2015) Balance 4P: Balancing decisions for urban brownfield redevelopment. Available at: <http://publications.lib.chalmers.se/>

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About this policy brief

This policy brief is based on the [Baltic Urban Lab Working Paper Planning systems and legislation for Brownfield Development in the Central Baltic Countries](#) (Perjo, Fredricsson, & Oliveira e Costa, 2017).



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