INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE IN URBAN CONTEXT

Jana HORICKA
CTU Prague, Fac. of Civil Engineering, Dpt. of Architecture, Thakurova 7/2077, 160 29 Prague 6, Czech Republic, jana.horicka@fsv.cvut.cz

Summary

This contribution deals with possibilities to include industrial heritage in the urban planning and development, concerning mainly local circumstances in the Czech Republic. First, arguments for connection between industrial heritage regeneration and urban planning and development are set. The research focused on assessment and application of known means, starting with databases, classification, concerning embedded values and heritage conservation, up to regeneration strategy. Generally, the strategy is explained to initiate a complex regeneration process avoiding extremes, at least in the Czech Republic, both often resorted to – strict heritage conservation or complete demolition.

Keywords: industrial heritage, brownfields, urban development, urban planning

1 Industrial heritage assets

1.1 Industrial heritage included

Responsibly planning development, none of Czech municipalities can most likely avoid including industrial heritage, as the traces of industrial production, not only traditional Czech beer and sugar industry, are located within its region. Even more specific role of industrial heritage would be expected in development of historically industrial regions.

Although the topic is not unfamiliar to a professional public, a lack of institutional background resulted in two extremes often applied in Czech Republic – strict heritage conservation or complete demolition. Heritage listing and conservation became the only means to preserve the traces of our industrial tradition. On the other hand, the way it is applied, it usually obstructs the urban development.

Including industrial heritage into an urban development process provides possibilities to create wider relations among industrial sites, not to deal with several separate issues, and to regulate the development on the originally industrial grounds, even if not listed. This proposition works on the assumption that preserving industrial history is a public interest. Moreover urban planning presents a long-term strategy exceeding the term of office and political interests.

1.2 Sustainable development arguments

Industrial heritage assets to urban fabric are very difficult to quantify, for being mainly involved in the socio-cultural pillar of sustainable development. However, most of them have already been described:

Industrial heritage contributes to the orientation possibilities inside the city, providing variety, uniqueness and attractiveness to an urban fabric and to public spaces.
within it. Regeneration of a decaying industrial brownfield opens a recovery of the whole district. A ‘flagship’ project, eliminating a burden, a barrier of urban development, impacts positively quality of living in its surroundings. Attractiveness of these places for artists is known, as well as many bottom-up initiatives monitored, proving especially the artists and enthusiasts initiate changes in the industrial districts. [1]

Besides, ecological and economic arguments are relevant as for another refurbishment projects. Industrial heritage objects also include embodied energy and related emissions, to be considered in favour of regeneration.

2 Urban development possibilities

Unfortunately, devalued industrial heritage is often a result of uncontrolled development. Sole ‘flagship’ projects and bottom-up initiatives, which seemed to be a good beginning, lacked wider consequences, if they were not followed with a strategy. There are quite a lot of projects, expected to kick of the urban regeneration process, change the public attitude to the issue and finally stuck in their walls, as an island in a neglected urban fabric.

2.1 Identification and inventorying

To formulate a working strategy, information is a basis. First step to start dealing with abandoned industrial lands is to identify them, to know their location and characteristics. Optimally, this is provided with a national database, supplemented with a map (GIS).

In the Czech Republic the issue was included in legislation, changed in 2006. Identification of areas for regeneration and reuse became a part of planning analytical materials, information groundwork for urban planning. This was considered the first step to include abandoned (industrial) lands into the urban development, despite all imperfections described in professional studies [2] The mentioned process of inventorying is based on local information – close to the problem – and regard the fact that required information need to be updated periodically (every 2 years in this case).

Although fallow lands comprise a significant part of the database, potential industrial brownfields and regenerated/converted/reused industrial estates are also important to monitor for decision making process.

2.2 Evaluation and qualities

To provide clear and synoptic overview of the industrial brownfields, which could be considered a decision support tool, some kind of evaluation and classification is required.

Generally known brownfields classification dealing with the economical feasibility of the regeneration based on the A-B-C model and modified for Czech conditions combines two factors – location and costs of land preparation. [3]. However, industrial brownfields bear the specific historical and cultural values of industrial heritage and to consider them in the decision making process, these should be included in the brownfield evaluation. It has to involve the adaptability – ability to accept a new function, to define possibilities of the new use and to evaluate particular historical and cultural qualities. Last but not least, regeneration obstacles need to be defined, e.g. contamination, structure troubles, legal obstacles etc.
2.3 Priorities and strategies

Only when the information is complete, there is a time for decisions. The municipality is expected to set the priorities in regeneration and responsibly chose the new use/function for the abandoned industrial sites. The choice of future use become a part of the urban development strategy, on one hand concerning values and qualities of the site, on the other hand concerning demands and needs of the community. Public participation in this process was proved to help, to achieve general acceptance of the regeneration projects. [4]

Depending on set development priorities, the initializing project (‘flagship’ project) is to be defined. There are many cases of the ‘flagship’ project fully invested and then operated by the public sector, such as Municipal Office in Semily (Fig. 1). However, these cases rather tend to stay the only regeneration project for a long time.

![Municipality office, Semily (photo T. Šenberger)](image)

Public-private partnership is an optimal model, although it requires organization and financial input of public administration and municipality, to attract and motivate private investors. Several prosperous regeneration projects proved that there is a potential private investor – a local patriot, who initiated a discussion. And the discussion, including private investor, municipality and authorities is the most important to accomplish a successful project. Unfortunately, there are also many cases, where the discussion failed and the regeneration project was blocked.

Nevertheless, there are many sites, awaiting investments to regeneration and representing a barrier of urban development. The barrier could be broken with opening them to a public life, through removing the fences and regeneration of the plots to public spaces and parks, while buildings only maintained. Even more attractive and often naturally happening artist activities, or another temporary use, provide a possibility to let the public in, as well. The issue often discussed in this context and complicating changes is the ownership of the abandoned lands and motivation of the owners to change. Where the investments are lacking, priorities are rather low and future use is not determined, the abandoned industrial sites could be included in urban land reserves.

Complex information system based on local level, aims to define priorities, because not all projects has the same local conditions (context), and not all sites has the same value in the sense of uniqueness as e.g. the Lower area of Vitkovice ironworks in Ostrava has (Fig. 2). All industrial sites cannot be fully preserved, but a living city should be the objective. If inevitable, demolition is the means to achieve the objective, but the well considered demolition.
3 Conclusions

Industrial heritage relation to urban development as formulated above aims to offer ‘instruction for use’ to deal with abandoned industrial sites. All these things are familiar, but compiled together, they provide a system solution. This system works on assumptions following:

▪ Respecting basic sustainable principles, the demands of the community are preferred to realize within the existing city fabric instead of green fields.
▪ There is a will for discussion among all involved.
▪ Required funding is available in municipality budget.

Local community plays an important part, especially in small towns rather than in big cities and capitals. Opening the sites and the issue itself to the people is known to be the key to change. Finally, responsibly building on qualities and uniqueness of industrial architecture, sustainable regeneration could be achieved.

Acknowledgement

This research has been supported by SGS CTU grant no. SGS13/021/OHK1/1T/11.

References


