

Szellem és Tudomány

A Miskolci Egyetem Szociológiai Intézetének folyóirata

2012/2-3.

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Szerzőink

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Gábor Biczó

The Lack of Sociocultural Aspects in Brownfield Developments in Hungary¹

As it is well known fact the sociocultural aspects are significant factors in today's international brownfield developments. A brownfield site (or simply a brownfield) is the land that was previously used for industrial purposes or certain commercial uses. This land might be contaminated by hazardous waste or pollution and often environmentally burdened, especially if considered as a potential site for redevelopment. The sociocultural factors are important in those countries like Canada, where the government's National Brownfield Strategy has existed for years and the so called "brownfield-policy" is well elaborated. Analyzing most Hungarian brownfield projects we can observe the general lack of sociocultural aspects. This paper examines in its first part the general context of sociocultural aspects concerning brownfield investments. The second part focuses on the question: why doesn't the community factor appear as an important element of brownfield development in Hungary?

I. The Sociocultural Background of Brownfield Development

Brownfield investments and accompanying developments create a complex system of challenges. Besides the economic, environmental, judiciary and technological aspects appears the sociocultural factor as an important context of brownfield developments.²

¹ "This research was carried out as part of the TAMOP-4.2.1.B-10/2/KONV-2010-0001 project with support by the European Union, co-financed by the European Social Fund."

² The sociocultural factor in brownfield investments became important only in the last decades. Nevertheless, the technical-economical side of brownfield issue is generally more characteristic than the sociocultural dimension of developments. Even in 2002 one famous U.S. expert, Todd S. Davis, published on the topic in his book (*Brownfields, A Comprehensive Guide to Redeveloping Contaminated Property* (Chicago. American Bar Association,)) and ranked the sociocultural aspect as a secondary or less important dimension of developments. In his reading the credibility of brownfield developments depend on the professional judiciary, environmental, economic, real estate, insurance and monetary treatment. (p 5.)

In the followings I am going to discuss some of the key aspects of sociocultural dimensions in the brownfield developments based on relevant literature. However there is a frequently analyzed topic this short survey won't deal with, namely the comparison – advantages and disadvantages - of greenfield and brownfield investments. Our intention is to comprehend modern tendencies in brownfield developments.³

The discovery of sociocultural aspects in brownfield developments is coeval with the discovery of the brownfield issue. In the early history of brownfield it seemed to be a very environmental and economic problem because in the USA and in Great Britain where the rehabilitation and reuse of previously industrial land became an important part of political debates in 1930-ies. In the years of slump many economically collapsing industrial regions had to deal with poverty and social decline. The blossoming of heavy industry around the Great Lakes from the third decade of the 20th century was a highly respected achievement all over the world. Pittsburgh and its surroundings was the engine of US economy as the saying goes: "As U.S. Steel goes, so goes the nation." One of the first brownfield development projects dealing at least partially with the so-called sociocultural aspects was carried out in the Pittsburgh-region. The depressing consequences after the definitive crack of steel industry required the immediate intervention of authorities in the 1970-s. The crack in steel industry affected the transportation system – railway and shipping – as well as the mining in all West-Pennsylvania. The preservation and rehabilitation of abandoned industrial sites appears for the public as an investment that hasn't any economic use. Authorities striving to control damage had to face problems of communities in the demolished industrial regions. At the same time the theme of reuse and rehabilitation of cracked industrial sites was combined with the interests of communities; it was the very moment of the birth of the sociocultural dimension of brownfield developments. When analyzing the register of brownfield sites in the Pittsburgh region we will note three significant aspects:

First, let us see the important difference between the sites found around an unsettled environment and the sites where the close environment is inhabited. Second, all the redevelopment projects of abandoned but in the close surroundings inhabited industrial sites are effective contributions to the solution of unemployment problems as well as to the social crisis there. Last

³ Suzanne L. Greinert, *Public participation in brownfield redevelopment: An exploratory case study*. New York. State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry. Landscape Architecture, 2007. especially p. 9. and p. 24-31.

but not least the experiences of brownfield projects can be very useful considering novel industrial investments. Summarizing the above arguments we can define the Pittsburgh-region as a real laboratory of brownfield developments that provides an example for similar projects all over the World.⁴

The investigation of the sociocultural background in brownfield projects was also an important issue in Great Britain where the topic has gained priority within the government housing plan. At the turn of the Millennium the British Government's project to reach the proportion of housing of at least 60% was to have been realized in the frame of a brownfield-type redevelopment project.⁵ In England the government housing plan is a conscious element of public policy aiming at warranting equal opportunities as well as protecting the diminishing green belt.

We can see the discovery of sociocultural aspects as an inherent part of the history of brownfield developments that is a highly practical issue. Nevertheless our topic can't be treated like a theoretical basic research because it appears always just like a contextual part of the particular local scene.⁶ Any successful brownfield development requires the analysis of sociocultural conditions.

Thus the brownfield development is a coherent entity consisting of different components like economic, industrial, environmental, infrastructural, juridical and sociocultural aspects. In order to treat this multiplicity the development requires well informed specialists. We can observe in societies with a well developed brownfield culture a growing demand for specialists who can take part in the realization of interdisciplinary projects. Nowadays, there is characteristic solution for recruiting at least a part of concerned labour force from the targeted local community. Hereby the brownfield development may serve general socio-political goals.

A good example is the *Brownfield Internship Program* in New York City.⁷ According to the organizers, thanks to functioning local identity, the youth has special ties to the city. Moreover, the training of skilled labour can

⁴Jerome N. Dettore: Brownfield Development in Pittsburgh Last download 09. 11. 2011 <http://www.pittsburghgreenstory.org/html/brownfields.html>

⁵ Tim Dixon: Sustainable brownfield regeneration: liveable places from problem spaces. Oxford-Malden. Balckwell. 2007. p. 80.

⁶ Justin B. Hollander, Niall G. Kirkwood, Julia L. Gold: Principles of Brownfield regeneration. Washington. Island Press, 2010. p. 8.

⁷ Last download 09. 11. 2011

http://www.nycbrownfieldpartnership.org/applications/Internship_Application.pdf

be the residential commitment an expedient extra factor of the workers' selection. Participation in the program is available for residing university and high school students in New York who study one of the necessary subdisciplines like environmental engineer, hydro geologist, and sustainable development. We can observe through the example of the *Brownfield Internship Program* that a modern development strategy should serve the widespread interests of concerned community. Through the brownfield development it is possible to harmonize local interests with general socio-political goals.

Summarizing the above aspects of sociocultural issue considering the brownfield developments we can diagnose the lack of almost all of them in Hungary. What are the causes of that?

II. Community Issue in Hungary, the Diósgyőr Case

Considering the complexity of our topic I start my interpretation with the historical background of industrialization and its specialties in Hungary. Beyond the historical causes the physic-geographical location of industrial sites is also an important factor. Industry in Hungary was traditionally ranked as the second important structural element of economy after agriculture till the late 19th century. In the last decades of the 19th century two main types of industrial development were introduced throughout the country.

The first type grew out of coal-mines all over the northern and eastern hill area with the appearance of local forges. Some of them survived the last century in modernized steel or iron factories. After the I. World War as a result of the peace treaties most of this traditional industrial sites were attached to the new Central European Nation states. In the interwar period Hungary made an effort to reorganize its industry focusing on the formerly less developed regions within its new political borders. These efforts created industrial belts in the Northern and Midwest regions and these sites due to the pressured industrialization attracted lot of employees from the countryside during the period of Socialism. After the political turn in Hungary, an economic change and restructuring, during the last two decades facilitated by quick ownership changes in the country, resulted in the appearance of a higher and higher number of brownfields. At the same time, political

processes affected regional alterations significantly increasing the number of unused and highly polluted military areas and brownfields.

On the basis of their historical background the second type of brownfield sites appeared in bigger cities like in Budapest or Miskolc. Studying the history of industrialization in Hungarian cities there is noteworthy to observe parallel tendencies of the processes and comparing them with those of western countries. In consciously planned modern cities the very core of industrial facilities always surrounded by residential areas. Originally this practical structure of settlements served the easy and cheap move between the workplace and residence. Nowadays this former advantage has become a general cause of deterioration in industrialized cities thanks to the process of general pauperization and the collapse of industrial activity.

Comparing the above two historically developed types of industrial regions in Hungary we can identify the different characteristics of sociocultural factors in brownfield investments. First of all we should distinguish the sites where the brownfield development can be realized independently from the surrounding communities. Most of these abandoned places are isolated physically from the local community and the ecological as well as economical improvements can be facilitated technical projects. This type of brownfield sites mainly include deserted places of mine industry and abandoned military sites, that is to say barracks and ranges. The development of these sites has only an indirect impact on the population and we aren't going to deal with them in this paper.

In the following we will deal with the lack of sociocultural factors in Hungarian brownfield developments at the sites with inhabited surroundings.

Analyzing the statistics of brownfield sites we can observe a striking number of places in Hungary as well where local communities are directly affected by the investments. To comprehend the complexity of the brownfield projects we need to study international research results as well. This shows a significant turning point in the late 1980s when these communities became recognized as conscious actors of development. Suzanne L. Greinert in her work, *Public Participation in Brownfield Redevelopment: An Exploratory Case Study* gave a convincing analysis of the sociocultural factor.

"As public participation in brownfield planning is increasingly required, it becomes imperative to understand both the process and the value of public participation in brownfield redevelopment projects. Research is needed that analyzes public participation processes and stakeholder perceptions of these

processes to reveal effective public participation strategies and increase understanding about the value of public participation."

We can see both the activity of community and the involvement of community as equally important components of modern brownfield developments. In other words, the sociocultural aspects might become decisive factors in a brownfield strategy if the community has motivation to take part in it and all other stakeholders calculate with the intention of communities. In this context the brownfield issue is a complex and general social-practical problem but we can grasp its essence as a particular case.

In Hungary we have lot of brownfield sites where the community issue should be one of the main aspects of investment. The brownfield project of the Center for Environmental Studies was launched in 2004 in order to conduct a survey of Hungarian brownfield sites, collect good and bad practices as well as foster exchange of experience related to their utilization. The survey confirmed all of the former stereotypical expectations. First of all, thanks to economic polarization and the historical backgrounds in the regions of Hungary brownfield sites are concentrated mainly in the northern part of the country. The largest and most contaminated sites are to be found here but only the 3% of municipalities are owners of their brownfield sites in the region. According to the brownfield inventory of 2005 54% of the sites in Northern Hungary reported 75-100% of their land to be completely unused.

It is not difficult to deduce from this information that municipalities and communities in general have no influence on the redevelopment of deteriorated sites in the Northern part of Hungary.⁸ However most of these industrial facilities can be found within the settlements, consequently these places are encircled by residential areas. Let me give a characteristic example of this case.

Miskolc is the third largest city in Hungary close to the Slovakian border. It is generally known as an industrial city, and the largest boost to its economy was indeed provided by industrialization during the Socialist era. Diósgyőr, a formerly independent settlement is now part of the so called greater Miskolc steel factory that made it the most important heavy industrial city of Hungary. The decline of steel industry began after the political turns of 1989. After the privatization the permanent threat of bankruptcy resulted in the firm's division into approximately 140 small companies. These

⁸ See Ádám L. - Madarász Tamás: Brownfield redevelopment status and lessons from Northern Hungary. In: Report of the NICOLE Workshop: redevelopment of sites - the industrial perspective. Akersloot: NICOLE, 2007. p. 22-23. NICOLE Workshop (2007) (Akersloot)

microenterprises exist within the frame of the factory using its centralized infrastructure. The Diósgyőr steel factory can be characterized as a huge but fragmented brownfield site where the still existing microenterprises suffer from the lack of resources.

At close to a quarter of the factory neighborhoods there is a residence area of former workers. At present this so called colony of workers is the poorest district of Miskolc.⁹ The population in the colony was 18000 in 1980 and this number decreased to 3000 by the Millennium.¹⁰ According to observations ties weakened between the factory and the colony after the collapse of the steel industry. Moreover the new enterprises on the field of steel factory hardly employed any workers from the colony. When we examine the colony inhabitants' attitudes towards their former workplace the ambiguities are remarkable. First, the cultural memory of community has kept the memory of golden age in Socialism. Second, according to the inhabitants' perception the microenterprises cannot offer an extensive solution to the unemployment problem or to the future of Diósgyőr. In other words, because of the lack of a well outlined brownfield redevelopment project the local community is unable to break down the walls of poverty. We can agree with the words of Robert Colongelo, executive director of the Chicago-based National Brownfield Association: *"Brownfields are like a cancer. If left unattended, and people take do-nothing strategies, it grows and perpetuates blight and drags down the economy."*¹¹

Surveying the debates and the initiations concerning the complex rehabilitation of Diósgyőr Steel Factory the only aspect we can recently observe is the economic side of development. Neither potential investors nor the municipality count on the participation of the local community. They don't calculate with international experiences either: *"While the economic and environmental benefits of brownfield development are more obvious, brownfield development can also generate significant social benefits at the local level. (...). Case studies reviewed by the NRTEE (National Roundtable on the Environment and Economy) showed that this renewal can take the form of:*

neighbourhood, employment area and downtown revitalization;

improved aesthetic quality of the urban environment;

⁹ R. Nagy József: *Boldog téglafalak között. Munkáskolóniák kulturális antropológiai vizsgálata Északkelet-Magyarországon. A Miskolci Galéria könyvei 39. Miskolc, 2010.*

¹⁰ R. Nagy József: *Identitásbeli azonosságok és különbségek a rudabányai és a Diósgyőr-vasgyári munkások esetében. In. Századvég 2002/24.*

¹¹ Last download 09. 11. 2011. <http://dtsc.ca.gov/Emeryville.cfm>

provision of affordable housing opportunities;
creation of recreational and public open spaces;
improved safety and security; and,
an increased sense of community participation and civic pride.”¹²

As we could see the community issue is a crucial aspect of modern brownfield developments and sooner or later stakeholders in Hungary need to learn this lesson.

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¹² Last download 09. 11. 2011.

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