

Brownfields in historical context – a case study of Czech Silesia

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Abstract—The paper deals with brownfields and historical dimension of their creating. Brownfields have become a significant topic in the public administration, business sector and within the professional circles of the most of the European countries as well. The aim of the article is show, which factors influenced the formation of brownfields using the example of specific Czech border region. The topic is analyzed from historical point of view. The historical analysis will be based parently on unpublished Czech archival sources.

Keywords—Brownfields, borderland, history, Silesia

I. INTRODUCTION

The formation of so brownfields is a consequence of structural changes and transformation of the economic, political and social situation. Brownfields are a specific phenomenon; they have become a symbol of the sustainable development concept. Existing brownfields are studied by professionals, they are interesting for the public and private sector as well. Both sectors make an effort to revitalize them. The abandoned, unused and underutilized sites are a problem that may be examined from various points of view – from the economic, environmental, urbanistic, social, historical and the cultural point of view. The following article deals with this topic from the historical point of view. It aims is to show how historical changes that occurred in specific marginal areas have influenced brownfield formation and its future perspectives. Problems of brownfields will be analysed using the example of the Czech Silesia which was a part of a large historical region and a specific part of the Czech borderland. It is very variable and it has undergone a difficult social and national development. This article introduces various concepts of brownfields in its initial part, and it continues to describe types of brownfields as they are defined in the Czech Republic and its specific region. It characterizes main features of the Czech Silesia development, its specific features related to the formation of brownfields. The last part of the article deals with a possible revitalization of brownfields in the Czech Silesia. As this article is limited by space, it shows several examples of brownfields located in the chosen region.

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II. BROWNFIELDS AND ITS PERCEPTION IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

There are different brownfield definitions defined by various countries. Generally said, a brownfield is an abandoned object or a building that does not fulfil its original function anymore. There are typical features of the brownfield: a devastation rate, a proximity of municipalities, large area, unclear rights to the property and, in many cases, an environmental pollution [1].

The problems of brownfields has been discussed and tackled by the public administration since the beginning of the 21st century. According to official definition (created by Investment and Business Development Agency – CzechInvest) brownfield is “*as a property – land, structure, complex – which is not sufficiently utilised, is neglected and possibly contaminated, cannot be effectively utilised without undergoing regeneration, and arose as the result of industrial, agricultural, residential, military or other activities*” [2]. The public administration has been dealing with possibilities of the brownfield revitalization since then. This topic was explored by elementary planning documents, i.e. the Strategy for sustainable development in the Czech Republic, the Strategy for economic growth in the Czech Republic, the Strategy for regional development in the Czech Republic and the State policy of the environment of the Czech Republic. All these documents show the perspectives we can view the brownfield problem from. The elementary vision of possible future development of the abandoned, unused and underutilized objects and areas is described in the National Brownfield Regeneration Strategy. The document was produced by the CzechInvest in 2005. It resulted from the Government regulation. “The overall revitalization of the area, more possibilities given to entrepreneurs, better environment and efficient use of the abandoned, unused and underutilized areas” are the main objectives of the strategy [3]. Considerable efforts have been made to make these visions come true. They have to respect, adopt and support cultural, historical, economic, environmental and social viewpoints. Brownfields are divided into several categories in the Czech Republic [4] :

- unused industrial objects and buildings
- unused administrative buildings

- unused railway buildings
- unused army buildings
- unused agricultural buildings
- remains of former mines.

Formation of brownfields was profoundly influenced by a fierce restructuring of the domestic economy in the Czech Republic and many more former communist countries. A lot of industrial sectors failed and collapsed there, or they have changed fundamentally in recent years. The economic transformation strangled agriculture as well. Many more effects of the restructuring of economy have also led to the brownfield formation, e.g. changes in rights to properties, the environmental pollution of properties and a secondary devastation of buildings and areas which lost their original function [5]. A specific situation aroused in the Czech border regions. Brownfields were formed as a consequence of changes in population before the Second World War.

III. CHANGES OF CZECH SILESIA AND FORMATION OF BROWNFIELDS

The Silesia became a part of the Czech State in the 14th century. Individual Principalities of Silesia were separated from Poland back then, and they accepted the sovereignty of the Czech Kingdom. The Silesia became an independent administrative part of the Kingdom much later, having its center in Wrocław. The Silesian Wars broke out in 1740, after Maria Theresia ascended the throne. They became the significant historical milestone there. The Habsburg Monarchy lost a significant part of Poland during the war and fighting against Prussia, except for the region of Opava, Krnov, Nisa, Ratibořice and Těšín. The region of Těšín was the only region of the Silesia Principality that did not become smaller within the Habsburg Monarchy. Several decades later, the Silesia was much smaller but it was still an independent country within the Habsburg Monarchy. Therefore, it hoped to win the whole area of the Silesia back. However, it did not happen. At the beginning of the 1780's, the Silesia and Moravia were administratively joined together. They stayed one country until the mid-19th century. The Silesia became a autonomous country again back then [6].

Economy of the Eastern Silesia was enormously influenced in the second half of the 18th century, when black coal was found there. The first reserves were found in 1776. Less than 20 years later, a regular mining began. Mining and heavy industry changed the image and shape of municipalities around Těšín a lot. Construction of the railway between Košice and Bohumín was a significant impulse towards the industrial development. As a consequence of industrialization, a brand new industrial centers opened and the population increased greatly.

After Czechoslovakia was established in 1918, so called Austrian Silesia was joined to the new country. The region around Těšín was a difficult issue there as Poland also laid claims on it. The danger of war was eliminated in 1920, when

an international arbitrary determined the region of Těšín to be divided into two parts (for both countries). Czechoslovakia kept most of the significant industrial regions. The German nationality prevailed in the region of Opava and Krnov and there was a Polish minority in the region of Těšín. As the region of Těšín was divided, a new administrative reform was adopted in 1928 and the Silesia and Moravia were joined together again.

Czechoslovakia lost the Silesia for a limited period of time, after the Munich Agreement was signed in 1938. The regions of Opava, Krnov and Hlučín were annexed by Germany then, Czechoslovak part of the region of Těšín was joined to Poland until the World War broke out. As a structure of nationalities was different in the Silesia (especially in the region of Těšín and Hlučín), the Nazi enforced very specific forms of germanization there, so called German "volklists". The German occupants wanted to use unclear Silesian identity and nationality in the region of Těšín and they divided it into four categories, according to an anticipated rate of germanization [7].

As a consequence of tough and fierce fighting in the final period of the World War, the Silesia was seriously damaged. Situation in the Czech borderlands after the World War was characterized by a structure of nationalities that was changing greatly there. Some parts of the Silesia were inhabited by a few Czechs-colonists, as local news reported and revealed. They came there and replaced the German population that was expelled from there. There were also municipalities inhabited by the only Czech family or by the only Czech inhabitant – an administration commissioner who was sent by official circles there [8]. Different elements endangered a brand new code of rules and they were unwanted.

After the WWII, the Silesia made an effort and wanted to be autonomous again. It required the Silesian administration and it made territorial requirements as well, which was typical for the Silesia back then. The territorial requirements were made and expressed by memorandums and demonstrations that burst out all over the Czech Silesia [9]. The Silesian origin was understood as a part of ethnically defined Czech national identity. It was "cleared" of all the foreign and strange elements. Post-war Czechoslovakia was being reconstructed as a nation of Czechs and Slovaks. After war about 2,820,000 Germans were banished and transferred from Czechoslovakia to Germany or Austria. Expulsion of Germans was one of the important step in homogenization of country, which was typical trend of Czechoslovak post-war development [10]. The settlement of Czech borderlands was connected with acceptance reemigrants and refugees - specially from Greece. Not only displacement of German inhabitants but also essential political and economic changes after ascension of the communist regime in 1948 created space for settlement of refugees from different cultural environment in the above mentioned areas. Confiscation of German property and subsequent nationalization led to vacating of suitable properties that could be used for accommodating of Greek

children. Various recreation buildings and sometimes also chateau sites taken over by the state were used for accommodation of the children. The level and capacities of the new homes often differed significantly and some of them were closed soon with regard to technical conditions [11].

In the initial years after the WWII, the Silesia was in the middle of interest within Czechoslovakia. However, a new industrial region around Ostrava was formed later and a preference was given to it over the Silesian region. Traditional regional identity weakened (it was a typical feature of the after-war development in many more communist countries). Administrative reforms mentioned above did not respect borders of the traditional regions, they weakened relations to local institutions and traditions and strengthened a position of the central power [12].

In 1945, large industrial factories were nationalized in Czechoslovakia. The Silesian factories and industries met the same destiny. The period of nationalization and state ownership finished after the communist regime failed and the market economy was revitalised there. Since the 1980's, the Silesian heavy industry stagnated and black coal mining was not as interesting as it had been before (but not only in the Silesian region). From the 1990's to 2001, 14 mines, the most of them in the region of Ostrava, stopped mining and lost their original function.

IV. SPECIFICS OF BROWNFIELDS IN CZECH SILESIA

The impact of historical development of Czech Silesia was the formation of different types of brownfields. We can remind the number of factors that influenced their creation:

- Growth of heavy industry in the first half of 20th century
- Displacement of German population and settlement of new inhabitants
- Establishment of central planned economy (including nationalisation, collectivisation of agriculture, focus on heavy industry)
- Transformation of economy and restructuring of industry after 1989

Moravian-Silesian regional office records on its territory total of 126 brownfields. The table shows numbers of brownfields according to former use.

Former use	Number of brownfields
Civic amenities	49
Industry	48
Farming	15
Military housing	11
Transport	3

Source: Moravian-Silesian Region

[Online]. Available: <http://www.invest-msr.com/en/component/investor/?ref=type02&Itemid=153>

Economic changes fell more intensively in border areas after WWII. The consequences of one-side focus on heavy industry showed significantly in these regions. The decline of coal mining, steelworks and heavy mechanical engineering led to formation of industrial brownfields, characterised by the large size, by the higher cost for regeneration and by complicated options for its new use. Typical examples of industrial brownfields in Czech Silesia we can find in Karviná. In the town was found 28 areas that can be designated as brownfields. Most of them are mining brownfields. Possibilities of their regeneration are limited by their peripheral location and by the expected contamination. [13].

As specific aspect of brownfields in several areas of Silesia is higher number of cultural objects. The abandoned and neglected chateaus or another cultural building were often used as homes of social care. Case of chateau Jindřichov in Bruntál-region could be used as an example. After the rise of communist regime, the chateau was used as the children form Korea. Later the Social Care Institute for Mentally Handicapped Youth was established in the castle. After the cancellation of Institute the castle was transferred to ownership of the village. The chateau should be newly use as residence for elderly people, starting flats and facilities for chronically ill. The village also plans organizing the exhibitions and concerts in representative parts of the castle [14]. This case shows possibilities of various using (social and cultural) of abandoned castle buildings.

Another type of brownfields in Silesia are former oversized agricultural buildings. Changes of the agriculture can demonstrated by case of Osoblaha region. After displacement of German population decreased the number of inhabitants and developed collectivized agriculture. New established state farm employed settlers from inland characterised often by lower level of education and lack of deeper identification with region. After the fall of communist regime state farms as the main employer in the region fell apart [15]. The employment in agriculture significantly declined. The majority of local inhabitants lost their source of livelihood and the agricultural areas have changed into brownfields. Perspectives of their regeneration are influenced by the unfavourable economic conditions.

Several brownfields in Czech Silesia are result of former military activities too. The large objects in Bruntál, Osoblaha, Krnov and another cities served as barracks for Soviet army after the occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968. This buildings lost their use after withdrawal of Soviet troops and after cancellation of military bases and garrisons in 1990's. [16]. Cases of agriculture and military brownfields remind the importance of political transformation and its social dimension.

V. CONCLUSION

The specific location and position of Czech Silesia as a border region, its multinational features and consequences of

the industrialization and the dominance of the heavy industry have formed its specific character, have influenced its social structure and mentality of the population there. Although the Silesia is currently perceived as a history, its regions and sub-regions are still strongly formed by the historical events – more than we could say.

The formation of brownfields in Silesia was determined by fundamental transformation of political, economic, social and national conditions during the 20th century. This change had in this part of Czech borderland stronger consequences in comparison with other regions. To the main factors which influenced the formation of brownfields in Czech Silesia belong the changes of national structure after WWII, collectivisation of agriculture, restructuring of industry and political transformation. The possibilities of revitalisation of brownfields in Silesian region are limited by peripheral location, various degrees of devastation and by different local conditions.

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