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Urban Regeneration in Cottbus Neu-Schmellwitz – The Transformation Process of a City Quarter

I. Introduction

I.1 Introductory information about the market research study

The following market research study is part of the European project 'ReNew Town: New post-socialist city. Competitive and attractive' and examines urban regeneration activities in Cottbus, State of Brandenburg in East Germany.

Since 2001 Cottbus is part of Germany's largest funding programme 'Urban Renewal East', which focuses on the demolition and enhancement of the housing stock of vacancy affected residential areas and on the revitalisation of East German inner cities. Based on the positive results of the programme's evaluation and the fact that 'Urban Renewal East' made a considerable contribution to the stabilisation of the housing market in East Germany (Bundesministerium für Verkehr, Bau und Stadtentwicklung (BMVBS) & Bundesamt für Bauwesen und Raumordnung (BBR), 2008), the German Bundestag decided to prolong the project's term until 2016. However, 'Urban Renewal East' had an extensive effect on people's life and also on the self-conception of hundreds of East German municipalities. Therefore the following market research study was carried out and aims to give interesting insights into the experiences of local stakeholders who were directly affected by the demolition and enhancement activities funded under 'Urban Renewal East'. As a location for the market research study, the quarter Neu-Schmellwitz in the north of Cottbus was selected. Neu-Schmellwitz has the highest flat vacancy rate in the city of Cottbus. After the reunification Cottbus had to face the loss of thousands of jobs in the energy and textile industry, and is therefore an interesting example of how a

city tries to establish a new image and to stop the on-going process of shrinkage and housing vacancy.

During the preparation phase for the market research study, the neighbourhood management office of Neu-Schmellwitz was contacted and the neighbourhood manager, Ms Köhl, was of great support during the entire study process. She was interested from the start and agreed to share her experience with the ReNew Town project partners.

Within the market research study, five face-to-face interviews were conducted in January 2012 and the interview partners were directly contacted by Ms Köhl. This personal contact has most likely increased the willingness of the experts to take part in the interview process because the neighbourhood management office is very well known in the quarter.

The following chapters will give an overview over the challenges that came up in Cottbus after the reunification and also over the results of the market research study.

II. Characteristics of Cottbus

II.1 Socio-demographical characteristics

The city of Cottbus is the second largest city within the State of Brandenburg with around 100.000 inhabitants in 2011. During the socialist era, Cottbus was famous for its coal mining and textile industry and the population steadily increased from around 55,000 inhabitants at the beginning of the 1940s (Kühn, 2007) to 128,947 citizens in 1990 (Stadtverwaltung Cottbus, 2007).

After 1989 Cottbus had to face the problem of shrinkage and deindustrialisation especially with regard to the energy and textile industry where thousands of jobs got lost. Between 1990 and 2005 Cottbus' population shrank by more than 20%. Although there was a total growth of 333 people in 2010 (see table 1), it is expected that the process of shrinkage will go on in the future (Fischer & Kühn, 2009) – not only because of the outward migration but also with regard to the decreasing birth rate. In fact, population ageing in Germany will continue (Statistisches Bundesamt Wiesbaden, 2009) and this does also affect Cottbus. The city council expects that the age groups from 0 to 18 and from 30 to 45 years will decline in the coming decades, while the number of people that are older than 45 will increase (Stadtverwaltung Cottbus, 2007). This has also an effect on the birth rate in the way that the number of potential mothers will decline in the future (Stadtverwaltung Cottbus, 2007).

Table 1: Migration balance						
		1990	1995	2000	2005	2010
town	migration balance	-3717	-2041	-2227	-669	673
	natural growth	461	-388	-254	-357	-340
	total growth	-3256	-2429	-2481	-1026	333

Source: Stadt Cottbus¹

Table 2: Age of inhabitants						
		1990	1995	2000	2005	2010
town	men	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	women	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	total	33,0	37,4	40,4	43,1	45,0

Source: Stadt Cottbus²

II.2 Economic development

As already mentioned Cottbus was famous for its brown coal mining and textile industry. During the GDR the city was the national centre for the energy production but after the reunification lots of coal mines and traditional industry branches such as the textile industry closed (Stadtverwaltung Cottbus, 2007). Since 1990 Cottbus is affected by a high unemployment rate, and with 12,1 per cents in 2010 the unemployment level was nearly twice as high as the national average of 6,8 per cents (see table 3) . Interestingly Cottbus has a high proportion of highly educated people but this does not change the fact that the city is characterised by a structural weakness with regard to the labour market (Stadtverwaltung Cottbus, 2007).

¹ Data was kindly provided by the Municipality of Cottbus as a result of a personal request.

² Data was kindly provided by the Municipality of Cottbus as a result of a personal request.

	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010
Absolute	n/a	7935	10199	9835	6594
In per-cents	n/a	13,4	16,5	17,3	12,1

Source: Stadt Cottbus³

Today, Cottbus focuses more on its reputation as a city of science with its two research institutions, the Technical University and the University of Applied Sciences (Kühn, 2007). Apart from that the economic structure is dominated by the service industry and by administrative units with an overall amount of around 44,000 employees (Stadtverwaltung Cottbus, 2007). In comparison to that both the manufacturing industries as well as the agricultural production are extremely weak (Stadtverwaltung Cottbus).

This fact becomes also apparent with regard to the most important employers in Cottbus, which are: CTK gGmbH, arvato direct services Cottbus GmbH, Deutsche Rentenversicherung Knappschaft-Bahn-See, BTU – Brandenburg University of Technology, Stadtwerke Cottbus GmbH, Vattenfall Europe Mining AG, walter services GmbH, Lebenshilfe Werkstätten Hand in Hand gGmbH and Lucia Dienstleistungs- service GmbH⁴. Most of these above mentioned employers belong to the service industry.

II.3 Urban development

Cottbus is located in the State of Brandenburg, which lies in the North-East of Germany near to the Polish border. In the middle of the 19th century the railway system to and from Cottbus was constructed and Cottbus became an important traffic junction which improved its attractiveness as an industrial site. Further to this, various industries were set up especially in the field of energy, textile manufacturing and coal mining.

The Second World War was a profound decisive point due to the fact that parts of the city were completely destroyed after a bombing raid was launched by the American Forces in 1945. Nevertheless, the city soon became important to the GDR's industrial development and due to the high demand for employees that were needed in the ongoing process of energy production and textile

³ Data was kindly provided by the Municipality of Cottbus as a result of a personal request.

⁴ Data was kindly provided by the Municipality of Cottbus and the EGC GmbH as a result of a personal request.

manufacturing, the population of Cottbus increased rapidly right after the separation of Germany into two different states.

Even though the population was rising, the first urban development activities that were carried out during the socialist era focused predominantly on the inner city development and on the establishment of a new inner city centre (Historischer Heimatverein Cottbus e. V., 2009). Therefore, large housing estates were built not until the 1970s. In 1974 the GDR regime responded to the high demand of housing opportunities and the first large housing estate, Sachsendorf-Madlow, was built on the southern city edge of Cottbus with over 12,000 dwellings for around 30,000 people (Knorr-Siedow, Jahnke, & Trostorff).

It was not until 10 years later when the expansion of Cottbus took place in 1985 and Cottbus' youngest large housing estate, the district Neu-Schmellwitz, was built in three stages of construction until 1991 to match the needs of housing for another 5,000 inhabitants (Stadtverwaltung Cottbus, 2005).

This newly built housing estate is located in the north of Cottbus and became a popular housing district during the socialist period where the apartments were equipped with hot water and a district heating system (Bürgerverein e.V. Schmellwitz). Furthermore community facilities, service and trade centres as well as social institutions such as schools or child-care centres were established to ease the life of the industrial workers and their families (Bürgerverein e.V. Schmellwitz).

After 1989 Cottbus suffered the same fate as many other East German cities and recorded a loss of population especially within the two large housing estates that were made from prefabricated slabs. As the larger housing estate, Sachsendorf-Madlow received higher attention at first in 2001 by local authorities and urban planners, so that the preparations for urban regeneration in Neu-Schmellwitz did not begin before 2004 (Stadtverwaltung Cottbus, 2005).

In 2004 a strategy for urban restructuring in Neu-Schmellwitz was elaborated and completed by an action plan and the establishment of a future model (Stadtverwaltung Cottbus, 2005). The overall strategy for all the regeneration activities was called 'Minimaler Eingriff' (minimal intrusion), based on the idea that demolition activities focus on the demolition on buildings owned by housing associations and not by other third parties. In reality this means, that demolition activities are carried out in different parts of the whole district instead of focussing on a particular quarter. This entails that the already established technical infrastructure has to be preserved which causes high maintenance costs (Furhmann & Daldrop-Weidmann, 2008).

The urban restructuring East process in Neu-Schmellwitz is mainly funded under the national programme 'Urban Renewal East' and more than 2,000 apartments were demolished until 2010

(Stadtverwaltung Cottbus, 2005). As a link between the actors of the demolition process and the local residents a neighbourhood management office was opened in 2006 and Neu-Schmellwitz was accepted by the funding programme 'Socially Integrative City'. Furthermore an open network for various stakeholders such as local authorities, local NGO's, companies and citizens was founded in 2006 to inform and discuss about the regeneration activities (Stadtverwaltung Cottbus, 2007). Since then the demolition activities in Neu-Schwellwitz are guided by neighbourhood scale projects, such as a district newspaper, a music course and other social and cultural events to support the regeneration strategy and to let various stakeholders take part in the development and changing processes of the quarter⁵.

III. Results from the survey

For the current study, five experts that were involved in urban regeneration activities in Cottbus Neu-Schmellwitz were interviewed. The interview partners were selected according to the market research guideline elaborated by the ReNew Town project partners (Regional Development Agency of Usti Region, 2011). The interviews were conducted with:

- A local journalist,
- an urban planner from the municipal department for urban planning,
- a representative of a housing association,
- a representative of the municipality who is responsible for the district management,
- and a representative of a local cultural and social institutions who for example leads the open network.

Face-to-face interviews were conducted during the period from January to February 2012. According to the results of the interviews, urban regeneration in the quarter Neu-Schmellwitz concentrated on two main activities: Demolition and the improvement of the living conditions within the quarter. Two of the experts stated that the local authorities had to change their objectives for the development of Neu-Schmellwitz after the reunification took place. Originally, the local authorities planned to invest only in the stabilisation of the quarter but due to the loss of population and the high amount of housing vacancy after 1990 it was decided to reduce the housing stock and to demolish several buildings. Furthermore, three of the experts stated that urban regeneration in Neu-Schmellwitz aimed to improve the quality of life in the district or to preserve the district.

⁵ The funding for the projects on the neighbourhood level according to the Socially Integrative City programme will exist until 2013. It is unclear what will happen after 2013 (Lausitzer VerlagsService GmbH, 2008-2010).

Apart from the fact that all the experts were informed about the demolition activities, it was not clear if the buildings were affected by specific problems. Only the representative of the housing association stated that those buildings that were not demolished had to be refurbished to maintain the value of the building stock.

With regard to the public space, all experts agreed that enhancement activities took place but interestingly diverse answers were given in the way that each expert listed different kinds of enhancement activities. One told about the establishment or preservation of shopping facilities while another expert talked about a workshop to invent new ideas for the usage of demolition sites or other places and again another person mentioned the establishment of playgrounds and a citizens' park. One expert mentioned that an area called 'Schmellwitzer Fließ', a huge ditch system which was created to lower the groundwater level, was redesigned as a leisure area through the integration of playing areas, the creation of a botanical trail and several plantings. On the whole more than 10 different enhancement activities were mentioned.

Within the urban regeneration activities, the housing associations had a strong position and when the experts were asked about the main actors of the regeneration activities the housing associations were mentioned by all, followed by the municipality and public utility companies. Interestingly, none of the experts mentioned inhabitants at this point except the representative of the housing association, but when the experts were directly asked about the role of non-public institutions or non-governmental initiatives, four of the five experts were able to specify concrete non-governmental actors and projects that accompanied urban regeneration activities, for example:

- the open network, which was spontaneous founded during a workshop for the enhancement of the public spaces and which is open for everyone to meet once a month and to discuss the regeneration activities,
- private building owners that were involved in the elaboration of the strategy for urban restructuring in Neu-Schmellwitz referred in chapter II.3,
- inhabitants who were able to take part in workshops to design open spaces realised by a company for urban planning,
- various projects coordinated by the neighbourhood management office.

Within these statements it was said that it is important to involve inhabitants, building owners, civil associations, representatives of social infrastructure facilities and the neighbourhood management team in regeneration processes.

All these initiatives made an important contribution to the life of inhabitants but apart from projects to stimulate the social and cultural life, four of five experts stated that the preservation of the public

transport system was also an important measure to improve the life in the quarter and three of them, the journalist, the urban planner and the representative of a local social institution, mentioned that the preservation of social infrastructure facilities, such as schools and child-care centres, was also a considerable factor.

With regard to the success of the regeneration activities in Neu-Schmellwitz all of the experts stated that the measures were successful, for example with regard to the reuse of demolition sites for other purposes or the reduction of housing density in the quarter. Only the representative of the local authority made an exception at this point and stated that outward migration and vacancy could not have been prevented especially because the municipality had more focused on the enhancement of inner city quarters where attractive places of living were established. This statement was not agreed by the representative of the housing association and by the urban planner who followed the opinion that the housing vacancy was reduced and outward migration could have been prevented - at least for the moment.

Apart from that, all experts agreed that people move to Neu-Schmellwitz because cheap living space is offered. Furthermore, other advantages in comparison with the inner city were mentioned as well, such as that Neu-Schmellwitz is a green area and the quarter is near to city centre where basic social infrastructure is available. At the end of the interview process and despite the different opinions and perceptions, all experts agreed on a common lesson for other cities to learn: Urban regeneration needs a common strategy where local people are allowed and willing to participate and where social assistance is given to the affected inhabitants.

IV. Final summary

The present study regards an urban regeneration programme in the district quarter of Neu-Schmellwitz, city of Cottbus in Germany. The quarter was established in 1985 to respond to the housing needs of an increasing number of inhabitants. After the German reunification, the quarter was affected by outward migration and a resulting housing vacancy, therefore large urban regeneration and demolition activities were carried out. Today the quarter is still a residential area but it is under observation and as one expert stated, the future depends on the prospective demographic changes and the economic development of the entire city of Cottbus.

To-date, it seems that Neu-Schmellwitz has recovered from these profound changes. But as the study shows, comprehensive urban regeneration activities such as demolition and restructuring of an entire city quarter is never an easy task and opinions and perceptions with regard to realised measures differ from individual to individual. This can be explained by the fact that the implementation of a large urban regeneration strategy is not only a short-term measure but a profound transformation

process that continues for years. During that time, various different regeneration activities are carried out – some more successful, others less, some more important to one particular individual, others less.

This has been the case with Neu-Schmellwitz as well. But besides the diverse opinions and views of the experts, it became apparent that a range of incentives was given to the local inhabitants to prevent the quarter from decline. First, the very need for social assistance and collaboration was considered in the official regeneration strategy. A strong neighbourhood management and an open social network were also part of the process. Apart from the social net however, demolition activities were carried out in combination with enhancement strategies aimed to improve the well-being of the inhabitants, also with regard to visual aspects and enhancing leisure opportunities in the surrounding area. Furthermore, the public transport system was preserved so that Neu-Schmellwitz was not cut off from the inner city life of Cottbus. In addition to the above mentioned incentives, another strong stimulus was given to the inhabitants in the way that the rents for the apartments were kept relatively low so that the quarter is affordable to all types of inhabitants, especially to young families with children.

In conclusion, it appears that providing a set of incentives and the idea that urban regeneration measures have to be carried out in combination with other stimuli, such as social, economic or ecologic ones, can be a valuable lesson for other urban quarters to learn, if they are to embark on an urban regeneration programme.

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