
The Need to Consider Social and Cultural Objectives When Regenerating Brownfields in Europe

SUMMARY POSITION

For brownfield regeneration schemes to fully realise sustainability goals, more attention needs to be paid to achieving social and cultural benefits. There needs to be a strengthening of social and cultural aims and outcomes. **CABERNET believes that when regenerating brownfield sites, a set of key social and cultural objectives should be considered.**

This paper represents a component of wider discussions about how to achieve sustainable brownfield regeneration through the successful delivery of social and cultural goals, alongside economic and environmental objectives

CABERNET **recommends** that in regenerating brownfield sites, eight key social and cultural objectives should be considered. These are:

People-oriented objectives: focusing on social and cultural needs

- Objective 1: Preserve cultures that are valued by the local people and exploit opportunities for new forms of social and cultural development
- Objective 2: Provide or enable learning, or 'up-skilling', opportunities (improve employability)
- Objective 3. Promote employment opportunities appropriate for the development
- Objective 4. Promote social equity in the brownfield development

Place-oriented objectives: focussing on creating more sustainable places

- Objective 5. Improve perceptions and image of the brownfield development
- Objective 6. Contribute to strategic sustainability objectives in the urban context
- Objective 7. Ensure physical accessibility
- Objective 8. Provide liveable, healthy and safe environments for local communities

CABERNET Network and Contributing Authors

This paper was developed from the activities of CABERNET's Working Group (WG) 5 on Social and Cultural Issues¹. CABERNET is an expert multidisciplinary European Network that aims to facilitate new practical regeneration solutions for urban brownfields (www.cabernet.org.uk). The Network's vision is to 'enhance rehabilitation of brownfield sites, within the context of sustainable development of European cities, by the provision of an intellectual framework for coordinated research and development of tools.' CABERNET is coordinated by the University of Nottingham², in association with the German Umweltbundesamt, and is funded under the European Commission 5th Research Framework Programme³.

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³ European Commission 5th Research Framework Programme Key Action City of Tomorrow and Cultural Heritage

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1 Introduction

Brownfield sites can damage the social fabric and cultural capital of their surroundings. In order to achieve sustainable brownfield development, **social and cultural, economic and environmental** objectives all need to be met. However, in the past, economic and environmental objectives have driven brownfield development, and there now needs to be a strengthening of social and cultural aims and outcomes. Without more consideration of social and cultural impacts, current brownfield regeneration schemes that appear successful in the short term could become the eyesores and blighted areas of the future. This paper argues that for brownfield regeneration schemes to fully realise sustainability goals, more attention needs to be paid to achieving social and cultural benefits.

However, it is not enough to simply identify social and cultural *objectives*.

There is also a need to be explicit about:

- Who is responsible for implementing these objectives;
- The costs and benefits of incorporating these objectives into brownfield development schemes; and
- Which specific instruments might best be used to implement these objectives (e.g. specific policies and regulations; particular methods of public participation or new coalitions of agencies; fiscal
- measures, such as tax incentives; and/or better skills and education)

This Position Paper identifies eight key social and cultural objectives to consider when developing brownfield sites. They are sub-divided into those that deal mainly with 'people' and those that deal mainly with 'place'. This distinction was found to be useful, although several of the objectives incorporate elements of both 'people' and 'place'. For simplicity, the objectives are placed where their primary emphasis lies.

2 Position Statement

In regenerating brownfield sites, eight key social and cultural objectives should be considered. These are:

People-oriented objectives: focusing on social and cultural needs

Objective 1: Preserve cultures that are valued by the local people and exploit opportunities for new forms of social and cultural development

Objective 2: Provide or enable learning, or 'up-skilling', opportunities (improve employability)

Objective 3. Promote employment opportunities appropriate for the development

Objective 4. Promote social equity in the brownfield development

Place-oriented objectives: focussing on creating more sustainable places

Objective 5. Improve perceptions and image of the brownfield development

Objective 6. Contribute to strategic sustainability objectives in the urban context

Objective 7. Ensure physical accessibility

Objective 8. Provide liveable, healthy and safe environments for local communities

3 State of the Art

The importance of including social and cultural aims and objectives in brownfield regeneration schemes is increasingly acknowledged. And, of course, social and cultural issues have always been of prime concern to professional planners. However, a common - or shared - understanding of what can be achieved in terms of preserving and enhancing social and cultural conditions through brownfield development is lacking. Of course, different objectives will be relevant to different schemes: some brownfield developments take the form of vast cleared sites with no existing uses, while others may contain existing buildings and be surrounded by tight-knit communities or specific industries or businesses. But each development has the potential to improve the social and economic conditions of the neighbourhood, town or city in which it lies.

Indeed, in Europe now, there are numerous examples of regeneration strategies that demonstrate the value of a strong socio-cultural component in urban planning and regeneration. In such schemes, far from being a peripheral issue, social and cultural regeneration is now a significant driver for change. Examples are: in Barcelona, 'the city is the people model' (1); in Belfast the waterfront regeneration programme (2); and specific strategies included in projects in the Dublin Docklands (3) and Manchester City Centre (4). However, there is still a need for a broader articulation of the fundamental social and cultural objectives that should be considered when developing brownfield sites; and this is the aim of this Paper.

4 Justification of the Position Statement

There are eight key fundamental social and cultural objectives that should be considered when developing brownfield sites. These objectives go to the core of a social and cultural challenge to redefine the traditional concept of brownfield regeneration as an endeavour that relates to sites and reclamation, to an activity that is about delivering sustainable places that enrich the lives of the people who live and work there. It is important to note that this list of objectives is not definitive and, as stated, the relative importance of different objectives will change depending on the characteristics of any given brownfield scheme, but

it is felt that this is a valuable generic list with applicability across Europe⁴. In order to clarify the eight key objectives, aspects of 'State of the Art' information are included as a component of the discussion below.

4.1 Conceptual model of objectives and instruments required to achieve sustainable brownfield development

Before presenting the 8 social and cultural objectives it is useful to present a conceptual model of how social and cultural objectives fit into the process of sustainable brownfield development. This is useful to demonstrate how social and cultural drivers fit in with economic and environmental objectives.

The framework (Figure 1) conceptualises how the social and cultural objectives (Box B) fit with other objectives (Boxes A and C), and lists suggestions for their means of implementation (D). The Figure shows that the objectives need to be defined, then implemented through appropriate instruments if sustainable brownfield reuse (Box E) is to be achieved. Clearly different objectives have different means of implementation. The objectives are clearly overlapping and therefore it is necessary to search for the instruments and tools that will follow fulfilling several objectives. As it is possible to see from the list of tools and examples elaborated during the meeting of the 3rd project year, several methods and examples introduced here occur more often, which supports the choice of the instruments in the way to meet synergic effect of fulfilling several objectives by implementing these instruments.

5 Eight key social and cultural objectives to consider when developing brownfield sites

5.1 People-Oriented Objectives; focusing on social and cultural needs

Objective 1: Preserve cultures that are valued by the local people and exploit opportunities for new forms of social and cultural development

A common consequence of brownfield redevelopment is the displacement or destruction of local cultural heritage and memory. This has been a common experience across Europe, for example in the redevelopment of industrial sites such as mines, docklands and those with other heavy industrial uses. In addition new, redeveloped schemes often lack a cultural or social identity of their own. There is a need to preserve elements of existing or past cultures to provide some continuity, but also to balance this with the needs of new development and offer opportunities for new forms of social and cultural development. This objective relates primarily to 'people': to maintaining where appropriate, skills, experiences, crafts and

memories. But it is also about maximising benefits from the physical environment, for example, by making the best use of industrial buildings and familiar and valued landscapes. In particular, the objective is to highlight high quality existing features with complementary high quality new designs.

Creating new elements of physical structure as a project will have spin-off benefits to the local population. The recognition of existing cultures can be recorded by the aid of academic research into the cultural and social history of the area in the historic booklet and the conservation of the most significant physical elements can be proposed.

Supporting the development of a wide range of community organisations by the people who have the community's interests at heart is an important element in the active approach to new social and cultural development. It is also necessary to recognise that the local population should be sustained socially and culturally to counter negative influences, so some profits generated in property development should be ploughed back into the communities in terms of support for these organisations.

The cultural history can be commemorated in the form of sculptures, art shops and interpretative panels⁵ of course, a key to being able to maximise cultural benefits is access to adequate resources, and to this end all available funding opportunities need to be pursued. **An important point to remember, however, in seeking to achieve this objective is that a realistic approach must be taken towards the skills match between previous and new uses for brownfields. This can be best done by:**

- academic research into the cultural and social history and its record and promotion as well as integration of cultural heritage in wider sustainable strategies of revitalisation (preservation of artefacts, cultural tourism)
- involving the public into the processes of identification of locally significant valuable structural elements of the brownfields,
- using the most valuable structures as the innovation initiating points in the brownfields, restoring them from public sources and re-using them for public purposes thus supporting the quality of living environment in those localities,
- use GIS (Geographic Information Systems) for identification of social and cultural data in the areas of brownfield
- application of SIA (Social Impact Assessment) and social and cultural sustainability indicators for the appraisal of regeneration process.

⁴ See the List of Simple Case Studies and Tools for implementation of S&C issues in brownfield redevelopment, elaborated in the 3rd project year.

⁵ See the List of Simple Case Studies and Tools Examples elaborated during WG5 meeting in Riga 2004

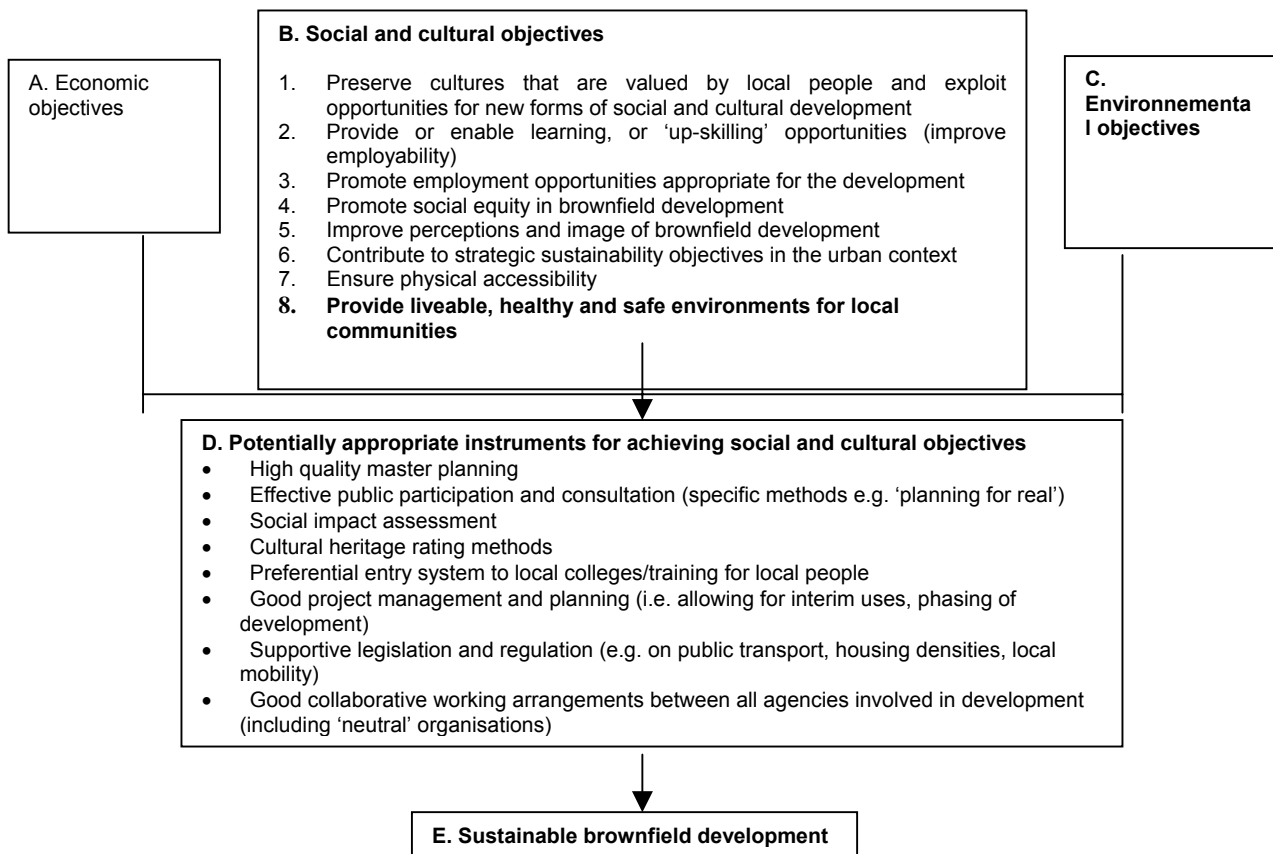


Figure 1: Objectives and instruments required to achieve sustainable brownfield development

Objective 2: Provide or enable (education) learning, or 'up-skilling', opportunities (improve employability)

Another important objective in brownfield development is ensuring local people have the skills and knowledge required to take advantage of employment opportunities and to participate as citizens within their locality: i.e. improving employability. This is important in brownfield regeneration schemes as often whole communities require new skills to be able to adapt to new economic opportunities or new social identities. Another aspect of this 'up-skilling' objective is the desire to maximise local learning about the process of regeneration: to capture knowledge and experience within the local community for continued and future benefit to the community and other areas undergoing similar changes. But employability is about the capacity to move self-sufficiently into and within labour markets and to realise potential through sustainable and accessible employment. It is particularly relevant to the experience of communities in a brownfield context. For an individual employability depends on; knowledge and skills they possess and their attitudes; the way personal attributes are presented in the labour market; the environmental and social context within which work is sought; and the economic context within which work is sought.

There is a need for greater emphasis placed on mixed use, which could provide a wider range of jobs, skilled and unskilled. More fundamentally, an interventionist approach has to be taken at school level providing programmes designed to encourage retention levels, thus preparing children more adequately for the world of work in their neighbourhood. These programmes have to be provided not only for the school children but also for their parents in order to emphasise the importance of completing education and lead towards suitable local opportunities in employment or in training. There should also be scholarships provided for those having the ability to go to university education. These programmes should be organised with the state educational and training agencies and funding should be provided by the local authorities for the majority of these programmes and guidance should be provided for the applications to the areas of most need. This can be supported by:

- offering special courses and training programs and adapting them to the knowledge and skills standards in the locality of the brownfields,
- using the specific potential of skills and knowledge of the local population and train them towards suitable employment opportunities that are required by increased competitiveness on labour market,

- identifying the gaps on labour market and use them as targets for specific training based on the local tradition,
- providing programmes designed to encourage children and their parents to complete education and offering local scholarships for those having abilities for third level education.

Objective 3. Promote employment opportunities appropriate for the development

A major problem in many brownfield development schemes is a lack of appropriate employment opportunities. Hence an objective is to create new and innovative job opportunities wherever possible and/or appropriate. Alongside this, it is important to ensure access to any new jobs for local people. In this sense access is both 'physical', i.e. meaning local people can actually travel to new jobs, but also related to 'skills match', i.e. the jobs are available to local people in terms of qualification, skill and experience requirements.

There is a need for a wide range of differing jobs to maximise the opportunities for local people. The proposed development should bring more retail, services and educational facilities in order to provide wider opportunities. However, it is important to recognise that most, if not all of the jobs associated with brownfield redevelopment, whether they are in industry or technology related activities, are no longer sustainable so that the emphasis is very much on re-training.

There are numerous ways of achieving employment opportunities through brownfield development. Sometimes, the need is for housing development to provide homes near to employment; in other cases, the need is for new employment-generating buildings on site; in others still the need is for new mixed-use neighbourhoods. Where possible, new or reused buildings or infrastructure in brownfield developments should be used for new enterprises and job creation and give support to:

- development of the mixed use areas in the process of brownfield revitalization,
- public-private partnership as the guarantee of variety of interests in the locality and diversity of functional use of the area,
- self-regeneration process of the brownfield using the local potential for starting the business activities,
- establishing the local training centres in order to educate local people in relevant skills and methods.

Objective 4. Promote social equity in the brownfield development

Promoting social equity in a particular brownfield development is an almost impossibly complex objective. However, there are some tangible goals that can be achieved. An important objective is to provide affordable housing and business accommodation. In any given development it is important to strive to meet the differing requirements

of local residents and potential newcomers. A key aim in many urban brownfield regeneration schemes is to attract relatively wealthy people to an area to improve the local economy, however in these cases consideration should also be given to providing a proportion of affordable accommodation for local residents and businesses. An equally important issue is access to services and facilities. Wherever possible, access and opportunities should be open to all – schemes should resist elements of 'private areas'. Likewise, transport and physical infrastructure should not disadvantage particular elements of society (such as non-car owners, disabled people or cyclists). In devising schemes, all involved should be mindful to attract a mix of people to support (and not over-stretch) local facilities (5).

In many instances these objectives can be achieved through planning: both high quality master planning and strong local policies on elements such as affordable housing will be crucial. Similarly, supportive legislation and regulations on, for example, inclusion of the representatives of local community directly within the workings of the development agency are important. The incorporation of social equity aims at the outset of a development project is also key. These are complex issues that can only be resolved through joint working with a number of agencies; for example those responsible for housing, health, environment, transport, and education and local community organisations and at the same time the way should be given to:

- involvement of the local community representatives directly within the working of the development agency,
- supporting public-private partnership as the optimal model for complex revitalisation processes guarantying higher social diversity,
- avoiding single used and mono-structural character of revitalised brownfields because even in the case of high quality they lead to social exclusion of certain social group (high society, outsiders, ethnic group etc.),
- ensuring a variation in types of housing supply (rented housing mixed with owner occupied, large dwellings mixes with small ones, high rise mixed with low rise),
- strict control of the standards of barrier-free environment for disabled, children or women during the process of designing and constructing/restoring the structures in the brownfields.
- give special consideration to children and young people and their ability to influence and enjoy their neighbourhood.

5.2 Place-oriented objectives: focussing on creating more sustainable places

Objective 5. Improve perceptions and image of the brownfield development

Poor image is seen as one of the most destructive elements in brownfield development. The notion of outsiders and their perceptions are equally as important as perceptions of those living in new developments. The objective is to improve the image of the development for those living and working in it so that a sense of community, identity and ownership can be fostered. Creating a sense of place is very important. Poor image is related to poor visual quality, physical dereliction, social stigma and blighting. Whole areas can suffer from 'low esteem' which then results in lack of confidence for investors and newcomers. A large part of the problem is also a resistance to, or fear of, change.

The approaches to counteracting the negative image of brownfield are various. It is possible to improve the sites physically through demolitions by the erection of clean fencing, flags and signage. In the case of brownfields, an international development competition can be held to make a statement about the high standard of development desired. Foreign developers and professionals can often have a wider vision for a site, being familiar with successful brownfield redevelopments elsewhere than local people, who can be sceptical, having lived with a problem for a long time. Interim uses for the site can then play an important part in beginning to change the image of an area and soft uses such as quality green space is frequently beneficial too. It is also good to renovate an existing building and bring it to use (see WG5 CS and examples, e.g. Gasometer in Vienna, which became an important landmark) and promote the image of brownfield regeneration schemes very successfully.

Physical improvement works should concentrate on social infrastructure such as the forward development of public spaces. In the cases of an extraordinary negative visual image amongst citizens, it should be considered essential to wipe out that memory with the provision of public spaces of quality around the neighbouring areas. For improving the image of brownfields it is important to:

- identify latent potential of the brownfields (historical, socio-cultural, geographical) for the development of positive impression/perception of the brownfield locality,
- initiate the development/creation of the significant symbols and connotations of structural elements,
- create new progressive interesting architecture, preserved technical works, or natural complexes in the locality of the brownfield,
- promote the development of public spaces in the area, including greenspace,
- to extend the master plan with a design guide for urban design,
- preserve valued elements of existing cultural heritage, underlying positively perceived specific features and architectural quality of the redeveloped structure.

Objective 6. Contribute to strategic sustainability objectives in the urban context

The objective of contributing to strategic sustainability relates to maximising opportunities to create more socially and culturally sustainable urban forms within the town or city as a whole. Examples of this are: contributing to more compact cities which are diverse in terms of ethnicity, age and economic status; designing developments to support population densities high enough to make public services viable (such as public transport, hospitals, schools etc.); and contributing to reducing urban sprawl with its associated social inequity problems. It is about developing an appropriate mix of uses in the city as a whole rather than just concentrating on one particular brownfield site.

The redevelopment should be in line with policies on sustainability. The objective is to allow people to work, live and play in the area if they chose to do so, thus minimising travel between these activities. Mixed use can be difficult to achieve as it depends on the developer's plan and in the case of the developer's imperative to make profit, he/she is likely to seek the highest value use in all cases, often at the cost of the long term viability of the development. A strategic decision has to be taken in the process of re-development that the area can be developed, with the local authority exercising control on each site. Thus the authority will be able to take a balanced view between financial returns and long term sustainability.⁶

This objective can be achieved largely through good spatial and land use planning techniques. However, supportive legislation is required which puts the onus on developers to reuse brownfield sites before greenfields. The redevelopment should not rely only on private car transport for access because of the lack of planning and investment in public transport. It should be predicated on the provision of public transport and seek to integrate with the developing proposals for such transport. It is necessary to concentrate on:

- avoiding all brownfield regeneration projects looking the same
- avoiding the development of mono-functional structures in the process of regeneration,
- supporting mixed ownership/investments in the locality of brownfield,
- creating viable public services and public transport,
- connecting the newly developed local economy to the variety of hierarchic levels of market (local, regional, national, international).

⁶ See example of the Third Level College in the CS of Dublin Docklands, which was given a site free of charge on condition that it provided particular courses suitable for the local communities and that it reserved a number of places for local students who might not have the normal, minimum academic entry requirements.

Objective 7. Ensure physical accessibility

The objective of creating brownfield development sites that are physically connected to their surrounding areas is crucial. This means creating links and overcoming physical barriers. It also means providing for modes of transport other than the private car – such as walking, cycling and public transport. And it means integrating these modes of transport in space and time. The importance of physical connections to aid accessibility to jobs, services, facilities and employment opportunities cannot be overstated.

In order to achieve a physically well-connected site, a supportive legislative framework is required⁷. High quality master planning is a pre-requisite for physical and virtual connectivity of the site so that the infrastructure for a choice of travel modes can be carefully integrated. Local transport mobility plans can be of use too, as they can link to city wide, regional and national plans. The preparation of "access statements" linking macro and local planning to specific building proposals will also assist the development of accessibility strategies. The most important issues impacting upon accessibility are:

- The inclusion of brownfield sites within sustainable macro, regional and city plans, fully connected to transport, socio-cultural and economic networks;
- The provision of a choice of travel modes rather than single-system solutions. Transport systems should be fully integrated, prioritising public pedestrian and cycle routes;
- Urban design principles should optimise planning solutions to minimise local movement, and promote barrier-free inclusive environments for all buildings and public spaces.

Physical accessibility in the areas of brownfields can be met by fulfilling the following requirements:

- including the locality of brownfields in the system of the city and of the region, in its transport system and technical and social infrastructure;
- avoiding one-system transport service for the locality ;
- optimising the developed local functional structure and minimizing the length of necessary inner movements in the locality;
- avoiding collisions of the various transport systems and giving preference to pedestrian and cyclist oriented public routes;
- setting architectural standards of barrier-free environment for disabled, children, women, aged people and good engagement with and provision for young people

Objective 8. Provide liveable, healthy and safe environments for local communities

The objective of providing liveable, healthy and safe environments for local communities is extremely important, whatever the end use of the site. In the past, too little attention has been paid to the types of neighbourhood in which people want to live, work, and spend their leisure time. All too often homes and business spaces have been poorly designed and badly constructed and little attention has been paid to the public realm. However, advances in understanding and skills in urban design, neighbourhood planning and landscape design in the last decade are beginning to produce exemplars of healthy, safe neighbourhoods, which provide a high quality of life. Key elements of these neighbourhoods are good access to open and recreational space, high quality public realm (places that people can freely go that are not private or retail space) (landscaping, lighting, public art etc.), provision for walking, cycling and public transport, and a sense of place.

Good consultation and design processes are a key to securing high quality neighbourhoods, when coupled with highly skilled planners, designers and community representatives. Innovative collaborative design and planning processes have been devised to achieve such high quality results, such as "planning for real", "visioning" and "scenario testing" methods. In order for these to be successful all involved in the redevelopment need to be committed to collaborative processes, and resources need to be available to facilitate them. In the effort to provide sustainable communities it is necessary to consider:

- providing certain amount (approx. 20%) of all new housing units in the area to be social/affordable and designated for the local people with no differences articulated in the design,
- the development of appropriate scale of the physical structure and concentration (via functional and structural limits for the built environment) with the goal to optimise the conditions for the development of the communities,
- public-private investment in the refurbishment of the environment,
- the urban design with the elements to increase social security,
- stabilising the population in the locality through improvement of the living conditions – employment opportunities, safety, social atmosphere, hygienic and health standards.

⁷ E.g.: compulsory purchase orders may be required to buy land to enable links.

6 Conclusions

6.1 Areas for further research and development

The objectives listed above, and suggestions of how to implement them, represent the results of the discussion on social and cultural issues to consider in brownfield development. Further work is needed to explore several of these issues deeper, under the research projects.

6.2 Areas where CABERNET can contribute to achieving social and cultural objectives

CABERNET has a broad remit, of which social and cultural issues are a component of its work. In terms of this remit the Network as a whole can contribute to raising the priority of social and cultural issues in brownfield development in the following ways:

1. By clarifying how socio-cultural issues relate to and are 'traded off' in brownfield development with economic and environmental issues
2. By clarifying which instruments are most effective in implementing social and cultural objectives (examples of good practice are given by CABERNET members in the List of Simple Case Studies and Tools)
3. By collecting case studies of brownfield redevelopment schemes which have been successful in incorporating social and cultural objectives
4. By helping to disseminate good practice for practitioners at a number of levels

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Kerri Farnsworth: FACT Centre, Wood Street, Ropewalks, Liverpool city centre, UK

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