



Plzen (CZ) workshop 17th of September 2013

Titel of presentation:

“Creative valorisation of industrial heritage sites? Experiences from European projects”

Abstract:

Uneven development in late capitalist society has various spatial consequences. Probably one of the most analysed and researched in regional sciences, but nevertheless persistent forms, has been the appearance of regions whose former growth paths have been interrupted and now face an uncertain future regarding their economic and social development. For long such “old industrialised regions” in Europe have been at the forefront of processes of crisis, but lately have identified their industrial past as an asset in the struggle to overcome the negative economic, social and environmental impacts of structural change. This paper wants to reflect on efforts of different European regions that have tried to valorise their industrial heritage through various approaches.

In recent decades, many traditional European centres of the old industries, i.e. mining and steel production have been rendered unprofitable, through various processes. These changes have had a profound impact: the complete closure or substantial down-sizing of mining and related industries have triggered difficult processes of de-industrialisation, high unemployment and out-migration. Owing to the lack of economic alternatives, the organisational, financial and conceptual capacities of such regions are generally regarded as extremely sparse and overtax local and regional decision makers, which are relying increasingly on their own capacities and potentials to master structural adjustment.

In most of such regions issues of brown field rehabilitation and re-development of heritage sites are playing a key role. This paper discusses approaches and challenges to valorise the industrial heritage of old industrialised regions. The analysis will discuss specifically such approaches connected to the creative revitalisation of old-buildings and production sites, as well as the necessary cooperation and governance processes taking place in the regions. The focus of the research is on regions predominantly characterised by small and medium-sized towns, as here the problems of change and the opportunities for new development are especially difficult due to the limited capacities (human, financial resources) such territorial units possess.

The background for this abstract is formed by research carried out in both the ReSource (www.resource-ce.eu) and SHIFT-X project, two Objective 3 'Territorial cooperation' projects (Central Europe), that have been co-funded by ERDF. While the former project had a run-time from 2009 to 2012, the latter is currently running until 2014. Both projects deal with transformation processes in old industrial regions in central Europe, providing a unique insight into processes of regional development across various European countries.

CV:

Jörn Harfst is a research associate at the Karl-Franzens-University's Institute of Geography and Regional Science in Graz (Austria). He studied Geography at the Universities of Hamburg (GER) and Southampton (UK). Major research interests are urban and regional development issues and governance processes in old industrialised regions worldwide. Over the last years he has been involved extensively in European networking processes via various EU co-funded projects.

Contact: Karl-Franzens-University Graz, Institute of Geography and Regional Science, Heinrichstrasse 36, 8010 Graz (Austria), Mail: joern.harfst@uni-graz.at