

FILLING THE 'IN-BETWEEN' SPACES WITH TRUST

Key information

- Location: **Brno (Czech Republic)**
- Population: **375 000**
- Involved in URBACT network: **sub>urban**
- More information: <http://urbact.eu/sub.urban>



The view of Brno from Red Hill

Brno's fringe is plagued by poor infrastructure and weak social ties. As part of their effort to tackle this, the municipality is using URBACT tools to trial a new citizen-centred model of regeneration in the Red Hill area.

As the Czech Republic's second largest city, Brno is an important cultural centre, driven by a strong, diverse economy. Following a rapid increase in population throughout the 20th century, the post-communist period saw a move towards suburbanisation led by the private sector. The consequences have proved particularly complex. Today developable land is running out and while demand for housing continues to rise, the number of new builds is declining. As a result young people and poorer residents are being priced out of the market. Some already-established communities face parallel problems. While many suburbs are well connected by bus links and tram lines, and enjoy good quality services, large pockets of "in between" spaces, in the fringe, have been left behind.

A plan for the hidden gem of the peri-urban city

For over a decade the municipality has been working on a polycentric development plan which, among other things, aims to regenerate these neglected areas. URBACT has provided an important source of innovative tools to help put this into action. As part of the sub>urban network, the city saw an opportunity to work with URBACT methods at a smaller, neighbourhood level. This time their aim was to experiment with a new model of fringe development through the regeneration of a single site.

Finding a pilot location required unprecedented cooperation between municipal offices. As a requirement from the



Cleaning up the pilot site of Red Hill



The final local group meeting

"URBACT was really useful for helping us develop a vision for Red Hill."

Kateřina Pavlíková

URBACT programme, the city's strategic department set up a group of local stakeholders (URBACT Local Group) to link with the transport, investment and housing offices. Together, these groups co-created a set of criteria to guide the selection process. After weeks of conversation they decided on Red Hill, a potential residential area situated on a border site between the city centre and the Bohunice neighbourhood, which is home to a series of allotment gardens and a former brownfield site. In addition to problems of services and infrastructure, Red Hill was suffering from regular sewage leaks and some of its green spaces were being used as illegal dumps.

The objective of the local group was to draw up an Integrated Action Plan based on new techniques introduced by URBACT. "Throughout the project we discovered a lot of new tools, mainly about coordinating administration, like making a problem tree, collecting all the data, mapping relations of ownership," confirms Kateřina Pavlíková, Expert for Regional Policy at the municipality. "URBACT was really useful for helping us develop a vision for Red Hill. Doing it in a combined way definitely made some processes more open and understandable to local people later on."

The official legacy of Brno's participation in the network is an urban study of the Red Hill site, which was developed as an extension of the Integrated Action Plan. It was presented at the final local group meeting where citizens were invited to speak with the experts and ask them questions directly. Red Hill itself is still undergoing a geological survey and various transport models are being tested to verify the proposals in the urban study. But while the renovation will

be implemented step-by-step during the coming years, the processes employed during sub>urban have already been recognised as valuable and potentially transferable tools. "We managed to show other departments that if you work in cooperation with locals it can really pay off," concludes Martina Pacasová, City Strategic Manager. "Hopefully this will have an impact on their work as well."

A forum for regeneration

"Usually the municipality just does all this and then reveals the plan," reflects Ms Pacasová, "but as part of the sub>urban project we wanted to try something new." A second, parallel local group was established, made up of all stakeholders in the Red Hill area, from individual residents and gardening associations, to big local employers and land-users. These were involving up to 90 people. Everything was written down and all decisions communicated back to the community via email and web pages.

"The municipality doesn't usually organise meetings like this," says Ms Pacasová, "so we didn't know how people would react." Initially there were conflicts of interest, arising from the complex ownership of the Red Hill site, but after two years of working with participatory methods the municipality and citizens learnt how to collaborate more effectively. One of the best symbols of the progress made was the 'Clean Up Red Hill' event, which saw over 100 people coming together on two occasions to work in the site. The municipal managers were among them. "It was a nice way to show citizens that even office workers can get their hands dirty and we're not just chatting and sketching but really doing stuff," says Ms Pacasová. "I think we gained some trust from this."