

ALEŠ KOMÁR

THE PROBLEMS OF THE REVITALIZATION AND REUSING OF FORMER MILITARY LANDS IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

A. Komár: *The Problems of the Revitalisation and Reusing of Former Military Lands in Central and Eastern Europe*. – Geografie – Sborník ČGS, 103, 3, pp. 347 – 351 (1998). – The article in its introduction deals with the topic of the Pilot Study “Environmental Aspects of Reusing Former Military Lands”. The Pilot Study has been launched within the framework of cooperation and has brought together Alliance and Eastern Partner countries to share experiences in planning and managing the cleanup of former military sites in order to launch a successful and sustainable re-use project. The conversion and redevelopment should be based on pilot study experiences, which are stressed by the author in the main part of this article.

KEY WORDS: conversion of military sites – structured approach – NATO/CCMS Pilot Study.

Introduction

The 90s this century are connected with political changes the central and eastern Europe, and enter human history as a period of hitherto unseen decrease in troop numbers and and closures of military bases. More than 8,000 military facilities in the area of more than 1 million ha was released for civil use. The former USSR withdrew more than 1.5 million soldiers and left a big number of military facilities and training zones in the abandoned areas. In the east as well as in the west these changes bring problems. Firstly, who is responsible for the conversion to another use, then who answers for the damages to the environment. Probably the biggest problem is to propose successful projects for locality development.

The administrative responsibility is also connected with looking for real estate keepers, their sale or hire. In eastern Europe the military columns abolition affects the local economy, because the soviet military facilities were more or less independent, while in western Evrope they have a direct impact on laborers, purchase power and the receipt of taxes. Government agencies strive to make regional institutions use the places with the help of extensive and costly planning. To enable the locality to use it it is necessary to solve the pollution cleansing and to remove unexploded ammunition, thoroughly appraise and estimate the future utilization and state the financial expenses for gaining investors.

Regions usually require lands for flat construction and business activities. On the other hand a lot of military buildings are situated in remote places, which do not attract potential buyers with their position and economical possibilities. The reuse of real estate for civil purposes is conditioned by

working out utilization studies, marketing strategies and improved financial mechanizations. These considerations must run in connection with specific regional conditions. In principle there are two possibilities – the use of the military buildings for economic gain (trade, industry, business, habitation, tourism etc), and the use of wild landscape, which include parts suitable rather for natural restoration.

International attitude

Solving the problems has since 1994 been dealt with by the pilot study Environmental aspects of reusing former military lands. It is run under the control of NATO/CCMS (an association which deals with the environment) and its participants are experts from NATO and eastern European states. The aim is to share experience in planning and organizing the process of former military places sanitation and controlling the process of their further use. These questions include the methods of research of the place, pollution sanitation, cooperation with adequate institutions of public government, forming proposals of utilization projects, presentations to business and financial circles etc. Particular groups of problems – e.g. military buildings methods of utilization, contamination types, unease with civil utilization, but also the costs of the conversion process, financial shortage, time inconvenience of transformation and others are of global character.

Brief description of transformation conditions

To the basic dominating factors affecting the new use belong the geographical conditions of locality, type of military facilities and with that their connected use. We cannot omit the conditions of the natural protection and regional economical situation.

Especially natural areas with weak infrastructure are considerably unfavorably affected by the troops withdrawal, leaving the buildings free for vandalism and the rise of unpermitted pits.

Some military facilities cannot be used because of their construction and quality. Most reasonable seems to be the reuse of barracks and inhabitable parts of bases for habitation and institutions , for which there is a reasonable infrastructure.

Variable conditions of successful reuse include:

- Forming area development planning based on knowledge of the former military use, building quality and infrastructure accessibility.
- Forming suitable organization structure and controlling management for arranging cooperation of different institutions on different government levels. This condition is considered the alfa and omega of the achievement of success.
- Working out the study of reusing the military facilities and feasibility study, success can be achieved through the help of specific interest groups (e.g. politics, universities, associations), especially local inhabitants and institutions.
- Financial mechanization and offer programs, e.g. expenses and contributions to the reuse project analysis. At the same time it is obvious, that this problem can not be left to the municipality self-government,

because the transformation is a politically important question of conversion on the state level.

- Gaining investors and marketing, which means looking for suitable new users (investors, keepers and renters), this stage principally decides on particular use on the basis of consideration and demands of settlements.
- Economic project durability, by which there must be considered expenses for monitoring, pollution removing, site security, removing of unneeded infrastructure, facilities and pits, development of necessary infrastructure, administration and marketing on one hand, and contributions on the other hand – from sale (hire), creating job openings, regional economy development, “green meadow” protection, which will not be built up in the consequence of reuse of the already built-up area, increase of the surrounding lands prices and environmental contributions (often combined with contributions from recreation and tourism).

Process stages

The conversion process of military-used places for civil use has been divided into stages of orientation, conceptualization and realization. The purpose of this process is the optimization of process and its transparency.

The orientation stage starts at the time of accessibility of the former military base for civil use. The participants are different experts and officials aimed at gaining as much information about the areas future as possible. It includes the activities of stating and measuring according to the interest in the place, open variants of utilization and the support of government institutions.

The conceptualization stage starts by appointing the organ controlling the project, forming the development and financial concept, setting up planning steps and active marketing aimed at turning the project into reality. To the main questions belong the forming of a professional section from local and state institutions with a respected director at the head, appointing entrusted persons and central-government commission, selecting the advice and support authorities and regarding the investments selecting the representatives of suitable state commissions having access to funds which can be used. From the development concept point of view remain unsolved the questions of ecological risks and state correction evaluation, infrastructure analysis and buildings built for military use, trade analysis orientated on the civil goals of conversion and feasibility study. To state the further progress the results of evaluating the place and trade analysis are combined. To important questions still belong stating the locality value and sale prices, according to which the financial plan composition is based. The presupposition for that is the necessary political decision on the local and regional factors level, because there is no other way to achieve this step. At the next step – realization – private investors must become familiar with the binding legal scope for the planning, with locality articulation and construction conditions.

The realization stage is the fulfilling of the conception and connecting the former military zone to the regional economy and trade. In this stage it is important to establish a particular system of institutions, which will transform the new area use concept to reality, arrange the utilization and market locality utilization. To carry out this stage and control the process the regional and local state self-government or independent development agency

can be used. Simultaneously with the process of realization the marketing activity started in the previous stage and using all kinds of media for advertisement and presentation must continue. The last point is then the control and evaluation of the achieved immediate goals and the whole process of cancellation and transformation of the former military base.

Conclusion

From the mentioned very brief survey of problems we can see the time-consumption of military areas conversion to civil use. The study also demonstrates, that in the transformation system concerning East-European as well as West-European states or North-American states there are important visions on the places future and its economic exploitation, based on the marketing study. Progress cannot be achieved without the active control management of local, regional and state institutions and without state support.

A hitherto unappreciated reality is the active participation of the Czech experts in doing the pilot study, which in the end resulted in the presentation of a project of conversion of the Ralsko military area. The Czech Republic is among those countries, whose experiences will help in the future to avoid these faults when reusing former military zones.

References:

- BURKHARDT, D. (1995): Environmental Problems at Military Installations in Germany. IABG, Ottobrunn, 15 p.
- Environmental Aspects of Reusing Former Military Lands: Phase 2. Minutes of October 1997 CCMS Pilot Study Meeting, Jurmala, 14 p.
- GONCHAR, K. (1997): Research and Development Conversion in Russia. Report 10. Bonn International Center for Conversion, Bonn, 119 p.
- KOMAR, A. (1996): Problematika životního prostředí ve Výboru pro výzvy moderní společnosti NATO. Zpravodaj MŽP, VI, No. 2, pp. 6-7.
- Study "Reusing Former Military Lands". The Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, BMU, Berlin 1997, 36 p.
- The Challenges of Modern Society. NATO – CCMS. Scientific Affairs Division, NATO, Brussels 1993, 44 p.

Summary

THE PROBLEMS OF THE REVITALISATION AND REUSING OF FORMER MILITARY LANDS IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

The fundamental political changes in the countries of central and eastern Europe brought about a period of troop reduction and base closure. More than 8,000 military installations world-wide (one million hectares) have been given over to civilian use. The former Soviet Union withdrew over half a million of its soldiers. In the East and West alike, the transfer of such areas from military to civilian hands creates challenges for those responsible for the redevelopment, the remediation of environmental damage and for need to launch a successful and sustainable reuse project on a given site.

A series of difficult tasks must be fulfilled in order to develop the site, including the remediation of contaminants and unexploded ordnance, an overall assessment and an evaluation of the re-use, value appraisal and price negotiations, and financing and acquisition of investors. For re-use projects the use of the correct feasibility study, organisational structure, marketing strategy, or innovative financing mechanism are

important. The goals are limited to sites which are put to renewed economic use (industry, housing, business, recreation, etc.), and does not include former military installation which are under-going renaturation.

One of the objectives of the NATO/CCMS Pilot Study is to identify which factors have a more positive impact on the redevelopment process and which have a negative impact in order to determine a redevelopment strategy. It is necessary to stress, that the problems of reusing a variety of military site types, various types of contaminants, costs and time-consuming actions of conversion, lack of finances, etc. are global.

The re-use of former military sites has been divided into three phases. The orientation phase starts after the former military installation is made available for civilian use. A series of key questions need to be considered during this phase – who may be interested in the site, which re-use options are open, what kind of government support is available.

During the conceptualisation phase, a form of project management must be established, an overall redevelopment concept – as well as a financing concept – need to be developed and the first steps toward both turning the project idea into reality and active marketing need to be taken. The concept must be based on a detailed assessment of the site within the regional context and should include the following components – detailed environmental risk and remediation assessment, analysis of the structures and buildings, market analysis, a feasibility study and a finance plan.

The realisation phase – the re-use concept is carried out on the site and the site is reintegrated into the regional economy and marketed. Goals are the establishment of an institutional structure to put the re-use concept into practise, utilisation and marketing of the site. The Czech Republic has gained tremendous experience due to the presentation of its proposal of conversion of the former military training area at Ralsko.

(The author is with Land Forces Military College, 682 03 Vyškov.)

Arrived at the editors office on April 3, 1998

Recommended for publication by Václav Poštolka and Zbyněk Ryšlavý