



World Soil Day: Fostering sustainable land use

Sustainable management of soil needs re-use of brownfields

Since its conception by the International Union of Soil Sciences in 2002, the 5th December is internationally recognised as World Soil Day. In this week, several organisations and projects use this occasion to advocate the importance of soil for human survival and to raise awareness of the threats facing it and the vital nature of sustainable land use management.

European projects TIMBRE and HOMBRE signed a Memorandum of Understanding to combine the ambition to create a paradigm shift to ‘Zero Brownfields’ where Brownfields become areas of opportunity that deliver useful services for society, instead of derelict areas that are considered useless

Since the second half of the 19th century industrialisation and economic change have produced many contaminated Brownfield areas all over Europe. Today most perceive Brownfields as a legacy. However, about 2 million presumably contaminated sites exist in Europe threatening the scarce soil and groundwater resources, ecosystems, human health and often impeding development of surrounding areas. Moreover, in our urban sprawl European societies are continuing in creating the Brownfields of tomorrow.

The reduction of natural land consumption by means of brownfield regeneration and revitalization plays a key role in European sustainable development strategies. European research centres, practitioners and Brownfield owners join forces to realize a long overdue paradigm shift in attitudes of land use. In November, 29 European research organisations and companies agreed in a Memorandum of Understanding to collaborate in bringing about and enabling this paradigm shift of ‘zero brownfields integrated into the land use cycle’.

“Circular land use means, better understanding why, how, where and when brownfields are formed in order to avoid future brownfields, in different areas in the EU and in three main fields: urban, industrial and mining areas” said Hans van Duijne (Deltares, Netherlands), coordinator of the project HOMBRE – Holistic Management of Brownfield Regeneration.

Stephan Bartke (Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research – UFZ, Germany), coordinator of the project TIMBRE – Tailored Improvement of Brownfield Regeneration in Europe – adds: “Our collaboration will also foster the enhancement of sustainable and economically efficient brownfield revitalisation based on an assessment of nature’s, stakeholders’ and site owners’ needs through the development and provision of integrated problem- and target-oriented packages of approaches, technologies and tools for derelict land redevelopment.”

The World Soil Day draws attention to the importance of healthy soil and sustainable land use management: “Man lives on as well as from intact and healthy soils. Fertile soil is a source of raw materials and food, a store of nutrients, water or greenhouse gases, and a habitat. Contaminated sites and the expansion of human settlements have increasingly jeopardised the role played by soil.” said Jochen Flasbarth, President of the German Federal Environment Agency.

The activities of the projects HOMBRE and TIMBRE can be followed on their websites www.zerobrownfields.eu and www.timbre-project.eu. Research results, examples from case studies, options for interaction and collaboration with these projects and more in-depth information is also available from that addresses.

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