

The Recovery of European “Weak Market Cities”

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ABSTRACT

Following overarching transformation processes since the 1970s, many industrial cities have experienced a dramatic decline of their economic base. During the subsequent crisis, these cities were confronted with a wide range of problems that severely affected their functioning (e.g. population decline, increased social problems and welfare dependency, pressures on municipal budgets). Most cities have since made considerable efforts to adjust to the new requirements, their strategies and approaches have been widely studied. The level of success has varied considerably as we know from many examples around the world.

With a research project on “Weak Market Cities” we are currently investigating the recovery processes in seven European cities (Belfast, Bilbao, Bremen, Leipzig, Sheffield, St. Etienne, and Torino). Evidence gathered from data as well as key experts and stakeholders suggests that the situation in these cities seems to have improved since the crisis. Although one might argue that the larger regional, national and global context builds the general operational framework, cities still seem to have a certain degree of flexibility to influence their development. The research was driven by a number of questions:

- How was the turning-point reached? How do we evaluate what has been achieved so far?
- Which were the main factors for progress?
- Is there a more general lesson to learn about urban recovery?

One of our observations is that the cities demonstrate both striking similarities and differences in their urban recovery process. The presentation will draw upon our learning from the seven cities and present the major outcomes that we were able to distil from the research.

Key Words: urban recovery, urban transformation, resurgent cities