

Case Study 8: Altena, Germany and Pori, Finland

The evidence around successful turnaround towns in Europe is limited. However, the cases of Altena, Germany and Pori, Finland feature a number of characteristics that are relevant to this study, so we have included them as illustrative short overviews. Pori and Altena are two of the towns involved in the European Commission's URBACT II programme, which aims to foster sustainable and integrated urban development. Altena was part of the Op-Act project, which focuses on the strategic positioning of small and medium-sized cities facing demographic changes. Pori was involved in the SURE, Socio-Economic Methods of Urban Regeneration in Deprived Urban Areas project.⁵⁰

Altena, Germany

Altena has a population of 18,000, and is situated on the river Lenne, 25 miles from Dortmund in highly industrialised South-Westphalia. It has a 12th-century castle built on a hilltop, which was home to the world's first youth hostel. The town's other main feature is its steel wire industry, and it is home to the German Museum of Wire. Altena supplies 18% of the world's steel wire, and produces special steel sheets for Airbus and the Ariane Rocket.

What the situation was

Altena was hit hard by deindustrialisation and the 2008 economic crisis. Over a number of decades, major businesses, including Nokia, left the town, and the population began to decline. The housing market deteriorated, and there were many empty properties in the town centre.

What it became & how it happened

Altena already had a tourist attraction, its hilltop castle. But of the 100,000 people who visited the castle each year, only 10,000 made the short trip

down the hill to the town. So the Town Council decided to build an elevator linking the castle with the moribund town centre. This was complemented by a plan to fill 20 empty shops to turn the town centre into a crafts village. An association was founded in 2011 to manage real estate in the city centre, and Gundula Schulze from the mayor's office says that progress is already being made:

“For 10 years, shops in the centre were empty – no-one was buying. And now, something is changing. During the last two years, about 10 buildings with shops have been sold... everyone knows something is changing in our town.”



⁵⁰ All material is taken from URBACT II Project Results, Second Edition, November 2013, European Union

Other successful initiatives include the establishment of a medieval market, which now attracts 25,000 visitors a year.

Council working groups on developing tourist infrastructure were galvanised by a target to make tourism the second largest contributor to the local economy. The groups themselves were broadened to include residents, representatives of civic forums, chambers of commerce, journalists, shop-owners and other groups.

Pori, Finland

Pori is situated on the Kokemaenjoki River about 12 miles from the coast of the Bothnian Sea, and is home to one of Finland's largest commercial ports. The town has a population of 83,000. A severe recession in the 1980s prompted a level of economic diversification that enabled Pori to fare reasonably well during the recent economic crisis. Since 2003, a renovated cotton factory has hosted the University Consortium of Pori and dozens of media, communications, and other start-ups.

What the situation was

Pori needed a long-term development vision for the city's old industrial district of Karjaranta, which they wanted to develop as a mixed-use

area. A Local Action Plan (LAP) was prepared to address a wide range of aspects of Karjaranta's evolution from industrial area to residential neighbourhood.

What it became & how it happened

Recognising that local residents and business people know their own environment best, Pori council developed a participatory planning process, focusing on 'user-expertise'. The resultant Local Action Plan covered the following areas of focus: increasing services and activities; improving traffic connections; making recreational areas more varied; and strengthening the sense of community. The first and last of these came together in a pop-up photo exhibition of the area's local history in 2011. It was held in a long-empty office building, which, since the exhibition finished, has continued to be occupied for other uses.

During the development of the Local Action Plan, Pori officials visited other SURE cities. Daniel Nagy, Pori's Planning Architect, recalls:

“Examples seen in [other places] demonstrated the beneficial results of cross-sectorial cooperation and the contribution of creative ideas and voluntary activity.”

