

Case study ID

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GUNDELDINGER FELD

CASE STUDY SHORT SUMMARY REPORT

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GUNDELDINGER FELD

Case Study at a Glance

The Gundeldinger Feld case study is an interesting example of a bottom-up initiative in urban space. It shows how local people and their leadership reacted when a situation arises that makes people afraid of the future development in their neighborhood.

Gundeldinger Feld is a former factory that has been left by a company. The local community, in cooperation with other stakeholders, started a project to transform the factory into a social and economic center. During this process, a participatory dialogue with the local community took place, with the aim of achieving a place fulfilling the economic, social and environmental dimensions of local development.

The whole process resulted in a space that is widely used by various actors and is often used as a successful case of bottom-up initiative in urban transformation. The great peculiarity of the whole transformation is that the resources of the public sector have not been used in a targeted way.

This report was prepared by the team of the Center for Philanthropy Studies (CEPS) at the University of Basel within the UPRUN project. The team of CEPS is responsible for the content and the accuracy of the statements presented in this report.

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Case Study Profile

Topic

- ☐ Community Gardening & Urban Agriculture
- ☒ Community Hubs & Cultural Activities
- ☒ Urban Design & Planning Processes
- ☒ Public Space Development & Management
- ☒ Local Economic Development
- ☒ Urban Regeneration & Rehabilitation

Scale

- ☐ Metropolitan / city region
- ☐ City scale
- ☒ Neighbourhood scale
- ☒ Block scale
- ☒ Building scale

Resilience Challenge

- ☒ Environmental and ecological resilience
- ☒ social & cultural resilience
- ☒ Infrastructure and technological resilience
- ☒ Economic & livelihood resilience

Duration

- ☐ Immediate (less than 1 month)
- ☒ Project-Based (1–12 months)
- ☒ Programme-Based (1–3 years)
- ☒ Strategic (3–5 years)
- ☒ Structural / Transformative (more than 5 years)

Stakeholders

- ☒ Community members
- ☐ Local government
- ☒ Non-governmental organizations (NGOs)
- ☒ Private sector
- ☐ Academic and research institutions

Type of Civic Engagement Supporting Neighborhood Resilience

- ☒ Resident-led and grassroots initiatives
- ☒ Collaborative planning projects or processes
- ☐ Advocacy and capacity building
- ☐ Volunteer and community service projects
- ☒ Short-term, more flexible project-based engagement
- ☒ Long-term, more institutionalized engagement (development of stable structures, etc.)
- ☐ Protest and resistance mobilization
- ☒ Art-and culture-based civic Engagement

Level of Civic Participation

- ☒ Information
- ☒ Involvement or participation
- ☒ Collaboration or co-creation
- ☐ Empowerment
- ☐ Resistance and protest-based empowerment

Empirical Basis and Methodological Approach

The case study introduces a social innovation project of a transformation of an industrial place into a community center. During the process of re-use of the Gundeldinger Feld in Basel, various cooperation partners, including citizens, have been collaboratively developing the site into a neighborhood that integrates, commercial, and community-oriented utilization of the place. A key feature of this case is the transformation of an industrial site into a vibrant community hub.

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As part of the case study, we conducted a total of three interviews:

- » **One interview with a local stakeholder** who rented premises in the Gundeldinger Feld to start business activities. This interview enabled us to view the space from inside, from the perspective of a user who visits and uses the place on an everyday basis.
- » **Two interviews with two representatives from the group that initiated the change.** One of these people was responsible for architectural solutions, while the second for the economic viability of the place. Thus, these interviews enabled a combined view of the place. Interviews with them provided us with information about processes and thoughts about eligibility of ideas and ways of implementing them.

Compendious summary

Introduction

In this case study, we would like to introduce you the Gundeldinger Feld in Basel in Switzerland. It is a former factory rebuilt into a social place with many companies, a kindergarten, a theater, and a place for meetings of local communities. The site of the former factory itself is over 12,000 square meters large. This factory was in the middle of a residential area till the year 2000. When the company decided to move and sell the site, it caused huge uncertainty in the city, and especially in the neighboring city district. Now, the change of this place is considered a great success, and various studies exist about this transformation (Buser, 2017). In our case study, we will discuss what steps led to success and what obstacles came the organizers across, including finding investors for the new concept (Buser, 2017).

The Gundeldinger Feld is in Gundeldingen – a city district in southern Basel. In this district, about 18,000 inhabitants live here (Statistisches Amt Basel-Stadt, 2020). It also has a high population density (about 148 people per hectare). As other parts of Basel, the share of foreigners on population is high¹ – it is approximately 40%. People living here are quite young – there is a high number of people below 40 years of age and living alone. It is also projected in statistics of occupied flats and size of households. The apartments are in average 36 m² large, and there are about 1.85 people living in an apartment (Binz, Voyame, & Müller, 2008, p. 7).

The interesting aspect of the change in the place and the selected solution is that it took place without the active contribution of the public sector. It is, thus, an example of how a business organization can contribute to the resilience of the local community and the building of local identity.

Neighborhood challenge

In 2000, the production of the engineering company was relocated and the premises in Gundeldinger Feld were for sale. This change has caused uncertainty among local residents about what will happen to the factory site which is in the middle of the residential area. As one of the interviewees stated - the goal was to avoid purely residential development and instead create a space that benefited the community.

Response to the challenge

Due to the financial and logistical complexity of the place transformation, a professional approach was needed. There were five people leading the transformative process at the beginning, including an architect and experts in community planning.

They set up a developing company (Kantensprung AG) to engage in Gundeldinger Feld. Two of these

¹ Actually, it is even higher in comparison to other parts of Basel.

people lived in Gundeldingen. Thus, they were aware of the mood and fears of the locals. Social contact through these two people played a crucial role in establishing contact with a wider community, especially in the initial phase of the transformation.

The social aim of these five people was to repurpose the area for the local community while ensuring a high quality of life in the Gundeldingen district. The development company set up by them was well-positioned to undertake this project. These five owners had previous experience in urban planning and architecture. They transformed a former bank building into a café (Kantensprung AG, 2019). Leveraging their expertise, connections, and knowledge, they secured initial financial support to further develop the area of the Gundeldinger Feld. This ownership structure allowed a balanced approach, combining objective decision-making with deep personal engagement. Each partner actively participated in the process, enabling the company to focus on rational and innovative solutions that benefited all stakeholders.

The core approach by the developer was to enable creative solutions in the place and to transform the former industrial place to a vibrant place for the local community, but one that is also financially self-sustaining. Such a change will not take place immediately. To some extent, it is still happening today. Initially (especially during the first ten years), the changes involved companies that had leased premises (Binz et al., 2008, p. 16). Coincidentally, at that time (2001-2002), there was a change in the zoning plan and changes in the traffic plan in the surrounding area in order to reduce the traffic volume in the area. At the same time, the developer was aware of the importance of communication with other stakeholders, especially people living in Gundeldingen district. Thus, the secretariat was open in the Gundeldinger Feld. It helped to set up communication channels and improve communication about visions at all levels (Binz & Voyame, 2004).

This phase was followed by the creation of office spaces, nursery school rooms, a kindergarten, and a playground for children in the years 2002 – 2004 (Binz et al., 2008). Nevertheless, the project still had to fight for its survival. Challenging was winning long-term tenants and simultaneously not making huge changes in the buildings (Binz et al., 2008, p. 13).

The transformation of Gundeldinger Feld did not concern only social and economic dimensions, but also environmental approach. During the third planning phase (2004–2005), technical and construction challenges arose regarding passive energy savings (Binz et al., 2008, pp. 17-18). Due to construction constraints, only less ambitious modifications, such as thin insulation, were implemented. Since 2015, Gundeldinger Feld has operated its own solar power plant, in compliance with the commitment to reducing energy consumption. Environmental sustainability activities in Gundeldinger Feld follow the principles of the 2,000-watt society, which defines 2,000 watts per person as a sufficient sustainable energy output (2000-Watt-Society, 2020). This requires lowering annual per capita energy consumption from approximately 6,000 to 2,000 watts, with at least 75% of it produced by renewable resources (Buser, 2017). This approach also complies with the City of Basel's sustainability framework, integrating social, economic, and environmental goals (Basel, 2001). As a result, the project has reflected the values of public, private, and nonprofit stakeholders involved in Gundeldinger Feld (Ziegler, 2017). Three

photovoltaic systems had been installed on rooftops within the area, with additional projects in development.

Another key principle is the diversity of activities within Gundeldinger Feld. The place enables the provision of services and spaces that cater to all community members, including young families, athletes, partygoers, craftspeople, and theater visitors. This dynamic mix enables an exchange of values, leading to a lively place in Gundeldinger Feld. Moreover, this combination enabled a combination of achieving social, economic, and also environmental goals. The transformation was facilitated through the development of a network connecting the community, tenants, and other stakeholders.

During the whole process, the function adapted to the existing space rather than altering it entirely. For instance, the factory workers' former cloakrooms and showers were incorporated into a hostel. Rather than completely redesigning the space, the goal was to preserve the building's original structure while optimizing its financial viability. To support this approach, the previous owner rented out several buildings before the sale, generating a crucial revenue stream during the project's initial phase (2001–2002). Additional cost savings were achieved through the efficient reuse of existing resources.

The project team also leveraged competition among potential tenants as a motivating factor while ensuring the mix of services in the Gundeldinger Feld. Stakeholder inputs, particularly from tenants, were carefully considered whether and how they fit to the core concept of integrating diverse social and economic actors within the space. This synergy enhanced value for all participants and necessitated an innovative ownership and space management model (Kissling-Näf, 2005). While the developer did not claim full ownership, it championed a collective ownership philosophy. Legally, the property remained in the hands of a limited group of individuals, yet the operational framework empowered stakeholders and fostered a collaborative approach to property management, similar to a collective ownership model.

To prevent private profit and ensure long-term community benefits, the Kantensprung Stiftung (Foundation) was created:

- All shares were transferred to the foundation to remove private financial interest.
- If the land is sold, proceeds go to the foundation, not shareholders.
- The foundation supports similar community projects with revenue from the shares (AG).

Mechanisms of civic engagement

We see two types of engagement and participation depending on what is the target group. The first one concerns the neighboring population. The second one relates to various companies and organizations that hire spaces in Gundeldinger Feld. In both cases, the developer applied a very participative approach.

The selected approach to the place followed the principle of networked governance (with some limitations, as the responsibility was always in the hands of the investors and the developer). The approach is based on the advantageousness of whatever happens in the Gundeldinger Feld for the participants. It means the developer built a network of local people, companies, and various

organizations around the Gundeldinger Feld. The place became a community center providing spaces to the local community.

The local community also participated in designing the place. The developer intentionally invited the locals to participate with ideas on discussions about the future of the place. It concerned all relevant stakeholders. On the other side, this approach helped the developer in searching for new use of the existing buildings and facilities. The form of participation was based on the face-to-face meetings. These meetings were well attended as about 150 and 250 individuals took part in the initial meetings. Furthermore, some people (around 50) started helping as volunteers (Binz & Voyame, 2004, p. 26). This approach enables achieving consensus about the utilization of the Gundeldinger Feld with the local community.

The second approach was based on corporate collaboration. When companies and organizations were asked to rent the premises in Gundeldinger Feld, they also participated in redesigning the spaces. Nevertheless, rooms were never completely renovated to new shapes. The opposite was the approach – the developer always tried to find solutions that would incorporate the current shape of the spaces to new use according to the needs of the renting organizations. It had been done in collaboration with these organizations. They could come up with their ideas and visions, while the investor wanted to keep the premises in a way that would not need a huge investment. On one side, it was caused by the need for financial sustainability with low initial investment costs in the early stages of the project. On the other side, it enabled building identity and belonging to the place in those organizations that came to Gundeldinger Feld.

Case study findings and lessons learned

- The success of the transformation depends on people: In the case of Gundeldinger Feld, it concerns a diverse group of stakeholders. With them, an inclusive planning process significantly helped to balance various interests.
- Effective coordination by the developer helped to cope with the demand of substantial time and patience, as extensive discussions were required to integrate different perspectives into feasible and economically sustainable solutions (still under the responsibility of the developer).
- Throughout the consultation, numerous ideas and proposals surfaced, though some were deemed impractical due to financial limitations, a lack of social value, or favoring purely commercial interests.
- The participatory planning and capacity building (Howaldt & Schwarz, 2014; Murray, Caulier-Grice, & Mulgan, 2010) was essential to the project's early success. A major innovation in creating the community center was the broad inclusion of diverse societal sectors. Beyond nonprofit organizations, the initial objective was to involve small and craft businesses as key partners while also incorporating cultural organizations into the development process.

- Low entry barriers and the gradual cultivation of trust over time are important for long-term relationships among the stakeholders and the success of the transformation (Schnurbein, 2014).
- Within this framework, dialogue was essential, facilitating the exchange of expectations and ideas among stakeholders while allowing new insights to shape the creation and development process. Consequently, projects that did not align with the shared vision were not pursued. For example, a feasibility study on constructing a residential building in the rear section of the site determined that, given the existing conditions, a sustainable housing project was not feasible (Binz & Voyame, 2004).
- The second key factor was space. With urban land being both scarce and expensive, development approaches often compete with projects focused solely on market-driven returns. To succeed, such projects must maximize existing resources to keep costs manageable. At Gundeldinger Feld, the principle of "genius loci"—the spirit of the place—played a crucial role, prioritizing the repurposing of existing buildings to maintain the site's character while minimizing expenses.
- Tenant selection is based on specific criteria, such as contributions to the neighborhood, diversity of use, sustainability, and a commitment to integration (Rudolph & Stark, 2015). This approach has gradually cultivated a varied tenant mix, including social institutions, cultural and recreational facilities, schools, restaurants, artists, and service providers. By 2019, the site accommodated 78 tenants (Kantensprung AG, 2019). The initial phase of the community center's development was strategically managed, even when only a portion of the space was occupied. Interviewees agreed that the current tenant composition effectively maintains a balanced integration of social, economic, and environmental factors, supporting sustainable local development.
- While the original goal of having 80% of tenants from the local community was not met, efforts were made to establish networks both within and beyond the Gundeldingen district. Despite this adjustment, local residents still identified with and took ownership of the community center (Brack & Breyemeier, 2005). The expansion to city-wide tenants was largely driven by financial factors, yet the center ultimately gained recognition beyond its immediate surroundings.
- The project was deliberately kept independent from public funding to avoid bureaucracy. No direct subsidies or government support were sought, ensuring faster and more flexible decision-making. Some tenants received public funding (e.g., a family center), but the property owners did not.

Conclusion

People greatly appreciate the intangible aspects of Gundeldinger Feld, including its historical evolution, as well as its economic, social, and environmental dimensions. The collaborative networks that have shaped its development have fostered a strong sense of identity of belonging to Gundeli among those involved.

Attachments

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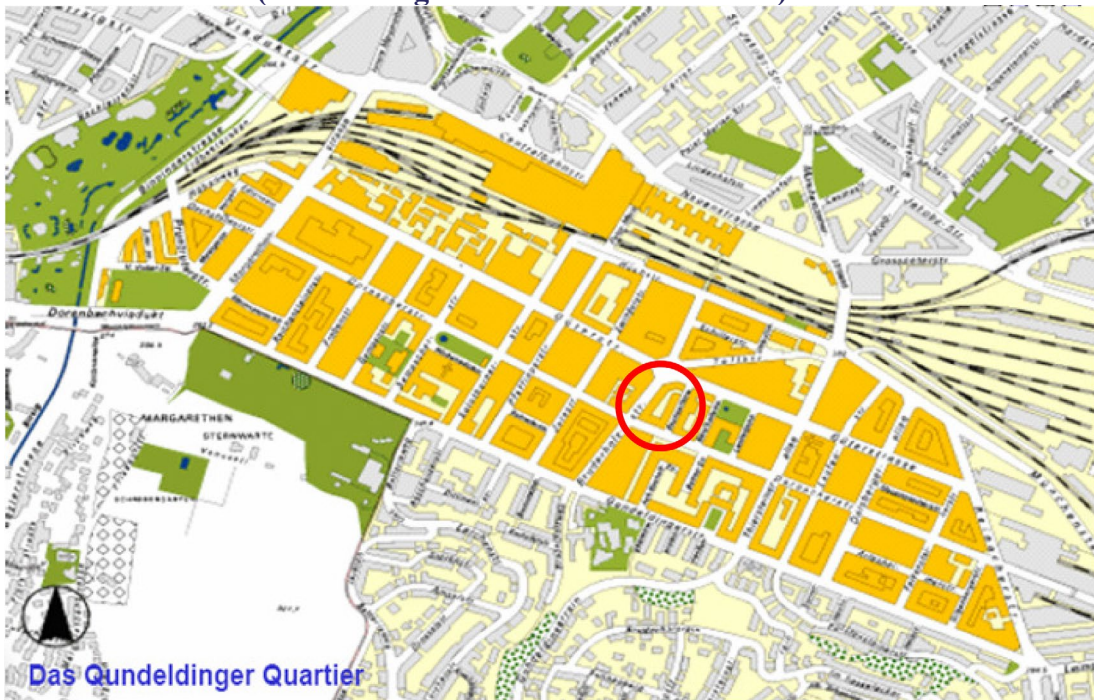
Photos

Figure 1: The northern entrance to the Gundeldinger Feld



Source: Kantensprung AG (2015)

Figure 2: Gundeli in Basel (Gundeldinger Feld is in the red circle)



Source: Binz et al. (2008)

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