



Summary

SEG International Workshop

January 2007, Leuven



Purpose of the day

Many regions in North West Europe enjoy high rates of economic growth but this success can have negative consequences such as pressures on land, natural resources, skills and labour shortages. The Smart Economic Growth (SEG) International Workshop brought together national and local government representatives, policy makers, planners, business representatives, researchers and academics to examine the elements of smart economic growth and explore how it could be implemented across North West Europe. Delegates were presented with and discussed examples of environmentally sensitive forms of development and land use; innovative ways of working; and smarter policies, all of which can improve quality of life, economic productivity and the environment in Europe's high growth regions.

Welcome and introduction

The Governor of the Province of Flemish-Brabant, Lodewijk De Witte, opened the international workshop and welcomed delegates and SEG project representatives, all of whom had come from North West European countries.

Les Andrews, SEG co-ordinator from Surrey County Council, then introduced the project, its partners and aims. He explained the definition of Smart Economic Growth that the project had developed to date and outlined what the project partners thought smart economic growth was. He explained how the study project was run, both locally and transnationally, emphasising the importance of case studies for identifying best/worst practice. He introduced the main output of the project, SEGDEG (Smart Economic Growth Development Guide) which will be used as an 'à la carte' toolkit for policy makers, planning practitioners, developers, and businesses across North West Europe and possibly beyond. The idea of a 'smart charter' to be used by all key players was also presented before those present broke up into the SEG International Workshop parallel sessions (the 'Smart Groups').



Smart Groups

The Smart Groups set out to test what smart economic growth means by looking at how smart business sites, smart use of land, smart working practices and smart policies can be turned into a reality.

Smart Business Sites

Led by the consortium of Haviland, Interleuven and the Province of Flemish-Brabant, this smart group showcased the development of a business park by the West Flemish Intercommunale and explained the principles of sustainable development that applied on such sites. The group then discussed sustainable quality issues on business sites.



Smart Use of Land – Space Gain

This Smart Group was led by the Province of Utrecht. They presented case studies on, firstly, a methodology with which the intensity of land use can be measured (the Floor Space Index) and, secondly, the Larenstein Business Park in which space gain methodologies had been used. The group went to discuss international differences in economic land use practices.

Smart Working Practices

Led by Surrey County Council, this Smart Group considered a number of approaches to flexible working and smart working practices. Flexibility.co.uk and Vodafone showcased different uses for new technologies and ways of working, together with their impact on the workplace, work-life balance, productivity, and commuter and business travel.



Smart Policies

This group, led by the University of Darmstadt, discussed what core feature “smart policies” possess whilst leaving some flexibility for different approaches in varying European countries. The case study presented was the Regional Land Management tool (internet based platform) used in the Stuttgart region. This tool helps plan for and manage the use of inner reserves and their potential for development.



Plenary Session: a Summary of Key Issues

During the afternoon plenary session, key issues identified by the Smart Groups were fed back to and discussed by all the delegates. These were as follows:

Smart Business Sites

- A list of principles of sustainable development of business sites should take into account both the developers' and companies' points of view.
- Written contracts are key in enabling developers to manage the situation on site and intervene for future developments.
- The impact of the public sector on site development should not only occur through regulation but also also through investment and/or project management.
- Greenfield versus brownfield. Brownfield development is more time and money consuming, which makes it difficult to shift from greenfield development when there is land available.
- Park management is an important tool to keep track of developments on site.



Smart Use of Land – Space Gain

- The use of space gain tools/methodologies, such as the Floor Space Index, could be broadened to measure the use of space by the people working and living around the site.
- Scarcity of land obliges authorities and businesses to find creative solutions, not only on the spatial side but also to improve business environment.
- Quality of life and social aspects of a site should be taken into consideration when focussing on the smart growth of business areas. Mono-functional business sites may not be smart enough.
- Sometimes land prices are not (yet) high enough for the use of instruments and methodologies in gaining space, mixed land use etc. Even in North-West Europe! Implementation tools work only when there is financial benefit or at least no loss.
- Stakeholder involvement is smart but tends to slow processes down. How can we address this?



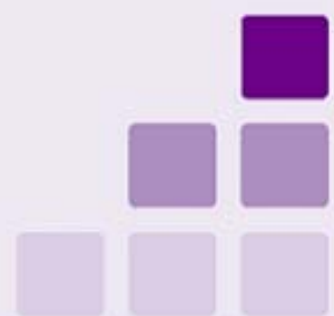
Smart Working Practices

- ...bring about cultural change within companies
- ...can be perceived as something which only benefits employers
- ...are about personal attitudes
- ...should take social issues into account
- ...require clear policies



Smart Policies

- Ideal world of Switzerland...from a planner's perspective! In Switzerland, planning is rooted in the Federal Constitution: Transferability of Best Practices to other countries depends on legal, political and cultural frameworks.
- Inventory is the basis for the strategy but this is a sophisticated approach with lots of challenges (technical, legal, procedural etc.).
- Means to an end: the inventory needs a strategy to form a policy instrument.
- Value added can be gained through co-operation and processes: a peer-to-peer dialogue is smarter than a authority-subject relation.
- The power of the good example: tangible results help when similar instruments are available elsewhere



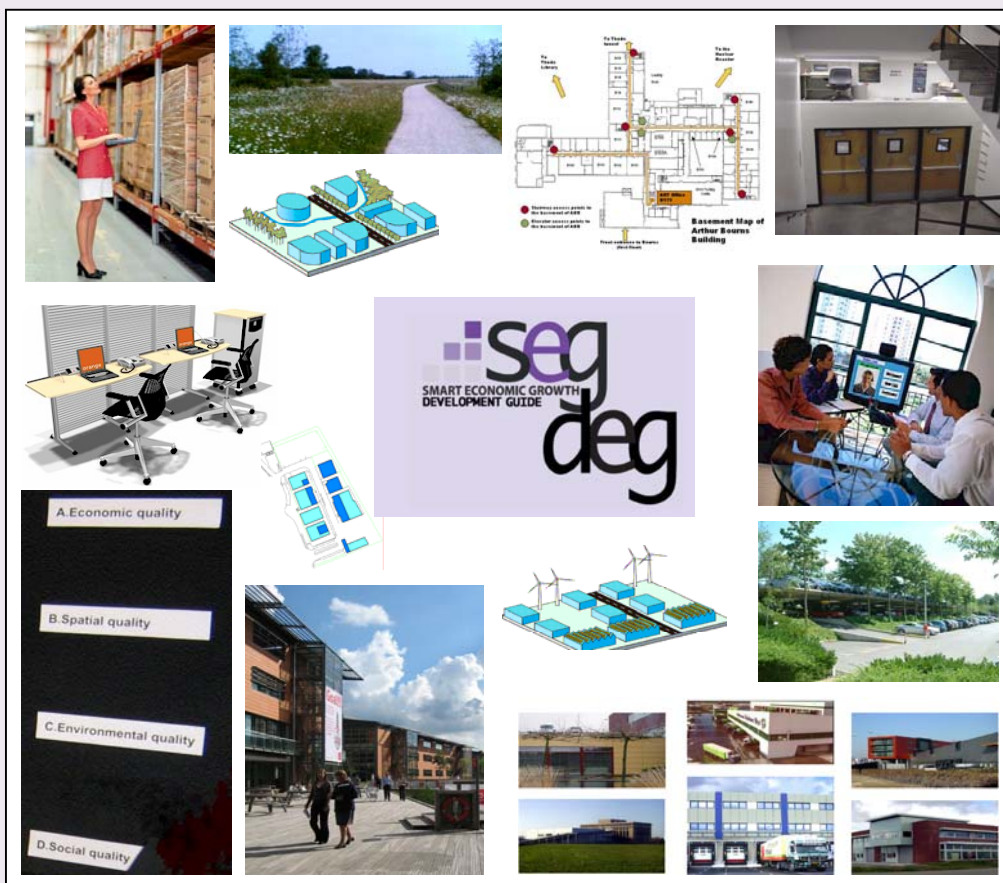
Close of workshop - The way forward

SEG co-ordinator, Les Andrews, closed the workshop by indicating that the work of the day and issues raised by the delegates would be considered and integrated into the main product of the SEG Study, the SEGDEG (Smart Economic Growth Development Guide).

He reiterated that SEGDEG would be both web-based and available in hard copies and that its main components are likely to be:

- a sustainability toolkit and good practice guidance including smart policies, examples of smart developments and smart organisations;
- a smart economic growth methodology for assessing the scope for intensification on different types of site and in differing contexts and;
- smart working practices, including introducing flexible working practices and new technologies, focusing on the opportunities for raising economic activity rates and reducing related impacts on employment land and floor space requirements.

At the close of the International Workshop, delegates, project partners and organisers had an opportunity for further networking and informal discussions.



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Contact: Les Andrews - tel. 44 (0)20 8541 9523 - fax 44 (0) 20 8541 8612
les.andrews@surreycc.gov.uk, www.segproject.org

