7. Development of an industrial district

Kekk in Tartu

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7.1 DEVELOPMENT OF AN INDUSTRIAL AREA

7.1.1 Tartu as an industrial town

The development of industry in Tartu has reflected the common patterns of a socialist town. Industry was concentrated in specific districts outside of the central areas. In Tartu there were industrial sites around the territory of the municipal area. The area of Ropru was an industrial district in Tartu, three kilometres south from the centre, where the largest industrial enterprise in Tartu, Tarmeko with 1,500 workers, was located. The major and still active industrial complex of Sangar with 500 workers is located close to the district of Jaamamõisa. Of 3,600 enterprises in Tartu about 400 are registered as industrial enterprises. The enterprises are predominantly small, less than a hundred have over 50 employees and about 46% have less than ten employees. A third industrial site consisting of small enterprises is located at the crossing of the Riia road and the ring-road (Fig 7.1).

As mentioned earlier, industrial development is one of the activities that has suffered particularly from the change to a market economy system, especially large-scale production and specific final products. An example of the former is the industrial area of Kekk which was important for the construction industry. An example of the latter, perhaps the most significant example in Tartu, was the military industry that produced “black boxes” for military aviation. Both activities have ceased to exist to the same extent as the old, stable markets have disappeared. Industrial development in Tartu stabilised towards the end of the 1990s.

7.1.2 The Kekk industrial area

The industrial area of Kekk has a decades long history as a site for industry. It is located by the Riia road, three kilometres from central Tartu. The site has an excellent logistic position as it is close to the ring-road and the road to Tallinn. Development at the site is a good example of a situation where a site for large, socialist, heavy engineering and construction enterprises is quickly turning into a site for smaller enterprises and storage. This is characteristic of the transition period in Estonia and in other Central Eastern European countries.

However, maybe the best example of total conversion of a site is the “E-Kaubamaja” (Shopping Mall E), a large shopping mall that used to house industrial activities during the Soviet era. It is located two kilometres south of the centre. The building now houses shops of varied size and product selection; there are large grocery stores, clothing shops and speciality stores for a variety of sports and leisure activities. The internal design of the building has taken post-modern styles into account: there are exotic trees and even flowing water between the shops at the entrance. In front of the building there is a large retail store, similar to others found in Tartu.

However, it is not possible to convert all sites into shopping areas. That requires investments in the quality of the site. Often a more feasible investment is the short-term use of a former industrial area, i.e. 5-10 year use. An example of this is the Kekk industrial area.

7.1.3 Planning, construction, and redevelopment of the area

The closure of the major activities in the former industrial area of Kekk followed the re-independence of Estonia and the end of the Soviet production style in the early years of the 1990s. At first, development was intensive but after 1996 the situation stabilised. As in many similar instances, the large building site was divided into smaller lots and the buildings were given over to use by various smaller, private owners. In this sense, the area is not of particular concern
to local authorities. The use and development of the site is dependent on private sector initiatives.

The current land-use is devoted to enterprises that produce small-scale industrial products, services that do not require a central location and retailing of materials that require more space, such as lumber for apartments, paint, tyres, etc. There is also a maintenance service for logistic activities and repairing large vehicles. Many activities have carried over from the Soviet period, such as the logistic function and small-scale construction industry. There are a total of about 20 enterprises in the area. With regard to physical infrastructure, it is important to note that the buildings are low-rise. They are one or two stories high and the technical infrastructure provided is suitable for the site. This is an important element for current activities. There is no need for major renovations because the economic activities are of a kind in which outer appearance does not play a major role as they do in the case of the E-Kaubamaja. Actually, there is a random mixture of buildings styles and building colours that is typical for sites that have been constructed and reorganised during different periods.

Town planning has played a relatively small role in the development of the site. Relevant to planning, however, has been the verification of land ownership and the clarification of development possibilities by taking care of the technical infrastructure.

Most of the development is, however, an outcome of the private initiatives of the property owners, as indicated before. The role of the public authorities has been to guarantee continuity in the land-use.

The most important aspect of sustainability has been the re-use of buildings for new activities. In Tartu there are several examples where former industrial buildings have been abandoned. In the short-term it seems to be more economically viable to build a new site with a new technical infrastructure than to convert former industrial areas. This is due to the low cost of labour construction materials. However, this will change in a few years with the growing integration of Estonia into the European market. This may increase the attraction to re-use industrial sites that have remained in a structurally good condition. Unfortunately, this is rare in Tartu.

![Location of industrial sites.](image)

Figure 7.1 Location of industrial sites.
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7.2 DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVES

7.2.1 A practical sustainability perspective
The development prospects for the Kekk industrial area should be looked at from both a short and a long-term perspective because they differ a lot. From a short-term perspective the possibility for continuing economic activity at the industrial site is relatively good. The site has found a niche in the economic sphere in Tartu that is also reflected in the current master plan. The area’s land use is designated as land-use for business and small-scale industrial purposes. This means that the area can maintain its function and actually increase it with the possible introduction of new businesses depending on the market and private investments. Future land-use options show that in the near-by area, there is development planned for industry (in the north) and for housing (in the south). A housing area would not be an additional cause of noise and pollution to the extent of the industries.

The situation in a decade may be different. In the long-term perspective, a problem may arise due to the fragmented ownership in the area. This could hinder general improvement of the site and necessary new development projects. The long-term perspectives are thus more uncertain because the infrastructure might not be adaptable to the requirements that will exist in one decade. Furthermore, it is expected that much of the current land-use and economic activity is still part of the transition economy and will disappear in the coming years.

How much of the site will be in use in the future and for which purposes is thus unclear.

7.2.2 Lessons learned
However, the current re-use is a simple example of practical sustainability in an industrial area of a post-socialist town. One learning experience has been the absence of a strong municipal intervention and the rise of initiative from private owners due to their particular needs and a weak interest for remodelling the site. In this sense, economic constraints can have a positive influence on the development of sustainability at the local level.

The role of public authorities should remain limited in the areas discussed in this context. There is a need in a developing town for sites that absorb new transitional economic activities and those that do not require a central location. In fact, former industrial buildings may be the only possibility for enterprises that do not necessary need or cannot invest in the surrounding environment. Maybe supportive actions with regard to the knowledge base for maintenance as well as funding for sustainability are needed.

- The primary activities should be the responsibility of those private enterprises that make use of the site and the use of this type of “transition” area should be promoted.
- Use of this kind of “transition” area should be promoted in the town.
- Local authorities should facilitate the sustainable use of buildings by providing information and by giving a clear indication of the planned long-term land-use development.