

ÓZD: AN ABANDONED INDUSTRIAL SITE Piroska VACSZI*, Hongrie / Hungary

Hungarian industry that developed in the second third of the 19th century produced innovations and products of international standard. Our industrial heritage constitutes such an important part of our cultural heritage from the technological, the industrial history and the architectural point of view alike that saving and protecting it in the present situation requires a significant *decision of cultural policy*.

On one hand the state-provided protection of industrial buildings is served by regulations of the local governments, on the other hand by the national monument preservation office in power. This office, which is now called the National Office of Cultural Heritage, similar to the Austrian model, has been functioning as a state office since 1872. Thus in Hungary, monument protection always functions from above, on behalf of the state. It decides, prohibits or regulates matters, which should be enforced by the decisions of society as well.

The difficulties that we meet concerning the preservation and protection of industrial buildings are not merely theoretical ones or differences in point of view. This type of monument has always been much rather a part of the economic life than of the cultural life in Hungary.

At the same time the economic and political circumstances of the almost past twenty years started an extremely quick and massive destruction of industrial sites, legally not protected areas of our cultural heritage: this means the destruction of specific buildings, traditional industrial sites and region's characteristics of the manufacturing industry, as well as 20th century buildings of the socialist large-scale industry, their equipment and fittings, the traditionally well-known Hungarian technologies and products ceased to exist.

This phenomenon confronted Hungarian monument protection with such a problem to the solving that we can get ideas and models from our foreign colleagues but the special, central-eastern European mode of protection has to be worked out by ourselves. Namely, while in the western countries these buildings became part of the cultural values to be protected gradually, what is more traditionally, in the ex-socialist countries these areas, with the collapse of large-scale industry and due to the economic consequences of the political changes, suddenly and in large numbers got into such an economic state that due to their mass privatisation there is the danger of them disappearing/ undergoing transformation/ being destroyed in a way that cultural politics will not even be able to react.

On the basis of these facts, this year the experts of the National Office of Cultural Heritage have prepared a pilot project on one of these sites, the industrial town Ózd.

The town and the surroundings of it face all of the problems existing in this field. The importance, its significance still not manifests itself in this challenge but in the special atmosphere of the place. How does it appear? "Genius loci" of a certain place are created by the complex entirety of the material and spiritual manifestations, which were created in the specific medium, in specific form, in specific place, created something special, unique one, which is typical of that place only, something special. By analysing, we can reveal the components of it, but we can feel it only in its complex entirety. Therefore the conservation and revitalisation of a site is not only a great economic challenge but a serious cultural and cultural-ethical task as well.

Ózd is situated 160 km from the Hungarian capital Budapest, in the northern industrial centre of Hungary. Near the Bükk Mountains, within 300-400 metre high hill sections of mostly sandstone and clay, brown coal is the most important asset that facilitated the industrial developments. However, its mining largely ceased by the 1990's.

Iron industry can be considered traditional in this area, and can be dated back to the 14th century. Besides iron mining, small iron-smelting works – run by water – were dominant at the beginning of the 19th century. These were replaced by large-scale industry in the mid-19th century, which was the era of significant transport and railways infrastructure developments. Based on the production of local coalmines, the Ózd Ironworks became the country's first large-scale industrial factory, at the time when coal was considered one of the most up-to-date forms of energy resource.

The factory was built from 1846 to 1847 at the joining of the surrounding hills' valleys along the Hangony stream. The factory had become the generator of settlement, the organizing power of the urban structure situated in the centre and, as a result of its extensive economic and social activity, which had created and maintained the new settlement Ózd, the industrial town. Therefore the factory had become the centre of the little villages situated in the joining valleys. As factory workers lived in these villages, they became a part of the urban structure of Ózd, too, but keeping their local architectural images. Consequently the centre of the town is not a historical town centre (in Hungary traditionally with a church and a main square) but a factory itself.

After the formation of another significant local factory, the Rimamurány-Salgótarján Ironworks SC., the Ózd factory had to be entirely restructured. Between 1861 and 1970 the factory established several residential areas for its workers. They were called “workers’ colonies”, or “workers’ settlements”. The colonies, which have determined the special atmosphere of the town with their location and their names, were built at the end of the 19th century and at the turn of the century. The colonies’ location within the urban structure and the name of the different settlements reflected the social hierarchy manifesting itself in the architecture. The placement of the houses, the size and the quality of the buildings were formed according to this hierarchy as well. The so-called Big America (1913-1915) lies on the top of the hill in front of the factory. It was built for the clerks and the directors of the factory. From here, from these big houses they could have a view of the so-called Little America (1898-1912) that were built for skilled workers. One can see the differences very well. The names however, express a special and typical humour of the local people. There is a so-called Untidy colony (1882-1886) for the unskilled workers and a colony of Venice (1922-1925) because it was situated along a channel.

The factory also built public buildings in front of the row of the chimneys. It was a kind of meeting place for young people; even 15 years ago rendezvous were fixed in front of the chimneys. This street was the centre of the town’s corporate life, one side the row of the imposing public buildings: the Reader’s Club (1924), the Casino (1884), the building of the local museum (former school, 1896), the office block (1895), and the factory with the so-called “chimney cathedral”, as the chimneys were named by the local people on the other side. There was also a beautiful swimming pool in the factory that was the first indoor swimming pool and bath in the provinces at the turn of the century in Hungary.

The factory manifested itself in every aspects of the life. Instead of church bell the sound of factory hooters had structured the time of the town as well. There was a sound of hooters at 6 am, at 12 am, at 2 pm, at 6 pm and at 10 pm signalling the shift and the time. The special sign language, which was used in the factory among workers, was used also in the every day life. Even school children used it.

Ózd is a unique example of Hungarian large-scale industrial areas. It shows how industry and social conditions developed simultaneously. This development manifested itself in an area of civic facilities that has without doubt set an example for industrial companies in providing suitable residential facilities for their workers.

The time of development and prosperity starting in the 1850’s, lasted almost 150 years. In the 1990’s however, with the change of political regime, large-scale industry ceased to exist in Hungary, leaving significant factories, including Ózd, without work. With the factory’s decline, most of its workers became unemployed and Ózd lost its traditional dominance in the area.

These last ten years of decline have certainly had their impact on the town. The once 50-hectare central industrial area has seen many of its buildings demolished and several civic and residential buildings were left abandoned and empty. The “chimney cathedral”, the symbol of Ózd was demolished. Even most necessary maintenance works were not carried out, therefore most of the buildings have reached a worrying physical state by now. Consequently to the changes in economy, the town’s population decreased. Many of the town’s inhabitants left the area – especially young and educated people.

This process should be stopped as soon as possible. Otherwise it is feared that Ózd will not survive this stage of decline.

But how can we preserve a town in its original form, with its special atmosphere, which has lost his generating power in economic, cultural and spiritual sense as well. Is it possible or is it allowed to restore the social medium in which that special atmosphere was created? The former workers’ colonies today are the poorest parts of the town. Inhabitants have changed. We have to face up to very difficult social and ethical problems. So, how we can keep the built environment without its original maintaining power in social and economical sense as well, without original function. These are very difficult economical and ethical questions, at the same time. Preserving the “genius loci” means not only preserving material objects. It means preservation of spiritual memory as well. But what can we do if this memory does not belong to the changed inhabitants’ memory. How can we restore, how can we re-create the special atmosphere of the place?

At the beginning of my lecture I tried to show you this particular place, and now I speak about those first steps we took in this field this year.

The initiation of the Ózd Project, which started in March this year, reflects the intention of the National Office of Cultural Heritage to meet its engagement codified in the Act No. LXIV/2001, § 28 point c): “[the Office] harmonises the maintenance, development and value conservation management of areas protected by monument aspects.” By other words: the Office has to give effective tools into the hands of public players and private persons responsible for the preservation of cultural values, widely serving the interests of this kind.

Though within the selected area, the Ózd Project will highlight that the cultural heritage, handled with proper approach, represents a national resource capable to multiply the amount of the well-thought-out direct subsidy. Consequently, the public opinion on heritage-conscious budget expenses, from both social and governmental resources, will turn increasingly favourable – this is a long-term interest of cultural heritage protection.

The National Office of Cultural Heritage, however, endeavours to fulfil two actual professional tasks as well: the effective protection of industrial objects on the one hand, and the application of integrated heritage conservation as a new method on the other.

Aim of the project:

Starting the cultural heritage-based revitalisation programme of the recently functionless Ózd Industrial Region.

Content of the project:

- Exploration of potential domestic and international partners, and development of co-operational relationship with them;
- Exploration and recognition of the regional values;
- Analysis of opinions, intentions and potentialities on the basis of the explored values;
- Proposal for the regional revitalisation programme and urban rehabilitation based on the integrated conservation.

Exploration and recognition of the regional values

Aims:

- Complete exploration of the cultural heritage values of the examined region.
- Acquainting and interpretation of the results of exploration and making the public conscious of them in the spirit of Act No. LXIV/2001, § 5, article (1).
- Defining the conservation of cultural heritage values as common interest to be realised through wide co-operation.

As a first step we have identified the heritage areas and started to survey the individual buildings. This is the central heritage module with the factory itself and the row of public buildings in front of it: we have suggested for listing 4 individual buildings in the field of the factory and the building of the former Reading Club, the Casino, the former school, now local museum, and the building of laboratories. They are all empty now.

The further heritage modules are the residential areas. They all preserve their original architectural values: Venice Colony, Little America, Big America, New Colony, Várkony, Officers' Line, Hétes.

After the large-scale industry ceased to exist in the area, demolition work has been started in the factory. Almost half part of the buildings within the area were demolished and levelled in the hope that new small and medium-sized private businesses would settle in the place. The formerly busy centre of the town has become deserted and depopulated. Public buildings were scattered in the town. A shopping street of no account has become the main street of the town.

That is why we consider the factory and the row of public buildings in front of it, to be the main heritage module, which has to be dealt with organically. The basis and the main goal of the heritage-based strategy of the town rehabilitation is that the factory and its surrounding regain, recover its original role in the urban structure and in the social and cultural life as well, which was so unique in Ózd.

Our aims are to open the factory and the empty place, giving opportunity to cultural and business re-uses as well. Instead of the demolished chimneys we plan light-chimneys as the symbol of Ózd revitalisation. The side of the factory swimming pool has to be opened, too.

As a first step of the rehabilitation of residential areas we have pointed out three action fields along the three main road leading from big towns into Ózd: the "Budapest Gate", from the capital, the "Miskolc Gate", and the "Eger Gate". These sight plans mark out the main principles of the maintenance of these sites, their connections with the urban structure and the environment.

As I mentioned we are at the very beginning of the work. We have just pointed out the main principles of the work and started to build up partnerships. However, I hope that I could demonstrate that our work would be able to prove our basic aim: that culture is able to generate economic development.

ABSTRACT

The economic and political circumstances of the almost past twenty years started an extremely quick and massive destruction in legally not protected areas of our industrial cultural heritage: this means the destruction of specific buildings, traditional industrial sites and regions' characteristics of the industry.

Ózd Ironworks is a unique example of Hungarian large-scale industrial areas which is dated back to the mid-19th century based on the production of local coal mines. The town and its surroundings shows how industry and social conditions developed simultaneously: the factory which is the traditional centre and the generativ power of the town structure with its residential areas and row of public buildings represent a characteristic atmosphere. The spirit of the place can be caught in this town structure and in the living memory of the local inhabitants, in their customs and in the special name of the places. All of these reflect a vanished life in the abandoned scenery of the past. The question is how we can built up again, or keep these social, architectural, industrial, natural and traditional values without the original meaning and background. Namely, in the 1990's with the change of political regime, large-scale industry ceased to exist in Hungary, leaving significant factories, including Ózd, without work. The once 50-hectare central industrial area has seen many of its buildings demolished and several civic and residential buildings were left abandoned and empty. In the lecture it is shown where one can catch the special atmosphere of the site. a new project worked out by the National Office of the Cultural Heritage is outlined, in which one tries to keep these very complex values of the site.

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