

HUNGARY

Ózd – an Abandoned Industrial Site

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

State protection of industrial buildings is provided by local government regulations, or by the national heritage office. Now called the National Office of Cultural Heritage, in accordance with the Austrian model, this body has been functioning as a state office since 1872. Thus in Hungary, heritage protection always functions top down, on behalf of the state. It decides, prohibits or regulates matters, that also should be enforced by community decisions.

Difficulties met concerning the conservation and protection of industrial buildings are not merely theoretical or problems of differences of opinion. In Hungary, this type of heritage has always been more a part of economic than cultural life.

Ózd, view from the Big America Colony



At the same time, the economic and political circumstances over almost the past twenty years started an extremely rapid and mass destruction in this legally unprotected area of our cultural heritage. This means the destruction of specific buildings, traditional industrial sites and regions characteristic of manufacturing industry. The 20th century buildings with their equipment and fittings, of the socialist large-scale industry, as well as traditionally renowned Hungarian technologies and products, are also ceasing to exist.

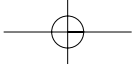
Whilst this phenomenon confronts Hungarian heritage protection with an extensive problem, which may be solved by getting ideas and models from our foreign colleagues, we must work out a special, central-eastern European manner of protection by ourselves. That is, while in western countries such buildings gradually become part of protected cultural values, which is the more usual, the situation is different in regards to this type of heritage in the ex-socialist countries. The collapse of large-scale industry, due to the economic consequences of the political changes, resulted in sudden and extensive numbers getting into such an economic state. Due to their mass privatisation, this risks their disappearance, transformation, or destruction in a way that cultural politics will not even be able to react.

On the basis of this, experts from the National Office of Cultural Heritage have prepared a pilot project this year in the industrial town of Ózd. The town and its surroundings contain all of the problems we are facing in this field. The challenge is not the importance or the significance of the task but the special atmosphere of the place. How does this show? The *genius loci* of a certain place is created by the complex entirety of its physical and spiritual manifestations, which were created in a specific medium, in a specific form, in specific place, creating something special, something unique, which is typical of that place alone. We can analyse and reveal the components of a special place, but we can only feel its complex entirety. Therefore, the conservation and revitalisation of a site are not only a great economic challenge but also a serious cultural and cultural-ethical task.

Ózd is 160 km from the Hungarian capital, Budapest, in the northern industrial centre of Hungary. Near the Bükk Mountains, 300-400 m high sections of hill formed, mostly of sandstone and clay. Brown coal is the most important asset and enabled industrial development; however, mining largely had ceased by the 1990s.

Iron industry is traditional in this area and can be dated back to the 14th century. As well as iron mining, small iron-smelting works, powered 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 the development of significant transport and railways infrastructure. Based on local coalmine production, the Ózd Ironworks became the country's first large-scale industrial factory, at a time when coal was considered one of the most up-to-date forms of energy.

The factory was built between 1846 and 1847 along the Hangony stream at the junction of the surrounding steep valleys. As we can see, the factory became the settlement's creator, the organising power of the centre's urban structure resulting from its extensive economic and social activity, which created and maintained the new settlement Ózd, the industrial town. Therefore the factory became the centre of the little villages situated in the adjoining valleys that provided the workers and became part of the urban structure of Ózd, whilst keeping their local architectural image. As a result, the centre of the town is not a historical town centre (in



Ózd, the factory today



Ózd, one of the poorest colonies today



Ózd, the former 'Chimney Cathedral'



Ózd, the Big America Colony



Ózd, the Reader's Club

Ózd, the swimming pool



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 around the factory. They were called „workers' colonies“ or „workers' settlements“. The colonies, which have shaped the special atmosphere of the town with their locations and names, were built at the end of the 19th century and at the turn of the century. The colonies' locations in the urban structure and the name of the different settlements reflected the social hierarchy, that was also manifested in their architecture. The location of the houses, the building size and quality was also formed according to this hierarchy.

So-called Big America (1913–1915) lies on the hill-top in front of the factory. It was built for the clerks and the directors of the factory. From these big houses, they had a view of so-called Little America (1898–1912), built for skilled workers. The differences are very clear, their names however express a particular and a typical local humour. There is a so-called Untidy colony (1882–1886) for unskilled workers and Venice colony (1922–1925), so-called because it was sited along a canal.

The factory also constructed public buildings in front of the row of the chimney-stacks. It was a sort of meeting place for young people, even 15 years ago rendezvous were decided in front of the chimneys. This street was the centre of the town's corporate life. One side had a row of 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 opposite, the factory with the 'chimney cathedral', as the chimney-stacks were known by the local people. There was a beautiful swimming pool in the factory that at the turn of the century in Hungary was the first indoor swimming pool and bath in the provinces.

The factory showed itself in every aspect of life. As well, instead of a church bell, the sound of the factory hooter structured the town's time. There was a sound of hooter at 6 am, at 12 am, at 2 pm, at 6 pm and at 10 pm signalling the shifts and the time. A special sign language, which was used in the factory among workers, was used also in every day life; even children used it at school.

Ózd is a unique example of Hungarian large-scale industrial areas. It shows how industry and social conditions developed simultaneously. This development is seen in the area of civic facilities that has no doubt set an example for industrial companies in providing suitable residential facilities for their workers.

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

These last ten years of decline have certainly had their impact on the town. The former 50 hectare central industrial area has seen many of its buildings demolished and several civic and residential buildings left abandoned and empty. The 'chimney cathedral', the symbol of Ózd was demolished. Even the most essential maintenance works have not been carried out and therefore most of the buildings have now reached a worrying physical state. As a result of the economic changes, 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 phase of decline. But how can we preserve a town in its original form, with its special atmo-

phere, which also has lost its power to generate power in an economic, cultural and spiritual sense? Is it possible or even permissible to restore the social medium in which that special atmosphere was created? Today, the former workers' colonies are the poorest parts of the town. Inhabitants have changed. We have to face up to very difficult social and ethnic problems. So, how can we keep the built environment without maintaining the original social and economic power, given the original function has gone? These are very difficult economic questions, yet at the same time ethical ones. For preserving the *genius loci* means not only preserving material items: it means also preserving spiritual memory. But what can we do if this memory does not belong to the different inhabitants' memory? How can we restore, how can we re-create the special atmosphere of the place?

The initiation of the Ózd Project, begun in March 2004, reflects the intention of the National Office of Cultural Heritage to meet its commitment codified in the Act No. LXIV/2001, § 28 point c): „[the Office] combines the maintenance, development, conservation of values and management of areas protected for heritage features“. In other words, the Office has to put effective tools into the hands of public players and private individuals responsible for the preservation of cultural values, widely serving the interests of this kind.

Aim of the project:

- Starting the cultural heritage-based revitalisation program of the recently redundant 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 program and urban rehabilitation based on the integrated conservation.

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

The other heritage units are the residential areas. They all still have their original architectural values: Venice Colony, New Colony, Big America, Vasvár, Várkony.

After large-scale industry ceased to exist in the area, large-scale demolition work was started in the factory. Almost half of the area was demolished and leveled in the hope that new small and medium-sized private businesses would locate there. The formerly busy town centre has become deserted and depopulated. Public buildings were scattered through the town, an insignificant shopping street becoming 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 complex, which has to be dealt with organically. The basis and the main goal of the heritage-based strategy of the town's rehabilitation is that the factory and its surrounds regain and recover their original role in the urban structure as well as in the social and cultural life, which was so unique in Ózd.

Our aims are to open the factory to the town and that the empty space also provides opportunity to cultural and business re-use. Instead of the demolished chimney-stacks we plan chimneys of



Ózd in 1864



View of Ózd in 1847

laser light as the symbol of Ózd's revitalisation. The site of the factory swimming pool must also be opened.

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

As mentioned, we are at the very beginning of this work. We have just outlined the main principles of the work and started to build up partnerships. However, we hope that this demonstrates that our work can prove our basic aim, that culture is able to generate economic results.

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