Revival of industrial towns through cultural regeneration – a viable solution?

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Abstract: This paper explores some issues and suggests how policies and institutions can induce and furnish an urban environment that supports regeneration activities that turn lead to sustainable development of post industrial cities. Cultural regeneration is one of the most frequent measures taken in order to support the renewal of industrial areas that have undergone a reorganization of their functions. Those actions involve the preservation and cultural capitalization of those industrial heritage assets that are suited to be exploited as touristic resources. Mention should be made of Romania’s openness to initiatives to better capitalize on the technical and industrial heritage, resulting in the work done on various types of industrial assets in order to include them in the tourist circuit (decommissioned mines converted into museums, vineyards, industrial
museums specializing in cultural capitalization of various economic ventures, narrow-gauge mountain railways). Nevertheless, in Romania, there are numerous areas that feature an outstanding industrial-heritage potential, relatively few steps have been taken to capitalize on them from a cultural viewpoint and those steps taken were typically in traditionally-industrial areas.

Keywords: technical and industrial heritage, urban regeneration, conversion, ecomuseums, industrial archaeology, Romania

1 Introduction
The matter of reviving industrial towns became a stringent one in the context of the diminishing in industrial output or even the shut-down of certain non-lucrative branches of the industry, with the mining industry standing out among them, in addition to relocate industrial activity to areas with low production costs. Thus, revival of industrial towns in the context of economic reorganization came as a challenge for authorities, especially in the case of mono-industrial areas.

In Romania, industrial reorganization was not followed by the implementation of viable development programs, a situation that led to the emergence, and, in time, to an exacerbation of the decline of the economy in those areas, industrial by tradition, most of them being declared disadvantaged areas.

For Romania, the current challenge as far as revival of underprivileged industrial areas is concerned in implementing alternative development policies that would be compatible with the specific economic, social and cultural features of each particular area. Globalization requires the reinvention of towns, from industrial centers into cultural centers. The relocation of industrial facilities, an effect of globalization, involves new specialization for the areas vacated, a step frequently in concert with historical and cultural activities (Cercleux, Merciu, 2010, p. 45). This revalorization of urban areas is based in an exploitation of creativity, starting off from the principle that culture is the force bringing about a multiplication of jobs (Sasaki, 2010, Homadovsky A., 2009), and at the same time contributing to the emergence of a specialized workforce (Scott 2006 quoted by Sasaki, 2010).

Local authorities’ focus on investments in creative industries contributes to the improvement of living standards (Florida, 2002) and to the same extent to stopping the exodus of the population (Markusen and King, 2003 quoted by Sasaki, 2010). The focus on revival of industrial towns becomes a priority in the current context, where urban and regional competitiveness is increasing (Bontje, Musterd, 2009).

One should also notice a change in the perspective used in analyzing the development of big cities, i.e. they are no longer presented as areas where economic and social problems accumulate, but rather as areas with an economic potential (Peck and Tickell, 2002, Peck, 2005 quoted by Bontje, Musterd, 2009, p. 844). Using this strategic view, when it comes to industrial towns, one may consider that abandoned sites or production/storage facilities must be planned as cultural resources and as potential touristic attractions.

2 Cultural regeneration – general considerations
In the European Union, the urban transformations presented above are, in general, a feature of towns in the first states to join the Union, and there is a trend to imitate that model of development in the new metropolises in transition. Starting off from an analysis of the American model (New York, beginning with the 1970s) or from the European success exemples (Preite, Maccioco, 2000) the municipalities of Eastern-European towns can implement various programs to convert industrial spaces into cultural, historical, commercial or religious destinations.

These actions practically involve a reinvention of towns as a response to the structural changes that occur on a local, regional and global scale. Most of the times, and especially in the case of industrial towns, those structural transformations lead to an improved capitalization of industrial heritage assets by means of a conversion of abandoned sites or decommissioned economic facilities into museums of the territory (ecomuseums) that display and preserve the identity of the local community (Massarente, Ronchetta, 2004). These actions to reorganize the land require creativity and they are useful instruments in the cultural regeneration of the industrial areas that are functionally reorganized.

Deindustrialization and industrial relocation are the trend in the evolution of the industrial sector in Romania in the past decade, characterizing several towns among which the capital saw the most
visible effects of those processes (Cercleux, Merciu, 2010, p. 46). Just like in France in the 1980s, technical and industrial evolutions, accelerated by recession, aggravated deindustrialization by means of the disappearance of enterprises (…) which led to an increase in the number of industrial wastelands inside towns which can offer the opportunity to reorganize the town (Bruyelle, 1984), the same way the emergence of abandoned industrial facilities in the metropolis of Bucharest after 1990 requires restoration, reconversion or demolition work (Cepoiu, 2009).

Although, in the first stage of economic reorganization in Romania several steps have been taken, meant to contribute to the development of new economic ventures in disadvantaged areas, there was not taken into consideration the opportunity to preserve and capitalize on the industrial heritage. This stage generated a series of actions that caused serious damages to the industrial heritage assets – they were either abandoned or they were demolished. Later on, Romania showed an opening-up towards actions to capitalize on abandoned industrial sites (conversion of decommissioned mines into industrial museums: Roșia Montană, including the Roman mine galleries inside the Câlnic massif, also known as the Alburnus Maior archaeological site) and even to capitalize on functional economic units (the Recaș, Murtfatlar and Rhein-Azuga wineries and the salt-mine industrial destinations: Slănic Prahova, Turda, Târgu Ocna) (Armaș I. et al, 2004 cited by Unguraș, Merciu, Stoica, 2009, p. 70).

2.1 A model for in situ preservation of an industrial area

Industrial heritage assets reconstruct history and to the same extent they are a symbolic representation of a past time; they are considered genuine remains of the material culture. Therefore, the association of industrial heritage assets and cultural regeneration no longer seems that much of a contradiction. An attempt was made to draw up a plan that would synthesize the evolution of an industrial building from the state of functional industrial facility to abandoned building and the opportunity to be “rescued” from demolition. One can notice that figure 1 reflects the state of the industrial facility before the onset of economic reorganization, when the ties between the population and the economic unit were work-related. The second figure indicates the situation of abandoned industrial facilities; they gradually deteriorate with the passing of time or authorities decide to demolish them. The interruption of work ties and the failure to launch any new development projects will bring about, in time, a gradual or more intense exode of the local population.

One can notice that figure three synthetically depicts a model for the in situ preservation of industrial archaeology elements by means of converting the industrial facility into an eco-museum.
In this case the positive effects of the cultural use of the industrial asset are reflected on the residential borough, a large part of which – the workers’ quarters – being subjected to renovation actions. Workers’ quarters are thus included in the touristic circuit, as they are part in the industrial heritage, representing the social side. In this situation, the population’s work-related flow is radically changed from the first stage, as the population holds the strategic position of host. The importance of getting the local population involved in this type of project is essential because the support and devotion to preserving local identity ensures the veracity of the industrial site as a cultural destination.

There is also a series of key-jobs (custodians, guides) whose filling involves the selection of people who are acquainted with the historical and cultural facts of the region, and locals make the best narrators. In the case of the third figure, it captures a new type of movement, bound towards the culturally-renovation workers’ boroughs (colonies), consisting in tourist traffic. The presence of tourists means a validation of the cultural importance of this type of tourist attraction. Although the conversion of mining sites can not generate an impressive number of jobs when compared to a functional mine, it can stimulate the local economy into extra dynamism, by means of the opportunity to develop more economic ventures (creating tourist accommodation facilities, the development of trade and transportation, among others).

2.1.1 Types of conversion of industrial sites

The effects of globalization of the industry on industrial areas worldwide were the apparition of abandoned and under-used post-industrial landscapes (Antrop, 2000) which contribute to lowering the development potential and the living standards (Handley, 1996 quoted by Merciu, 2011). In this situation, it becomes necessary to come up with projects able to redefine abandoned industrial sites through community-based, interdisciplinary action that integrates multifunctional longer-term solutions based on cultural, social, economical and ecological objective.

Authors Kessides and Ionescu-Heroiu (2008) have identified 3 major categories of brownfields depending on forms of reuse them, the degree of suitability to be converted into new productive or cultural assets, and the actors that may get involved. Thus, the first category, “A”, comprises sites that, despite their contamination and liability problems, are economically attractive in order to be redeveloped by means of a sole private effort. In the case of “A” sites, development is favored by the location of the industrial site, by the dynamism of the real estate market, by the demand for buildings, matters that can act as strengths that outweigh the negative aspects mentioned before. Authors Kessides and Ionescu-Heroiu (2008) include in this category of brownfields the Semănătoarea plant in Bucharest, Romania. The strengths of the Semănătoarea plant are its favorable position inside the capital city (it is situated along the banks of the Dâmbovița river, on the metro line and next to the Polytechnic University) and the fact that it offers a tract of land of more than 42 hectares for development. Category “B” refers to industrial sites whose future yield is uncertain as a result of a number of unknown factors (the gravity and scale of contamination, unclear ownership, slow or inactive real estate market). It almost involves a public-private partnership and presupposes the elaboration of innovative and creative economic, environmental, policy and legal tools. One instance in this respect is The Glud am Marstrand Development, one of the most deteriorated industrial areas in Copenhagen. Handled as a partnership between a private developer, the population and the local administration, the project involved rehabilitation of the area, the final result being a new park (as a result of the locals’ wishes) and a residential area (the goal set by the private company).

The third category of sites, “C”, is made up exclusively of hardcore cases that can only be redeveloped through a concerted public effort. In this category typically are included mining sites whose degree of pollution is very high, especially in case there had been underground quarries that impacted on several elements of the environment (water, soil, air); they are situated in less attractive locations and they are spread on large surfaces. Usually, these sites are more difficult to convert into new economic ventures. The authors mention as an instance of capitalizing on “C” sites the large-scale projects to preserve industrial heritage launched by IBA Emscher Park in the Ruhr region. IBA is an organization that has been involved in numerous cultural-regeneration projects in mining areas impacted by the economic reorganization processes in Germany. Although the projects created by IBA have created opportunities for the redevelopment of industrial areas both from the cultural point of view and by ensuring other development opportunities, those actions were criticized by Lintz, Müller, Schmude (2006), who consider them “revolutionary ideas” that were accomplished at high costs and that
failed to replace the need for hard policies meant to develop infrastructure (p. 516).
“C” sites are the subject of successful cultural regeneration projects involving their conversion into eco-museums or in geo-mineral parks (laying them out as a cultural system where various types of mines found in that region are included in tourist circuits, for instance the geo-mineral park in Sardinia).

3 Forms of conversion of industrial sites in Romania

Usually, in many situations the action to re-use the old industrial buildings is a controversial topic, as a result of the processes to establish the correctness of the decisions to reuse them, decisions analyzed from various points of view (cultural, economic, historical, ethical). High-quality re-use of the industrial heritage must become an alternative to the action to destroy it (Corti 1991, Holichy et al, 2010).

Although there are numerous forms of re-use decommissioned industrial facilities (residential or educational spaces, hotels, museums, shopping centers, exhibition spaces) (Holichy et al, 2010), the transformation of abandoned industrial buildings into spaces with new functions is a complex process that involves studying the particular characteristics of the industrial objectives that are going to be reshaped by means of a different economic venture. When choosing a new function for a decommissioned industrial facility one must consider the unit’s characteristics (age, the current state of conservation, the nature of its past function) (Merciu, 2011).

In Romania’s particular case, the reconversion of industrial sites is a recent process. However, we can notice the interest of the public opinion and the institutions and organizations that militate for the preservation of the cultural heritage, so as to stop the actions of the Canadian corporation to exploit the gold resources in the Roșia Montană mining area. The archaeological mining site goes back to the Daco-Roman times, a site that has been well preserved up to the present. We consider this is one of the most controversial cases of protecting the natural heritage nationwide, because of the historical, technological and cultural values the Alburnus Major mining site incorporates. These values recommend it for inclusion on the UNESCO list of monuments, alongside other archaeological sites of a similar nature. If one compares the number submitted, one notices an imbalance that indicates a higher ratio of projects suggested, or projects launched but stalled in an early phase because of the absence of financial support; for instance the conversion of the Aninoasa mine in Hunedoara county into an eco-museum, a project launched in early 2011 and expected to be completed late this year, stagnates. The absence of finance is the main obstacle in launching project suggestions. Also, the uncertain status of property of the asset limits getting financing from European funds because one of the conditions is providing evidence as to the statute of owner of the institution/person that submits the project for funding. One such case is that of the Anina mine (an ancient coal mine in the Banat mountains) whose ownership is disputed between the mining company that administrates the mine and the local council, so that submitting the project to convert the mine into an eco-museum has been postponed. The opportunity to launch the project using other non-reimbursable funds (received from the World Bank) was turned down, on the grounds that similar funding had been offered to the project concerning the Aninoasa mine (Hunedoara county). The passing of time and the authorities’ disinterest in preserving and capitalizing on the industrial heritage cause the deterioration of industrial heritage assets, which are abandoned to decay into ruins.

There are other, additional, sets of examples that prove the lack of interest in preserving and cultural capitalization of the industrial heritage by way of willful destruction (arson, demolition) of industrial buildings with heritage value (Assan’s Mill, the Spicu bread factory). One can also identify, however, a series of positive examples that refer to the reuse – in a strict economic way – of former industrial buildings (Sema Parc, the former “Cartea Românească” printing shops in Bucharest, converted into a services building).

4 Conclusion

There are numerous instances at European and global level of units with an industrial tradition that have been converted into attractive cultural touristic destinations.

In the case of Romania there are numerous areas that feature remarkable industrial-heritage potential, but which, either because of the disinterest of local administrations to preserve and reuse economic ventures closed down, or because of the restraints of a bureaucratic or legal nature, have a poorly-used and poorly-promoted industrial heritage.

Suggestions for cultural regeneration and tourist
exploitation of abandoned mining sites must be followed through by ensuring the financial support needed to launch those projects and ensuring a management that focuses on preserving and making the best out of the sites.

Re-use of industrial heritage assets may positively contribute to the sustainable development by preservation of cultural values and facilitating the economic regeneration of industrial regions in decline.

For mining sites, in particular, cultural regeneration is the only viable alternative for development by in situ preservation, and at the same time it serves as a means to emphasize the identity of the local community.

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