
The paper was also published in:

Revija za geografijo, 11-2/2016, University of Maribor: Maribor

<http://www.ff.um.si/dotCMS/detailProduct?categoryNode=15123&categoryName=&orderBy=&page=0&pageSize=0&direction=&filter=&inode=66539&bulk=false>

Industrial heritage, cultural resources of current industries and creative pioneers – utilizing Industrial Culture in Central Europe

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1. Introduction

In the frame of major societal and economic changes, Europe's industrial societies have transformed over the last decades towards networked information societies that are increasingly based on knowledge-intensive services and creative industries. However, these developments are affecting territories in very different and uneven ways. Urban agglomerations are the major hubs in this development, being the preferred location of innovation and the knowledge economy, often merging manufacturing and design sectors. By contrast, small and medium-sized towns in rural environments often continue to have a small industrial base, but they do not succeed in attracting the knowledge economy in the same way as large cities.

At the same time, political attention to industrial production is increasing in the aftermath of the financial crisis. In a recent communication to the EU Parliament, the EU Commission '*considers that a strong industrial base will be of key importance for Europe's economic recovery and competitiveness*' (European Commission 2014). In a similar vein, national and regional governments set up strategies for reindustrialisation through the development of 'Industry 4.0' or smart specialisation strategies, both aiming at an increased valorisation of industrial labour. Additionally, we can also notice a new interest in former industrial sites and heritage locations by using them as sites for events or exhibition centres, often connected to events, such as the Cultural Capital of Europe award (e.g. Ruhr 2012), or World Heritage titles (e.g. Völklinger Hütte). To understand these trends and their possible impact on regional development in peripheral, old-industrialised areas in Central Europe, this article will refer to the term Industrial Culture, as a tool to unlock un-used potentials in such areas.

This article will discuss the situation by referring to the recently started 'InduCult2.0' Central Europe INTERREG project (2016-2019) focussing on Industrial Culture in small- and medium-sized towns. By drawing on the project aims, this article will focus on the framework conditions of Industrial Culture and the specific challenges in former industrialised towns outside agglomeration areas (section 2). To illustrate the use of Industrial Culture the paper will give a short Austrian example (section 3) and finally discuss the main points in a conclusion (final section).

2. Theoretical background

Industrial Culture is a term that has no coherent definition, especially when taking into account different national contexts. It is often narrowed down to physical remains of former industrial sites and their preservation or re-utilisation, often as sites for cultural events, education or other purposes. This understanding of Industrial Culture, as captured maybe best in the German expression 'Industriekultur', focuses mostly on the tangible remains of industry, i.e. buildings, infrastructures and landscapes (Pirke 2010). While this is indeed an important and the most wide-spread utilisation of the industrial past, previous research has highlighted already broader utilisations including also intangible aspects of the industrial past, focussing on skills, traditions and mind-sets (Harfst 2014; Harfst and Fischer 2015), thereby addressing more the Anglo-American understanding of 'Industrial Culture', as a whole 'milieu' of social and physical remains (Byrne 2002). The next sub-section will discuss why this topic has gained a more popular notion in past last decade, followed by an introduction to the InduCult2.0 project aims in this context.

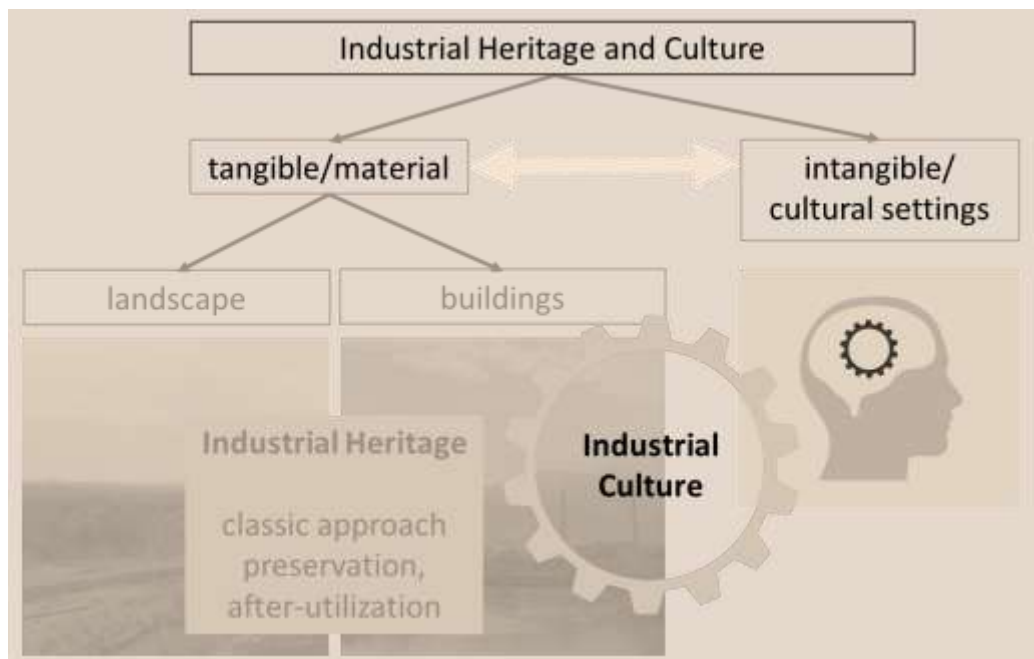
2.1. Industrial Culture in the frame of structural change

Industrial Culture in its broader sense has gained an unprecedented popularity across various sectors in the recent decades. Not only several world heritage titles and initiatives address the industrial past (e.g. UNESCO heritage application 'Ore mountains', European Route for Industrial Heritage), but also spectacular events like Cultural Capital in the Ruhr 2012, have celebrated the (bygone) era of intensive, industrial mass production. All these elements show a heightened interest in the industrial past and its remains, (ironically) after years of industrial decline in Europe and the Western countries in general, that stamped many of these places with a negative rustbelt image.

Focussing on the cultural and heritage value of the industrial past is one aspect of Industrial Culture. In this context cultural heritage has been identified in numerous EU strategies as an important driver of change (European Parliament DG IP 2013), mainly in relation to the tourism sector, but also in the context of creating a joint European identity (Soyez 2015). Various scientific articles proof this relation, having enforced a trend by towns and cities to 'rediscover' their industrial heritage (i.e. Fleiss and Strelow 2008), despite the often subdued value of industrial heritage as a tourism product (Hospers 2002).

In addition to this sometimes rather backward looking, nostalgic perspective on industrial production, we find on the other hand initiatives that aim to strengthen industrial knowledge and production. As a reaction to the financial crisis since 2008, we find a heightened interest by policy makers towards a re-industrialisation of Europe - such as the EU's policies for the industrial sector, laid out in the Competitiveness Report 2013 (European Commission 2014). In connection to these aims also the European Territorial Agenda 2020 demands a more focused approach towards place-based (territorial) potentials (EU Ministers of Spatial Planning and Territorial Development 2011). Here the second, knowledge-based aspect of Industrial Culture becomes important: the existing skills, traditions and knowledge of old-industrialised regions and its people. Once old-industrialised regions were drivers of change, being entrepreneurial and innovative by developing specific mind-sets and skills in their field of production (Sadler and Thompson 2001). These intangible remains of the industrial age form an important, but so far neglected resource in any re-industrialisation effort.

Picture 1: Post-industrial resources (own design)



The main question in this context is therefore how to re-connect these skill and knowledge of traditional industry with the demands of a globalised market economy, build on creativity and innovation – in other words how to activate the specific milieu of old-industrialised regions to face new challenges. In agglomeration areas this task is certainly easier to tackle, with (world-) market access, creative classes, higher education institutions and an industrial-base all to a certain degree in place (Camagni 1991).

But for Europe's old-industrialised regions that are situated outside agglomeration areas this question is especially difficult to answer. These regions often still possess highly-competitive industrial units, albeit without the major employment effect for the region, they once had (Müller, Finka, and Lintz 2005; Koutsky, Slach and Boruta 2011). Nevertheless such places and industries face specific problems, which are often place-based – being situated outside agglomeration areas means a stronger reliance on local workforce and knowledge to remain competitive – a challenging task for regions with often high rates of outmigration, lack of higher education facilities and suffering from a bad image from the times of structural change (Wirth, Cernic-Mali, and Fischer 2012).

2.2. The InduCult2.0 project

Within this context described above, the INTERREG project "InduCult2.0" brings together regions with a distinct industrial past and present, which are situated outside major agglomeration areas in Central Europe. In recent years, all of them have undergone deep transformation processes due to automation, adaptation to globalized production patterns and the opening of markets in the former state-led economies. The long economic predominance of industrial production has brought about a particular cultural setting in the project partners' territories. It is made up of certain skills, attitudes, traditions as well as tangible monuments and artefacts. However, these regions are usually considered culturally less active and they are not utilizing the existing industrial culture to their full development potential (Osebik und Pizzera 2012).

The concept of Industrial Culture, as outlined above, is thereby fundamental to the project. Industrial Culture in the project's context is not understood as a synonym for industrial heritage. Here, Industrial Culture is understood as going beyond heritage issues by including contemporary or upcoming cultural and creative resources, addressing directly the future development opportunities of regions. Whilst some aspects of this conceptual framework of Industrial Culture are already applied in some places, there is no comprehensive outline available yet. In the academic field so far no coherent concept can be found. The aim of scientific workshops organised throughout the project term of 3 years is to elaborate a discussion on the state-of-the-art regarding the conceptualisation of Industrial Culture. Central questions in this context are:

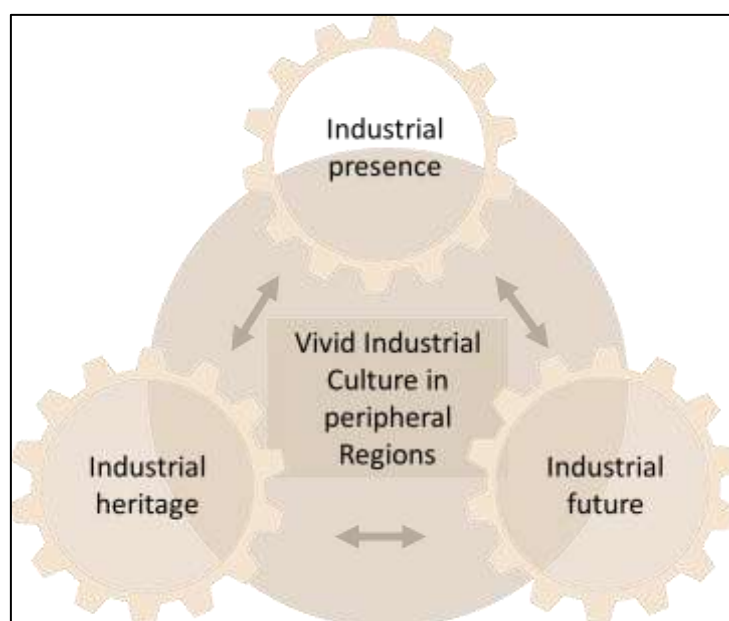
- What different understandings of the concept of Industrial Culture do exist?
- What role does Industrial Culture play in the context of a post-industrial society and a knowledge-based economy?
- How is Industrial Culture linked to regional development and regional identity?
- How can Industrial Culture be used to increase the attractiveness of industrial labour and as a location factor for companies?

InduCult2.0, wants to revive the cultural spirit of long-standing industrial regions in Central Europe. Together with local stakeholders, partners rediscover and develop the positive elements of industrial communities. Specifically, project partners intend to:

- Promote and establish the idea of Industrial Culture in Central Europe;
- Strengthen the distinct culture of industrial regions and utilise it as location factor;
- Empower industrial regions by re-activating their pioneer spirit.

The scientific partners, the Department of Geography and Regional Science at the University of Graz, Austria, and the Leibniz Institute for Regional Geography in Leipzig, Germany, will support and reflect these activities and conduct an academic research along the project.

Picture 2: InduCult2.0 – Central idea (own design)



3. Case-study Steirische Eisenstrasse

In this section we will briefly give a practical example of what the new understanding of Industrial Culture could mean in practice. We will refer to a well-covered Austrian example, the Steirische Eisenstrasse (Zimmermann and Janschitz 2004; Fischer 2014). The region is a typical example of the above described case: It is a typical peripheral, heavy industry region in Austria that has suffered extensive job losses in the last decades. Despite the restructuring, the region still has highly competitive, globalised companies in place, nevertheless the demographic development of the region as a whole is marked by distinct outmigration and population loss, which also affects the existing industries (Wirth, Cernic-Mali, and Fischer 2012).

The region has integrated its industrial heritage already for a long time in its development plans. Here, like in many other regions, various former industrial sites have been protected, preserved and partly converted into museums and other utilisations. In recent years regional actors have also embarked on tapping on the intangible resource of its industrial past, setting out to change the region's image, trying to stop the outmigration of the younger, skilled workforce or to attract new people, as visitors or residents from the nearest metropolis Graz (Harfst and Wirth 2014).

Amongst many initiatives, one of the landmark events in this regard is the 'Rostfest', an annually creative, urban arts festival in the mining town of Eisenerz (www.rostfest.at). On one weekend in summer the event attracts young people from across Austria to the small town by offering concerts, performances, creative workshops and podium discussions on various topics. The festival aims to bring creative, pioneer spirit back to a formerly thriving mining settlement that has lost 30% of population over the last decade. In general the Rostfest plays with the industrial past and puts these traditions into new contexts – incorporating inhabitants, as well as outsider in the spirit of a place set deep into industrial culture. Therefore, visitors are involved through interactions in the events that take place. According to the multi-temporal approach of the project, the past, presence, and future are integrated during the festival, aiming to foster the regions development.

The main method is based on a sequence of five steps: impulses, collaborate, locate, perform and implement. First experimental impulses are planned and the actors are linked (collaborate). Next step is to locate those actions and give them a special space. It is mainly focused on abandoned buildings which are reintegrated in the "life" of the city. The events are then performed, giving those vacant spaces a new image. One important instrument for new images are light installations, which show the "rusty" places in a new light. It is mainly locals who are addressed with these new images, giving them a chance to think of the future in a positive way. In the end sustainable results of those actions are implemented in the region and again used as a new impulse (Rostfest Dokumentation 2014).

Picture 3: New images of the city during the “Rostfest”



4. Conclusion

This contribution has highlighted a new approach of utilising the remains of industrial production by focussing on the concept of Industrial Culture. In the light of recent trends in tourism and economic policies, especially old-industrial regions in the periphery, once again face new challenges, but also could make use of potentials deeply embedded in their culture of place.

These specific settings, described here as Industrial Culture, have the potential to bring new impulses to regions, which are affected by a variety of negative social and economic trends. Valorising these potentials might not only attract more visitors to these places - studying the remains of the by-gone age of industrial mass production - but also holds the potential to strengthen still existing industrial units, i.e. by securing future workforce, creating new regional networks and gaining access to creative impulses from outside the region. This can happen in various ways, such as festivals (like the here described Rostfest), but also via employment initiatives, co-working spaces or other ideas, bringing together the past and present of industrial culture in order to jointly create a sustainable future in these regions. Therefore the concept of Industrial Culture holds the chance to transform old identities into new way of thinking forward in regions, where its inhabitants often have been marked by the painfully processes of structural change. The InduCult2.0 project is therefore an interesting experimental scheme to test the ideas behind Industrial Culture and to work out if and how new concepts can be jointly implemented by local and external actors.

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