Regeneration of the Industrial Heritage in the Central Area of Oradea, Romania

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Abstract. This paper addresses the phenomenon of topicality, the desire to recover the declining or abandoned urban areas. It focuses mainly on the central area of the cities, where industrial units of historical and cultural value have often been forgotten. The study refers to the context of Romania joining the European region, with perspective of the past period since it was under the influence of the Soviet Union, a period in which a rapid industrialization took place. The period of change of the 21st century favoured the decline of many large industries, producing nowadays buildings and enclosures awaiting for a change. The object of study consists of the industrial units and their premises situated in the central area of Oradea; considering a special situation in which the historical tissue intertwines with the residential and the fragmented former-industrial one. Urban regeneration is one of the most important strategies for cities with irregular development that want to survive the "urban sprawl" phenomenon. Sustainable development goals can be achieved by changing policies and the direction of development, while pursuing economic and social progress. In the case of industrial heritage, old abandoned structures can turn into strengths. These holes become opportunities for changing the rhythm and direction of the development, offering flexibility to a rigid tram. An analysis of the strategies applied to areas having characteristics as close as possible to the fragments of the proposed site has been carried out. Also examples of good practice having a favourable effect on society, economy and environment were considered. The aim of this paper is to emphasize the importance of preserving the industrial heritage and to present various methods by which it can be converted and used for the benefit of contemporary society, while preserving its character and identity.

1. Introduction

Industrial heritage is a cultural asset. It is part of our social, economic and territorial evolution. It can be considered a proof of history, useful in explaining our present. An industrial vestige is part of an urban tissue, meaning it is very important to understand heritage not as an isolated element, but in its context. Industrial heritage means: buildings, equipment, objects, structures, archives, production infrastructure, housing and services and the way of living of the working formed communities around the site [1].

Unfortunately during communist times in Romania, only the large industrial complexes of the 60-90s were considered to be important, thereby the belief was that the past should have been forgotten. A lot of the architectural assets were lost, demolished or left to become a prey of decadence. The orientation towards sustainable development appears quite recently [2] (2007- in the same time with joining the European Union). The trend of rescuing these testimonies of the past industry has started
approximately 30 years before, but it is still at its beginnings, bounded by the lack of education and funding.

In Oradea the brownfields and industrial remains in the city center of today used to be deposits of collective memory, landmarks of the urban tissue, social life and economy. If not protected they will slowly disappear from the memory of the city of tomorrow. This process already started with the last three changes of the generations. Also being located in the center of the city and left with no function, they end up creating urban conflicts in important areas for city development.

2. Neighbourhood of Velența

Oradea is a small city (the 10th Romanian city by population). It is situated in a good geographical area and also having a great advantage being at the crossroad of important commercial roads linking East Europe to West Europe. [3] This City has a circular urban evolution, its growth gravitating around Oradea Fortress. This city is rapidly affected by urban sprawl nowadays. Oradea has accumulated many layers, leaving the focus area of the study, isolated in the path of evolution. The focus area is a neighbourhood in the heart of City of Oradea.

2.1. Location

Velența or „Venice of Oradea” is situated on the left side of Crișul Repede River. Its name comes from the Latin vicus Venetia meaning little Venice. The old settlement was known as a marshland and an area full of water channels. [4] A few decades ago this neighbourhood had a reputation as a “home to gipsies”, outcasts and criminality. Today Velența is changed, it is more clean, but seems stuck in time and for some years started to experience a process of urban and architectural decay.

2.2. History

Velența is supposed to be the oldest neighbourhood in the region, certified at 1291-1294. [4] Amongst the locals (Romanians) living in the area, there were Italians (1400), Greek (1700), Aromanians and then people from Roma community. This was the land of the outcasts or all who didn’t have a citizenship right. In the medieval times, as part of the city strongly influenced by Crișul Repede and Peța rivers, it had a reputation of being a neighbourhood of the mills and guilds (a lot of streets are still named after the specific guilds or industries).

The neighbourhood kept its industrial character during time. After the guild shops period, a series of important industrial buildings were built and a lot of private but also state-owned companies were born: Spirits and Yeasts Factory - founded in 1848, it grows in time and gets impressive dimensions and also it will be considered a catalyst for the future businesses in Oradea; on 1st of December 1857 - Refinery Lederer and Kalman (The Eastern Mill - the oldest enterprise with an important role in the development of the industry) is inaugurated; The tram depot for industrial goods transport (1906); Rovex - in 1917 the Animal Skin and Fur Workshop was set up; 1928 - the anonymous society Imperial is established, in 1949 changing its name to Avântul - the biggest food production and packing premise in Oradea in the time of communism [5].

2.3. Present

In the present it is a flat quiet area with almost no high landmarks, reaching the socially-economically unfavourable extreme. It is dominated by residential use with no interesting spots, without polarization spots, lacking attractiveness (Figure 1). It is an ex-industrial neighbourhood situated in the heart of the city, but not functioning as part of the city centre. The industrial buildings and their premises were converted and lost their function in favour of some activities which are characteristic to city outskirts: the Spirits and Yeasts Factory – vacant land nowadays; the Eastern Mill - space managed by SC Parcul Amintirilor SRL (it is to be converted into a place for art, but this intention going for years brought no change and result); the tram depot – it became a functional food market, but lost its place as an ex-
industrial important space in the collective memory of the citizens, it is to be demolished to make room for a business centre; Rovex – a ghost place (the company that owned it declared bankruptcy); Avântul – in 2018 there were spaces leased by the bankrupt company Leonardo. The ex-industrial structures are now seen as empty spaces in the urban texture. All the industrial heritage is in awaiting for a change. The administration wants to own more and more of them and try to find ways of handling them, but the private owners speculate on the real estate market and block every move, bringing the buildings into a state of degradation.

3. Urban Conflicts and Potentials

After an analysis of the site there came up some specific characteristics which helped in choosing the study cases: located in the historical area – in the city centre; fragmented site (Figure 2); some remaining buildings have reusable space and volumes; these current brownfields are part of the community’s cultural baggage and history; The Integrated Development Plan of Oradea Municipality supports the revitalization of this area. The social, economic and cultural life focuses on the other three quarters of Oradea centre. The urban conflicts are of social (cultural), economic and spatial nature too (table 1). There is also a white side of the analysis consisting of resources and potentials of this area (table 2).

![Figure 1, 2. Active places. Ex-industrial fragments in Velența neighbourhood](image)

| Social                          | Economic                      | Spatial                          |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| For a long time it was a place of marginalization | Real estate speculations blocks the market | Abandoned and ruined buildings and empty plots |
| Disintegration of heritage      | Lack of systematic investments | Industrial area in decay         |
| Loss of landmarks that shaped the history of the community | Residents are mostly working class people | The absence of a gathering place |
| Absence of a space for communication between residents | Neighbourhood old past is stained of criminal activities | Limited by high traffic arteries |
| Lack of interesting places      |                               | No direct contact with the water |

Table 1. Urban conflicts
Table 2. Resources and potentials

| Social                                           | Economic                                     | Spatial                          |
|--------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Community is looking for a gathering place       | Linked to all the utilities                 | Accessible                       |
| Community is in need of a green space            | Attractive location for private investors    | Industrial area in decay         |
| The neighbourhood has a story                    | Potential reusable buildings                 | Located in the city center       |
| The neighbourhood had a strong character         |                                              | Located in the historic center   |
|                                                  |                                              | Close to the river               |
|                                                  |                                              | Vacant buildings and empty plots |

The features listed above define a historical site or industrial architectural fragments in the centre of the city rapidly affected by urban sprawl. Two examples have been chosen closer to Velenta’s situation: Urban Incubator (Belgrade) and former industrial district Poble Nou (Barcelona). These two cases are examples of vibrant, sustainable cities that used conversion combined with urban acupuncture as tools of regeneration. Conversion can continue indefinitely and at any scale. Urban acupuncture has been studied on an architectural scale, resulting in typologies of interventions on existing constructions and on the public space (Figure 3). The added functions were: parks, squares (as urban pockets), spaces for cultural activities, workshops, offices, habitation and commerce.

Figure 3. Urban interventions on built space and public space

The two approaches, although different (first bottom-up, second top-down), have intersection points and the effect is similar (table 3). As a result of the analysis of urban regeneration case studies, it was concluded that a punctual and small scale approach would be more beneficial than "deforestation" approaches and action on a large scale site. The strategy would involve or become aware of the community and surrounding communities, so the effects would be noticeable in the long run. It appears that urban healing of these areas is usually done using conversion, introducing new urban functions in order to create a mix of social classes and a synergy between different fields of activity. This type of approach implies actions like: the forced and spontaneous seizure of spaces (involving residents and activists), restoring buildings to create new opportunities (creating a sustainable loop); injecting major
cultural objects; connecting the historic area to the rest of the city by improving the infrastructure; giving space to pedestrians and urban slow life.

| Table 3. Effects of punctual small scale approach |
|-----------------------------------------------|
| Social                                      | Economic                                      | Spatial                               |
| 1 Social dynamism                           | Establishment of a scientific and technological platform | Responsible use of space              |
| Performance in the inserted or attracted activity fields | Establishment of a virtual and physical community work platform | Better aesthetics of the neighbourhood |
| 2 Strengthening relationships in the community | Residents are mostly working class people Neighbourhood old past is stained of criminal activities | Claiming unused spaces                |
| 3 Safer neighbourhood                        | The place is given back to people The increased interest of the investors Introducing the area into administration development plans | Rescue from demolition No direct contact with the water Maintenance of public space |

4. Strategy

After understanding the site (conflicts and positive or potential features) and analysing the case studies, it is suggested to generate eccentric cores (Figure 4) to activate the neighbourhood and attract communities to the centre and more precisely to the area of the fortress. There will be a mix between Top-down and Bottom-up approach. An urban acupuncture based on conversion is proposed.

The activity cores will attract investors, become catalysts of the regeneration of the area. The process is based on a multi-layer collaboration. The strategy involves contextual resources, a vision, and then direct action (administration, specialists, citizens). The action attracts the attention of the creative community and the interest of the residents of the neighbourhood for aesthetics and functionality of the premises; a strong image and identity is created. The furthest cores from the historical centre will be first activated.
The inserted functions were chosen taking into account the image that the local administration wants to build for the city: Oradea dynamic city, as it is mentioned in the Integrated Urban Development Strategy of Oradea Municipality [6]. The new functions are the representation of the characteristic features of a European historical centre: the pursuit of the imposed city narrative, prestige and image, social life, shopping culture, work and accessibility. The aim is the removal of routine and city fatigue with simple gestures and also explosive one: the Spirits and Yeasts Factory – becomes a park; The Eastern Mill – new unconventional hotel; The tram depot/functional food market – it is to be demolished to make room for a business centre; Rovex – accommodation for students; Avântul – food court / market, kitchen school, art gallery and space for rent, park and dwelling (Figure 5). Establishing functions in addressing this kind of urban acupuncture felt a strong influence from Jamie Lerner, a pioneer of urban acupuncture who was presenting this powerful tool as the best to be used in fixing urban conflicts [7].
The proposal is generated with the help of the study of what small-scale urban regeneration means, understanding what the mechanisms of space restructuring are and what tools are to be used in order to change the nature of a place. The proposal alternates static, dynamic places, offering a special rhythm to Velența's life. Buildings have been refurbished, sites have been cleared of temporary and parasitic structures. "Life" has been injected into constructions that are still structurally capable and have cultural, and aesthetic value. The result is the resuscitation and regeneration of the urban tissue of Velența neighborhood and generation of the corridors towards the central point, the fortress.

5. Conclusions
Modern cities undergo a continuous transformation of the built and interstitial environment. Because of the past deindustrialization and today's uncontrolled horizontal development, the city gets fragmented. Holes are generated in urban fabric, unjustified spatial strangulations occur obstructing pedestrian flow. The streets have lost their character, the squares disappeared, and with them a certain model of responsible citizen disappeared also. A global thinking about what a balanced development shall mean is necessary.

The industrial heritage is a material tool that helps people to remember their past. It is still not sufficiently appreciated in Romania, therefore there is a thin line between this sites to be seen as obstacles or opportunities. The buildings are a tangible deposit of energy usually situated in key points for urban development. The industrial heritage treated as cultural asset is a resource that is always consumed having an economic potential but in order to have a sustainable result of a regeneration/refurbishment the context has to be respected and the participation of the residents is essential.
For any proposal of urban regeneration at the macro or micro scale to be viable, it must perfectly adapt to the site. So there is not a perfect recipe for all the types of former industrial sites, but in order to have a successful strategy, there will be a global thinking of project; the proposal will consider a pragmatic and theoretical study of the area, respective to the spatial and social aspect of the context.

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