Industrial afterlife: a tale of three cities

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Abstract

Decommissioned old factories constitute valuable real estate assets as they are often placed in important positions inside the urban areas, they can be quite large in size and surface and they used to play a key role in the past in the development, economic and social life of the communities. Along the historical value, the sheer size of those "dead spaces" in our times, built according to long time gone size and structure of the cities or communities formed around them or even created specifically for their functionality, give today a new meaning to these structures that can hold a great potential of developing new focus points for the smart cities we are trying to create. For those reasons these buildings are reinvented as mixed-use spaces incorporating commercial, residential, cultural and recreational uses. The latest trend is to focus on the buildings' original features, such as brickwork, metalwork, arches and high ceilings, while incorporating contemporary technologies and modern amenities. Reusing these structures helps to preserve the area's historical character while introducing new life into the community and reconnect old circulation routes between the surrounding areas. In addition to boosting local economies and property values, these repurposed factories also reduce the environmental impact of new construction projects. Urban planners worldwide are recognizing the potential of these structures for revitalizing cities. We are going to present two Romanian old repurposed factories that were a valuable addition to the cities in their proximity, and the story of the oldest oil refinery in Romania that is now in the process of being totally transformed, hoping to bring new life to the city that was built around it. Three cities with three interesting stories and three historical industrial landmarks that are making the future of those cities look brighter, smarter, environmentally friendly and beautiful.

Keywords: historical landmarks, old building reused, emblematic buildings, famous structures, recycled architecture.

1. Introduction

Decommissioned old factories constitute valuable real estate assets as they are often placed in important positions inside the urban areas, they can be quite large in size and surface and they used to play a key role in the past in the development, economic and social life of the communities. Along the historical value, the sheer size of those "dead spaces" in our times, built according to long time gone size and structure of the cities or communities formed around them or even created specifically for their functionality, give today a new meaning to these structures that can hold a great potential of developing new focus points for the smart cities we are trying to create.

For those reasons these buildings are reinvented as mixed-use spaces incorporating commercial, residential, cultural and recreational uses.

The latest trend is to focus on the buildings' original features, such as brickwork, metalwork, arches and high ceilings, while incorporating contemporary technologies and modern amenities.

Reusing these structures helps to preserve the area's historical character while introducing new life into the community and reconnect old circulation routes between the surrounding areas. In addition to boosting local economies and property values, these repurposed factories also reduce the environmental impact of new construction projects. Urban planners worldwide are recognizing the potential of these structures for revitalizing cities.

We are going to present two Romanian old repurposed factories that were a valuable addition to the cities in their proximity (Brașov and Suceava), and the story of the oldest oil refinery in Romania that is now in the process of being totally transformed, hoping to bring new life to the city that was built around it: the Steaua Română Rafinery in Câmpina City.

Three cities with three interesting stories and three historical industrial landmarks that are making the future of those cities look brighter, smarter, environmentally friendly and beautiful.

2. The successful transformation of two old factories to vibrant urban areas
We are noticing that the industrial heritage may be in many cases a complex mixture of very different types of structures: brick and mortar buildings, massive concrete structures, technological structures of steel and iron with towers, pipes, tanks, railways, a.s.o.

Due to the scale of those structures and the strength of the materials they have been built with, those intricate engineering jewels are difficult to be demolished and some of them really shouldn't, considering the historical, architectural or cultural value they have.

One of the major problems is the extended level of depreciation some of the structure may be in, raising the real safety concern about the surrounding areas for potential polluting reasons or security for the people that may be passing by, risking to be injured by collapsing components of those structures.

A tall rusted metal structure may be in danger of being damaged or collapsing in a severe winter storm with strong winds and snowfall.

Another major reason for concern is the big amount of urban space those old industrial decommissioned structures are occupying. Factories can be placed on massive plots of land, they are usually inaccessible to the public, surrounded by fences, useless for the city. Just a reminder, a shadow of their former selves.

The reintegration of those areas as a surface alone can be significant for the city, not to mention that the better preserved or valuable heritage structures can be restaurated and converted into useful and meaningful new buildings, that would have a better visibility that before, when they were fenced in or could not be perceived but only from a great distance.

The reconversion of old industrial structures is not an easy task to undertake, from many points of view: financial, logistic and as timeframe. Building a new development of any

kind on an empty plot is already a difficult task. But an old factory plot with the old rusted or collapsing structures on it is a totally different story.

After the difficult step of structural solidity analysis of all the existing structures and the decision of what needs and can be kept and restaurated or not, it follows the "decontamination" step, which is comprised of eliminating all pollution threats to the surrounding areas through old remains of any chemical pollutants stored or leaked by the factory through the air (evaporation), water or soil (by seeping into the underground waters).

After that, the restoration of the structures or buildings that are not about to be demolished is a financial effort almost equal to building the same structure from scratch. What fuels the developers to do this effort is of course the respect for the valuable original architectural structure that holds a great amount of historical and cultural significance for the community, for the city, for the entire region or maybe, in some cases, for the whole world.

The matter of properly connecting the new area with the surrounding one is also very important, the access and new circulation routes need to create a correct circulation flow and also improve the connectivity between the neighboring parts of the city, especially because in most cases the circulation routes were designed to go around the enclosed factory area and not right through it.

The reintroduction of decommissioned old factories in the city can encourage people to explore different parts of the city, potentially leading to the development of pedestrian-friendly streets, bike lanes, or even public transportation options. As a result, this effort can contribute to a more vibrant and accessible urban environment for the whole city.

2.1. Tractorul Plant – Brașov City
Brașov is a beautiful mountain town of around 415.000 inhabitants with a rich history that goes back all the way to the Neolithic.

Fig. 1. Brașov City, Romania
Source: https://www.destinatiaanului.ro/destinatia-anului-2023/brasov/

In 1925, a large aircraft factory was constructed in this city: IAR Brașov (Industria Aeronautică Română – Romanian Aviation Industry). In the period between the two wars and during the Second World War, Romanian planes were manufactured here and used in the war.

Fig. 2. IAR – Romanian Aviation Industry, which became Stegul Roșu Factory, production hall and
administrative building, Brașov, 1927
Source: professor emeritus arch. Sorin Vasilescu, PhD (historical archive images)

Famous Romanian architects have designed the beautiful structures in an industrial style
architecture. George Matei Cantacuzino designs the Assembly hall, cell section and central
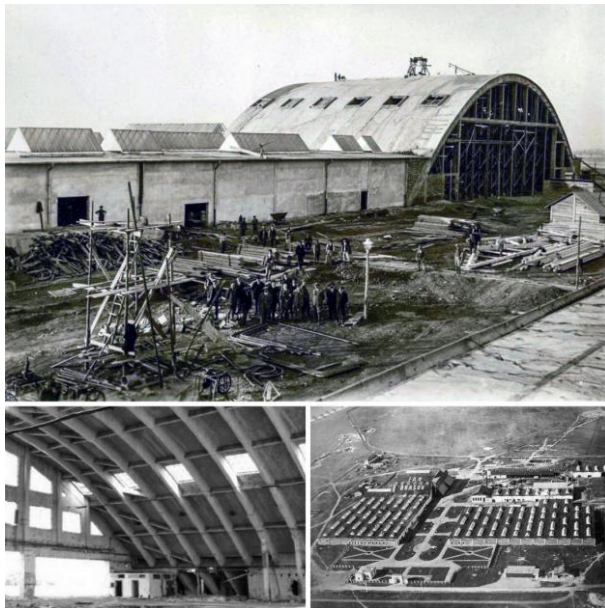hangar in 1927.

Fig. 3. Assembly hall, cell section and central hangar designed by architect George Matei Cantacuzino, IAR
Plants, Brașov, 1927

Architect Octav Doicescu designs the Administrative complex and the Club, beautifully decorated on the exterior brick wall with a stone bas-relief by Constantin Baraschi, built between 1937-1938.

Fig. 4. Administrative complex and club designed by architect Octav Doicescu, IAR-Brașov, 7 Turnului Street, Brașov 1937-1938
Source: professor emeritus arch. Sorin Vasilescu, PhD (historical archive images)

After the war ended, with the arrival of the Russians, they confiscated much of the equipment as spoils of war, so the factory had to change its profile.

Thus, in 1946, *Uzina Tractorul Brașov* (Tractorul Brașov Plant) was founded, one of the most famous and appreciated Romanian companies, both in Romania and abroad. The first tractor to come out of the factory gate was an IAR 22, but over the years the factory's products have led Romanian agriculture to unprecedented development.

In 1990, the plant employed 23,000 people, but with the economic and political changes that came in the period after the fall of the Communist Regime the factory slowed down its production capacity, reaching less than 2000 employees and finally it was closed in 2007. With a total surface of about 100 ha, 1.000.000 msq (10.763.910 sq. ft.), the old and abandoned plant, practically a massive "dead space" in the city has been cleaned up and cured with a private investment of a British investment fund and transformed in a new development comprising a shopping mall, apartment buildings and office spaces.

Known as Coresi Business Park in Brașov, this is one of the most ambitious business projects in the centre of the country and the largest urban regeneration project in Romania.

The entire project is estimated to be finished by 2030, with a total investment of about 350 million euro. [1]

The development integrates four functionalities: shopping centre – Coresi Shopping Resort, residential – Coresi Avantgarden, developed together with Kasper Development, office – Coresi Business Campus developed together with Ascenta, and Qosmo hotel, opened in July 2021 and operated by Kronwell.

Fig. 5. Coresi Development project, Brașov
Source: https://coresibrasov.ro/tag/urbanizehub/

Some of the valuable historical buildings have been restored and transformed into luxurious office spaces, keeping the elegance and the majestic architectural style of the original design. For example the old Administrative complex and club designed by architect Octav Doicescu with the tall water tower, with an area of 8,300 sqm, was put into use after restauration and interior redesign in September 2016.

The first phase of Coresi Business Park development comprises approximately 26,000 sqm of converted unconventional office space with industrial architectural elements.

The refurbished and converted buildings offer all class A facilities and have a 100% occupancy rate for the refurbished office spaces. [2]

Fig. 6. The Old Water Tower transformed in order to accomodate office spaces and apartments, Brașov
Source: https://www.bizbrasov.ro/2023/03/03/turn-simbol-uzina-tractorul-brasov-consolidare/

The massive development also has a shopping mall (Coresi Shopping Resort), with shops and restaurants,eight cinemas, playgrounds and a performance stage. The shopping centre is the biggest investment made in Brașov city in the last ten years with a cost of €60 million and created 800 jobs.

Fig. 7.Coresi Shopping Resort, Brașov
Source: https://coresibrasov.ro/tag/urbanizehub/

The high circulation flow to the shopping centre has prompted Brașov city autonomous transport authority to set up three new bus stops around the mall and some bus routes have been rerouted to make it easier for the city inhabitants to get to the shopping centre. [3]

Fig. 8.Coresi Shopping Resort, Brașov
Source: https://www.mmcite.com/en/brasov-coresi-shopping-center

2.2. The Artificial Fiber Enterprise (IFA) – Suceava
Suceava is the largest urban settlement of the Romanian Suceava County, with a population of 84,308 inhabitants [4] and a surface of 52 km².

The town is a beautiful historical city, among the oldest and most important settlements in Romania. It was documented in 1388 and during the late Middle Ages was the capital of the Principality of Moldavia, being strategically located at the crossroads of several trade routes linking Central Europe with Eastern Europe.

During the last years of the communist regime, the buildings of the Suceava Artificial Fibres Enterprise – Întreprinderea de Fibre Artificiale (IFA) – were built, and the factory started operating in 1984, producing artificial fibers.
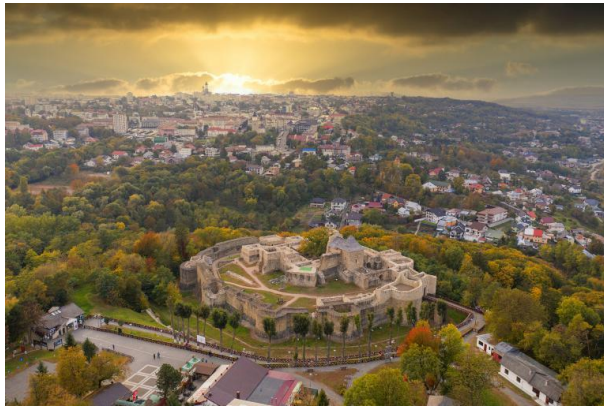
Fig. 9. Suceava City, Romania
*Source: https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=4424819804231337&set=p.4424819804231337,
photo by Nelu Scripciuc*

Fig. 10. Suceava Industrial Zone, with the Pulp a Paper Mill in operation – view from the plane.
Source: https://www.monitorulsv.ro/foto/ouMkoOyR/1 , photo: Dumitru Vinţilă

At the beginning of 1990, IFA's activity was discontinued because the manufacturing process there was very polluting for the city and the surrounding area.

The IFA Tower is the name under which the former gas dispersion stack at the Artificial Fibres Enterprise in Suceava became known. This is the tallest building in the town, standing 230 metres high. [5]

Lined on the inside with special stainless steel materials, the tower was used to remove sulfides resulting from the industrial process of manufacturing man-made fibers.

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It was designed and built by the former Trust of *Lucrări Speciale Bucureşti, Antrepriza de Coşuri Industriale, Glisări şi Precompatimari, Brigada Săvineşti*, brigade chief Eng. Meglei Adrian, supervisors of the works Eng.Ţepeş Bibescu Ioan and Găman Corneliu. [6]

Fig. 11. The the Artificial Fibres Enterprise with the IFA Tower on the right
Source: https://suceavalive.ro/social-democratii-au-identificat-o-suprafata-de-teren-pentru-un-viitor-parc-industrial/

In 2006, the Iulius Mall group from Iasi purchased from FAMOS Suceava the 131,977 square meters of land on which the former IFA Suceava buildings were located, intending to open there the largest supra-regional center in the group's national shopping mall network.

In 2007, the developers began demolishing the massive concrete buildings that belonged to the former IFA: the hall that housed the silk spinning section, which covered an area equivalent to a football pitch, tanks, production halls, workshops, tanks for acids and other toxic substances, pump stations, warehouse platforms, the administration building, the fire station, the guards' huts, the 39-metre-high cooling tower (demolished in a controlled explosion), etc.

The only building remaining in the IFA complex was the chimney stack, the 230m high tower.

The Iulius Mall Suceava shopping complex was built around this tower and inaugurated in November 2008. On this occasion, a series of works were carried out on the tower to integrate it into the Iulius Mall complex. The metal structures providing access to the levels were replaced, sources of rust were removed and it was painted in the colours of the Iulius Mall complex (yellow, orange, blue).

Fig. 12. The Iulius Mall Suceava shopping complex with the IFA Tower

Source: https://www.discoverbucovina.info/un-cos-de-fum-este-cea-mai-inalta-constructie-din-suceava-privel istea-din-varf-este-spectaculoasa/

There have been several proposals to give the tower a practical use: its illumination and the placement of illuminated signs, which would be visible from all over the city, especially at night, the installation of a restaurant or an astronomical observatory on top of the tower.

In April 2009, the Vinci Club was set up at the base of the tower, with more than 600 seats and armchairs available in the concrete rooms. The walls of the club have been decorated in various colours, with dozens of words from Leonardo da Vinci's work strung on the walls, sketches of designs, drawn with reflective paint, to be visible in the disco light. In the centre of the IFA's old smoke stack, a mini-cascade has been set up. [7]

Fig. 12. The Iulius Mall Suceava shopping complex with the IFA Tower base

Source: https://www.centruturistic.ro/suceava/iulius-mall-suceava-suceava-id2176.html

The mall covers an area of 51,500 sqm and offers a complete mix of retail and entertainment: over 200 shops, international and national brands, the largest multiplex cinema Cinema City in the north of the country, with 8 screens, food court, Auchan hypermarket, seasonal ice rink, numerous relaxation and entertainment options, multiple services and offices of public institutions.

Fig. 13. The Iulius Mall Suceava shopping complex seasonal ice rink
Source: https://suceava.media/s-a-deschis-patinoarul-ice-dream-de-la-iulius-mall-suceava/

The shopping and recreation destination attracts around 10 million visitors annually, including from neighboring counties and even across the border.

Fig. 14. The Iulius Mall Suceava shopping complex
Source: https://orasulsuceava.ro/unde-iesim/mall-uri-si-centre-comerciale/iulius-mall/

Now, after 15 years, the project is expanding, continuing its mission to keep the public connected to retail trends, with access to famous fashion brands right in their city, new entertainment concepts and services that make life easier every day, the Iulius investment in Suceava will thus reach the amount of 110 million euros.

Fig. 15. The Iulius Mall Suceava shopping complex extended project
Source: https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-esential-25339152-iulius-mall-suceava-cea-mai-mare-destinatie-shopping-entertainment-din-nordul-tarii-investeste-40-milioane-euro-extindere.htm

New regional premiere fashion brands, restaurants with outdoor terraces, leisure facilities and services will be added, a park and recreation area, as well as an expansion of parking to a total of 2,150 spaces.

The expansion will have 14,000 sqm of leasable space in the form of a retail park, with direct access from the outside, but also connected to the mall. A further 10,000 sqm of the existing Iulius Mall Suceava will be reconfigured and redeveloped. In total, Iulius Mall Suceava will have over 65,000 sqm, consolidating its status as the largest shopping and entertainment destination in the north of the country.

The new development will also integrate a green and pedestrian area of approximately 10,000 sqm, a hallmark of the projects carried out by the developer, which will bring an infusion of nature and a space for outdoor events, complementing the existing entertainment offer at Iulius Mall Suceava.

With the expansion, the area will benefit from an urban makeover, with upgraded project entrances, pedestrian access and road connections. Almost 800 new parking spaces will contribute to the accessibility of the project, bringing the total capacity to more than 2,150 parking spaces, as well as new facilities for electric, alternative and public transport. [8]

3. The trend keeps on going: a promising future reintegration of an old industrial landmark into the urban structure

3.1. Steaua Română Rafinery – Câmpina City

Câmpina city is located in the historical region of Muntenia, in the western part of Prahova County. The small town of 29.000 inhabitants is situated in a hilly region, at the southern end of the Prahova Valley, on the banks of the river Prahova, in between the rivers Câmpinița and Doftana.

Fig. 16. Câmpina city, Romania
Source: Camil Iamandescu

Its existence is first attested in a document of 1503. [9] Formerly a customs point on the trade route between Transylvania and Wallachia, the town developed at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century as an oil extraction and processing center.

Between 1897 and 1898, Câmpina became the site of the largest oil refinery in Europe: Steaua Română Rafinery.

Fig. 17. Steaua Română Rafinery, Câmpina, România
Source: https://proiectsteauaromana-acc.ro/

Throughout its 127 years of existence, the Câmpina refinery has played an essential role in the development of the Romanian state, producing and refining oil, which has not only fuelled the entire nation, but has also positioned Romania as a key player in global energy markets during crucial historical periods.

In 2010, the old and very polluting refinery closed down its activity.

With a total surface of 49.6 ha, the industrial colossus have slowly slowly started to depreciate, the dozens of exposed metallic towers, massive fuel tanks, kilometers of intricate tangled pipes, the railways and all the other structures started to rust, lose their stability and get invaded by the wild nature, as the terrain has remained closed to the public that could be exposed by entering the premises to dangerous hazards as inflammable gasses and fluid still being present on the refinery's ground.
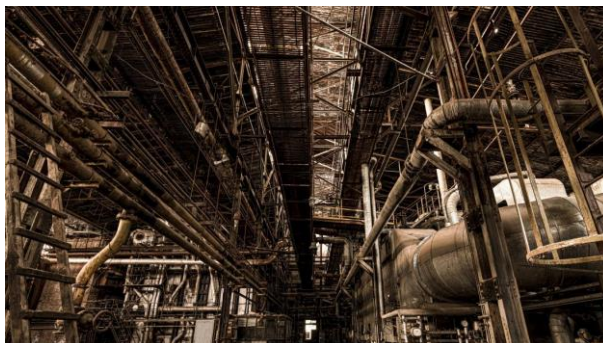

Fig. 18. Steaua Română Rafinery, Câmpina, România
Source: https://proiectsteauaromana-acc.ro/, photo: Emil Dico

Recently, the Refinery has been purchased by the company Ecogen Power that has already started the process of decontaminating the ground of all pollutants and it is planning on creating a new urban development hub by reintroducing the area in the city life.

The central building and a couple of metallic structures will be kept and restaurated as mementos of the glorious edifice from the past and also for their historical and architectural value, but they will be repurposed as art/culture galleries and art installations. But most of the mechanical installations, in very poor shape, have to be removed, leaving a great amount of free space that can be returned to the city by inclusion in the urban tissue.

Fig. 19. Railways of the Steaua Română Rafinery, Câmpina, România
Source: https://proiectsteauaromana-acc.ro/, photo: Adrian Bercaru

This year the new owners had the initiative of launching a nationwide contest of documentary photography, where over 300 photographers came to the old refinery to take photos of the still existing structures.

Last month the public ceremony of the photo contest awards and the photo gallery display gathered in the Refinery's premises hundreds of visitors that came to say goodbye to the soon to be gone crumbling refinery.

Fig. 20. Interior of the Steaua Română Rafinery, Câmpina, România
Source: https://proiectsteauaromana-acc.ro/, photo: Mihaela Tulea

Most of the visitors from Câmpina city had never in their lives the chance to visit or see inside images of the great industrial asset from their own town.

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The following step is the launching of a national contest for architects in order to find the best ideas of the future development of the Refinery premises.

This example shows us a positive direction in the efforts of improving our cities, eliminating unused and useless spaces, bringing into the urban life more facilities, circulation routes, parking spots, green spaces, and, as result, more comfort, better mobility and more fun!

Fig. 21. Interior of the Steaua Română Rafinery, Câmpina, România
Source: https://proiectsteauaromana-acc.ro/, photo: Ştefan Mareş

The title of this presentation refers to the parallel between the old industrial city and a possible future city in which old industrial structures are reinterpreted and reintroduced. These are the two possible smart cities in the title with their story.

The first idea of representing these variants started from the Dickensian narrative which is the best-selling book of all time. Especially from its famous opening paragraph. But more recently, a steam punk story by the enfant terrible of contemporary fantasy literature, Neil Gaiman, has opened up the same perspective on the coexistence of two possible cities with opposing visions of the technological idol, mutually denying each other. [10] And a recent TV show, Peripheral, launched in 2022 by Amazon Prime, depicts an alternative city, London of a virtual future, dominated by classical idols reconfigured as urban landmarks: reclaiming a cultural identity.

The behavioural prediction will be verified as smart cities become more and more impressive in their performance. We can already find examples where predictions can be tested, but we are still in the early stages of implementation. One example is Songdo the first smart city in South Korea, and declaratively in the world, built with the help of IT company Cisco [11] at a relatively short distance from Seoul, just 60 kilometres, an hour and a half drive for residents attracted by the unique project. Launched in 2003 and implemented in 2015 on 600 hectares reclaimed from the Yellow Sea.

Fig. 22. London of a virtual future in Peripheral TV production, produced in 2022 by Amazon Prime
Source: https://climatecrocks.com/2022/10/30/the-peripheral-future-london-with-giant-spoiler-alert/

Conceived as a major economic centre aided by an attractively priced luxury residential area offering a quality of life that becomes a standard to be achieved and a model to be followed. Yet the press declares it "an impersonal project that is not a great success". [12] The project is made up of metal and glass volumes gathered around a 305-metre tall landmark, the North East Asia Tower, and contains no museums or cinemas. It's only half as populated as expected, with residents attracted by the novelty of the project and the amenities on offer: generous green spaces, a 25-kilometre bike trail, a quality education offer, but employees of the (only) 58 companies based in Songdo say they can't live there.

Fig. 23. The Tale Of Two Smart Cities – a possible skyline
Source: arch. Iulia Toader, Ph.D.

The city is highly developed technologically, there are 500 surveillance cameras in constant contact with the police, there is internet everywhere and an IoT innovation project is in development. The electricity grids are running on an efficiency programme, there are garbage collection systems that achieve 76% recycling. And yet, what is the cause of the lack of attachment of Songdo employees and residents?

On the graph above, the point corresponding to the atmosphere of the projected place is in the dual range, and since the technological control is not forced (although we can say that the city is under constant surveillance) the reaction is not very violent. The identity of Songdo – the smart place, tends towards neutral values, due to the complete neglect of the scene for a complex social life, making Songdo "A ghetto for the rich", as Le Monde calls it [11].

Stories are always fascinating and contain ideational and, why not, behavioral archetypes, which on close examination we can see repeated over and over again. It is very important to relate to the stories of the place to shape a complete *genius loci*, so much so that, separated from urban myths or regional mythology, places are difficult to understand on a de-anticipated basis for architecture consumers who are strangers to the place.

In the search for the defining story, we will always associate principles such as "the first of its kind", "the last of its kind", "the oddity/out of the ordinary as opposed to normality", "the best one – the hero" or "the one the most hated – the bad square", all these ways of interpreting the architectural object that gives the place its character being preserved and passed down through generations through stories. The presented locations, with their industrial character, are stories for the future. They speak of courageous existence in times of innovation, or of absolute resilience in times of destruction.

We cannot now assess the future role that such buildings will play in preserving the identity of place, and why not, of national identity. But we can try to treat them the way that oral tradition handles lores, passing them from mouth to mouth, until they find their particular context where they become relevant. We currently have that role of keepers that Heidegger talks about in *The Origin of the Work of Art*, in our case talking about an origin of communities, hinged around avant-garde industrial goals at a certain point in history. With the recommendation to abandon any tabula rasa attitudes, with the understanding of the immensity of the resources needed to rehabilitate such objectives and the lack of opportunity for such approaches, we are looking for a means of preserving and transmitting their living stories written in the mere matter put into the work. With this in mind, we conclude with Jean Luc Marion's famous quotation, which puts before us a mirror that makes us think. "Name your idol, and you will know who you are. The first visible of a look is thus also equivalent to an invisible mirror". [13]

We may be leaning towards the idol of progress-at-any-price, a globalizing and consumerist attitude leading to an urban reconfiguration at the expense of the vestiges of early industrial eras. Such an attitude is appropriate to a revolution of technocracy versus an era of care and respect, almost idolatry for the past, resulting in the creation of cities and communities of the future elliptical to their own histories. Or we can reconfigure a future in which stories of trial and error, or of outdated technologies becoming obsolete, are the new archetypes

of self-aware cities with a high potential for resilience, because stories and archetypes are unequivocally recipes for the survival over time of communities and settlements.

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