ABSTRACT: At the turn of the 19th century, numerous facilities and factories for tobacco purchasing, processing, and manufacturing were built in Croatia. Due to the reduction of the tobacco industry, these complexes were left abandoned. In recent years the rehabilitation of some of them has been realised, although most of them are left to decay. In this paper, three Croatian case studies of renewal and reuse of tobacco buildings and complexes are analysed with the aim of affirming the use of former industrial complexes for new purposes.

KEY WORDS: Industrial heritage, Croatia, tobacco factory, tobacco purchasing stations, rehabilitation, decay

Introduction

At the turn of the 19th century, the tobacco industry was well developed in Croatia, which encouraged the construction of a large number of tobacco complexes. In southern Dalmatian towns (Imotski, Vrgorac, Metković, etc.), centres of intense tobacco production were formed and tobacco purchasing and processing complexes were built. Tobacco factories were built in larger Croatian cities (Rijeka, Rovinj, Zagreb, etc.). The complexes were the bearers of industrialisation and modernisation, but they shut down when the tobacco industry declined. In the new context, however, these important spatial resources were not used to start a new wave of development, usually because the value and the potential of
such heritage were unrecognised. Instead, they were left to decay and obstruct the spatial development of their communities. Thanks to the revaluation of industrial heritage, some of these complexes have however been preserved, reconstructed and reused. In the following text, the tobacco factory in Rijeka will be used as an example of the renewal and the reuse of a whole tobacco factory complex. The tobacco stations in Metković and Imotski will also be presented as two examples of partial renewal and reuse.

Analysis of Three Case Studies

Rijeka Tobacco Factory (Fig 1)

The Rijeka Tobacco Factory was set up in mid-19th century in the pavilion-type complex of the former Sugar Factory (built from the mid-18th century at the seafront). In 1949, it was converted into the Rikard Benčić Factory of Mechanical Industry. The complex was reused in phases. The initial project by Idis Turato and Saša Randić aimed to convert the northern T building into the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (MMCA), but the project was never realised. The MMCA eventually found its home in the western wing of the H building, renewed according to the design by architect Dinko Peračić [Peračić et al. 2016]. The tight budget was used by the architect to renew a part of the ground floor and the floor above for exhibition purposes and leave visible “patches” of the damaged floor (Fig 2). The phased approach with minimal interventions won three awards. The northern brick building was renewed according to the design by
Saša Randić - a radical intervention to create the Children’s House. What remained was the wall shell, whereas the interior was interpolated by a skeleton system and a series of different geometrical shapes characterised by rich textures and vivid colours to encourage children’s imagination. The architect renewed the northern T building for the purposes of the City Library. Its entire south wing was also radically altered because of its collapsing structure (Fig 3). The baroque HQ building, located at the seafront, was renewed and converted into the Museum of the City of Rijeka according to the design by architect Irma Huić (Fig 4). The museum showcases good-quality restoration works and complex restoration, and houses collections representing the rich history of Rijeka, as well as the industrial heritage Rijeka is extremely proud of [Dubrović 2020]. Almost the entire renewal of the complex named Art Quart Rijeka was made possible by funds provided by the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) project as Rijeka was the Croatian 2020 representative [Rijeka 2020 2019]. The only building left out of the project is the MMCA, whose run-down facade shows all too well the limited budget of the local community.

Figure 2 Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (reused H building of the former factory complex), architect Dinko Peračić, 2014-2017, 1st phase realisation – View from MMCA to the north onto the Children’s House in the former brick building of the Tobacco Factory (right) and the “T” building of the former Rijeka Tobacco Factory under reconstruction for the City Library (left) (Source: Zrinka Barišić Marenić, 2023); section of the “H” building (Source: architect Dinko Peračić’s archive); interior of the MMCA (Source: Zrinka Barišić Marenić, 2023)

Figure 3 Axonometry of the former Tobacco factory complex (Source: architect Saša Randić’s archive); interior of the Children’s House (reconstructed brick building), architect Saša Randić, completed in 2020, Rijeka (Source: Zrinka Barišić Marenić, 2023)
The Tobacco Purchasing Station was set up in the 1880s on the southeast edge of Imotski. It was formed as a pavilion-type complex with multiple parallel buildings which conformed to the characteristics of the sloped terrain. With the rise in tobacco production, the complex grew with the building of detached warehouses and other buildings. After World War II, the fourth and last warehouse to be built was extended and started being used for the purposes of the new textile factory [Ujević 1991]. The remaining part of the complex was slightly altered and active until the 1990s. Since the tobacco purchasing station closed its doors, the complex has not been reused. In 2006, only the building of the former workers’ canteen (Fig 6) was renewed and re-
used as the Heritage Museum. It is the most well-known building in the complex, whose exterior is completely preserved in its original state. Its interior was adapted, with minimal interventions, to house the museum collections and other facilities (Fig 7). The future of the remaining parts of the complex is unknown.

Figure 6 Former workers’ canteen of the Imotski Tobacco Purchasing Station converted into the Heritage Museum in 2006 – Exterior view of the south facade (Source: Branimir Leko, 2023); original ground floor plan drawing from 1903. (Source: Imotski Heritage Museum’s archive)

Figure 7 Imotski Heritage Museum – Interior of the entrance hall (Source: Branimir Leko, 2023); ground floor plan drawing from Architectural project of Renovation and Adaptation from 1998. (Source: Imotski Heritage Museum’s archive)

**Mtković Tobacco Purchasing Station** (Fig 8)

The Tobacco Purchasing Station in Metković opened its doors at the beginning of the 20th century on the outskirts of this town located on the Neretva river. The huge stone building is a counterpoint to the church of St Elijah in the town’s centre. A tobacco weighing and purchasing station, it was dubbed “Vaga” (Scales). The parallel
buildings complex was built in phases throughout the 20th century. The complex was enclosed by a high wall, and its park dignified its industrial character. After its closure in 1996, the main HQ building (Fig 9) was converted into the Natural History Museum (Fig 10) and the City Library. The process of reuse, along with the reconstruction of the floor structure and the roof, was realised according to the design of Goran Rako (2013-2015). Unfortunately, the remaining part of the complex is yet to be renewed. The integrity of the complex has been disrupted by two residential buildings built in the area of the original park and the enclosing wall, which has greatly devastated the area. [Vukojević et al. 2019]

Figure 8 Current uses of Tobacco Station Metković buildings (Source: Ivan Vukojević, 2023)

**Results and Discussion**

The above tobacco complexes have similarities and differences. The tobacco factory complex is located in a big port, whereas the two tobacco stations are in two small Dalmatian towns. They share the pavilion-type organisation of the plan, as well as the architectural features of the buildings. The complexes are noticeable in the urban tissue and the city landscape because of their scale, the area they occupy, and their spatial organisation. Despite their different locations, the renewal processes are similar. All the complexes have been partially renewed, which was made possible by their pavilion-type structure. A continuous and full renewal of the complexes was made difficult by the
large areas they cover and many buildings they contain. Problems involving property rights halted the renewal, as did difficulties in finding adequate new functions and the funds for the expensive works they require.

Rijeka eventually did succeed in completing the renewal process and reused its complex thanks to the ECoC funds. But Metković and Imotski each renewed only the most recognisable building. The remaining buildings have yet to be renewed and permanently repurposed. All renewed buildings were reused for cultural purposes that serve the community. The investors were local government bodies, which received aid from the Ministry of Culture or from EU funds. It is also obvious that the geographical position can either help the renewal process or make it more difficult. While the renewal in Rijeka is slowly coming to an end despite the phased renewal process, the renewal of the complexes in Metković and Imotski is much more difficult. Rijeka is the ECoC, it is more populated and is economically more important than Metković and Imotski, towns whose population is decreasing and which are strategically not as important. This is why the renewal in these two towns is slow and its continuation is uncertain. In addition to that, Rijeka is a city that has for years been popularising its industrial heritage thanks to the activity of Pro Torpedo - the Association for the Promotion and Protection of Industrial Heritage, which created favourable conditions for the successful renewal of the factory complex.

Figure 9 Former administrative office building of the Metković Tobacco Purchasing Station converted into the Natural History Museum and the City Library (2013-2015) – Exterior view of the northeast facade (Source: Ivan Vukojević, 2016); original ground floor plan drawing from 1905. (Source: Ivica Puljan’s archive)

Conclusions

The three analysed tobacco complexes clearly represent the Croatian context of preservation, renewal and revitalisation of industrial heritage. Croatia boasts a small number of high-quality realisations of planned industrial heritage renewal. These sites are more frequently found in the western and northern parts of Croatia than in its hinterland.¹ This proves that European tendencies towards the revaluation of industrial heritage are
more slowly finding their way from the North to the South, or from the western part of Croatia to its eastern part. This is also a reflection of the economic situation as the Northwest of Croatia is more developed than its South and East. The most significant and exemplary renewals of industrial heritage in Croatia are still in large part done by the city and the state and their institutions. In the process, the industrial complexes are most often reused for cultural or community-focused purposes. This is also true for the few other Croatian examples of good practice of renewal of industrial sites, such as the coal mine in Labin, the Tobacco Factory in Zagreb and Paromlin (steam mill) in Zagreb. In smaller towns, it is difficult to start the renewal and repurposing of former industrial complexes because of their size and the difficulty in finding new use for such big spaces, as well as because these processes require significant funds. Therefore, new approaches and models should be considered and alternative ways of financing these projects should be found. European funds can be a significant financial instrument which can ease the processes of renewal and reuse of industrial heritage. However, the main and the essential prerequisite for the preservation and renewal of industrial heritage is a well-informed local community, as well as well-informed representatives of the local and state authorities which are the initiators of heritage renewal in Croatia. Given that industrial heritage in Croatia still bears little value in comparison to other types of cultural buildings (palaces, castles, sacral buildings etc.), it is necessary to continuously inform the public of the significance of industrial heritage and its preservation in order to set the foundations for future industrial heritage renewal as heritage can only be saved from decay and disappearance by its revitalisation. This paper contributes to the affirmation of such topics.

Figure 10 Natural History Museum and City Library – Interior of the Natural History Museum on the ground floor (Source: Ivan Vukojević, 2016); floor plan of the City Library on the first floor (Source: architect Goran Rako’s archive)

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Footnotes

[1] Exceptions are certain examples in coastal areas where tourism was the instigator of reuse for hospitality purposes.

[2] Such processes are long-lasting and also legally and financially complex, which is why there is a lack of interest from private investors. However, there are certain exceptions. In Zagreb, a private company started the renewal and reuse of a textile factory complex (originally Austro-Hungarian riding arena) to convert it into Lauba gallery. The tobacco station complex in Trogir was converted into a hotel in a similar manner.

[3] The coalmine buildings converted into the City Library.

[4] The factory was to be converted into the Croatian History Museum, for which all necessary projects had been made. However, due to the lack of finances, it is now being reconstructed and converted into the Conservation Institute.

[5] The creation of projects for the renewal of Paromlin and its conversion into the City Library and a cultural and community centre is underway.

[6] For reasons stated above, a partial renewal and reuse model is frequently used.

[7] The reconstruction of the Dutch House for the promotion of the industrial heritage of the City of Sisak was also financed by European funds.

References


