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Protection and Reuse of Industrial Heritage: Dilemmas, Problems, Examples

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**Protection and Reuse of Industrial Heritage:
Dilemmas, Problems, Examples**

edited by Sonja Ifko and Marko Stokin

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Preservation, Restoration and Revitalization of the Idrija Mercury Mine Smelting Plant Area – Part of the ‘Heritage of Mercury. Almadén and Idrija’ UNESCO Site

Summary

Idrija has managed to preserve the diverse and unique industrial and technical heritage of its 500-year-old mining history that tells the story of mercury, which was inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List in 2012. Many mining facilities, machines, equipment and documents were preserved during the Idrija Mercury Mine's closing down and liquidation process. One of the crucial parts of the mine that has not yet been renovated is the smelting plant, which is in danger of losing its protected properties due to its deteriorating state. The area of the monument covers the cableway end-station, the building of the ore separation and crushing plant, conveyor belts, collection silo, rotary furnace, smoke chamber, smoke pipelines and chimney, and the Špirek-Čermak furnace. The smelting plant represents the final phase of the mine's development. Its renovation and renewal is a significant challenge in terms of financing and expertise. In February 2014, the Idrija Mercury Heritage Management Centre (IMHMC), a public institution, took over the management of the smelting plant area from the Idrija Mercury Mine, Ltd. – in liquidation. The IMHMC was founded pursuant to a decision of the Slovenian Government aimed at the comprehensive and sustainable management and preservation of cultural heritage and natural values linked to the Idrija ore deposit. The IMHMC successfully applied to a call for proposals to co-finance the project 'IDRIJA – SMELTING PLANT AREA OF THE IDRIJA MERCURY MINE – 1st PHASE OF RECONSTRUCTION' under the EEA Financial Mechanism Programme 2009-2014 – B.3. Cultural Heritage, in the amount of EUR 2 million. Its project partners are the Idrija Municipal Museum and the Magma Geopark from Norway. The goal of the project is to preserve the endangered cultural monument and enrich it with new content, enhance its modernity and attractiveness, revive its heritage with educational content, raise awareness of the importance of preserving cultural heritage, and enhance tourism opportunities in the area. The project was begun on 30 December 2014 and will be completed on 31 December 2016.

1 Introduction

The smelting plant of the Idrija Mercury Mine ceased to operate in 1995. After twenty years of endeavours aimed at restoring this cultural monument of national importance, the Idrija Mercury Heritage Management Centre (IMHMC) began to implement the 1st phase of restoration and revitalization of the smelting plant area of the Idrija Mercury Mine, which is being co-financed under the EEA Financial Mechanism Programme 2009-2014.

2 Smelting plant area

During its 500 years of operation, the Idrija Mercury Mine was reputed for its technical superiority. Throughout history, the Mine's technical achievements in the areas of mercury extraction and transport were much better known than its processing of mercury ore. Over the years, the burning of ore underwent many changes and/or improvements, but it was not until the introduction of Čermak-Špirek furnaces (1886), later followed by a new separation plant (1957) and rotary furnace (1961), that the Mine attained one of its peaks

in the field of metallurgy as well¹. The Čermak-Špirek furnace was entirely the result of domestic know-how and an original technological solution in the area of smelting at the end of the 19th century, which won Idrija the leading position among mercury producers. The present-day smelting plant area represents the last stage of technological development, as its facilities and devices operated continuously until the shutdown of the mine and represent an inseparable part of its history. The abandonment of mining activities and the development of a new industry has in many ways changed the town's appearance. The mine facilities, especially those in the smelting plant areas, have been replaced by the production facilities of a new industrial zone of the Kolektor Group company and others, which have given this part of the town a new content and appearance².

In 2011, the smelting plant area was proclaimed a cultural monument of national importance by the Decree on the designation of technical heritage in Idrija and its surroundings (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, no. 66/2001), under Heritage Register Number (HRN) 7460. The area comprises the cableway end-station, the building of the ore separation and crushing plant, conveyor belts, collection silo, rotary furnace, smoke chamber with smoke pipelines and chimney, and the Špirek-Čermak furnace II. The Čermak-Špirek furnace II has been entered in the Register of Cultural Heritage as an independent heritage unit (HRN 4825)³. All the facilities with preserved original machines and devices have exceptional historical value that needs to be treated in the context of the continuous, 500-year operation of the second largest mercury mine in the world and its unique universal heritage that complements the story of mercury extraction, i.e. the procedure of extracting mercury from ore, which so far has not been presented in Idrija or in Almadén⁴.

Owing to its long-lasting abandonment, the vandalism and damage caused to it in the past, as well as its potential collapse, the monument faces the threat of losing its protected properties.

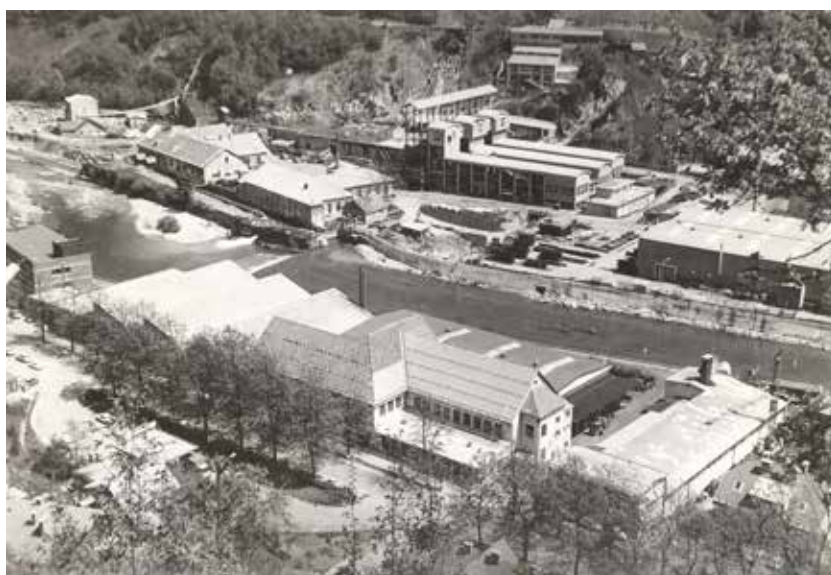


Fig. 1: Idrija Mercury Mine smelting plant area in 1991 (Idrija Municipal Museum archives).

1 Klemenčič, T., Eržen, U., Pišljarič, M. (1997). Predlog za ohranitev območja topilnice Rudnika živega srebra Idrija kot tehnični spomenik (pp. 1). Idrija Mercury Mine Archive.

2 Cigale, M. (2004). Žgalnica Rudnika živega srebra Idrija - nekoč, danes jutri. Posvet Žgalnica Rudnika živega srebra Idrija – jutri, Idrija. Idrija Mercury Mine Archive.

3 Odlok o razglasitvi kulturnih in zgodovinskih spomenikov ter naravnih znamenitosti na območju občine Idrija. Official Gazette of Republic of Slovenia, no. 16/1986.

4 Leskovec, I. (2015). Predlogi za območje občin Idrija in Cerkno za osnutek Zakona o kulturnem tolarju 2015–2020 (pp. 5-7.). Idrija Mercury Mine Archive.

3 Endeavours for preservation of the smelting plant area and its facilities

The long-term programme for the gradual, complete and permanent shutdown of the Idrija Mercury Mine, prepared in 1987, also foresaw, among the activities that would follow the termination of ore extraction and smelting, the disassembly of devices and the demolition of facilities in the smelting plant area. However, upon the termination of mercury ore extraction and smelting activities, the then management of the Idrija Mercury Mine recognized the significance of the Idrija mine's technical heritage and decided to restore, in the smelting plant area, one rotary furnace (RP3) with pertaining facilities and the ore separation building in order to preserve the image of the Idrija mine's technical heritage already being presented by Anthony's Main Road tourist mine as part of a demonstration of the history of mercury ore extraction, and complement it with a display of mercury transport and extraction in the smelting plant.

In 1996, alongside the demolition works (two rotary furnaces, chemical laboratory building and mercury filling plant), ecological rehabilitation of the smelting plant area, as well as the rehabilitation and recultivation of the smelting plant chimney area, the Idrija Mercury Mine initiated activities aimed at the preservation and arrangement of this area. For this purpose, the Proposal for the preservation of the rotary furnace and arrangement of the smelting plant area⁵ was prepared, and included the preserved rotary furnace and the ore separation plant with pertaining functional land. A year later, it was followed by the Proposal for the preservation of the smelting plant area of the Idrija Mercury Mine as a technical monument¹. The preservation and adequate arrangement of the cableway end-station, ore separation plant, bridge with conveyor belt, collection silo and feeder system structure, rotary furnaces and the condenser system would enable a demonstration of the comprehensive procedure of transport, separation, crushing and smelting of mercury ore. Part of the spaces in the ore separation plant would be used to present the use of and environmental issues related to mercury, as well as the development of new activities after the mine's shutdown. A space on the platform alongside the rotary furnace was foreseen for the display of the preserved Čermak-Špirek furnace, which at that time was still set up inside the industrial zone of the Kolektor factory and was not freely accessible, at the same time also posing an obstacle to the company's technological process. Precisely owing to the urgent expansion of production at the Kolektor factory, the Čermak-Špirek furnace was disassembled and its components removed from the factory's yard in 2002 under the expert guidance and supervision of the Idrija Municipal Museum and the Idrija Mercury Mine. Its components are stored on the platform beneath the rotary furnace. As the works were adequately documented (drawings, inventories, photos), the reassembly of this furnace in future is not questionable.

In the years that followed, discussions were conducted in connection with the smelting plant area, focusing on the spatial conditions at the location of the former mine smelting plant and the Halda 2 building plan in Idrija (ZN RŽS2-HALDA in Idrija) regarding the arrangement of an access route between the newly constructed facilities of the Kolektor factory and the preserved rotary furnace. Based on the project documents for the construction of the Kolektor factory's new production facility S-18/II⁶, the rotary furnace condensers, the smoke chamber of the rotary furnaces, the smelting plant's transformer station, warehouses I and II in the extension of the smoke chambers, the loading ramp, and the ventilation and gas station in the smelting plant area were demolished, and the platform alongside the rotary furnaces was arranged. In line with the project⁷ and the building permit, part of the construction wastes accumulated after demolition of the former smelting plant facilities were deposited in the existing ducts of the smelting plant's smoke pipeline running along the slope from the smoke chamber to the supporting wall

5 Klemenčič, T. & Pišljarič, M. (1996). Predlog za ohranitev rotacijske peči ter ureditev območja topilnice. Idrija Mercury Mine Archive.

6 Božič inženiring Ltd. Idrija (1997). Projekt za pridobitev gradbenega dovoljenja, no. 05/97. Idrija Mercury Mine Archive.

7 Inštitut za rudarstvo, geotehnologijo in okolje Ljubljana (1997). Rudarski projekt Izvedba odlaganja gradbenih odpadkov v bližini opuščene rotacijske peči Rudnika živega srebra Idrija, no. 12/7-97. Idrija Mercury Archive.

of the local road above the ore separation facility and, in the final phase, the recultivation of the area was carried out. For the purpose of preventing the deterioration of the rotary furnace, the static rehabilitation, sandblasting and anticorrosion protection of the support structure of the condensers were performed, as their static condition was most endangered due to the demolition of the other two furnaces. The roof structure and roofing were also replaced. Project documents were prepared for the arrangement of the mine area alongside the smelting plant and chimney⁸, and the first phase of disassembly of equipment in the ore separation plant, which had not been foreseen in the planned presentation of ore processing, was completed. Works were also completed on the rehabilitation of the upper part of the smoke pipeline above the road below Golica to the chimney, which had been finished in 2000 with the restoration of the chimney. After 2006, the roof structure and roofing above the rotary furnace were restored, the bunkers in the ore separation plant were rehabilitated, and the rotary furnace and ore separation areas were cleaned. On the basis of the documents entitled Concept of restoration and revitalization of the smelting plant area of the Idrija Mercury Mine⁹ and the Plan for the presentation and restoration of objects of movable heritage of the 'Separation facility – Crushing and ore separation plant'¹⁰, which foresaw the restoration of ore crushing and separation machines, the right ore separation line was entirely disassembled and the left line was renewed with useable components. The works included rough cleaning of machine components, the rehabilitation, restoration and manufacture of missing or obsolete components, reassembly of existing, still useable components from the right line 'rich ore', and the removal of other redundant materials from the facility. This intervention enabled, in line with the construction works project¹¹, more space to be acquired for new contents (mercury research centre, laboratory, exhibition area, conference room, study rooms, UNESCO information centre). In the period from 2011 to 2015, no other works were carried out in the smelting plant area, except for the disassembly of three of the four ore discharge channels and the conveyor belt in the shaft below the bunkers under the ore separation plant, whose preservation and presentation had not been foreseen.

With the aim of combining the reflections and plans in connection with the technical heritage of the Idrija Mercury Mine, the Idrija Mercury Mine, the Idrija Municipal Museum and the Idrija Museum Society organized conferences in the years 2000, 2003 and 2004 for the purpose of evaluating the state of Idrija's technical mining monuments and enhancing the preparation of joint plans for their integral inclusion in spatial plans, their restoration, presentation and marketing. Special attention was devoted at the conferences to the issue of the mine's smelting plant, whose thorough restoration could no longer be delayed indefinitely, because its facilities were inevitably deteriorating. One of the key findings at the conferences was that without financial support from the state, sponsoring by domestic companies, or funds from national and international public tenders, it would not be possible to carry out the foreseen works. Emphasis was also laid on the need to reach a mutual agreement or reconciliation between the spatial plans of the Municipality of Idrija, the interests of the Kolektor Group company, and the interests of the group for the preservation of smelting plant facilities (Idrija Mercury Mine, Idrija Municipal Museum, Idrija Museum Society) and, following the preparation of project documents for the restoration of the smelting plant, to devote efforts for ensuring financial resources for its implementation with the participation of the state, domestic companies, and project sources.

In the following years the Idrija Mercury Mine, in cooperation with experts in the fields of conservation, protection and presentation of cultural heritage, actively undertook the supplementation of the prepared documents for the restoration and revitalization of the

8 Božič inženiring Ltd. Idrija (1999). Projekt ureditev območja RŽS ob topilnici in dimniku, št. 053/97-1. Idrija Mercury Mine Archive.

9 Eržen, U. (2007). Idejna zasnova obnove in oživitve območja topilnice RŽS Idrija. Idrija Mercury Mine.

10 Eržen, U. (2009). Načrt prezentacije in obnove predmetov premišne dediščine 'Separacija – Drobilnica in klasirnica'. Idrija Mercury Mine.

11 GEA CONSULT Ltd., Škofja Loka (2009). Projekt gradbene dokumentacije 'Idrija – območje topilnice Rudnika živega srebra'. Idrija Mercury Mine Archive.

smelting plant area^{12, 13, 14}. The documentation covered the restoration of facilities and devices as well as the presentation of the history of smelting, the properties and use of mercury, trade routes, ecology and health care, shutdown works, monitoring, and the site selection of the then mercury information and research centre, and the information and interpretation centre.

The costs of preparation of the documentation and the execution of rehabilitation and other previously mentioned works in the smelting plant area, which were conducted in line with conservation requirements¹⁵ and in the period from 1995 to 2015 totalled EUR 523,100, were covered by the Idrija Mercury Mine from its own funds in the amount of EUR 160,700, the Ministry of Culture in the amount of EUR 345,700, and by the Kolektor factory in the amount of EUR 16,700 (disassembly and relocation of Čermak-Špirek furnace).



Fig. 2: Idrija Mercury Mine smelting plant area in 2007 (photo by Jani Peternej, 'Heritage of Mercury. Almadén and Idrija' nomination dossier presented to UNESCO in January 2011).

4 Liquidation of the Idrija mercury mine and establishment of the Idrija mercury heritage management centre

At the end of 2009 the Government of the Republic of Slovenia passed, on the proposal of the Ministry of Economic Affairs, a resolution on the implementation of a procedure for the regular liquidation of the Idrija Mercury Mine (Resolution of 24 December 2009), as a result of which the Idrija Mercury Mine was prevented from obtaining state funding for the implementation of further investments also in the areas of preservation, conservation and presentation of technical heritage in the smelting plant.

For the purpose of ensuring the comprehensive and sustainable management and preservation of cultural heritage and natural values linked to the Idrija ore deposit in Idrija, the Government of the Republic of Slovenia passed in 2011 a resolution establishing a public institution named the Idrija Mercury Heritage Management Centre – IMHMC (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, nos. 55/2011 and 6/2014). The principal activities of

12 ZVKDS Restavratski center, Ljubljana (2008). Konservatorski načrt in katalog: Idrija – Območje topilnice Rudnika živega srebra Idrija, EŠD 7460 in Idrija – Špirek Čermakova peč II., EŠD 4825.

13 Eržen, U. & Zelenc, A. (2009). Konservatorsko restavratski projekt Idrija – Čermak Špirekova peč II. Idrija Mercury Mine, Idrija Municipal Museum.

14 Eržen, U. (2010). Načrt prezentacije in obnove predmetov nepremične in premične dediščine: Območje topilnice – separacija, most s transportnim trakom, rotacijska peč. Idrija Mercury Mine.

15 ZVKDS OE Nova Gorica (2009). Ovrednotenje klasirnice rude in konservatorski pogoji, no. 1617-07/TB. Idrija Mercury Mine Archive.

the Centre, alongside the management of cultural heritage, including the important task of managing the site entered in UNESCO's World Heritage List, would also comprise, after the liquidation of the Idrija Mercury Mine, the maintenance of the unfilled part of the pit under the town of Idrija and the monitoring of the impacted area of the Idrija Mine, as well as tasks related to environmental and health protection.

To successfully carry out the project involving the 1st phase of the restoration and revitalization of the smelting plant area, it was necessary in 2015 to fulfil the requirement that the smelting plant area and its pertaining facilities from the Idrija Mercury Mine—in liquidation be transferred into the ownership of the Republic of Slovenia. Based on the proposal of the Idrija Mercury Mine's liquidator and the resolution of the Slovenian Sovereign Holding approving the submitted proposal, the ownership right to the immovable property was entered in the register in September 2015 to the benefit of the Republic of Slovenia, and in February 2016 the smelting plant area was put into the management of IMHMC by resolution of the Slovenian Government.

5 Application to a call for proposals under the EEA financial mechanism programme 2009-2014 for the first phase of restoration and revitalization of the smelting area

On 27 December 2013 the Ministry of Economic Development and Technology of the Republic of Slovenia published a call for proposals for co-financing the projects entitled the Norwegian Financial Mechanism Programme 2009-2014 and the EEA Financial Mechanism Programme 2009-2014, in which there appeared an opportunity to apply for the reconstruction of the smelting area of the Idrija Mercury Mine under section B3 – Cultural Heritage. In 2009 the comprehensive reconstruction, preservation and revitalization of the smelting plant area had been assessed at EUR 7 million, where the 2009 engineering cost estimate for the entire investment, comprising construction-craftsmen's-installations works, had amounted to EUR 4.3 million. The construction project covered the rehabilitation and arrangement of the ore separation facility, conservation and restoration of the conveyor belt to the rotary furnace, restoration of the collection silo above the rotary furnace, reconstruction and restoration-conservation of the rotary furnaces, reconstruction of the condenser system, renovation of the smoke chamber and mercury filling plant, and conservation-restoration of the Čermak-Špirek furnace. Because the Idrija Mercury Mine, as the owner of the smelting areas and its facilities, was no longer able to apply to various calls for proposals from 2010 onward due to the implemented liquidation procedure, and because IMHMC would begin to operate at the beginning of 2014 and take over the activities and employees of the Idrija Mercury Mine, the Idrija Mercury Mine transferred by contract the smelting plant area into the management of IMHMC, thus making it possible to apply to the call for proposals under the EEA Financial Mechanism Programme 2009-2014. The Idrija Mercury Heritage Management Centre, in cooperation with the Idrija Mercury Mine, the Development Agency of Idrija and Cerklje (ICRA), and its two project partners, the Idrija Municipal Museum and the Norwegian Magma Geopark, both possessing experience in the conservation, protection and presentation of heritage, prepared and submitted by the deadline of 28 February 2014 a project application entitled »Idrija – Smelting Plant Area of the Idrija Mercury Mine – 1st Phase of Reconstruction« in a value of EUR 2,332,810 (construction works alone were estimated at EUR 1.6 million), of which the share of grant funds for co-financing of the project from the EEA Financial Mechanism Programme 2009-2014 amounted to EUR 2 million. The remaining funds were provided to IMHMC in 2015 by the Ministry of Culture as its own participation share in the project.

The opening of applications to the call for proposals, which was not public, was conducted by the expert committee of the Government Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Development and European Cohesion Policy in March 2014. The project for the 1st Phase of Restoration and Revitalization of the Smelting Plant Area received the highest number of points among 27 submitted projects, thereby acquiring the right to utilise all of the requested funds.



Fig. 3: Idrija Mercury Mine smelting plant area in 2007 (photo by Jani Peternelj, 'Heritage of Mercury. Almadén and Idrija' nomination dossier presented to UNESCO in January 2011).



Fig. 4: Drawing of 1st phase of reconstruction of the ore separation plant and construction of the visitors reception and exhibition centre (Rafael Bizjak, 2014); note: yellow section designates area that will not be realised in 1st phase.

6 Implementation of the project »Idrija – smelting plant area of the idrija mercury mine – 1st phase of reconstruction« in 2015

By resolution of the Government Office of the Republic of Slovenia for Development and European Cohesion Policy on the approval of the project and the granting of funds (Resolution no. 4300-288/2014/13 dated 30 December 2014), the project duration period began on 30 December 2014 and, in line with the approved extension of the deadline for completion, which in the application had been foreseen on 30 April 2016, will be completed by 31 December 2016.



Fig. 5: Construction works during 1st phase of Smelting plant project in May 2016 (photo: Tatjana Dizdarevič).

With the completion of the first phase of the investment, the 'From Ore to Mercury Drops' story links Anthony's Main Road to the smelting plant. Regrettably, the project's financial resources were not sufficient for the reconstruction of the Čermak-Špirek furnace and for the rehabilitation and presentation of the transport bridge, rotary furnaces, smoke chambers, and the mercury filling plant. The goals of the 1st phase of the project, which comprises the reconstruction and new construction of the existing ore separation facility, a new reception and exhibition centre for visitors, and the exhibition 'From Ore to Mercury drops', are:

- to preserve and restore the cultural monument of national importance entered in UNESCO's World Heritage List, which, due to numerous factors, is vulnerable and in danger of losing its protected properties,
- to finally restore and present the machines and devices in the reconstructed ore separation facility with a demonstration of their functioning within the scope of the exhibition 'From Ore to Mercury Drops',
- to provide a modern, audio-video-virtual presentation of the 'Development of 500 years of smelting activities in Idrija' and 'All about mercury' within the scope of the exhibition 'From Ore to Mercury Drops',
- to increase awareness and knowledge about the significance of preserving cultural heritage, its maintenance, conservation and development possibilities,
- to enrich what Idrija has to offer through its revitalized cultural heritage and newly added content, educational and tourist programmes intended for different target groups, and in this way promote the recognisability of the area,
- to enable access to the cultural monument and its content to persons with special needs (most areas),
- to carry out the ecological rehabilitation of the smelting plant area due to the presence

- of mercury (rehabilitation of the ore separation facility and the slope below the ore separation plant to the visitors reception and exhibition centre), and finally,
- to enhance local and regional development.

The project for the comprehensive reconstruction of the smelting plant area follows the principle of sustainability. After the completion of the 1st phase, the project will be continued with the aim of pursuing the objective of comprehensive restoration and revitalization of a monument of national importance entered in UNESCO's World Heritage List and supported by new funding, and will include the implementation of regular activities as well as the 2nd phase of restoration of smelting plant facilities, the planning of new enrichments in tourist services, and further increasing the number of visitors to the area.

7 Conclusion

Idrija has devoted intensive efforts in the past to preserving, presenting, informing about, and enabling accessibility to its mercury heritage, and has evidently managed to conserve a part of its diverse and unique technical heritage and to restore and present it in a manner enabling its promotion and marketing as an attractive product of the area. With the completion of the 1st phase of the reconstruction and revitalization of the smelting plant area, we are one step closer to the integral image of the preserved, restored and presented cultural heritage entered in UNESCO's World Heritage List. The 1st phase of reconstruction project can serve as a pilot model for an innovative approach to the protection of endangered cultural heritage not only in the national framework, but also in the broader European environment.