

DYNAMITE FACTORIES – KEY TO A SUCCESSFUL REGENERATION

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Summary

Success of industrial heritage conservation and its potential for re-use differs from case to case due to various circumstances that are involved. The closer we confront the issue, the clearer we see that there is no simple answer offered through a straightforward approach. The reality has a pragmatic economic side that cannot be ignored, as it is often the main deciding factor. The future of a building or site cannot be guaranteed merely by listing its historical and cultural values, if they are not generally accepted and understood. This is the case of the former dynamite factory site in Bratislava, where the heritage quality has somehow disappeared over the time and it is almost illegible today. What protrudes, is a brownfield area accompanied by a number of problems.

Nonetheless, the factory in Bratislava was a very specific type of an establishment. As one of many similar dynamite factories, originally founded by the famous Swedish inventor Alfred Nobel, it belonged to one of the first global companies ever. Explosives works in general can hardly be omitted from the history of industry, but in the same time they belong to a group of monuments, which are not easy to re-use. Different situations that can be observed among various dynamite factories can at least provide us with a clue, how this specific type of heritage should be regarded, and what should be prioritized in order to preserve the most characteristic features that can retell the history.

1 Dynamite Factory in Bratislava – Brief History

1.1 Historical Context

In the second half of the 19th century, when the conditions for industrial development in Austro-Hungarian Empire became more favourable, Bratislava started to attract industrial entrepreneurs. Thanks to its advantageous geographical location, proximity to Vienna and Budapest and overall good transport connections, many Austrian and German companies decided to establish factories around the town. This was probably the most important reason why Alfred Nobel built in 1873 one of his factories in Bratislava, through his company Dynamit Nobel AG, based in Hamburg [1], after the first factory in the Monarchy, in Zámky near Prague, could not cover the demand for explosives anymore.

1.2 From Nobel to 1923

The idea to establish the factory was supported by the industrial and military circles. Dynamite was necessary also for large-scale railways constructions in Hungary, as well as for mining. The site chosen for a new factory in the north-east outskirts of the Bratislava, area called Holzworm, was quite different from previous Nobel's works – there was

neither a hill protecting the site, nor river or lake that could be used for transport of this dangerous merchandise.

In the beginning, according to a local historian Ján Turinič, the factory had been monitored by Alfred Nobel himself. Nobel commissioned an important local builder company of the family Feigler [2] with the project of the explosive works site, while the technical know-how was brought by Nobel's team of foreign engineers. The details are not known, as the original documentation was lost or destroyed and the oldest plans found in the city archives date to 1886. Nevertheless, the existing documentation proves that it must have been an extraordinary advanced establishment – comparable to the 1st Nobel's factory on the continent in Krümmel.

At the turn of the 19th and 20th century, the dynamite factory in Bratislava was one of the very important firms in the monarchy.[3] Since the beginning, the production was very dependent on the political situation, but between 1873 and the end of the World War I, there had not been any significant shift from the original programme – dynamite production. The change that came later was caused by strategic and political reasons. After the first Czechoslovak Republic was established, it was not desirable anymore to produce explosives in such a proximity to Hungary and Austria.

1.3 Further development

In 1923, dynamite production definitely moves to Semtín, now a district of the Czech town Pardubice. The use of the factory premises in Bratislava is in question. The director's board decides to build a sugar factory and the project is signed by an important Austrian company Pittel & Brausewetter. The sugar factory operates just for a couple of years in spite of its success, due to an interference of local business politics. Although the factory – still using the trademark of Dynamit Nobel – continues to survive thanks to oil production and chemical works, it is rather on a downgrade until the World War II.

Turn in the political situation, however negative it was, had a positive impact on an economic side of the company. The Slovak state under the Nazi regime was highly interested in dynamite. The factory became a part of a German concern IG Farben. Economically, the factory was flourishing until the end of the War, producing not only explosives, but also synthetic fibres Vistra. After the war, the company was nationalized, and the production continues, changing name to Works of Juraj Dimitrov, in 1951. Soon new works for synthetic fibres, Závod Mieru, is built, designed by a former Baťa's architect Vladimír Karfík.

To the current day, the premises of the factory have grown to an immense area of 158,806 ha. While the plans of the late 19th century show a coherent concept of the site with a compact settlement of adjacent dwellings and facilities, after 1950's the area got less and less clear. The site of Závod Mieru is in fact a separate factory, divided by an important roadway – Vajnorská street. Although various history stages brought some quality architecture – just to mention the Feiglers at the turn of the 19th and 20th century, Sporzon during the World War II or Karfík – the factory site suffers from the lack of further urban planning, specifically in connection to its surroundings. Since 1970's nothing more significant has been built within the premises, but the city of Bratislava slowly grew continuously up to the borders of the factory, that was never planned as a part of town.

After 1989 the situation worsened. In 1996 the company renamed to Istrochem was privatized, and in 2006 it became a part of Duslo, while economic activity started to slowly die out. In the spring of 2012, a large demolition started to take place, hidden from

the eyes of public, and most of the buildings from the World War II period, together with some older structures, were destroyed. The only positive example is found in a conversion of a water tower – one of two identical towers from 1916 (Fig. 5 and 6) – to an office building, that took place in 2006–2007. Project initiated and led by architects BKPŠ, who bought the building and designed it for to use of their own office is a good illustration of a sensitive yet original approach to an industrial conversion. Subtle new elements combined with the original structure create together a raw, and in the same time elegant appearance. However, it remains a solitary positive example, which does not give neither a hope nor answer for the rest of the area that is almost forgotten by the public and the authorities.

2 Comparison in the European Context

Nobel has build over 90 factories and laboratories in more than 20 countries in the world. [4] To find out what are the key points that are important for a successful regeneration and re-use of a former dynamite factory site, six situations in Europe were compared, selected from the list presented by Nobel in a lecture given at the Society of Arts in London in 1875: Krümmel, Zámky, Ardeer, Paulilles, Isleten and Avigliana. Result of a detailed comparison [5] of those factories built from 1865–1873, founded by Nobel himself, was rather surprising. The general interest in the preservation of the monument and its chance to be re-used was completely independent on the fact, whether it was or was not an officially listed monument. Nor the extent to which the most historical structure is preserved did not prove to be crucial.

On the other hand what has come out as essential and what brought light to the situation in Bratislava, is the importance of continuity in history and memory of a certain place – a social context. A moment that is critical for the situation in Bratislava factory happened after World War I, when the company made a large number of workers redundant. The workers, who were hired to work in the Sugar factory ‘came from the countryside, and their never found their way to the old worker’s families’, mentions an issue of the magazine *Závod* from August 1941. The link to the first generations – who remember the origin, fame and importance of the place was lost.

To revive the past, it is important to focus on the special features of dynamite factories, which could be hardly conserved as a whole, due to their size and chemical contamination. The research shows what might be important to protect. All of the factories were continually changing due to technical amendments, evolution in the process of fabrication, or changes in the production programme. What is valuable, are the elements that are typical for dynamite works in general or something unique for a specific location. One of the distinctive features is for example a blast wall that protected the workshops. It stands out as a hallmark, even though its form and material varied from country to country and throughout the time. It can still be found in Bratislava – at least those from the World War II period. Similar walls in Paulilles factory are part of an open air museum presentation. Even though the original, 19th century factory buildings succumbed to modernization, there is still architecture that remained and is worthy, whether we talk about water towers or worker's houses.

One may argue, that some of the former dynamite factories have changed to such an extent, that we can hardly refer to them as to dynamite factories. Although there is a certain truth in this argument, the changes in the dynamite factories can be seen as something that rather defines them, which makes the latter historical layers equally valuable. In case that

historically younger phase has an architectural quality, there is no reason why they should be omitted from an evaluation exercise aimed to investigate heritage values. This implies also to Závod Mieru in Bratislava, which proves that ‘even an operationally complicated industrial architecture can create an impressive ensemble’[6] and one of the factory workers colonies, Biely Kríž, was ‘among the first after war projects that developed application of standardized construction components and unitized projects in residential construction.’[7]

3 Conclusion

The findings that were outlined in the previous paragraphs indicate that there is no simple answer to help us deal with former dynamite factories. What is important is an interdisciplinary approach, where not only urban, architectural, environmental, technical, but also historical and social issues are addressed. It is also important to be realistic – we are talking about vast, contaminated areas. Nevertheless, when we specify what needs to be preserved, we already have some guidelines for regeneration and we are already a step ahead towards a meaningful future re-use. A re-use that is able to profit from the history, and makes the story alive not only for the local population, but attracting visitors as well.

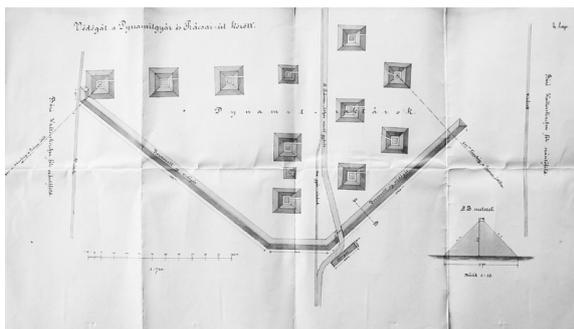


Fig. 1 Plan of DN Factory from 1888. [8]



Fig. 2 Blast wall in Bratislava. [9]



Fig. 3 Paulilles. Photo: N. Bartošová



Fig. 4 Ardeer. Photo: B. Cooper



Fig. 5 Water tower from 1916 in Bratislava. Photo: N. Bartošová



Fig. 6 Conversion to an office building. Photo: N. Bartošová

Acknowledgement

This project is funded with the Grant Funds of the architect Emil Belluš of FA STU in Bratislava, no. 2013/04 and supported by the APVV 0375-10 research project of Department of Architecture, ÚSTARČH SAV in Bratislava.

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