

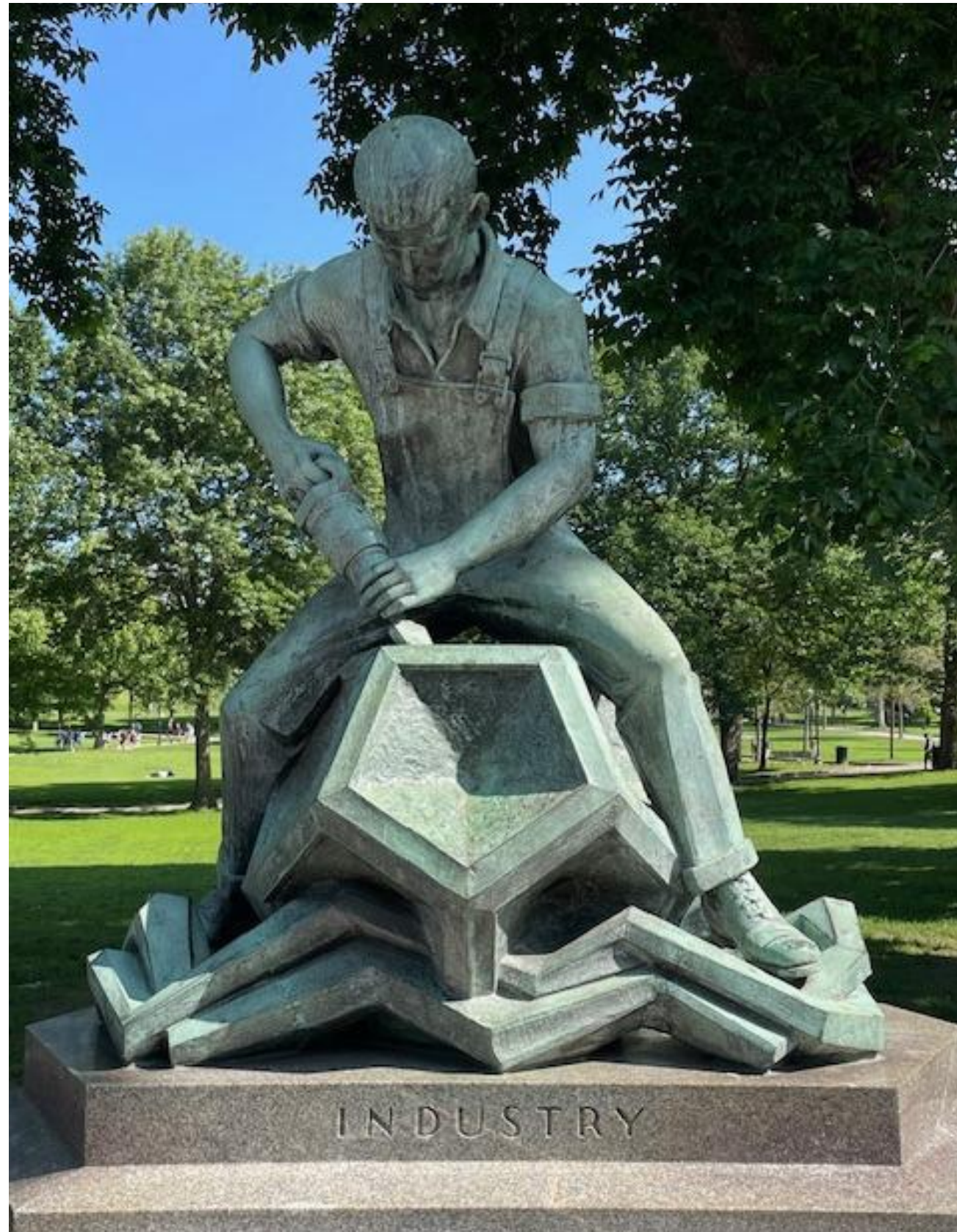


Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts

# **INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE AS AN IDEATIONAL RESOURCE: Contesting and Legitimizing Post- Industrial Futures**

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# RATIONALE

- What happened in the past will likely influence the future (studies on industrial culture in economic geography)
- “...actors actively (re)interpret the past by ascribing meaning to more recent or historical events related to development” (Eaton 2016)
- how we interpret the past influences how we see the future! Ideations & imaginaries (Benner 2025)
- industrial heritage is “place-based”, reflecting unique local context



# RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

We aim to analyse the role of industrial heritage in guiding post-industrial transformation and local development

## 01

### RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

We analyse how place- and time-specific **narratives** of industrial heritage influence urban transformation strategies.

## 02

### RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

We analyse how industrial heritage narratives are used to **legitimise** urban transformation paths and to mobilise or deter actors



# THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

## OVERVIEW

- Industrial culture/heritage as a relational concept
- Narrative inquiry / theory
- Legitimation in planning/development



### INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE

- Relational concept
- Object of the past experiences and future thinking



### INDUSTRIAL NARRATIVES

- Stories of past events and visions of the future
- Typical industrial narratives (decay, wealth ...): people and time specific



### LEGITIMATION FOR ACTORS

- Legitimation / de-legitimation strategies
- “Controlling” the narrative: controlling development



# METHODOLOGY

## TRBOVLJE - GEOGRAPHY & HISTORY

- Population: 15,000 residents
- Over 200 years of coal mining history defined the town's identity. Trbovlje was one of the most industrialised towns in socialist Yugoslavia.
- 1991 → rapid deindustrialisation.
- 1999 → massive job losses (coalmining closure).
- 2000s → rise of environmental awareness, postindustrial economy

## METHODS

- contextual analysis (geography / history)
- 17 interviews with key actors: **construction of dominant narratives**
- participatory workshop and participatory methods - **legitimation strategies**



VISUAL REMINDER OF  
INDUSTRIAL FAILURE /  
LOSS

*“The companies were tied  
to the Yugoslav market.  
When it collapsed, they  
went under too. Managers  
didn't know how to operate  
in the new market  
conditions”*

SYSTEMIC FAILURE OF  
ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL  
LEADERSHIP



NOSTALGIA FOR  
THE “GOLDEN AGE”  
OF ECONOMIC  
PROSPERITY AND  
SOCIAL STABILITY

# RESULTS 1:

## NARRATIVE OF DEINDUSTRIALISATION AND SOCIETAL BREAKDOWN:

- Collapse of local economy and identity after 1991
- Mass factory closures, job losses, and social disintegration
- Industrial heritage as a symbol of loss and abandonment

## Lafarge se umika iz Slovenije

AVTOR C. R. 17. MAREC 2015, OB 11:41

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SYMBOLS OF  
ABANDONMENT AND PAST  
INJUSTICES

*“The cement plant had employed entire generations. People considered the cement plant as their own and were unwilling to accept that illegal waste incineration was actually taking place”*

SYMBOL OF TENSIONS  
BETWEEN ENVIRONMENTAL  
AWARENESS AND  
ECONOMIC GAIN

## RESULTS 2: NARRATIVE OF POLLUTION AND CONTESTED LEGACY

- Conflict between industrial employment and environmental issues
- Emergence of civil activism and ecological consciousness
- Factories as both identity pillars and ecological threats

■

EMPHASIS ON PAST  
POSITIVE INDUSTRIAL  
VALUES AND IDENTITY



# RESULTS 3:

## NARRATIVE OF CULTURAL AND ENTREPRENEURIAL REVIVAL

- REAPPROPRIATION of industrial heritage through culture and innovation
  - New generation driving transformation using heritage as resource
  - Coexistence of nostalgia, opportunity, and redevelopment challenges
- 

THE NECESSITY OF  
RENEWAL AND DRAWING ON  
PAST INDUSTRIAL  
TRADITIONS



# RESULTS 4

## USING NARRATIVES TO LEGITIMISE DEVELOPMENT PATHS

### DEVELOPMENT PATH - VISION

destruction of industrial heritage, building a “new” city



adaptive reuse of industrial heritage, rebuilding the “old” city



### MEANINGS ATTRIBUTED TO INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE

- Loss
  - Systemic failure, abandonment
  - Pride, nostalgia
  - Environment
- 
- Nostalgia
  - Necessary renewal
  - Built environment positive town identity
  - Environment

### MOBILISED NARRATIVE

- Narrative of deindustrialisation and societal breakdown
  - Narrative of pollution and contested legacy
- 
- Narrative of cultural and entrepreneurial revival
  - Narrative of pollution and contested legacy

### MAIN AGENTS

- Small business owners
  - Policy-makers
  - Political right
- 
- Younger entrepreneurs
  - Cultural, heritage sector
  - Political left

# POSSIBLE THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

02

## THE IMPORTANT ROLE OF NARRATIVES IN ECONOMIC GEOGRAPHY

- Complexity of narratives: dominant, hidden ones, conflictual or complementary (power issues)
- Temporal aspects: narratives co-existing in place and time

01

## IMAGINARIES AND INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE

- Dynamic concept, able to influence the future (imagined histories → imagined futures), subjectivity
- Encompassing material and symbolic dimensions that might influence the future

03

## OLDER INDUSTRIAL REGIONS: CULTURE & INSTITUTIONS

- Long-lasting legacies of industrialism influencing development
- Slow to change, resilient (or resistant?) to change, lock-ins and sources of innovations



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# THANK YOU

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