

# Industrial culture as an agent of social innovations in industrial towns.

## Case study of Velenje, Slovenia

**GEOINNO 2020**

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Stavanger, January 2020

# Why is it important?

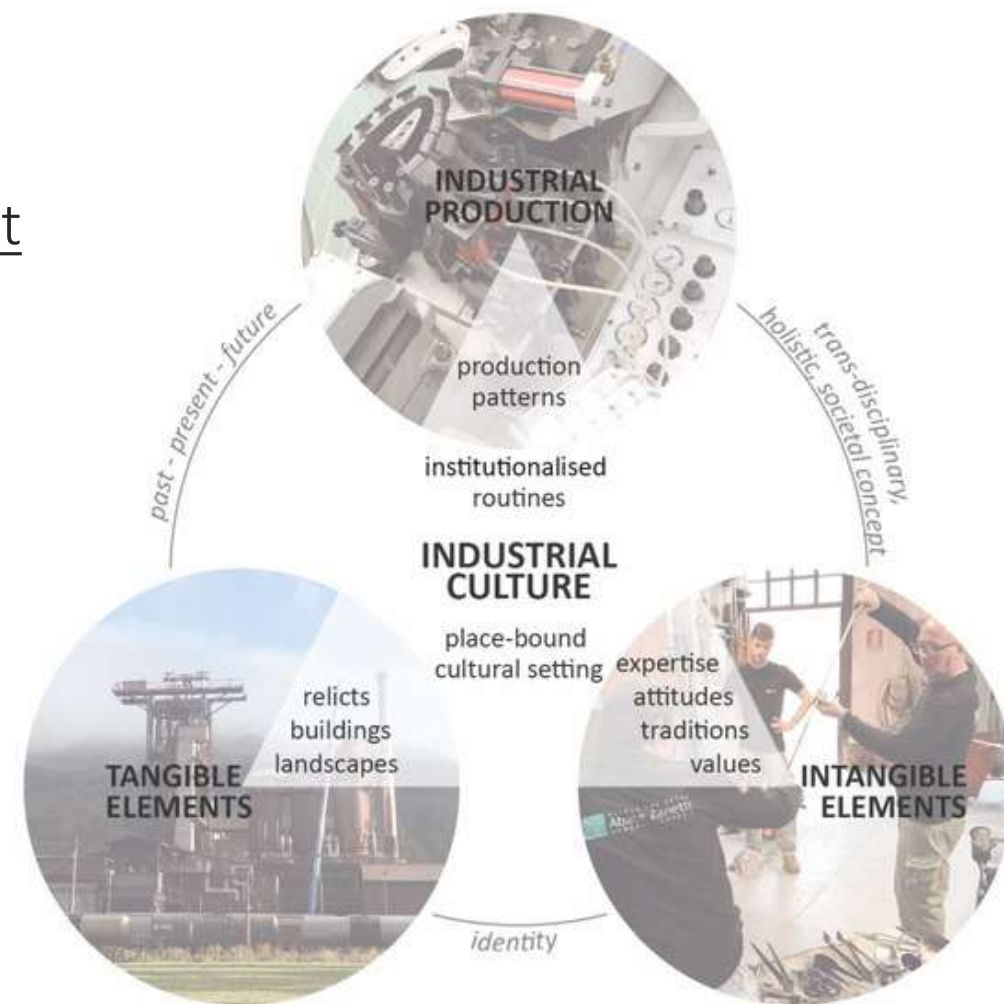
- 27 % of EU population lives in towns, industry is ,over-represented' in them (*Servillo et al. 2017, Koceva et al. 2016*)
- Transitional towns: social innovations an important part of making this transition – non-economic innovation bias
- Urban, industrial bias in innovation research
- Traditional industrial towns are surprisingly resilient
- Limited research on industrial culture and sociotechnical innovations



# Brief state-of-the-art

## Industrial culture:

- *Eaton 2016*: stories, ideas, meanings, orientations, practices ... structured around industrial development or local resource (coal...).
  - *Harfst et al. 2018*: tangible/material industrial heritage + intangible cultural settings (working class values, such as solidarity, welfare state ...)
  - Industrial culture is extremely resilient (*Byrne 2002*)
  - Industrial culture can foster new sociotechnical innovations
- (example: energy-extracting towns → bioenergy production towns)



# Research goal, hypothesis

- Adding new evidence on the link between industry and industrial tradition and social innovations
- Do specific societal and cultural norms in traditional industrial towns influence social innovations?

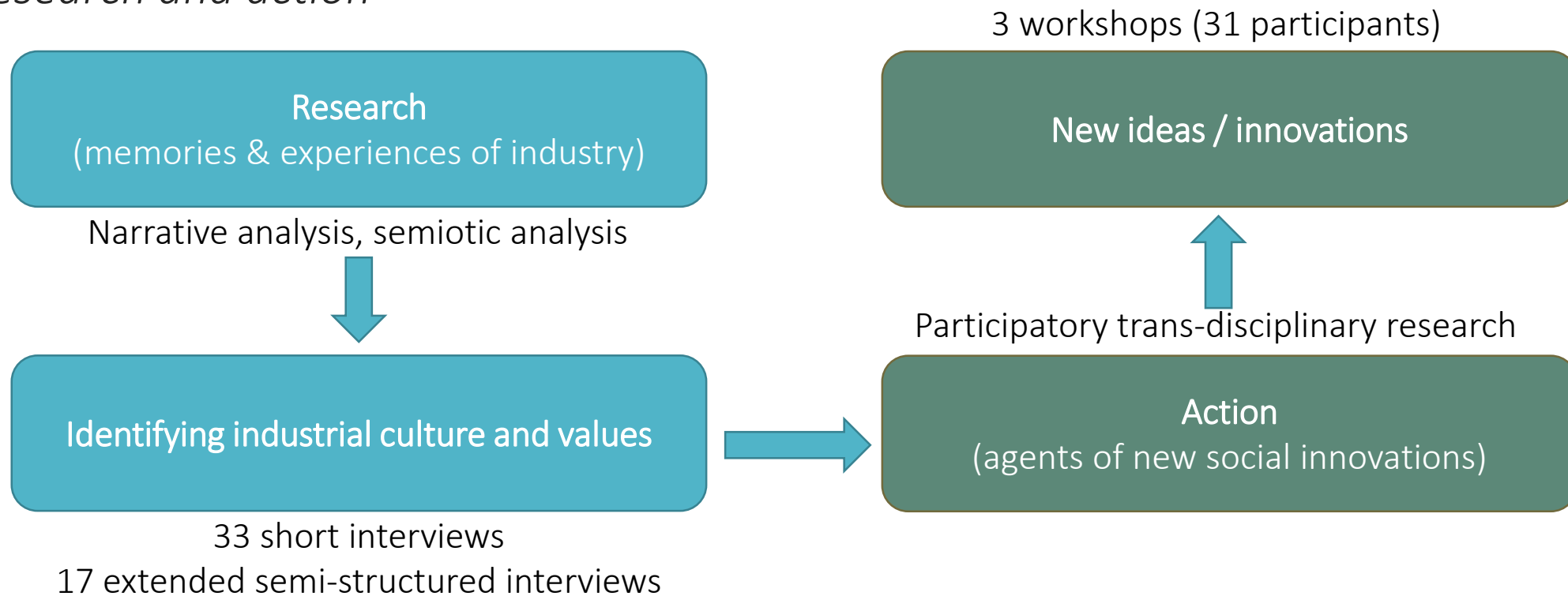


Industrial culture has a role in the industrial and  
postindustrial  
society, unlocking social and technical innovations



# Methods

*Jessop et al. (2013): Social innovation research should be an interactive process of research and action*



*NEW KNOWLEDGE*



# Case study town: Velenje, Slovenia



# Results: 1a) Narrative analysis

Dominant narrative: **THE GLORIOUS INDUSTRIAL PAST**

**positive expressions of industrial culture (norms, values ...)**

- ☐ Industry is connected with fond memories (*prosperous, successful, cosmopolitan ...*) and in connection to socialism
- ☐ Generational gap (*first-hand experiences vs. transmitted experiences of the young*)
- ☐ The pride of the industrial past is particularly told through specific town semiotics
- ☐ Key words: solidarity, comradery, mutual help, volunteer work, community identity, openness, empowerment





# Results: 1b) Narrative analysis

Hidden narrative: **FEAR OF CHANGE & GROWTH**

**negative expressions of industrial culture**

- ☐ Past practices & old conventions are preferred (*miners mentality*)
- ☐ Velenje: *rise of populist movements*
- ☐ Fear of globalisation, fear of new foreign investors: *social responsibility of big industrial companies is endangered*
- ☐ Duality: *pride over multinationalism, cosmopolitanism vs. Radicalisation of certain social groups*
- ☐ Result: *out-migration of young educated workforce*





# Results: 2) Generating social innovation based on industrial culture

*1st workshop: HISTORY OF SOC. INNOVATIONS AND IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR AGENTS OF CHANGE*

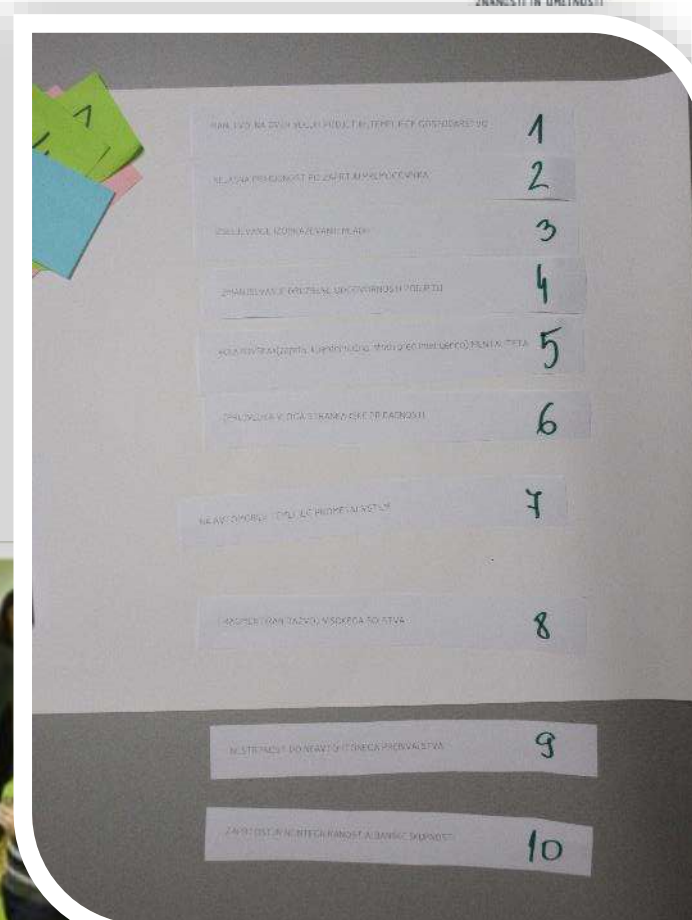
- Socialism and town construction (1945-1980)
- Environmental crisis (1980-1990)
- Transitional period (1991-2007)
- Response to a neoliberal threat (2007-today)



# Results: 2) Generating social innovation based on industrial culture

*2nd workshop: BIGGEST THREATS TACKLED BY THE LOCAL COMMUNITY*

- Bipolar and vulnerable economy
- Unclear future after the mine closure
- Out-migration of youth



# Results: 2) Generating social innovation based on industrial culture

3rd WORKSHOP: GENERATING IDEAS, POSSIBLE FUTURE SOC. INNOVATIONS

Bipolar and vulnerable economy

**Tangible asset**

Fish farm

Unclear future for the community  
values, norms

**Intangible asset - values, norms**

Strengthening & professionalization of NGO sector

Out-migration of the educated young population

**Intangible asset - skills**

Mentoring scheme





# (Possible) conclusions

❑ Industrial culture (negative and positive) as a source of social innovations

❑ Agents of change = historical events

❑ „Slow social innovation“ = personal relations, slow decay of knowledge & values

❑ Territorialized social innovations: embedded and reproduced by specific local trajectories

❑ Industrial culture: justice, bridging inequality

❑ *Bartels, 2020: „social innovation research creates learning and change“*



# Want to know more or to be involved?

○ BRIGHT FUTURE project (Research Gate, JPI Urban Europe)

1. Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SI) – Lead partner
2. University of Eastern Finland (FI) – WP responsible
3. University of Bucharest (RO)
4. University of Amsterdam (NL)
5. Social Life Limited (UK)
6. The Young Foundation (UK)

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