

# 5th Vestiges of Industry to be held this year



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This year's Vestiges of Industry enlarge their territorial reach. „In addition to Prague, Kladno and Ostrava, we're also working on a program in Ústí nad Labem, in the Jablonec and Liberec region and in Zlín and Žatec. And the number of places can still grow,“ says Svatopluk Zídek, of the Board for Technical Monuments. On the other hand, the diversity and variety of the event's program will remain the same. As usual, its fundamental feature will be a one-day conference, this time on the issue of industrial technology, machinery and other essential, yet often overlooked parts of industrial buildings. Just like in the past, the conference will be opened to the general public.

The highly popular offering of the Vestiges of Industry, which attracted 26,000 visitors in 2007, includes cultural and social events in the authentic premises of industrial buildings. This year the audience will enjoy the visually attractive and interactive projects within the framework of the festival 4+4 Days in Motion. At the aptly name exhibition „What We Demolished“, VCPD will show jewels of industrial architecture irreparably lost over the last decade. „Exhibitions are a traditional format of the Vestiges of Industry. The students of the Czech Technical University in Prague and the Technical University in Brno will participate in one of them. The soul behind another exhibition project, focused on industrial buildings in Prague 4, is the photographer Pavel Frič, whose works will be supplemented with David Vávra's poetry. We plan to install the exhibition in the Podolí waterworks,“ Benjamin Fagner describes the program of the Prague arm of the Biennial. However, exhibitions will not be only limited to the capital; for instance in Ostrava, two other projects with attractive names - Paths of Energy and Industrial Life - are currently in preparation. Vestiges of Industry will be held between 8 and 14 October this year.

As mentioned above, Benjamin Fagner, VCPD's Director, is one of the key figures behind the Biennial Vestiges of Industry and protection of old industrial architecture in the Czech Republic in general; we have asked him to answer several questions.

## **What is the current condition of care for industrial heritage in our country?**

On the one hand the interest is growing, while the technical condition of buildings and complexes that could or should become the target for conversions is quickly deteriorating. Unfortunately, time and insufficient or completely absent maintenance are taking their toll, the number of demolitions is rising. For this year's Biennial we are preparing a profiling exhibition and a publication called “What We Demolished”, which will show the period of the last decade. The pace of conversions has to be accelerated, just like the search for tools to make sure that other precious industrial works do not

disappear.

**You often say that old industrial buildings have an economic value, among other things. A loft in an old factory will be probably more sought-after than a flat at an estate of prefabricated houses, because there is usually a kind of genius loci associated with it, it evokes something. Has this approach gained any ground in our country among those who build most of all, i.e. developers?**

I'm sorry to say that we're half way down the path. The industrial atmosphere associated with the history of the individual locations is very appealing today and is virtually starting to be fashionable. Unfortunately, the previous conversion projects did not respect the fact that the external appearance is not the only value of a specific old industrial building. We can see highly unprofessional and unlearned acts of removing authentic details and original materials from such places. The value of the construction work is deprecated irresponsibly - for the future and for other owners. I think this is a short-sighted approach culturally as well as commercially.



**Has your attention been drawn to any successful conversion recently?**

As far as Prague is concerned, I like the cultivated and witty reconstruction of the former steam mill on Jankovcova Street on the basis of a project by CMC architects. Conversely, a ghastly example of our approach to architectural heritage is the incorporation of new houses among industrial buildings across the street - in the former Holešovice haven.

**Can you see any change in the approach of all parties and institutions concerned to the issue of conversions and preservation of industrial heritage in general at this time, i.e. in this recession?**

I think the situation is aptly described by a British report compiled for this year's congress of the International Committee for the Conservation of the Industrial Heritage (TICCIH). This report notes how, during the present crisis of development activities, the approach to the building heritage is changing. Its authors assume that industrial heritage is, with some degree of imagination, not just a reservoir of memory and history, but also materials and consumed energy. And demolitions constitute another waste of money and energy, much larger than repairs and transformations of buildings for new uses. This is a challenge for today's situation. However, I would hesitate to estimate how many people have stood up to this challenge in our country. Let's admit it, it has taken a lot of time in the Czech Republic to even acknowledge that the economic problems affecting other countries have to do something with us as well.

**In 2007, the Vestiges of Industry hosted 26,000 visitors - who are your supporters?**

The figure of 26,000 is actually a modest estimate of the number of people who, in a various degree of involvement, took part in at least one of the tens of events of the last Biennial, which was organized in four cities - Prague, Ostrava, Kladno and Liberec - in order to distribute the event's reach. And since the program was highly varied, the structure of visitors and participants was also colourful. From a highly profiled and erudite professional auditorium at the international conference in Prague to students and the general public that visited a concert or a theatre performance, sometimes maybe even at random. They all had something in common - a relationship to cultural heritage, with different motivations.

**Could you find an example of how the Vestiges of Industry influenced something or contributed to the rescue of a building?**

For me, the most telling example is that last year, the former lime kilns in the Vojtěšská hut' iron mill, a visual symbol and first-rate attraction of the 2005 Biennial, were pronounced a cultural monument. The atmosphere of the Biennial definitely helped this. A couple of days ago, this was shown to be true when I met Kladno's Lord Mayor Dan Jiránek. The former symbol of our events, which is a part of a dilapidated area only a few metres far from Kladno's centre, could become a crystallizing spot for the city's future urban development. Of course, we do not always meet understanding. And it a long shot from a public performance or an official act to actual project implementation.

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