

Conference Report

by Shan-Ti Tsai

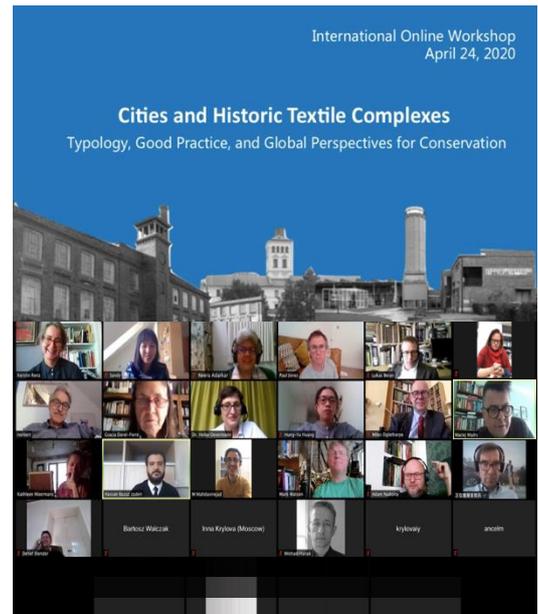
International Workshop (virtual): Cities and Historic Textile Complexes
- Typology, Good Practice, and Global Perspectives for Conservation

Organized by: Dr. Heike Oevermann Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin,

In cooperation with: Mark Watson, Historic Environment Scotland and Prof. Bartosz Walczak, Łódź University of Technology, and funded by the German Research Foundation

General Context

Changes to the textile sector in much of the world have meant that converting and repurposing these historic industrial complexes has become a new opportunity and important task in many worldwide cities. The aim of the International Workshop: Cities and Historic Textile Complexes- Typology, Good Practice, and Global Perspectives for Conservation is to identify an urban industrial typology to facilitate the description and valuing of historic mill complexes, as well as to discuss good exemplars providing orientation for conservation and conversion.



As the coronavirus pandemic marches around the world, the excursion in Berlin and Forst had to be called off but that did not hinder the enthusiasm for and excitement of participants. The alternative, a virtual meeting, knowledge-sharing discussion not only happen in Berlin but worldwide. not only happen in Berlin but worldwide. The international workshop brought together around 30 architects, curators, scholars and entrepreneurs to discuss challenges and good practice in the theme of textile heritage. Twelve experts from Europe to Asia shared respective examples and research on historical textile site in different countries.

Basic principles and concepts

To better facilitate the description and valuing of textile complexes, the meeting host Heike Oevermann, Mark Watson and Bartosz Walczak all highlighted the importance of typology of the textile sector. It's hard to keep everything in the industrial heritage site or keep mills alive and used by society. Developing the typology of textile complexes help to focus on identifying features, valuing, and comparing textile heritage at a European and even global scale, which are crucial for better understanding the potentials and challenges to conserving and preserving these spatial structures.

Heike Oevermann introduced urban industrial types and focused on the urban structure of the mill. Adding to the typological work already done by the past TICCIH meetings, she proposed three urban industrial types: urban block, flagship composition and production hall. Demonstrations of different examples prove that urban textile mills fit in and shape the urban setting as urban industrial types, their structural and infrastructural elements, and as architectural representations that contribute to urbanism and urban design.

Gain from the cases: practices of conservation and conversion

The presentation of Kathleen Moermans focused on northern Ghent, an area with high textile mill density. Introducing and analyzing 4 different types of mills, she revealed how urban planning decisions have influenced and will influence the conservation and redevelopment possibilities of these valuable buildings in Ghent.

For a deeper understanding of planned conversion on historic textile zone can also get German experience from Kerstin Renz and Iranian aspect from Hassan Bazaz Zadeh. Kerstin Renz shared perspectives for the conversion of building and spatial typologies in Wendlingen. And mentioned that real estate companies have an interest in redeveloping the historical planned areas, not only plan to keep "authenticity" and "brick flair" , as well as the eco-sustainable idea developing a zero - emissions housing district, in which however not much substance is maintained. She also observed the problems that locals do not identify with the textile industry nor industrial architecture. These show the current challenges of good conversion on textile mills.

Hassan Bazaz Zadeh shared a case in Isfahan, he valued the Risbaf mill and highlighted the most important features of this building and this complex is modularity which enhances the flexibility of this complex. And through the efforts from local NGOs and government 's competition for the adaptive-reuse of this textile complexes, he showed the diverse potential for the conversion of this industrial heritage.

Compared with the initial planning stage of conversion in the historical district with the amount of textile mills, the Russia team brought a closer look of practical perspective from Moscow. As a huge construction and real estate company, Golutwinskaja Sloboda led many large-scale investment projects in Moscow. Their projects show how they keep historic value and preserve the architectural appearance of industrial heritage in urban development areas, and how they transform the sites with adaptive reuse processes that fund their continued sustainability.

There is a bright side and a dark side, sometimes, urban planning decisions and policies toward industrial heritage brought irreversible damage. Neera Adarkar unfolded the dynamics of the urban transformation of Mumbai. The mills become a battleground for urban transformation when the textile industry declined because of the conflicting interest between mills owners and workers. And

the rules on planning were changed by the government to widen the redevelopment scale of mill lands under certain conditions, but all the privately owned mills have surreptitiously demolished the old structures to make way for full-scale gentrification.

The elegy of losing textile heritage also looms over Poland, the linen industry was one of the leading branches of the Lower Silesian economy. Maciej Mądry mapping the situation that without valuing the textile heritage, a large number of factories irreversibly lose tangible structures and equipment of irreplaceable industrial, economic and historical value in the area. At the industry which was the world's second-largest supplier of flax fibres, almost no material evidence remained in the area.

People and Historic Textile Complexes

Apart from discussing the aspect of tangible structure, Michael Hanak and Lukáš Beran provided a special figure to discuss the textile factories – an almost unknown but important engineer, Carl Arnold Séquin-Bronner. This Swiss engineer brought the advances over British experience in designing spinning and weaving mills to the region of Central Europe, as far as Italy and Finland and designed more than 250 factories and sites for a number of big industrial enterprises throughout Europe. Many “flagship” buildings are well-known as parts of industrial heritage, but Séquin himself remained unknown. Michael Hanak and Lukáš Beran presented an on-line map of Séquin's works, which can connect people dealing with these buildings.

In addition to establishing a historical understanding of textile heritage from the past architecture, Gracia Dorel-Ferre started from the working-class perspective and realized the importance of the relation between the industrial city and the workers' villages that are surrounding. She set up a chronology of the working class villages from the Royal factories of the 17th century to the present day from a global perspective and measured by space, time and scales.

From research to practice, one of the key questions presented frequently about the conservation and conversion of industrial heritage at the meeting was how to convince local communities that these textile mills are worth preserving and reusing. For the public, the idea of heritage is linked to a pleasant aesthetic experience, that most industrial buildings do not in favor of the society and it is not easy to build self-identity through these industrial structures for locals. Several presenters pointed out this difficulty in their presentations.

The case in Lodz shows a clear statement reply to the issue. In best practice the social value of conservation and conversion need locals and communities to take an important role and having space to develop their ideas. Julia Sowinska-Heim affirmed at the textile architecture in Lodz plays an important role in establishing the identity of the city, and at the same time secures its culture. With tangible heritage base, she further emphasized the transition from free grassroots activities to implementation of a carefully thought out plan carried out very smoothly by slowly introducing the

desired changes. However, there is the need that official development concepts maintain openness for those who have been made the heritage accessible and valuable for the public.

Concluding remarks and future perspectives



The screenshot shows a Zoom meeting interface. On the left, a slide titled "Some rules" lists five bullet points. In the center, a large video window shows Mark Watson speaking. On the right, a grid of smaller video windows shows other participants: Kerstin Renz, Sande, Neera Adarkar, Paul Jones, Lukas Baran, Robert, Gracia Dorri-Ferre, Dr. Heide Overmann, Mark Watson, and Miles Oglethorpe.

Some rules

- Must be outstanding to meet UNESCO criteria
- Quality of original architecture must be the priority, not the brilliance of the recent intervention made by a "starchitect"
- The new use must build in flexibility for future economic shocks.
- It must at least have been started, and is not just an empty factory-sterilised but without life.
- Then key textile sites can be beacons of hope for other places too.

Textile heritage is an inspiring, even though sometimes a conflicting resource for the present and the future. The conflict always comes from a lack of understanding of the value of the textile site. Developing typology of the textile mills provides guidelines for evaluating the value and identifying types.

The worldwide case studies giving context to possible UNESCO world heritage properties give idea also for places that are not world heritage, as to how to do good conservation and what are the good criteria for having a sustainable conversion. Mark Watson also suggested some rules: during the processes of conservation and conversion, the quality of the original architecture must be the priority. The adaptive reuse of the sites should allow flexibility for future economic shocks and the building must be adaptable enough to switch to other uses. And the factory cannot be preserved only as keeping the structure, but must have living uses in the sites.

The demand and the challenge for urban spatial planning came up today, the mills are always part of a broader context and the role of industrial architects, the role of entrepreneurs, the claims and self-identity of workers and locals are important for understanding a mill development and its architecture for further conservation.