

Industrial heritage as an identity resource. A Perspective on the city of Anina

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Abstract

This paper addresses the conference theme “Convergence. Architecture as a Framework for Collaboration and Trust” by examining how post-industrial legacy shapes relations between people, place and history. Inherited structures and spatial patterns strengthen identity and support regeneration grounded in local experience. In a town shaped by two centuries of coal mining, architecture embodies labor, resilience and belonging. Material presence conveys symbolic depth, while memory and everyday practices sustain continuity in landscapes of change. Living in Anina, together with its industrial landmarks, creates opportunities for reconnection and participation. Industrial heritage provides a framework for collaboration and trust, enabling residents, civic groups, and institutions to converge around shared values and explore new directions. Through community involvement and sustained care for place, environments once defined by work evolve into spaces for reinterpretation across past, present and future. Industrial heritage thus emerges as an active identity resource, capable of guiding participatory regeneration, inspiring collective action and preserving cultural meaning.

Keywords: architecture, industrial, regeneration, heritage

Introduction

There was a time when industrialization marked a fundamental reorganization of economic and social structures all over the world. It redefined territorial development, transformed cities, and reshaped everyday life.

In Romania, the trajectory of industrialization closely followed the country's political and territorial evolution. After the unification of the principalities in 1859, industrial growth became a national objective. The state invested in transport networks and prioritized the exploitation of domestic mineral resources (Popescu, 2014). This direction intensified after 1948, when the communist regime launched a program of accelerated industrialization based on nationalization and centralized planning, with heavy industry as a strategic pillar. Throughout the second half of the 20th century, mono-industrial towns emerged across the country, structured around extraction, processing, and production (Tuzu, 1964). In various mountainous areas, different extractive activities took root: non-ferrous metals in the Maramureş Basin, gold and copper in the Apuseni Mountains, coal in the Jiu Valley. Meanwhile, the Banat Mountains developed an integrated pattern where mining, processing, and energy production coexisted within interconnected towns such as Reşiţa and Anina (Grăf, 2011). After the 1989 Revolution, the sudden transition to a market economy led to the collapse of industrial production across the country. Factory and mine closures triggered mass unemployment, depopulation and the physical and social decline of entire towns. The effects were particularly severe in mono-industrial areas, where economic collapse disrupted local identities and created long-lasting territorial imbalances. Among the towns most affected by this transformation, Anina stands out as a paradigmatic case as it hosted Romania's deepest hard coal mine and an extensive productive ecosystem. Nowadays, Anina is marked by structural degradation and marginalization (Constantinescu, 2019).

This research approaches industrial heritage not as a static remnant, but as a resource for regeneration. It argues that former industrial

structures can generate meaning and support locally grounded transformation processes. Anina offers insight into how memory, identity, and space interact in post-industrial settings. By reintegrating local assets into community life, the town connects with broader discussions on sustainability and renewal, its industrial legacy and spatial imprint providing fertile ground for exploration. The research aligns with the FAST Conference theme, especially the section "Converging Communities: Past, Present and Future," by showing how a post-industrial community can engage with its past to understand present conditions and imagine new directions for the future. In this sense, heritage provides a framework for collaboration, trust, and participation, enabling communities to converge around their cultural legacy.

Literature Review

Understanding the industrial heritage of Anina and its role in shaping local identity requires a multidisciplinary approach that bridges national development strategies, regional industrial transformations, and local cultural interpretations. The selected literature offers a layered framework for analysis, revealing how economic evolution, spatial practices, and memory intersect across scales.

A national reference is N. P. Arcadian's volumes *Industrializarea României*, which present a detailed account of Romania's interwar modernization, focusing on economic structures, legislative developments, and industrial expansion. The work outlines the broader processes that contributed to the rise of industrial production as a pillar of national development (Arcadian, 1936).

Focusing on the Banat region, Rudolf Graf's research papers *Contribuții la istoria industrială a Munților Banatului. StEG, factor de modernizare 1855–1920* and *Din istoria cărbunelui. Anina 200*, document how the StEG company restructured the area through extractive industries, forestry, and transport infrastructure. Graf illustrates how coal production shaped both the territorial organization and urban morphology of towns like Anina (Gräf Rudolf, 1991). At the

local scale, Cristian-Liviu Mosoroceanu contributes with complementary works like *Anina – Geografie și istorie* and *Steierdorf–Anina. Minerul, într-al sorții joc!* which offers a more personal perspective on labor, community, and symbolism in the mining environment (Mosoroceanu, 2010). On the other hand, *Shrinking Cities in Romania*, published under the coordination of Ilinca Păun Constantinescu, investigates the causes and consequences of urban decline across a range of post-industrial towns. Through case studies, cartographic analysis, and architectural fieldwork, the book documents processes of spatial degradation, demographic contraction, and the everyday adjustments that shape life in shrinking urban environments (Constantinescu, 2019). Additionally, there are local cultural initiative like the project called *Mina de Idei Anina*, developed by a team of architects, that played a significant role in reframing the city's industrial legacy through participatory and creative approaches. The project combined research and practices to stimulate dialogue around memory, identity, and regeneration. Taken together, these contributions provide a coherent conceptual and empirical foundation for exploring how industrial heritage can inform the regeneration of post-industrial communities (Țiganea, 2014).

This study therefore extends previous research by shifting attention from historical description toward the active role of industrial heritage in shaping contemporary community dynamics and regeneration practices.

Methodology

This study applies a qualitative, exploratory and interpretive methodology to understand how Anina has changed after the closure of its industrial activities. The approach combines direct observation of the built environment, analysis of documentary sources and conversations with local residents. The purpose was to capture how the industrial past is visible in today's town and how people relate to it in everyday life.

The investigation had three directions. The first examined the material dimension through repeated site visits. Buildings, street patterns and mining structures were documented with notes, sketches and photographs. This work showed how traces of industry remain part of the landscape. The second focused on the cultural dimension. Archival sources, historical studies and local publications were consulted to provide context for Anina's development and to understand how traditions of work shaped community values. Initiatives such as Mina de Idei Anina also offered examples of how heritage has been reframed through creative practice. The third looked at the social dimension. Informal discussions with residents from different generations revealed how people remember the mining years, how they perceive decline and how they describe belonging to the town today. The material was thematically analyzed to highlight recurring ways in which places are remembered and reinterpreted. To place these findings in a broader perspective, references from the National Institute of Statistics on demographic change, migration and employment in post-industrial towns were also considered. These data confirm that the processes observed in Anina reflect wider regional and national dynamics.

The originality of this methodology lies in combining architectural documentation with cultural interpretation and community perspectives. This approach treats industrial heritage as an active resource that can support collaboration, trust and regeneration rooted in local experience.

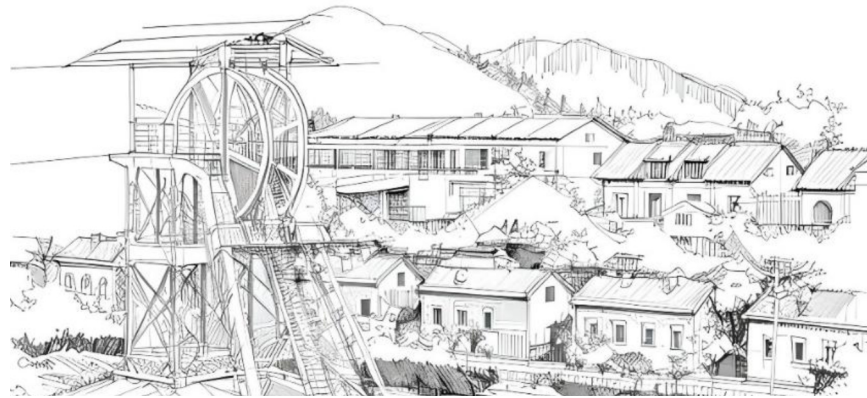
Results

Located in the heart of Romania's Banat Mountains, the town of Anina grew as a mining settlement whose development was shaped by coal extraction and the industries connected to it. What appears today as a place caught between decline and renewal was once an active industrial center that attracted workers from different parts of Europe. The first documented reference to coal in the area dates to 1790, and in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the settlement expanded

under Habsburg administration. From the mid-nineteenth century, the StEG company consolidated operations, introduced technical modernization and built railway links that integrated Anina into a wider industrial system together with Reșița, Oravița and Bocșa. By the end of the century, the town was recognized for the scale and complexity of its underground network.

After 1918, mining was reorganized under Romanian ownership through UDR, which expanded housing, public facilities and regional connections.

Fig. 2. Author's sketch, 2023. Perspective on the city of Anina - Pit 1.



During the communist period, large-scale investment reshaped the town once again, extending both production capacity and social infrastructure.

Apartment blocks, schools, medical institutions and cultural facilities were added alongside industrial plants, consolidating a social fabric structured around the mining workforce and their families (Gräf Rudolf, 1991).



Fig. 2. Author's sketch, 2023. Perspective on the city of Anina - Apartment blocks in central area called Brainer.

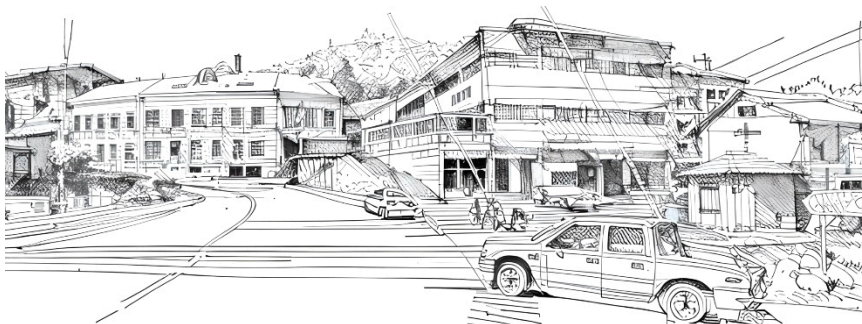
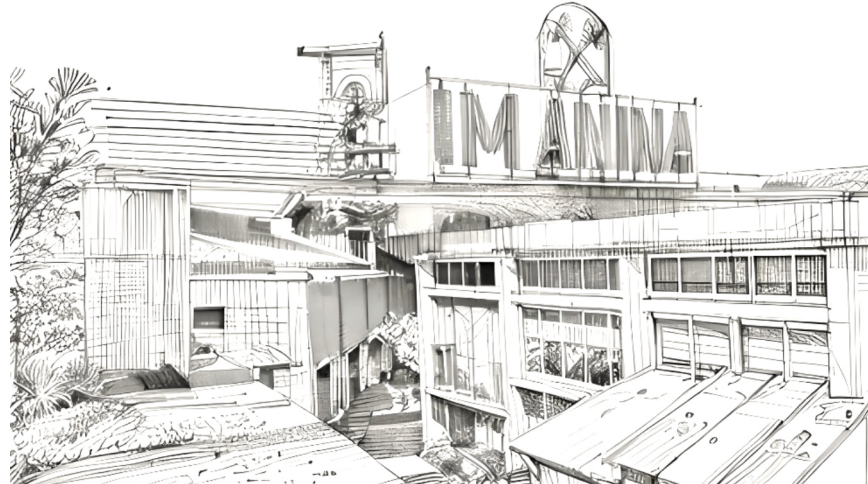


Fig. 3. Author's sketch, 2023. Perspective on the city of Anina - Facilities area.

The morphology of Anina mirrored this trajectory. Built on terraces and slopes, the town's structure followed the geometry of the underground network. Transport and ventilation galleries, drainage passages, vertical shafts and extraction wells determined the configuration of space. On the surface, housing colonies, functional public buildings and distinctive technical elements defined the landscape. Extraction towers, technical halls, water tanks, sludge silos and the former power plant remain visible markers of identity. Many are abandoned, yet they continue to dominate the skyline and suggest possibilities for reinterpretation.

*Fig. 4. Author's sketch,
2023. A symbolic
remnant: the mining
area sign*



In 2006, after the last underground accident, an explosion that led to the loss of several lives, a political decision was made to close the last active mine, which had long provided economic support. This event deeply impacted everyday life and the community's sense of identity. However, the local culture, shaped by underground labor, colony life and strong networks of solidarity, remains partially alive through rituals that preserve a shared sense of identity. Traditions such as Miner's Day and other commemorative or religious gatherings continue to carry symbolic weight and reinforce community ties (Mosoroceanu, 2010). Older generations recall periods of vitality, stable employment and social order, while younger inhabitants often describe the town through loss and limited prospects. Despite these contrasts, resilience persists: small gestures of care for homes and gardens, as well as informal initiatives, keep alive a sense of attachment to place. These findings show that Anina's importance lies not only in its surviving buildings or abandoned infrastructure but also in the ways memory and daily practice continue to shape belonging.

The interaction between industrial landmarks and community practices shows that collective attachments remain active and give continuity to the town's future development.

Discussion

The discussion of findings highlights how Anina's industrial legacy acts as a mediator of change. It shapes community relations and guides the use of space, creating conditions for renewal through collaboration and trust. At the same time, it sustains a sense of continuity that anchors present life in shared experience.

One important dimension is social meaning. The persistence of attachment to place shows that identity remains deeply linked to collective memory. Even when disappointment is voiced, such attitudes reflect involvement rather than detachment. Critique becomes a form of participation, indicating that people still care for their town and see themselves as part of its future. This perspective highlights heritage as a resource for trust, since shared memories and concerns create a common ground of belonging.

The spatial dimension demonstrates further potential. Industrial remains shape the town's image and offer opportunities for reuse that extend beyond preservation. Vacant halls, warehouses, and service areas can be converted into cultural venues or educational facilities. Open grounds can host temporary installations, events, or community gardens, encouraging encounters and collective activity. Through these interventions, heritage supports participation by connecting familiar places with contemporary uses.

Institutional involvement adds another layer of significance. Projects that adapt industrial sites into museums or cultural centers extend heritage into the public sphere. Their impact is strongest when they invite residents to engage directly, ensuring that transformation reflects both professional expertise and community expectations. In this way, heritage becomes not only conserved but reinterpreted, generating cooperation between people.

Broader implications emerge for policy and governance. Regeneration strategies that integrate economic, cultural and social dimensions provide more durable results than approaches limited to physical redevelopment. Partnerships between institutions and civic organizations can weave heritage into education and civic life, engaging younger generations in shaping future perspectives. At the regional level, cooperation among post-industrial towns can amplify resources and share experience, demonstrating how convergence extends across multiple scales.

Taken together, the findings show that industrial heritage in Anina functions as a catalyst for renewal. It reinforces trust through shared memory, creates opportunities for participation through spatial adaptation and supports collaboration between communities and local administration. In this sense, Anina illustrates how post-industrial towns can mobilize their legacy as a foundation for collective action and sustainable transformation.

Conclusion

The study of Anina shows that industrial heritage can serve as an identity resource and a framework for collaboration. By examining how architecture, memory and daily practices intersect, it highlights the relevance of post-industrial towns in contemporary debates on regeneration and community resilience.

The methodology, based on field observation, archival sources and conversations with residents, linked spatial traces with lived experience. This qualitative approach demonstrated how built forms and cultural practices remain interconnected, offering insight into resilience even in the absence of quantitative data.

Findings emphasize the value of community-level initiatives. Reuse of vacant spaces, small-scale gardens, or cultural events can strengthen participation and trust. At the same time, schools, museums, and civic groups play a decisive role by integrating industrial history into education and opening spaces for new interpretations.

Institutional and regional actions provide continuity for these efforts. Policies that combine economic, social and cultural goals, together with partnerships among administrations, civic associations and entrepreneurs, create conditions for regeneration. Cooperation with other post-industrial towns expands resources and visibility, reinforcing networks of support.

Overall, the case of Anina illustrates how architecture and heritage can sustain collaboration and trust while providing orientation for policy and practice. Industrial towns in transition hold resources for identity, continuity and civic engagement. By clarifying how memory and space interact, the study contributes both to academic debates and to the design of locally grounded strategies, aligning with the conference theme of convergence.

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Patrimoniul industrial ca resursă a identității. O perspectivă asupra orașului Anina

(rezumat)

Acest articol se încadrează în tematica conferinței „Convergence”. Arhitectura drept cadru pentru colaborare și încredere”, examinând modul în care moștenirea post-industrială modelează relațiile dintre oameni, loc și istorie. Structurile și tiparele spațiale moștenite întăresc identitatea și susțin regenerarea bazată pe experiența locală. Într-un oraș marcat de două secole de exploatare a cărbunelui, arhitectura întruchipează munca, reziliența și apartenența. Prezența materială transmite profunzime simbolică, în timp ce memoria și practicile cotidiene susțin continuitatea în peisaje aflate în schimbare. Viața în Anina, împreună cu reperele sale industriale, creează oportunități pentru reconectare și participare. Patrimoniul industrial oferă un cadru pentru colaborare și încredere, permițând rezidenților, grupurilor civice și instituțiilor să conveargă în jurul valorilor comune și să exploreze noi direcții. Prin implicarea comunității și grija susținută pentru loc, mediile odată definite de muncă evoluează în spații pentru reinterpretare în trecut, prezent și viitor. Astfel, moștenirea industrială se afirmă ca o resursă activă de identitate, capabilă să ghideze regenerarea participativă, să inspire acțiuni colective și să păstreze semnificația culturală.