



Article

Repurposing and the Impact of New Facilities on the Potential Presentation of Industrial Heritage

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Abstract: Industrial heritage combines historical, architectural and cultural values of the context in which it is located. In order for the spatial and architectural potential of these buildings to be used even after the loss of their initial purpose, the previous plants become the hub of new activity through repurposing and adjustment. This study is focused on the interpolation of hotel and business/trade activities within the previous industrial complex Belgrade "Steam Mill" where the practical issues related to the implementation of this entire process have been presented by means of a detailed analysis (case study). Repurposing of the old plant has been accepted as an evolutionary model of integrative protection. This paper names the shifts in the social and economic context of ex-Yugoslavia and adoption of new economic and cultural patterns as one of the causes for the abandonment of the Mill and its fall into disrepair. Accordingly, the contribution of this paper is based on an overview of a potential identification of a specific model for future actions in similar situations and in relation to the industrial heritage of the Republic of Serbia. The critical analysis of the results of Steam Mill repurposing presented in this paper implies the reviewing of both positive and negative aspects of the said process with the aim of understanding the significance of appropriate planning and use of future facilities in relation to the protection and promotion of cultural heritage values of general interest.

Keywords: industrial heritage; devastated spaces; free access; repurposing



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1. Introduction

The industrial architecture heritage represents a material testimony on the historical and cultural context which allows for the study of its social and technological development. Abandoned industrial spaces represent places of collective memory [1] (p. 137), and their specific aesthetical expression makes them an important social resource which can be tapped in different ways [2] (p. 505). Numerous studies in the field of industrial architecture have indicated the need for the preservation thereof through some type of new use [3,4]. Special attention is given to the defining of the reuse strategies for abandoned urban industrial spaces, i.e., the so-called urban regeneration management system [5–7], where the establishment of the balance in the context of sustainable usage of space (cultural, economic, environmental) becomes the main task. There are also studies dedicated to the analysis of the achieved repurposing results. Such studies are essentially focused on the impact of the use of new facilities and activities on the protection and promotion of heritage values [8].

The conversion of purpose, adapting, remodeling, rehabilitating and similar concepts are, in numerous research papers, covered by the umbrella term "adaptive reuse". [9]. There are different ways to repurpose and adapt old industrial buildings. There are examples of repurposing these facilities as cultural spaces (museums, galleries, exhibitions spaces, educational facilities, etc.), then as tourist facilities (for example, hotels), or even as offices or apartments [10].

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The shift in development of cities such as Belgrade, which previously existed within a socialist cultural context, have initiated new ways of urban space reaffirmation. Abandoned industrial facilities in urban zones receive a new role or are demolished if they do not possess a specific architectural and historical values. Such practice is typical for ex-socialist countries [11–14]. On the other hand, if the buildings do hold historical or social importance, their potential repurposing requires special attention of competent state institutions and professional associations.

Repurposing, as one of the ways for tapping that potential, has contributed, in international practice, to the awareness raising on the general significance of preserving the heritage of industrial architecture [15]. However, the complexity of the repurposing issue in practice is most frequently linked to numerous cultural, scientific, social and political interests [16].

The prevalent form of industrial spaces repurposing is certainly the introduction of cultural features, thus turning old plants and warehouses into tourist attractions. This is certainly supported by more appropriate protection and promotion of heritage. Such spaces enable free access to cultural goods. On the other hand, depending on the need for provision of specific services, an appropriate remuneration can be demanded. Additional service and commercial facilities transform these places into hubs of new events, thus revalidating the heritage values through establishment of new identities [17,18].

The link between tourism and industrial heritage repurposing is by no means accidental. Tourism has become one of the main development factors in modern cities [19] (pp. 24–25) and represents an important cultural exchange segment [20–23]. An overview of different practical examples of repurposing of similar spaces clearly indicates that tourism represents a unique development model for promoting industrial heritage [24].

The essence of the relationship between tourism and industrial heritage primarily relates to the assessment of heritage as a tourism resource. This is precisely why different studies highlight the importance of analysing specific historical and architectural factors [25]. Tourism does not only play an important representative and education role, but it also offers numerous possibilities for economic development, and it actually contributes to the creation of social capital [26] (p. 62). However, what should be emphasized is that the push for financial prosperity should be controlled so that it would not at some moment risk the heritage values exclusively for purposes of profit [27].

The repurposing of industrial heritage in urban environments is actually recognized as a part of urban transformation [28] (p. 13). In modern architecture reconstruction, revitalization and interpolation of new features in abandoned plants are considered as newer practices exceeding the boundaries of primary preservation of industrial heritage [29]. Repurposing in practice is very often justified as a concept because the costs of rehabilitation of the majority of these buildings sometimes present a more acceptable (cost-effective) solution than their demolition and removal [30] (p. 34). In this manner a possibility of creating a new picture of the city is generated, simultaneously encouraging the development of different improvements and concepts in architecture [31].

The majority of international papers in the field of integrative protection of cultural heritage indicate the obligation and importance of preserving industrial heritage as an integral part of cultural heritage [32–34]. However, the protection of heritage exclusively by defining a legal framework is insufficient on its own. *Charter for the Industrial Heritage*, as one of the basic documents in this area [35], justifies and initiates the refurbishment of industrial plants for a different purpose if the need for the initial one has disappeared. The decision on repurposing or refurbishment of an industrial building depends on many factors. The starting point of any paper is certainly the analysis of four interdependent levels: level of property law, of history and architecture, economy and the environmental level [36].

This study focuses on the interpolation of hotel and business/trade activities within the previous industrial complex Belgrade "Steam Mill". The paper starts from the assumption that the process of the abandoned mill repurposing has enabled the recognition of its

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values and improved the protection of industrial heritage. The need for preservation on rare examples of industrial heritage by means of integrating them in the modern trends basically represents the starting point of this paper.

This study aims to analyse the results of the repurposing of legally protected exindustrial facility in relation to the free/open space criterion which is considered legitimate with regards to a cultural good of general interest. More precisely, it aims to review the repurposing consequences in the framework of critical analysis of the impact and use of new content in relation to the potential for presentation of industrial heritage value. In order to enable better understanding of social and historical importance of the building, the case study includes the analysis of the historical and architectural values, as well as other identifiers of the relevant social and cultural context.

The historical picture of the Mill's development is provided in this paper with the goal of indicating the significance of the said facility in the context of European industrial heritage. Having in mind the fact that a good portion of similar buildings was in private ownership until World War Two and afterwards appropriated by the state, research has identified the proving of ownership rights as the linchpin of all issues. The review of the entire situation through a historical presentation of the Mill's development in that sense enables the analysis of the causative relationships in the domain of property relations as an accompanying contribution to research.

2. Materials and Methods

The case study is based on the analysis of the historical and architectural values and property relations while taking into consideration the planning regulations and legally binding acts which informed the development of the conceptual design of the given complex's repurposing. The review focuses especially on the acts related to the specific measures for protection of Mill's architectural heritage as a cultural monument.

2.1. Historical and Architectural Significance of the Steam Mill

The Steam Mill building represents one of the rare examples of conversion where spatial and functional structure of industrial space and related facilities was repurposed for commercial and service-related activities. The building is located in Belgrade, in the vicinity of Sava River, and represents an industrial complex which was pronounced a Belgrade cultural monument owing to its specific architecture (*Official Gazette of the City of Belgrade*, No. 16/87). It was constructed in 1902 as a building with a unique function. According to the assessments, it has been the most important plant of that kind in former kingdom of Serbia, later Yugoslavia, considering the value of its production capacities, its property and the profit it acquired at annual level [37,38].

During its life, Steam Mill was the first joint-stock company for food processing in Serbia equipped with the top-of-the-art machinery and managed by Vračar Cooperative, while the majority interest was held by the Bogdan Veljković family. The industrial complex consisted of the main complex building, building with the machinery, workshops, storage space, apartment building, stables and other accompanying buildings on the lot. Its architectural features align it with other similar industrial facilities which were constructed in early 20th century in Europe. Moreover, it should be noted that this was the first Mill in Serbia which introduced electric power in 1912 as part of modernization of production processes [39].

The main Mill building occupied a central position on the lot the size of approximately 80 ares (Figure 1). It consisted of a horizontal and a transversal section. The proper production line (wheat processing machinery) was located in the horizontal street facing section, while the transversal section consisted of a three storey high warehouses.

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Figure 1. Steam Mill, aerial view. Source: Google Earth (accessed on 19 June 2021).

Due to historical and social changes in the Balkans area, it was not easy to preserve the heritage of the ex-Steam Mill. The buildings within the complex fell into disrepair and contributed to the image of a dilapidated ruin located right next to the city centre. The level of disrepair was quite high and made the surrounding space unsafe because certain structural elements threatened to collapse at any given moment (Figures 2 and 3).



Figure 2. Steam Mill, look inside the yard of the factory. Source: http://www.newmill.rs/sr/istorija (accessed on 10 February 2017).

The problems with the life and functioning of the Mill arose already in the beginning of World War One. The Mill was robbed and demolished by the Austro-Hungarian army. However, soon after the end of the war, during 1920s, production was re-established and modernized, so the Mill's national significance kept growing until the beginning of World War Two (WWII).

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Figure 3. The Steam Mill, previous and current condition. Source: http://beobuild.rs/visuals/data/media/1/smlin.jpg (accessed on 10 February 2017).

Confiscation of the Mill by communist authorities and its transition into state ownership caused serious issues that were prevalent in our country until recently. Ownership disputes and unclarified property relations between all stakeholders, starting from the representatives of the family that possessed founding rights, through state, and various states, municipal and administrative bodies which claimed a right to Mill management in 1990s, and which later demanded their part of the heritage, prevented further investment into reconstruction, adaptation and refurbishment, as well as the implementation of the adopted urban plans.

Although it was placed under state protection in 1987 as an example of national industrial heritage, one part of the Mill was used as a storage space for years after that. In late 1980s and early 1990s, due to continuous lack of investment in maintenance, the building was declared unsafe. At the end of 1992, all the machines were sold, and since then, the mill has not been in operation [40] (p. 46). After a fire in 1994, the majority of the Mill was destroyed. It became a potential danger for the immediate surroundings because parts of the building were in danger of collapsing at any given moment. Management over the facilities and the land was given to Savski Venac municipality on whose territory the Mill was located. However, specific data on the manner in which the rights to facility and land management were transferred remain inaccessible to the public.

The construction of industrial facilities played an important role in the post-war development in Belgrade, thus considerably impacting its urban development. In the interwar period, Belgrade's population doubled in size, causing a growing need for organization of space. Such practice was especially prominent after WWII when worker apartments were built *en masse* due to the needs of accelerated industrialization.

Post-war industrial development in Belgrade area was guided by the general idea of socialist development. Some of the old industrial plants inherited from the Kingdom of Serbia, such as the Steam Mill, were no longer a part of socialist industrialization development plans. For many years after the war, the Mill kept waiting for modernization, rehabilitation, or potential relocation to city outskirts. However, this process was never fully implemented or completed, so the dilapidated industrial heritage buildings continued falling into disrepair [41] (p. 502).

The relocation of industrial facilities to Belgrade outskirts represented one of the crucial tasks of the general Urban Plan from 1950 [42] (p. 549). This idea was important to the state authorities due to several reasons. These were, inter alia, the plans for rural population employment, but also the introduction of socialist city planning ideas and creation of healthier and greener life in the cities. Having in mind the difficult economic situation of the country at that moment, as well as other ensuing political and economic issues, resolving the issue of the plant had to wait for many decades [38] (p. 314).

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2.2. Repurposing as a Form of Revitalization

The social relations paradigm shift since the 2000s in Serbia, from socialist social structure to the neoliberal one, has created a vacuum which has placed the industrial heritage buildings on the market and thus endangered their continued survival. Almost all of the ex-socialist countries experienced the same or similar transition processes. With the motto that everything even slightly connected to the socialist doctrine must be rejected, entire industrial plants and facilities were left to ruin. This was especially the case with those in urban communities because the land where they were located had high market values, as is the case with the analysed building.

Experiences from other European countries indicate that, apart from property issues, they used to encounter, or still do, additional problems related to unclear legal regulations as well as the lack of a clear methodology for identifying the right repurposing model [43]. There is also the fact that every industrial facility has specific origin and development.

The protection of industrial heritage in the Republic of Serbia is defined by the Law on Cultural Property [44]. The basic provisions of this law identifying the type, rights, liabilities and criteria of cultural property protection state that certain architectural and built structures can have a right to a certain form of protection—either as cultural monuments, or cultural-historical areas.

If a cultural property is in a potential danger of being damaged or destroyed, the aforementioned law enables the line Ministry to assign another natural or legal person as a trustee, with their consent and a right to appropriate compensation. The basic objective of such a provision is to prevent the continued deterioration of cultural heritage, which in the example of abandoned industrial facilities means that potential repurposing and revitalization enable not only protection but also open access for all to the said facility in its role of a public good. This statement is essentially the main issue in the research and concerns the analysis of the results of the conversion of the mill.

A common conclusion appearing in the majority of other studies in this area is certainly that industrial heritage undeniably possesses considerable economic potential. However, there is the issue of the importance of the preservation of industrial heritage value if its rehabilitation or adaptation for a different purpose requires a more radical architectural transformation [1]. Here we have a clash between economic interests and the need for heritage preservation and the cost-effectiveness of the entire concept is brought into question [45].

2.3. Planning Framework, Regulations

Planning of the hotel and business and trade activities in the space of the abandoned Mill industrial complex presented the result of urban planning activities. According to the General Urban Plan of the City of Belgrade [46], the basis of urban planning regulations, the Mill location later on was intended for commercial activities and the formation of public city space. Because the building was declared a cultural monument, there was a legal requirement to obtain the required permission of the appropriate institution, i.e., Belgrade Institute for Protection of Cultural Monuments, prior to undertaking any activities.

The taking of specific steps in the planning and construction process was limited by various legally binding decisions. Primarily so by the delivery of the legally valid Decision on the identification of technical protection measures for the purposes of the "Steam Mill" reconstruction and revitalization project and interpolation of new facilities on the said lot. Based on the analysis of the planning regulations and documents, the study identifies the level of achievement of specific technical documentation related tasks:

- Technical documentation needs to be drafted in line with the provisions of the Law on Cultural Property ("Official Gazette of RS", No. 71/94, 52/2011—other laws, 99/2011—other law and 6/2020—other laws);
- Alignment with the requirements of the Belgrade General Urban Plan 2021;

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 Alignment with the Regulation Plan of Dedinje Spatial Entity (Official Gazette of City of Belgrade 1/200), as well as the Act on Urban Planning Requirements for the given location;

- The reconstruction of the Steam Mill building should be performed by returning it to its authentic state on the basis of the accessible historical documents and the official Decision of the Belgrade Institute for Protection of Cultural Monuments [47];
- The interpolation of new buildings for the needs of the hotel/shopping mall should be executed in a manner that preserves the existing view of the Mill facility as well the State Printing House (BIGZ) on the adjoining lot, a Belgrade cultural monument designed by the architect Dragiša Brašovan.

3. Results

For many years the main issue lay in the fact that the communist authorities have expropriated the Mill owned by the shareholders of Vračar Cooperative, while later on the entire problem was additionally complicated by giving the management of the Mill to various public and state companies. A large number of entities involved in this process and the rights they were later demanding prevented any possibility and endeavour to rehabilitate this space. The issue of the ownership has been a matter of dispute for many years, and nobody wanted to seriously deal with it or strive for a compromise. In that sense it is important to highlight the political aspect of the decision on the final fate of the Mill.

The 2011 court decision on the property rights of all process participants provided the conditions for the obtaining of all necessary construction permits. The investor guaranteed that the future accommodation and business facilities will preserve the authentic parts of the abandoned Mill building and meet all the restoration and conservation requirements provided by the Belgrade Institute for protection of Cultural Monuments on the basis of the accessible historical documents (photographs and archived plans).

Because this heritage is legally protected as a cultural good of general interest of the Republic of Serbia, one of the main issues in the entire process was the decision of the state to allow private capital to intervene in the case of the Mill. However, the analysis and the review of international practice indicate an identical approach to refurbishing of these facilities. Providing the private investors with the rights to land in the aim of their repurposing of ex-industrial buildings was, among other cases, also utilized in the case of London docks [48,49]. This process was simultaneously accompanied by the establishment of special funds and organizations where each gave a specific contribution to the implementation of the entire concept.

Apart from the role of private capital, another issue arose during the repurposing of the Mill—the selection of future facilities/activities, primarily due to the large share of commercial activities when compared to the potential for cultural heritage promotion. Educational and cultural facilities would have a much bigger impact and cultural importance [50]. One such example would be the refurbishment of the ex textile factory in Covilhã (Portugal) into a university complex. That region was renowned for its textile production in the 19th century and is currently a prominent university center. The urban rehabilitation of this space was preceded by the historical factors analysis for the purpose of better understanding the value of heritage. New buildings were constructed, the existing ones rehabilitated, and thus the implemented architectural interventions have considerably improved the general image of the city and its immediate surroundings [51]. With the exception of the new purpose of the building, a similar design approach was used in the case of the Steam Mill where certain of the hotel and business facilities were designed as independent units, while the old Mill building is currently the hotel main entrance with the reception desk, lobby and other accompanying facilities.

At global level, the most well-known example of repurposing into cultural content is definitely the Tate Modern Gallery in London. The conversion of a thermal power plant into gallery space has initiated the introduction of a series of public activities and services (bars, museum space, halls, etc.). Its multipurpose character is precisely what transformed

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an old thermal power plant into a place frequented by a large number of people. The Caixa forum in Madrid also represents an example of an adapted power plant which became the central place for artistic and cultural events [52]. From the point of design, the museum is largely based on the elements of historically important industrial architecture.

As stated earlier in the paper, the preservation of industrial heritage is not financially sustainable by itself, and the creation of a multipurpose space is precisely what the development of a self-funding system might require. On the other hand, through interaction with the content located in adapted industrial spaces, the visitors actually familiarize themselves with the protected values of industrial heritage and the period in which it was created. However, in such a relationship, there must be a compromise where commercial and other accompanying content must be essentially secondary in the functional hierarchy.

Construction of the Hotel/Shopping Mall

The conceptual design of the hotel/shopping mall was completed in 2007. An Austrian company took the lead on project implementation as the future investor, taking the obligation to complete the construction of the hotel/shopping mall complex with the support of EBRD (European Bank for Reconstruction and Development) as a partner agency. Of course, the state played an important role in the process by accelerating the resolving of property issues and adoption of necessary planning documents.

The construction of the hotel and the business towers was finally completed in 2015. The Steam Mill was completely reconstructed in line with the original design. The use and restoration of the original elements of the existing industrial architecture existing in synergy with the contemporary architectural trends, the designers created a space which implies the original purpose of the building through the use of new content (Figure 4).



Figure 4. The interior of hotel lobby. Source: https://www.gradnja.rs/kako-su-stari-materijali-u-hotelu-stari-mlin-dobili-nov-zivot/ (accessed on 10 February 2017).

Regarding the design of new facilities within the complex, it should be pointed out the immediate vicinity of the State Printing House, which by its architecture and form belongs to the heritage of modernism, and it had an important impact on the form of the newly designed business towers. The idea of the authors of the hotel–business complex, architects Sanjin Grbić and Jovan Jovanović, was to create an integrated urbanistic and architectural design of this area of the city whose intention is recognised in the business towers' corner facade motifs which imitate the horizontal sections of the State Printing House (Figure 5).

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Figure 5. The newly designed office building. Photo: Authors' archive.

The construction of a hotel complex with business towers has in good measure improved the role of the Mill as a spatial landmark, even though some argued that new forms and shapes might degrade the authenticity of heritage. The design of public space—a "piazzetta"—within the proper complex (implying its old purpose) represents an important segment of the new architectural and urbanistic entity. The construction of a square within the lot was used in a functional sense as an ante-space in the open, connecting hotel premises with business buildings, other content and the environment.

Because it belongs to the category of accommodation and catering facilities, the integration of hotel-related content should provide the opportunity for learning about the values of the Steam Mill monument of culture. The hotel sublimates a considerable number of different activities, in the goal of providing efficient and comprehensive services to the guests. Apart from the basic hotel amenities, including rooms and the restaurant, we can also highlight the existence of fitness centre, large rooms for organization of different events, and business premises (Figure 6). However, in order to access specific content offered in the ex-Mill building, we have to be registered as hotel guests or conference participants, and this brings into question the option for free access to a cultural good which should be of general interest. Although the project partially envisages contents that could be accessed (cafe-bar), it is impossible to freely stroll and take photos of the building's interior because that breaches the privacy of hotel guests as indicated upon entry. The lack of possibility to view certain interior elements and rooms quite evidently indicates that the architectural heritage has been somewhat commercialized. The issue that logically arises is the review of tangible repurposing results in relation to other possibilities for heritage presentation. To whom does cultural heritage belong and where is the public interest in this entire story? Namely, does commercialization of heritage endanger its values? Commercialization certainly gives a considerable contribution to economic sustainability, but it should be approached strategically. It is important to understand that the typology of planned facilities represents an equally important task as specific heritage protection measures because it defines the future manner of space use and the specific approach to the heritage. If, for example, the access to a specific space is limited, it is understandable that this has a considerable impact on the promotion of heritage and can degrade its values—especially if the building is designated as a cultural monument (as is the case with the Mill) and the heritage becomes a privilege that can be enjoyed only by the selected visitors and hotel guests.

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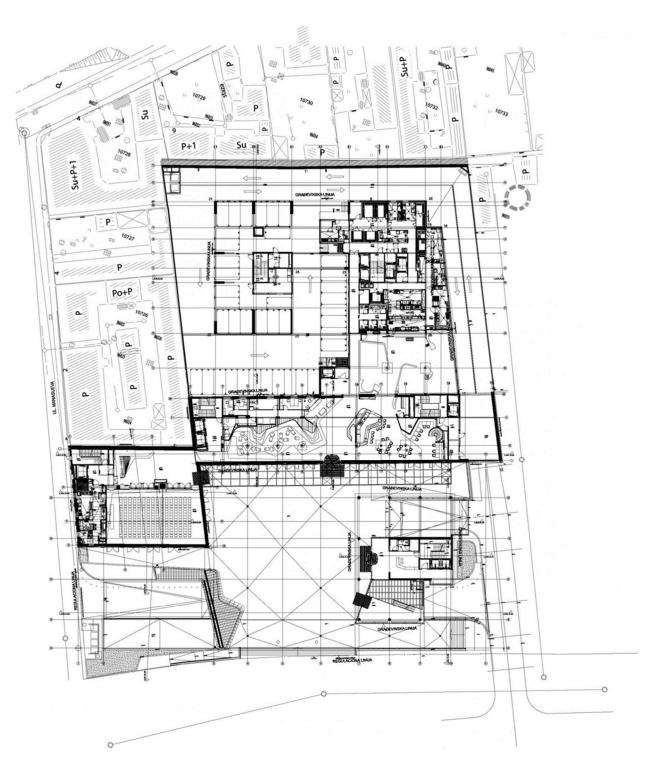


Figure 6. Ground floor plan. Source: https://arhitekta.co.rs/arhitektura-u-srbiji/radisson-blu-old-mill-hotel/ (accessed on 4 January 2022).

4. Discussion

First of all, the repurposing of the Mill has indicated the heart of the problem regarding rehabilitation of the majority of industrial heritage sites in the Republic of Serbia. The lack of clarity regarding property relations as well as the lack of strategic plans still remains an important issue in resolving the status of similar buildings. More appropriate defining of legal regulations in the future would certainly increase public awareness on the importance of individual industrial heritage examples by highlighting their development potentials.

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In this specific case, the Steam Mill should not be viewed exclusively from the aspect of Belgrade industrial heritage but should also be valued in the context of European countries of that period, thus highlighting the values of European 20th century industrial heritage in Serbia.

On the other hand, the analysis of the Steam Mill repurposing results highlights one of the important consequences of this process, namely commercialization and limited manner of presenting the values of heritage. More precisely, it highlights the limitations on movement within the ex-Mill building where some spaces cannot be accessed due to the nature of their new purpose. The general conclusion would be that protected environments and cultural goods that have been placed under certain degree of protection by the government and competent institutions, i.e., that do possess a certain general public interest, should be used primarily as cultural facilities. Such a model is much more efficient because it can include additional facilities as sources of income, but the access is to be generally provided to all, including visitors who would simply like to stroll around and look at specific things without the obligation of using the provided commercial services.

From the investor's point of view, the desire for profit is quite clear because nobody wants to invest funds if there is no possibility for the return of investment. However, the repurposing of such buildings should primarily be performed while keeping in mind the need for free access to newly designed faculties and the freedom of movement inside the repurposed buildings since the entire concept is based on the idea of protecting and promoting cultural heritage as a general interest and not as the interest of individuals, organizations or corporations.

5. Conclusions

Reconstruction, rehabilitation and interpolating of activities within the Steam Mill complex has presented a different method and options for integrative protection and presentation of industrial heritage. The introduction of Steam Mill heritage in the contemporary urban development trends has additionally emphasized its cultural and historical significance. By interpolating the new contents, the entire complex of the former mill has been reaffirmed, gaining a new meaning in the modern context. However, the research suggests that open access to this building, as a cultural monument, remained questionable.

Moreover, the achievement of certain compromises through decisions of state bodies did not, however, reduce the mutual disagreements and dissatisfaction of all parties in the process, but it enabled the establishment of a legal basis for implementation of the hotel and business complex. Achieving certain compromises does not, in principle, mean fulfilling the desired expectations of each participant and party in the process. In line with the complexity of property relations and other challenges, the purpose conversion of Steam Mill facilities has been presented in this paper as a question of commercialization of heritage. Examining the relationship between economic sustainability and the need to protect, preserve and present cultural heritage.

This paper started with the assumption that the repurposing has initiated the recognition of heritage values, and then indicated a completely different issue related to free access to heritage. It can be stated that the aforementioned visibility of industrial architecture heritage has failed to completely achieve the desired effect. The financial interest has been given preference over the possibility for more appropriate promotion of heritage, even though, from the architectural point of view, the protection has been performed in line with the requests of competent institutions. The refurbishment of the ex-industrial complex has certainly contributed to the affirmation of this space from the viewpoint of urban planning. However, due to the nature and needs of certain facilities, the access to the ex-Mill building has been restricted. If this building does have the status of a protected cultural good, it should be freely accessible regardless of its commercial purpose. This would allow the repurposing concept to exercise its full potential by enabling the recognition of values of specific industrial heritage site within a wider social context.

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