

## **Cultural Heritage of Post-Socialist New Towns. A Comparison of Eisenhüttenstadt and Velenje**

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vol. 5, 2016, 2, pp. 50-67

This paper deals with the issue of the New Towns built in the 1950s in East Germany and Yugoslavia, in particular Eisenhüttenstadt in Germany and Velenje in Slovenia. The authors would argue that socialist New Towns have gained historical and public recognition over recent decades and seem to have adopted a sense of heritage, both on the local and national levels. This article discusses the interpretations and recognition of (post-) socialist towns as places of cultural and historical value, as well as the post-socialist practices of the locals with regard to the cultural heritage of their towns. The national and local recognition of both New Towns reflect their position at the time of their planning and building in the 1950s. Eisenhüttenstadt was a showcase town for East Germany and has currently been (inter-) nationally recognised as a new, model town, while lacking a local sense of heritage. On the other hand, plans for the new town centre of Velenje, its financing and construction, were initiated by the local authorities and the Coal Mine Company managers, with the substantial assistance of the town's residents. While the New Town of Velenje immediately started to cultivate its mining identity, as well as the value of being a town built with the voluntary contribution of its residents, the heritage of Velenje being a new, modern town was and is discussed and contested locally and only partly nationally.

Key words: Post-Socialist New towns. Cultural heritage. Eisenhüttenstadt. Velenje.

Regardless of the different appraisal and recognition the European post-World War Two New Towns have received, they are, nevertheless, historical locations, as they represent solutions of post-war reconstruction, an overflow of population and, more generally, the modernisation of society. Despite their comparatively short history, the New Towns experienced changes over the years in the urban, social and cultural fields. In fact, many New Towns are not perceived as new anymore. Many of them were model towns in their time, but how are they considered today? Are they ordinary, rather homogeneous, mostly mid-sized towns within a post-modern, consumer-driven landscape of multiple urbanisation? Are they simply outdated conglomerations of mass housing? Or are they places that carry a distinctive historical significance? How far is their functional approach still acknowledged and recognised as part of the heritage? This paper focuses on the New Towns built in the 1950s in East Germany and Yugoslavia, in particular Eisenhüttenstadt in Germany and Velenje in Slovenia. We would argue that socialist New Towns have gained historical and public recognition over recent decades and seem to have adopted a sense of heritage, both on the local and national levels. This paper discusses the interpretations and recognition of (post-) socialist towns as places of cultural and historical value, as well as the post-socialist practices of the locals with regard to the cultural heritage of their towns. The national and local recognition of both New Towns reflect their position at the time of their planning and building in the 1950s. Eisenhüttenstadt was a showcase town for East Germany and has currently been (inter-) nationally recognised as a new, model town, while lacking a local sense of heritage. On the other hand, plans for the new town centre of Velenje, its financing and construction, were initiated by the local authorities and the Coal Mine Company managers, with the substantial assistance of the town's residents. While the New Town of Velenje immediately started to cultivate its mining identity, as well as

the value of being a town built with the voluntary contribution of its residents, the heritage of Velenje being a new, modern town was and is discussed and contested locally and only partly nationally.

### Post-What? Eisenhüttenstadt's Socialist Legacy Remains Ambivalent

In 2005, the final report of the "Stadt 2030" programme, a national competition on future urban development in which Eisenhüttenstadt took part, was published. Part of the questionnaire sent to the inhabitants concerned the tourist attractions that could be shown to potential visitors. It appeared that the top three destinations locals wanted to present were the "green surrounding area", a local park, and a nearby Baroque monastery.<sup>1</sup> How does this result compare with the recognition the town enjoys among urban and architectural historians as being the first New Town built after World War II in Germany and a "document of foresightful urban planning"?<sup>2</sup> The ambivalence between cultural significance and local practice, between inside interpretation and outside recognition is as obvious as it is striking. My argument is that there is a structural conflict between the functionality of Eisenhüttenstadt and the cultural attributions given to the New Town, which are both based on the town's history. Below, after a short introduction to Eisenhüttenstadt's history, four consecutive stages of the conflicting debate on heritage and normality are discussed.

#### History

Eisenhüttenstadt was founded in 1950 as an important site for the reconstruction and restructuring of the industrial basis of East Germany after World War II.<sup>3</sup> In the course of the German division during the Cold War years, most of the steel industry remained in what became West Germany. To ensure economic self-sufficiency, a steel mill was erected that was intended to produce the major part of iron and steel for the GDR's advanced mechanical industries. The "Eisenhüttenkombinat Ost" mill (EKO; Steel Combine East) employed up to 10 000 workers, who required housing for themselves and their families. Both the steel mill and the dwellings were planned by the East German government according to Soviet principles as completely new, industry-based sites.<sup>4</sup> According to this model of industrial New Towns, Eisenhüttenstadt was located in the eastern periphery of the country, in an underdeveloped, mainly agricultural area, some 125 kilometres from the industrial centres of Berlin and Saxony. Over the years, the industries advanced and so did the town. Eisenhüttenstadt was originally planned for 25 000 inhabitants and, by 1989, this number had increased to more than

1 Lara Bartscherer, a.o., *Stadt 2030. Abschlussbericht*, Berlin 2005, p. 210.

2 MAY, Ruth. *Planstadt StalinStadt. Ein Grundriß der frühen DDR - aufgesucht in Eisenhüttenstadt*. Dortmund: IRPUD, 1999, p. 11.

3 Eisenhüttenstadt has been intensively examined after 1989/90 and the town is well documented in May, 1999; KNAUER-ROMANI, Elisabeth. *Eisenhüttenstadt und die Idealstadt des 20. Jahrhunderts*. Weimar: Verlag und Datenbank für Geisteswissenschaften, 2000, 336 p. RICHTER, Jenny – FÖRSTER, Heike – LAKEMANN, Ulrich. *StalinStadt - Eisenhüttenstadt. Von der Utopie zur Gegenwart. Wandel industrieller und sozialer Strukturen in Eisenhüttenstadt*. Marburg: Schüren, 1997, 275 p. LUDWIG, Andreas. *Eisenhüttenstadt. Wandel einer industriellen Gründungsstadt in fünfzig Jahren*. Potsdam: Brandenburgische Landeszentrale für Politische Bildung, 2000, 132 p.

4 About 1,000 New Towns have been built in the Soviet Union and another 60 in other East European states, see: WAKEMANN, Rosemary. *Practicing Utopia. An Intellectual History of the New Town Movement*. Chicago: London: University of Chicago Press, 2016, p. 66.

50 000, according to the necessity for providing an industrial work-force. Today, the EKO-Stahl steel mill is still active and the town has approximately 27 000 residents.

#### *Heroic Times*

What makes Eisenhüttenstadt a heritage site is its function as a model town and its role during the Cold War. It was proposed that here the GDR would show how people would live in socialism in the future. Here, in the so-called “first socialist town in Germany”, a new society would be built in a New Town, according to the up-to-date principles of urban planning, equipped with the most modern provisions, and laid out in an architectural style that would be worthy of representing the working class in a socialist state. To represent the model character, the town was named “Stalinstadt” in 1953.



Figure 1: Bird’s eye view of the Planned New Town, 1952 (Deutsche Architektur 1952, no. 3)



Figure 2: Magistrale Ausführungsprojekt von Walter Palloks, 1957 (Stadtarchiv in Eisenhüttenstadt)

Although controversies about the adequate architectural style of socialism were ongoing during the 1950s and public infrastructure remained incomplete,<sup>5</sup> the New Town provided high-quality housing and well-paid jobs. This "Aufbauzeit" – the time of building a town from scratch – was accompanied by immense press coverage, films and literature, with alone three novels being published.<sup>6</sup> In 1960, on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of Eisenhüttenstadt, a propagandistic theatrical play was staged and an opera composed, in which the new residents performed their own role in the history.<sup>7</sup> Post-war reconstruction and the New Town were already history, the founding legacy of socialism in (East) Germany. The play culminated in a young couple dreaming of their own apartment which they would receive in the near future. At that time, the New Town was about the only place in East Germany where this could become true. A normal life after the troubles of war would be guaranteed in socialism and enabled by the heroic commitment of the people. A stereotype of historical narration was born and the New Town of Eisenhüttenstadt was the backdrop.

5 The turn to industrialized construction in the GDR went under way in the GDR from 1956 and replaced the "national", neo-classical and later romantic styles. Due to this change in construction technology and the priority to provide housing, the city center was not completed and even today is an empty space in the heart of the city.

6 Alone three novel have been issued: MUNDSTOCK, Karl. *Helle Nächte. Roman*. Halle/S.: Mitteldeutscher Verlag Halle, 1952, 580 p. MARCHWITZA, Hans. *Roheisen. Roman*. Berlin : Tribüne, 1955, 531 p. KNAPPE, Joachim. *Mein namenloses Land. Zwölf Kapitel einer Jugend im Dickicht der Jahrhundertmitte*. Halle/S.: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1965, 354 p.

7 Helmut Preißler, *Blast das Feuer an, Eisenhüttenstadt*, undated (1960), draft, Municipal museum of Eisenhüttenstadt, D 195/80; Jean Kurt Forest, *Damals an der Oder*. Opera, 1960.

*Modern Times*

During the 1960s and 1970s, the citizens of Eisenhüttenstadt enjoyed the benefits of working in a well-privileged industrial hotspot and living in modern houses (image: Town Centre). The international-style town centre was completed in 1962. The shops and restaurants, a late-night bar and a glass-covered car sales dealership, one of only two in the GDR, represented the modern lifestyle to customers.



Figure 3: Car sales pavilion in the main street, 1962 (Photo: Wolfgang Timme)

Eisenhüttenstadt claimed to be the newest town in the GDR. The town was organised according to the rhythm of the three-shift work which the blast furnaces required. This consumer-oriented modernity of the 1960s matched the priorities of the Socialist Unity Party's development plans to surpass West Germany in private consumption. This was proclaimed at the 5th Party Congress in 1958, as well as in the post-Sputnik technology-based development policy after the 6th Party Congress in 1963. For Eisenhüttenstadt, this meant more apartment blocks, now produced of pre-fabricated concrete slabs, more schools, more kindergartens. But the era of being the much admired showcase of East German socialist reconstruction was over. Other New Towns were erected (Hoyerswerda, Schwedt, Halle-Neustadt), different industries became core developmental areas (chemical industry, micro-electronics), and consequently money went elsewhere. In Eisenhüttenstadt, the normality of work and family life replaced the heroic years. The authorities presented the town as having a modern, satisfying routine. However, in

futuristic dreams, the development of the town went further, as a busy city with cars, a zoo and a fast train link to Berlin was sketched<sup>8</sup> for the steel-focused working town to become a big city.



Figure 4: Otto Schutzmeister: Eisenhüttenstadt Town and Factory, oil on canvas, 1978 (Municipal Museum of Eisenhüttenstadt)

#### *Escapes from the functional city*

In the course of the 1980s, the tale of an ongoing future slowly crumbled, as the former advantages of living in Eisenhüttenstadt became the norm in the rest of East Germany. The limited prospects for working life, the monotonous lifestyle and the isolated locality of the town became apparent to many citizens. In the 1980s, the young generation left the mono-structured industrial New Town, by hanging out in juvenile gangs listening to western rock radio, or by simply leaving town for big cities like Berlin and Jena. Thomas Heise's 1991 film "Eisenzeit" reflects this inner exile, as do interviews and autobiographies.<sup>9</sup> These documents are stunningly different from

8 Helmut Preißler, *Briefe aus Stalinstadt im Jahre 1963*, Frankfurt (Oder) 1958.

9 Thomas Heise, *Eisenzeit*. Documentary, 1991 (89 minutes); Interview with Ms. C., Feb. 9, 1998, lead by the author, see: LUDWIG, A. *Eisenhüttenstadt...*, pp. 96-98; and, stretching out to post-unification years, RENNEFANZ, Sabine. *Eisenkinder. Die stille Wut der Wendegeneration*. München : Luchterhand Literaturverlag, 2014, 256 p.

the lifestyle the majority of citizens led.<sup>10</sup> On the official side, perspectives changed as well, as history and heritage came back into focus. Firstly and most influential for future development, the New Town of the 1950s was put under preservation in 1984 as an example of the urban planning and architectural styles of the decade.<sup>11</sup> Secondly, the expansion of pre-slab tower blocks was being seen as critical, as parts of the nearby old river town of Furstenberg, incorporated into Eisenhüttenstadt in 1961, were torn down to make room for another new neighbourhood. It became important among municipal planning authorities to preserve the pre-socialist, formerly denounced structures and individual buildings, as shown by a poster published by the Municipality.

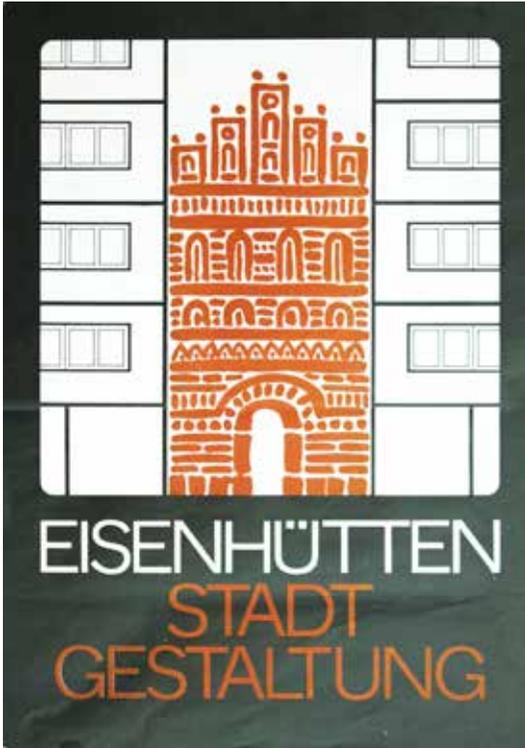


Figure 5: Stadtgestaltung Eisenhüttenstadt. Poster, ed. Municipality of Eisenhüttenstadt, Urban Planning Department, 1982

10 Documented in Interviews led in three industrial cities, Karl-Marx-Stadt (today: Chemnitz), Bitterfeld, and Eisenhüttenstadt, in 1987. See: NIETHAMMER, Lutz – PLATO, Alexander von – WIERLING, Dorothee. *Die volkseigene Erfahrung. Eine Archäologie des Lebens in der Industrieprovinz der DDR. 30 Biographische Eröffnungen*. Berlin : Rowohlt, 1991, 640 p.

11 As an ideal New Town outlined by the city's most influential leading architect, see: LEUCHT, Kurt W. *Die erste neue Stadt in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik. Planungsgrundlagen und -ergebnisse von Stalinstadt*. Berlin (DDR) : Verlag Technik, 1957, 98 p.

Thirdly, in 1980 Eisenhüttenstadt opened a Local History Museum in response to public interest in the developing history during those years. The Museum was not located in the New Town, as one would have expected due to the model character of the town, but in the old quarter of Furstenberg, where it was housed in a former entrepreneur's Art Nouveau-style villa. It presented traditional crafts instead of the socialist lifestyle. The project of a socialist future had already gradually dissolved before the civic revolution of 1989.

*The End of the Future and the Conflict of History (post-1990 years)*

The end of the GDR in 1990 hit the town hard, as it lost its economic purpose and politico-cultural background. Once declared the core of the working class in this underdeveloped, backward part of the country, the town's industries now had to match the challenges of capitalist production and the loss of political importance. After years of uncertainty, the steel mill was successfully privatised, but all other industries collapsed. Thousands of workplaces were lost during the first half of the 1990s and, to date, the town has lost almost half of its population. Thus, a severe crisis hit the city, both financially and morally. For years, officials refused to think about a future without industry. Great initiatives were taken to soften the economic collapse, but little was done to think about the future position of the town. Post-unification blues had a grip on both the unemployed and the younger generation, as shown by Johanna Ickert's 2006 film, "Eisenhüttenstadt", and the photographs by Petra Gall taken in 1994.



Figure 6: Teenagers (Photo: Petra Gall, 1993)

On the official side, the heritage of Eisenhüttenstadt, with the exception of its architecture, was concealed as it seemed to have been poisoned by the communist past of the town. On the symbolic level, the town's coat of arms of 1974, showing the steel works, a high-rise building and a dove as a symbol of peace, were replaced by a business logo on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the New Town.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, the restoration of the inner districts of the New Town, which had been under preservation since the 1980s, was completed over many years with subsidies provided on the state level. Pre-fab housing units, according to the declining population, had been demolished on the outskirts of town, effecting a concentration of inhabitants in the inner districts.

In opposition to this, after 1990, Eisenhüttenstadt definitely gained increasing outside recognition as a heritage and historical site. Already in 1993, the Berlin Academy of Arts held a workshop in Eisenhüttenstadt to debate the outstanding planning and historical significance of the New Town within post-war German history. A widely recognised exhibition was organised by the German Historical Museum, which compared Eisenhüttenstadt to Wolfsburg, Nazi Germany's car manufacturing city of the late 1930s. At the end of the 1990s, four monographs, dozens of articles in periodicals and a number of other book publications had been issued, focusing on the New Town's historical and urbanistic development and ambivalently branding the town as one of historical relevance and as a lieu de mémoire.<sup>13</sup>

Today, Eisenhüttenstadt's significance as a New Town and a model town of socialist post-war reconstruction is well known to specialists, but there is little heritage tourism, due to a lack of municipal public relations and tourist infrastructure. Following the present municipal Internet presentation, Eisenhüttenstadt is still a town of economic growth, good living conditions close to Nature, and a good location for a professional career in industry. This is exactly what official publications during the 1960s and 1970s had already emphasised under the auspices of "real-existing" socialism. Thus, a split image of the town can be considered. There is the self-perception of being an industrial town with favourable living conditions on the one side with still 45% of all jobs being in industry, and, on the other side, an outside perspective regarding the urban and industrial heritage of Eisenhüttenstadt as being something special in comparison to other New Towns and within the industrial landscape of Germany.

### **Local Participation for the Recognition of Cultural Heritage in Velenje**

In the early 2010s, the Slovenian town of Velenje participated in an EU-sponsored project "New Post-Socialist Town: Competitive and Attractive" (ReNewTown). The project focused on reducing the disparities in the quality of the urban environment of post-socialist towns.<sup>14</sup> During the implementation of the project, the strong involvement of Velenje residents in the revitalisation process became evident.<sup>15</sup> This can hardly come as a surprise, since voluntary work and people's participation in urban development

12 For which the city administration did not engage in any project concerning the New Town's historical development. For private initiative see: LUDWIG, A. *Eisenhüttenstadt...*, and SCHMIDT, Lutz (Ed.). *Einblicke - 50 Jahre EKO Stahl*. Eisenhüttenstadt: EKO Stahl GmbH, 2000, 399 p.

13 See footnote 3 and LUDWIG, Andreas. Eisenhüttenstadt. In: SABROW, Martin (Ed.). *Erinnerungsorte in der DDR*. München: C.H.Beck, 2009, pp. 128-138.

14 <<http://www.renewtown.eu/>>

15 WĘCŁAWOWICZ, Grzegorz. *Transnational Development Strategy for the Post-Socialist Cities of Central Europe*. Warsaw: Polish Academy of Sciences; Institute of Geography and Spatial Organization, 2013, p. 25.

had deep roots in the history of modern Velenje.<sup>16</sup> The local community had always actively participated in debating and defining the town's cultural heritage, not only in helping to build the town. Recognition of this participation was contested during the different periods in the town history. The argument is that while, on the national level, Velenje still lacks recognition as a town of cultural importance, locally the town prides itself as an industrial, new, modern socialist town and as one of the economic and cultural capitals of the region.<sup>17</sup>

### *History*

Velenje is a town in the Šaleška Valley of north-eastern Slovenia. Before World War Two, the capital of the valley used to be the town of Šoštanj, while Velenje was a provincial market beneath Velenje Castle. In the late 18th century, coal – lignite – was discovered. The main shaft and later the power plant building were situated between Šoštanj and Velenje in the village of Pesje. Neither the image nor the identity of Velenje was affected by the emerging industry. In communist Yugoslavia after the Second World War, new economic plans demanded an increase in coal production. The Valley faced the migration of new workers and the problems of their accommodation. In the first post-war decade, a new mining colony, New Velenje, was under construction near the main shaft. In the mid-1950s, the initiatives for planning a new, modern town for about 30 000 people came from local authorities and managers. Already by the late-1950s, instead of heavy industry, the priority turned towards light industry and consumer goods. As the Velenje Coal Mine Company sought a solution to provide jobs for the miners' wives, old company houses were offered to the Gorenje Company which manufactured household appliances. The company soon faced intensive growth and received international recognition during the 1960s. Since then, Velenje has been considered a Yugoslav, and nowadays Slovenian, industrial centre, the fifth-largest town in the country, with the population remaining at approximately 35 000.

### *Novo (New) Velenje – Just a Mining Colony (1945 – 1955)*

Although the post-war Yugoslav Federal and Slovenian Republican plans demanded that the Velenje Coal Mine Company increase coal extraction, they did not provide funds for the accommodation of the newly arriving workers. For the socialist Federal and Republican authorities, building a new, modern town for miners was not seen as necessary – a mining colony was considered to be sufficient.<sup>18</sup> At that time, in the heat of the Cold War, Yugoslavian / Slovenian authorities were concerned with building the New Town of Nova Gorica, on the Yugoslav – Italian border. It was expected that Nova Gorica would become “the small New Belgrade”, “the westernmost beacon to

16 The town's museum published a special publication about the volunteers and the voluntary work during town's most increased development after the World War II.: JEDLOVČNIK, Janja. *Mi gradimo nov svet in novo pomlad. Prostovoljne delovne akcije v Velenju in okolici ter velenjski prostovoljci in brigadirji [We build new world and new spring. Voluntary working actions and volunteers in Velenje]. Velenje: Muzej, 2014, 119 p.* In tourist promotion material of the Municipality of Velenje one can be informed about the meaning of the volunteers in building the town in the 1950s: <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kO\\_CGH3Zx\\_fw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kO_CGH3Zx_fw)> (accessed 16 November 2016). The Youth organization in Velenje promotes voluntary work among young people as a practice that has its deep roots in Velenje's history: Prostovoljstvo je v Velenju doma! [Voluntary Work is Home in Velenje!]. <<http://www.mladizaveleje.si/novice/prostovoljstvo-je-v-velenju-doma/>> (accessed 16 November 2016).

17 In 2012, Velenje was one of the Maribor's partner towns of the European Capital of Culture.

18 ŽGANK, Nestl. *Spomini "rdečega kralja"*. Edited by Damijan Kljajič and Vlado Vrbič. Ljubljana: Karantanija, 1999, 267 p.

alert to the danger of the reactionary West”,<sup>19</sup> and a socialist town that would “shine over the border”.<sup>20</sup>

In the late 1940s, a modern version of a mining colony called Novo Velenje (New Velenje) was planned near the main shaft – today called the 'Old' Shaft. The buildings planned for Velenje miners were a great example of Functionalism. Living spaces were South-facing, whereas additional facilities and all the stairways faced North. The shape of the buildings was very close to the common notions of miners, such as traditional gable roofs, instead of flat, modern ones. The apartments offered all the possible conveniences of the time and had basements, laundries, and an abundance of greenery around the building.<sup>21</sup> In 1953, Novo Velenje received a new Primary School, planned as a pavilion type, which was a Western style of school architecture and at the time still very rare in Slovenia. Since the 1960s, New Velenje became known as “Upper Velenje”. Although the Old Shaft from 1888 was declared a local heritage site in 2008, this part of the town still, according to some local architects unfairly, lacks recognition as a heritage site.<sup>22</sup>



Figure 7: New Velenje with Velenje Castle on the left and the Main (now 'Old') shaft in the back, early 1950s (Museum Velenje)

19 *Nova Gorica*, 11 June 1948, p. 13.

20 IVANŠEK, France (Ed.). *Hommage à Edvard Ravnikar 1907 – 1993*. Ljubljana : France in Marta Ivanšek, 1995, p. 183.

21 KORPNIK, Nande. Pripoved Velenja. In: *Arhitekturna delavnica Velenje 2000*. Velenje : Mestna občina Velenje, 2000, pp. 7-8.

22 Ana Kladnik, Interview with architect Nande Korpnik, 2007.

*Local Initiatives for Modern Velenje in the late 1950s*

The management of the Coal Mine Company was competing with the traditional Slovenian coal-mining area in the Zasavje region, trying to prove that Velenje was not just a backward provincial mining company. From the mid-1950s, Yugoslavia's new economic policy, called "Workers' Self-management", enabled the Velenje Coal Mine Company to invest the money of the increased production into building a new town centre at the bottom of the valley. In addition, together with local authorities, they decided to activate the inhabitants to assist in the construction of the new town (e.g. to regulate the flow of the river, etc.) in their time off after work, in "voluntary work" schemes. The response was massive. It is estimated that Velenje inhabitants contributed approximately one million hours of voluntary work in building the new town centre. The new urban plan was designed by a team of architects from Ljubljana and the official opening of the new centre took place in 1959. The main square represented a concentration of modern architecture: the two most dominant buildings were the headquarters of the Coal Mine Company and the House of Culture. The Town Hall building, situated on one side of the square, was the most consistent derivation of Le Corbusier's expression.

In 1957, still during construction work on the new town centre, Velenje achieved an important success that caused jealousy among miners and mine managers of other Slovenian mines. Namely, Velenje Castle was awarded the location of the Coal Mining Museum of Slovenia. For this purpose, the Castle had to be thoroughly renovated, mostly at the expense of the Velenje Coal Mine Company.<sup>23</sup> Together with the renovation of the Castle, there was also the collection of Museum exhibits. In 1966, the Castle housed 13 exhibition rooms and 500m<sup>2</sup> of exhibition space.<sup>24</sup> The first and only Museum in town was therefore dedicated to Mining and was housed in the prestigious premises of a medieval castle, a visual landmark of the Šaleška Valley.

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23 Anton Seher, *The History of the Coalmine Velenje*. Coalmine Velenje 1998, p. 563.

24 Anton Seher, *The History of the Coalmine Velenje*. Coalmine Velenje 1998, p. 563.



Figure 8: Founding document of the Coal Mining Museum of Slovenia to be established in Velenje Castle, 1957 (Seher 1998)

### *1960s and early 1970s: "Socialist Miracle" or "Our Little New York"*

In interwar Slovenia, there was a prevalent resistance to modern solutions of urbanism and architecture. It would only be in post-1948 Slovenia, after the Tito-Stalin split, when modernism would play a role in presenting the country as progressive and open. The new urban plan for Velenje received recognition in 1962 by the Prešernova Prize, the most prestigious award for cultural developments in Slovenia in the past year.

Comparing conditions in the traditional Zasavje mining region with Velenje leads to the conclusion that new modern Velenje was distinguished from other mining towns or mining colonies. Although the Republican and Federal leaders at first were not interested in the plans for a new Velenje, or were even opposed to them, in the 1960s they used it as a showcase how socialism is being built in Yugoslavia.

Between 1958 and 1969, Yugoslav President Josip Broz Tito visited Velenje four times, claiming that this was how socialism and a workers' town should be built. In the 1960s and 1970s, Velenje was also the site of high-ranking delegation visits from the Soviet Union, Poland, Romania, Western and Non-Alignment countries. The town was presented as a "socialist miracle". On the other hand, within the Yugoslav Federation, Velenje became known especially because of the Gorenje Company, which was opening its shops and services around the country. On a school visit from one of the Serbo-Croatian speaking republics to Slovenia (and Velenje), the new modern socialist town was described by pupils as "our little New York".



Figure 9: Postcard of the new town centre of Velenje under the construction, late 1950s (Museum Velenje)

*Crisis of the 1980s: Mining Town vs. Modern Town vs. 'Old' Town – Local Cultural Heritage Debates*

Velenje branded itself as a new, modern, socialist town and, at the same time, cultivated its mining identity. Between 1958 and 1969, Tito visited Velenje four times. After his last visit, the decision was made to construct a monument in Velenje in honour of the Yugoslav President. The ten-metre monument was financed by voluntary contributions of Velenje workers and was opened on the main square in 1977.



Figure 10: Tito's Monument in Velenje (Alenka Bartulović, 2010; <<http://www.dedi.si/dediscina/325-spomenik-josipu-brozu-titu-v-velenju>>)

During the 1980s, the Gorenje Company found itself in serious trouble and, in addition, Velenje simultaneously became an ecological catastrophe. All this had a strong effect on the city identity which by now had also turned to acknowledge older periods of local culture. By the 1980s, the Museum of Slovenian Coal Mines in Velenje Castle included an exhibition of the Workers' and National Liberation Movements in the Šalek Valley, as well as an exhibition on local Baroque Art. In the 1980s, local professionals and politicians started to debate how to recognise older, pre-1945 urban architecture and how to revitalise the "Old" Velenje beneath the Castle.<sup>25</sup> On the one hand, pre-socialist architecture of Velenje gained more recognition. In 1983, three churches, three castles, three villas, and a 19th-century peasant house were declared cultural heritage sites of local importance. On the other hand, at the end of the 1980s, two young local architects started a debate on Velenje's modern architecture. They criticised the city's architecture of the 1970s and 1980s, which, in their opinion, did not continue the idea of the original urban plan of the late 1950s. They also argued that the late 1950s' architecture of Velenje represented the architectural heritage.<sup>26</sup>

25 Questions from the delegates: The Old Velenje as a part of the cultural heritage. In: *Naš čas*, 1988 (14. 1.), p. 2. RAVNIKAR, Tone. About Cultural Heritage. In: *Naš čas*, 1986 (17. 7.), p. 2. Museum exhibitions at the Castle. In: *Naš čas*, 1986 (31. 7.), p. 5. PLANKO, Lado. On Cultural Heritage (Gorenje has renovated Villa Herbestein). In: *Naš čas*, 1986 (27. 11.), p. 6.

26 KORPNIK, Nande – VUČINA, Edo. The Disintegration of the Town's Architecture? In: *Naš čas*, 1989 (1. 6.), p. 5.

### *New Wave around 2000*

In the late 1990s, local debates about heritage were considering how to place Velenje on the map of modern towns, as well as how to cultivate its pre-socialist and industrial / mining heritage. In 1999, the Museum of Slovenian Coal Mines was relocated from Velenje Castle to the Old Shaft and renamed the Velenje Coal Mine Museum. On the other hand, the Museum at the Castle was renamed as the Velenje Museum. It now included an exhibition on the life and work in "Old" Velenje and an exhibition on how Velenje became a town – i.e. planning and construction of the "New" Velenje. In 2006, the House of Culture became a cultural heritage site of local importance and, soon afterwards, the Old Shaft, with the Mining Museum, became a cultural heritage site of local importance as well.



Figure 11: Postcard from Velenje with the House of Culture, 1963 (Museum Velenje)

Today, Velenje represents one of the most important industrial centres in Slovenia and is the country's fifth-largest town. The main employers are still the Coal Mine Company and the Gorenje Company. During the last two decades, Velenje has succeeded in being transformed from a highly degraded and polluted town into a well rehabilitated town. As a New Town built within the system of Yugoslav Self-management, Velenje is only slowly gaining recognition among specialists. In contrast, tourist possibilities offered by the town's official tourist office website are numerous and diverse.<sup>27</sup> As a "must see", the site includes various Nature walks,<sup>28</sup> an architectural guide emphasizing

27 <<http://www.velenje-tourism.si/en/velenje>> (accessed 16 November 2016).

28 <<http://www.velenje-tourism.si/en/must-see/natural-heritage>> (accessed 16 November 2016).

a walk through the modern city,<sup>29</sup> visits to the Coal Mine Museum and Velenje Museum,<sup>30</sup> as well as a socialist adventure experience, with one of the highlights being a walking tour across Tito Square, boasting the highest monument to Tito in the world.<sup>31</sup>

### Conclusion

Both Eisenhüttenstadt and Velenje are mid-sized New Towns of the post-war period which had an industrial core in common. Both were symbols of modernisation, a modern lifestyle and a socialist method of future development. Heritage as a form of historical and cultural sensitivity in both cities emerged especially in the 1980s and continued during the 1990s to the present day. At the same time, the differences are obvious: from the outset, Eisenhüttenstadt was a symbol of building socialism in East Germany and was already presented as a place of history in 1960. This strong identity with the socialist nation made history a difficult matter after 1990, although the architecture and urban planning are appreciated. With the collapse of the socialist state, Eisenhüttenstadt suffered a severe loss of political importance and economic stability. Modern Velenje, on the other hand, was planned and supported locally. In the 1960s, the city became one of the most important industrial centres, which it remains to this day. Its cultural significance and recognition increase mainly from the inside and include its modern, industrial and socialist heritage.

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29 <<http://www.velenje-tourism.si/en/must-see/architectural-heritage>> (accessed 16 November 2016).

30 <<http://www.velenje-tourism.si/en/must-see/museums>> (accessed 16 November 2016).

31 <<http://www.velenje-tourism.si/en/adventures/socialist-experience-in-velenje>> (accessed 16 November 2016). Today Tito's monument is registered (but not declared) on the national list of stationary cultural heritage.

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