Iconic Industry

The Making of Meaning in the Lower Area of Vítkovice

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Abstract

Drawing on cultural sociology and memory studies, this thesis offers a new framework for understanding post-industrial urban development. Focusing on the case of the Lower Area of Vítkovice in Ostrava, the Czech Republic, the author explores the meaning-making processes taking place in an area that has undergone a conversion. Interviews with 16 stakeholders involved both directly and indirectly in the current activities taking place in the Lower Area of Vítkovice serve as the main source of data. The conversion turned a brownfield, which as such, has been a contested terrain, into a cultural educational site. By placing meanings at the forefront of the interest, the author reveals a cultural structure that connects the post-industrial site with a larger, local, urban narration. The struggle to maintain the area as a cultural heritage site, while converting it into a living part of the city exemplifies the conflict between the past and the future, which is typical for post-industrial sites that were success-makers in the past yet are trouble-makers in the present. The process of making sense of the transformation of the Lower Area of Vítkovice has been navigated by understanding the area as a chance to reverse the negative narration of Ostrava city.
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1 Introduction

“Man makes his own history, but he does not make it out of the whole cloth; he does not make it out of conditions chosen by himself, but out of such as he finds close at hand.”

(Marx n.d., 5)

September 1998 marked the tapping of the last dose of iron from the blast furnace in the Lower Area of Vítkovice. Many of the onlookers present that day watched it with a mixture of sadness, relief and nervous anticipation. This, in many aspects unique, place where coal was extracted and iron was made in the vicinity of Ostrava city center, the Eastern metropolis of the Czech Republic, was closing down after 162 years of continuous operation, leaving behind huge iron structures and environmentally degraded land. In the turmoil of the wild 1990s, when the vast re-structuralization of the national economy was underway, the former symbols of progress and success advanced by the communist regime were left to decay, to be neglected, and seemingly unwanted.

Yet, the recent high-profile restoration of the area carried out by private-public cooperation has averted the (both physical and symbolic) degradation of the Lower Area of Vítkovice. It has furnished the immense, cold and rusty industrial facilities with cultural and educational activities. The transformation has stirred the interest of both local visitors and foreign tourists, making the entire city a more attractive destination than it has ever been. How are these changes reflected in the meanings related to the Lower Area of Vítkovice?

Places are not only geographical locations, material forms and objective structures, they are also invested with meanings, values and social experiences (Gieryn 2000, Smith 2008). And meanings occupy an important role in social life (Reed 2009, 2). The way we relate to the space we act in stands in relation to how we value it, what it means to us. Jaworsky (2016, 23) highlights that it is meaning itself that must be at the center of the academic inquiry in order to understand the social and political changes taking place around us.
The Lower Area of Vítkovice can be seen as a memorial of not only the consequences that the shift from a socialist to a capitalist form of economy and political system have had but also of the changes in attitudes in Czech society towards heavy industry and its remainders. The state had a monopoly of symbolic domination over the people that was forged by “expropriation of the public semantic space” (Možný 1991, 45-46). The collapse of the communist regime was trigged by the collapse of consensus in the dominant discourse that was anchoring the popular understanding of the role of heavy industry in society (see e.g. Pullmann 2011). The collapse of the ideological apparatus of National Socialism loosened the practice of meaning-making about places. Various localities thus faced a disintegration of place-related meanings that was exacerbated by the structural changes in the economy. The Lower Area of Vítkovice was one of them.

The current project therefore maps the meaning-making processes and the sedimentation of meanings in the Lower Area of Vítkovice after the fall of the communist regime.

1.1 What do we do with what is left behind?

Before anything else “…the forces of industrialization helped to [divide] the world between the advanced industrialized nations (…) and the underdeveloped, non-industrialized nations” (LeGates and Stout 2011b, 17), so that they could later become geographically diverse and affect societies all around the world. The citizens of so-called third-world cities, in China, India or Brazil, are engaging in today’s manifestations of what the first-world countries are now seeing in decline –
industrialization (Byrne 2002, 279, Kift 2011). Consider the example of the iron and steel industries. While in 1980, China was responsible for 5 percent of the global production, in 2014, China generated around 60 percent of global iron and steel production (World Steel Association 2015).

The decline in industry that today’s western world is privileged to witness is therefore a geographically relative term (Cossons 2009). The global processes of economic relocation from manufacturing to services affect concrete locations. As this shift in economy has failed to be smooth, some areas see a boom in their population, while others experience shrinkage in the number of urban inhabitants. This issue brings about not only the weakening of a city’s political and economic significance (Richardson and Nam 2014, Rumpel and Slach 2012) but also environmental challenges (LeGates and Stout 2011a, 319). The importance of urban areas in tackling environmental and social problems is increasingly recognized and stressed; cities should be made “inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable” (United Nations 2015).

Despite the global character of the phenomena, local experiences are unique. The cities in post-Soviet countries have had to face the challenges of declining industry at the turn of this century, too, when the urgent need to transform their societies emerged following the collapse of communism (Pike 2009, 55). De-industrialization joins the dissolution of socialist regimes in triggering the urban decline that threatens to leave these abandoned industrial areas and facilities behind as unheeded symbols of former success and today’s impotence (Rave 2014, 312). Yet, post-socialist cities have often been neglected as a research subject (Petrovic 2005). Ostrava stands out as an unique city with a very high number of brownfield sites, the vast majority of which come from former mining and metallurgical industries (Kunc et al. 2014, 116).

The new global demands challenge the beaten track of city management, forcing us to change trends in urban planning as well as urban living. In order to preserve nature and protect green areas, zones that have already been spoiled by human activity must be redeveloped (Loures 2015, 72). With the recession of industry in many places throughout the world, the question, ‘What do we do with what is left behind?’ has emerged.
The industrial remains of the modern era have become sites of immense interest to different stakeholders. Within the public sphere, communities, legislators, activists and business owners are sharing interests traditionally seen as the purview of urban planning practitioners and real estate developers (Frisch 1998). The post-industrial landscape is a compelling interdisciplinary domain for scientists as well. It offers fertile soil for researchers from various disciplines – historians, architects, engineers, ecologists, artists and sociologists, among others. Studies on post-industrial land, its reclamation, reconstruction and role in people’s lives represent a challenge on two levels. On the analytical level, one can observe the labyrinthine relations within and towards the places of former industry. On the theoretical level, one must consider which theoretical angle is the most fruitful in approaching the study object.

This thesis examines a small fragment of what the processes of de-industrialization have brought about. The recent restoration of the technical facilities in the Lower Area of Vítkovice in the Czech Republic provides a vivid and complex example of a redevelopment process that was not merely informed by economic interests but also by the meaning and value imbued to the particular space. This thesis examines the dynamics of the local meaning-making processes. It serves as a case study of so-called brownfield redevelopment in a post-communist city where industrial objects have been infused with new, cultural and educational, functions. It confronts existing literature on the topic with data gathered by the author, who originally comes from the region.

1.2 The aim and the research problem

Historian Michal Pullmann explores the collapse of National Socialism in the Czech Republic through shedding light on the semiotics of the collapse – on how those using the vocabulary of the ideology, affirming dedication to the regime, managed to push through novel and nonconformist impulses and needs (Pullmann 2011). In a similar vein, our focus can be centered on the words and concepts respondents use to talk about and to describe the Lower Area of Vítkovice and its transformation. These vocabularies contain and express the expectations, ideas and collective representations held towards the area and therefore, the meanings. The pluralization of topics in the society of the 1980s was very slow and rigid (Pullmann 2011, 72). As the power structures lost their
rigidity after the Velvet Revolution in 1989, the public space could be filled with a variety of topics, demands and expectations.

Following this line of thought, I explore the sedimentation of meanings following the democratization of the Czech Republic. To investigate the meaning-making processes in the Lower Area of Vítkovice against the backdrop of its transformation from an operational industrial zone into a post-industrial cultural and educational site, the thesis has been guided by the following questions:

_In what ways have people considered the area important throughout its history?_

_How do people make sense of the changes (connected to the conversion) that took place in the area?_

To collect data to answer these questions, I have interviewed stakeholders involved both directly and indirectly in the current activities taking place in the Lower Area of Vítkovice. The method of interviews, rather than, for example, the focus group method, allows for an open and intimate conversation in which a respondent and their account garner full attention within the time appropriated.

The interviews were carried out in October 2015 in Ostrava and Prague. I interviewed 16 persons in 15 interviews. A set of possible respondents was compiled before the commencement of the fieldwork. The individuals were chosen given their expertise and relation to the Lower Area of Vítkovice in order to gain a full and diverse picture of the transformation of the area, including the context of the redevelopment.

### 1.3 Rationale

In 2015, the Czech government had to decide whether to “break” or maintain the territorial limits to brown coal extraction in Horní Jiřetín, North Bohemia, which had become legally binding through a governmental resolution in 1991. The government decided to keep extraction within the limits; nevertheless, the case will have to be discussed again almost 30 years later, around the year 2020 (Lukáč 2015). Heavy industry still is an intractable and thorny issue for the Czech Republic as demonstrated by this long-lasting clash pervading all sectors of society – the political, the activist, the economic and the everyday.
As Loures and Burley (2012) argue, public participation in redevelopment projects is crucial. The way local communities spell out ideas about what the area was and what it is becoming aids the understanding of the dynamics and the ramifications of post-industrial redevelopment. There is great potential in approaches highlighting the importance of research into a social actor’s understanding of the historic industrial landscape since that is the “key to valuing” of such sites (Cossons 2005, 11). Further, according to Dickinson (2001), research into and increased understanding of the meanings and discourses framing urban development contributes to determining the role of rejected and void structures, areas and places in the landscape.

Drawing from the above, this study joins the international debate about urban development and the role of declining areas in it (e.g. Gotham 2001, Loures 2015, Fragner and Zikmund 2009). It also contributes to the field of (cultural) sociology and suggests possible fruitful overlaps with other disciplines, such as human geography.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

The thesis is divided into seven chapters. Chapter 2 outlines the theoretical framework and discusses the possible approaches to study meaning production related to places. The thesis relies on cultural sociology as it allows for analysis of cultural structures and the meanings that comprise them. The project also relies on memory studies that address how the past ensconces in physical locations. Chapter 3 describes the methods I used to investigate research problem; it explains the process of gathering data through interviews, introduces the respondents and outlines the challenges and ethical aspects of the research. Chapter 4 introduces the Lower Area of Vítkovice, providing the reader with information about its location. It also describes the key objects that were reconstructed under the transformation project until 2015, when the fieldwork took place. Chapter 5 goes back in history and using the collected data and related literature, develops an account of the Lower Area of Vítkovice until it was decided to reconstruct the area and open it to the public. It therefore discusses the role of the area in Ostrava’s urban landscape in the late 20th century, the process of cessation of industrial activity there and finally, it reconstructs the discursive negotiations that preceded commencement of the project of reconstruction and regeneration.
Chapter 6 builds upon the previous chapter and discusses the meaning-making process in the reconstructed area. It considers the Lower Area of Vítkovice a place of memories, yet it also utilizes the concept of iconicity in the analysis, claiming the reconstruction has strengthened the iconic power of the site. Finally, the chapter explores how the converted Lower Area of Vítkovice is narrated as a place of new functions and purposes. In particular, it argues that given the positive attention the converted Lower Area of Vítkovice has attracted, it has been used as a chance to reverse the negative discourse on Ostrava as an industrial, black and “unsuccessful” city. The final chapter concludes the thesis by offering answers to the research questions stated in this introduction and situating the findings and observations within the literature on post-industrial urban development. It also reflects on the theoretical approach and offers possible future research topics.
2 Theory and analytical framework

In social scientific research, there have been many attempts to understand and explain the complexity of modern urban forms: from understanding places as scenes of social interactions, thus stating that places are generated by action (e.g. Goffman 1959, Giddens 1979) to theorizing places as a structural result of either transforming capitalism or symbolic codes (e.g. Harvey 1989, Soja 1989, Eliade 1959, see also Smith 1999).

This thesis refuses the mundane conception of space as a configuration of things. Spaces and places are more than this, more than the visible and the material. That is why the problem at hand, namely the exploration of meaning-making processes at a transforming post-industrial urban site, requires an approach that enables understanding of the relationship between material objects and the process of meaning-making. The approach ought to respect the agency and contingency included in the “making of places,” which includes designing, using, interpreting and remembering places (Gieryn 2000, 469).

While this goal might lead us to use Henri Lefebvre’s (1991) triadic model of space production that aims to analyze, among other aspects, the symbolic dimension of space, the only independent variable the theory allows is late capitalism, which is claimed to influence space production in all of its layers. As will be explained further below, I therefore consider Lefebvre’s approach inspiring yet unproductive in regard to my research. In search of an approach that factors in cultural structures, where collective representations, grammars of categorization and other meaning-making elements are rendered, I invite cultural sociology and memory studies into the discussion. The perspective of cultural sociology places the meaning-making process at the forefront of the researcher’s inquiry into social life, refusing to succumb to deterministic explanations. Memory studies offer a vigilant way to address the temporal element in urban change and the role of people in it.
This chapter introduces theories reacting to some of the ramifications of the urban space and its objects. These will be explored in relation to semiotics, cultural sociology and post-industrial urban development. In order to explain and scrutinize the research problem at hand, in the final section, I propose an analytical framework built on a cultural sociological understanding of meanings and their relation to materiality, combined with concepts from memory studies.

### 2.1 Place, society and meaning

Every human activity, relationship, institution and role is set in a place – home, work, the street, the mountains, a quarter. As natural as it seems to seek understanding of the places framing our actions, the recent turn toward the question of space can be attributed to the continuous processes of urbanization and globalization (Schmid 2008, 27, see also Agnew 2013). Accordingly, the main threads of understanding the significance of a place in society will be discussed.

The concept of place is different from other spatial concepts. For example, a place is not equal to a space. In social theory, a place can be defined as “a meaningful location” (Cresswell 2004, 7). The main difference is in the meaning that the place contains but space is missing. Space is anonymous, abstract and generic. Place is, on the other hand, meaningful, sensible, readable (Cresswell 2004, 10). As such, it has, according to Agnew (1987), three aspects: locale, the intimate and routine social interaction; location, the macro representation; and a sense of place, or subjective attachment to a place.

We find a similar triad at the core of an earlier theory developed by Henri Lefebvre – the theory of the production of space. By claiming that “[s]pace considered in isolation is an empty abstraction” (Lefebvre 1991, 12), Lefebvre sets out to examine the relations between space and social reality in a search of a unitary theory bridging the physical, the mental and the social. In order to do so, he maps the production of space and poses a triadic scheme (Lefebvre 1991, 33).

The first of the components is spatial practice. Spatial practice is a daily routine situated in an urban environment; it is shaped by what is perceived. It designates social space as a network of interactions and activities; it both advances and assumes the
social space in a dialectical process. The second component is representations of space. These are the imagined spaces, the spaces designed and invented within a spatial context informed by knowledge and ideology. Representations of spaces practically intervene into the production of spaces by constructing projects rooted in the spatial context that does not purport to be only symbolic. They are created by a system of verbal signs (definitions, theories) and also by the depiction of space in the form of maps and similar objects. The third element of the conceptual triad is representational spaces. These are spaces that are directly lived through images and symbols linked to the space connected to our imagination. They refer to the non-verbal system. Through the process of signification, they create a symbolic coating on the physical space. (Lefebvre 1991, 33, 38-39 and 42, Schmid 2008)

Space is the concentration of social relationships and individuals make themselves subjects of their space through action – spatial practice (Prigge 2008, 52). The representations of spaces point to spaces that are “planned to fit the vision and the requirements” of the mode of production in power (Guano 2002, 181). Yet, the level of spatial practices does not cede any agency to the actor since the sphere of spatial practice consists of pre-structured representations of spaces that pervade the everyday user’s experience (Löw 2008, 28). Lefebvre points out that the triad of “perceived-conceived-lived” cannot be handled as an abstract model for it is anchored in the concrete (Lefebvre 1991, 40). However, asserting that the elements of the triad are related to each other in a fluid and flexible way, he falls short of providing a cogent theoretical explanation of relations between the levels (e.g. Löw 2016).

Despite the fact that Lefebvre’s theory of production of space includes structural analysis and historical philosophy (Prigge 2008, 48), the theory assigns the material forms of a city and its cultural meanings to economic and political interests. The structural determinism of Lefebvre and his followers (e.g. Harvey 1985, Soja 1996) deprives actors of any agency and overlooks the potency of local (political) institutions and ordinary people (Gieryn 2000, see also Logan and Molotch 1987). The theory is thus a critique of capitalism and its forms of influence on physical structures and individuals, rather than a tool to analyze place-making struggles in urban environments. Lefebvre’s theory omits the cultural dimension of social reality.
Wanting to understand the meaning-making processes that have been taking place in the Lower Area of Vítkovice, I ask: How can the cultural dimension therefore be brought into the picture? An answer requires that we discuss the role of the system of signs in social life. Such a connection is the purview of semiology, a discipline inspired by Saussure (1959). At the core of structural semiology, we can find the concepts of signifier and signified. When material bearers of meanings (signifiers) articulate with concepts, associations or meanings (signifieds) a cultural structure emerges. It is the cultural structure that enables the communication of signs (Heiskala 2014).

How the system of signs operates in a specific environment – in this case, the urban environment – is explored by urban semiotics, which recognizes “the material structure of the built environment, the image of its inhabitants, the codes of meaning found articulating with space” (Gottdiener 1983, 101) as analytical objects and thus, sheds light on the interplay between meanings and the material.

Barthes (2005), who was the first to direct the semiotic lens towards a city, pointed out that the built environment of a city writes a language read by its inhabitants through usage and cognitive relating. Barthes pioneered in suggesting abundance in the correspondence between signifiers and signifieds in an urban environment. This point has been developed by several scholars. For example, Lynch (1960) understands the city more like the relations of people to the city than a built environment. While he hence approximates Lefebvre in his viewing the city as an “intricate web of relationships that is continuously produced and reproduced” (Schmid 2008, 41), he proposes a less direct way of interpretation, arguing that the meaning of a city is derived from this structural configuration as well as from its function. However, Krampen (1979) suggests that the meaning conveyed by function is insufficient and in order for signification to arise, urban objects must be viewed beyond their direct function.

How do meanings percolate within social life in the built urban environment if it is not through their functions and not through economic factors?

Cultural sociology is an approach that factors in meanings as collectively shared patterns and does not predetermine their formulation. Building on the Durkheimian sociological tradition (see Durkheim 1995 [1912]), Jakobson’s binary semiotics and the literary tradition of hermeneutics (see e.g. Ricoeur 1981), cultural sociology has been
interested in discourse, binary codes and narratives that are structured and underpinned by meanings (Larsen 2014). Its main focus is on the practical meanings expressed by how people talk about phenomena in their lives. This discourse constitutes culture, understood as a relatively autonomous and ubiquitous dimension of social life. Culture is not practical knowledge or day-to-day know-how; neither is it the invisible binding material of society. Culture is the common patterns of meanings, the codes and narratives that drive human actions (Alexander 2003).

Offering an analytic definition of culture as “the symbolic and ideational element of any social action, social relationship, or historical pattern,” a cultural sociological approach leads to explanation of social action from a perspective that makes meaning central (Reed and Alexander 2009, 380). The focus on meanings does not imply that the social is a hard structure, as in realism. On the contrary, it allows the social to crystalize in “landscapes of meaning” (Reed 2011, 92). These landscapes are in practice discursive formations, what people say and what they can say, how they frame what they say relying on certain collective representations (Reed 2011). Cultural sociology suggests that the nature of the social narrative reveals practical meanings and how they are structured. Every action is “embedded to some extent in a horizon of affect and meaning” (Alexander 2003, 12).

Durkheimian sociology analytically divides meanings from the material world, yet it is clear that culture has also its material form. In order to consider the relationship between the ideational signified and its material signifier, cultural sociology has reintroduced the terms icon and “iconicity” to describe the power of events, places and material objects to structure our ability to “notice, understand and remember” (Bartmanski and Alexander 2012, 7). The signified does not percolate only in the mind; it is experienced and felt by both body and soul. An idea is perceived to be an object in time and space (Alexander 2008a, 783). The idea of iconic power is a way to bridge the cultural and the material without making cultural studies necessarily material, rather the reverse. The force of iconic objects is anchored in not only the material but also in the symbolic emission that the object attains, has and perpetuates. As Bartmanski and Alexander write,

“Icons are aesthetic/material representations, yes, but they are also signifiers of the ideationally and affectively intuited signified. In other
words, their concrete materiality points beyond itself to the elusive but very real domains of feeling and thought.” (Bartmanski and Alexander 2012, 2)

It therefore follows that meanings are neither arbitrary nor a simple reflection of the physical space and its assigned function. The meaning of spaces and urban objects is conveyed beyond their function. Meanings themselves are in constant flux - they change over time and space. And this transformability of meaning is indeed of interest to the thesis.

Smith (1999) employs the cultural approach to analyze and understand places. Building on Durkheim and his followers (e.g. Eliade 1959), he proposes four elementary forms of place. These elementary forms of place oscillate between two pairs of binary oppositions: sacred and profane, and liminal and mundane. To be able to locate a place in the model of four elementary forms, it is necessary to examine the elementary place identities that are yielded by narrative frames. Narratives are created by place-specific activities, and are maintained and institutionalized by rituals and monuments (Smith 1999, 16-17). At the same time, Smith (1999, 34), anticipating criticism of the proposed model, confirms that the elementary forms of place recognize agency, interpretation and variability, allowing for fluctuation in meanings, later described, for example, by Biernacki (2012).

However, the overabundance of semiotic structures in a city recognized by Choay (1969) complicates the coding of physical space. The multicoding of urban space can lead to a rather arbitrary semiotic analysis of an arena. Nevertheless, such haphazard interpretations can be prevented by establishing a sociohistorical understanding that embraces the relationship between “spatial signifiers and the larger social system” (Gottdiener 1983, 111). Rather than an already established interpretation of the urban space, the technical and historical documentation and users’ or producers’ discourse become a part of the dataset. At this point, Gottdiener warns that the approach requires a delineation of the role of an ideology in the production of space (Gottdiener 1983). Yet, as Alexander and Reed suggest (2009), it is culture that is wrongly understood by Gottdiener as ideology. Thus, what should be comprehended is not the role of ideology, but the role of culture in the form of actors’ discourses and the ways they interpret the social world of meanings.
2.2 Place and memory

Memory studies have long been concerned with individual memory, the ability of a person to remember and recall. In the early twentieth century, Maurice Halbwachs (1992) called attention to the collective nature of memory and enriched the psychological dimensions of memory with its social and cultural implications. Society cannot remember in the same manner as an individual can; nevertheless, the collective memory of a society can become part of an individual’s recollections. Since this thesis explores the shared memories via individual accounts, this connection is further illuminated by Aleida Assmann (2008a, 50):

“Autobiographical memories cannot be embodied by another person, but they can be shared with others. Once they are verbalized in the form of a narrative or represented by a visual image, the individual's memories become part of an intersubjective symbolic system and are, strictly speaking, no longer a purely exclusive and unalienable property. By encoding them in the common medium of language, they can be exchanged, shared, corroborated, confirmed, corrected, disputed, and even appropriated. In addition to that, it is sometimes notoriously difficult to distinguish what one has experienced oneself from what one has been told and afterward incorporated into one's own stock of autobiographical memories.”

This aspect of memory – collective, yet individual – differentiates it from history. History is rooted in time successions and connections between objects. It is everyone’s and no one’s at the same time; memory, on the other hand, is based in spaces, images and things (Nora 1989, 9).

In what follows, the collective aspect of memory will be discussed, together with the centrality that space occupies in memory and meaning. The memory studies in this thesis account for the historicity of the Lower Area of Vítkovice and its rootedness in the local culture. Understanding memory as collective and place-specific phenomena contributing to the structuring of social life complements the cultural sociological approach in the examination of meanings as drivers for social action.

The rapport between memory and place is the domain of memory studies, a part of the sociology of knowledge and predominantly pioneered by the work of Maurice Halbwachs (1992). Halbwachs proposes that our memories are common to a group of
people who we are close to or had been close to. Therefore, he puts forward a concept of collective memory that covers the social aspect of sharing a memory within variously defined collectives. Simultaneously, our memories are part of the totality of thoughts, whether new ones, from a few days back or very old ones (Halbwachs 1992, 52). The concept of collective memory has been used in various ways and contexts and it can also be understood as synonymous to other memory-related terms, such as, for example, “public memory” (Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Levy 2011, 16).

The materiality of spaces is essential for both cultural and collective memory. Memory is “framed by [various] spatial reference points” (Truc 2011, 148), which allow us to support and direct our memories, but at the same time, collective memory “structures the space in which we live” (Ibid.). Truc (2011) suggests that memory has constitutive power and therefore, it has its spatial consequences. The relation between memory and place is mutual. Memory is ensconced in the environments surrounding us. The spatial frame to memory makes the memory real and enables commemoration. Collective memory, in turn, enables a place to gain its position in time and space (Oláh 2016, 82).

Pierre Nora describes such a mechanism using the term lieux de mémoire. The “sites of memory” represent the “embodiment of memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists” (Nora 1989, 7). Sites of memory are created because milieux de mémoire, real environments of memory, no longer exist. Lieux de mémoire thus make the memory real to an extent that allows its commemoration, whether it is tradition, historical event or values. To uphold the historical continuity, it is necessary to participate and thus, perpetuate the link to the culture of a society.

While some recent studies have developed concepts of “remembering to forget” and “forgetting to remember” when discussing the collective nature of memory (eg. Chang and Huang 2005), lieux de mémoire would in this terminology translate as “remembering to remember,” because the sites of memory embody the will to stop time, to prevent forgetting, to materialize a memory (Nora 1989, 19).

Assmann expands on Nora’s writings and claims that places provide memory with continuity because as physical locations, they might outlast generations by creating concrete settings for it (Assmann 2011, 282). It is the material relics that embody the proliferation of presence and past. The past deposited in such places can become
significant to the present day if a legible link between the two can be created. In other words, if new relevance is given to long-ignored objects, ruins and relics may turn into the centers of today’s attention because “the spiritual legacy of the past becomes accessible to the senses through the informed eye” (Assmann 2011, 293).

Similarly, other scholars argue that a whole landscape is a certain record of the past; it is a testimony of past activities. A landscape engages with the passage of time and captures “human beings’ practical involvement with their environments” (Ingold 1993, 171, see also Roca, Claval, and Agnew 2011).

Drawing from the discussion above, the theoretical framework that I rely on in this thesis is based on an approach that synthesizes cultural sociology and memory studies. In this work, I therefore understand meanings as cultural patterns in speech/talk, ways of structuring arguments and putting forward explanations. Such meanings will be examined in relation to the physical/material place of the Lower Area of Vítkovice that, thanks to its aesthetic strength and visual pervasiveness, has iconic potential, as will be further examined in the analysis. Throughout the thesis, I will explore to what extent this iconic potential has been utilized. Further, I recognize the shared and collective nature of memories and recollections that might be framed by the location in question. The concept of sites of memory will be used in particular as a frame for explanation of the maintenance of the industrial site.

2.3 Industrial Remains and Industrial Heritage

The theoretical perspectives on place, meaning-making and collective history will be applied to a post-industrial site, a particular kind of space. In recent years, remains after industrial activity have been increasingly seen as multidimensional and important sites for locals because of their historical value. However, particularly in post-socialist states, industry and its transformation have also been framed by political and economic changes and understood as an aggravation along the path towards capitalism. In this section, I would like to provide the reader with a short discussion of brownfield sites and industrial heritage. This section will demonstrate that industrial remains have the potential to capture the passage of time (Loures and Burley 2012).
What do we call what is left behind after de-industrialization? The term brownfield is a widely used concept that might serve to categorize these very areas. One can find panoply of definitions that aim to explain what brownfields are. Alker and her colleagues (2000) have tried to create a definition that would be robust, interdisciplinary and would therefore, be accepted by all the stakeholders involved in the redevelopment of such an area. In their definition,

“[a] browned site is any land or premises which has previously been used or developed and is not currently fully in use, although it may be partially occupied or utilized. It may also be vacant, derelict or contaminated. Therefore a brownfield site is not necessarily available for immediate use without intervention” (Alker et al. 2000, 49).

Other authors take a wider view and define brownfields, for example, as simply as “the abandoned and neglected zones damaged by human action” (Grulich and Gargoš 2009, 8). Grulich and Gargoš acknowledge that brownfields can be considered from various viewpoints, such as urban planning, the environment, industrial heritage management and last but not least, viewing the zone as a potential location for a new intervention (Grulich and Gargoš 2009, 8).

However, one can also find definitions that step away from the concept of brownfield and offer a way to problematize such areas while they are already under certain development activity. One of the proponents of this view is Loures, who uses term “post-industrial landscape” to talk about formerly developed land and its redevelopment while highlighting the change of urban spatial formation caused by industrialization (Loures and Burley 2012, Loures 2008, see also Duží and Jakubiňský 2013).

This understanding fits better for the purposes of this thesis since I am not looking into an area that is currently abandoned; rather, I am studying an area being refurnished after a period of a seeming lack of interest. To be able to talk also about this “post-brownfield phase” of the area, the term post-industrial appears to be more useful. Besides, there is another simple reason to adopt the term post-industrial – it allows for a conceptualization of the broader living space and it might possibly let us understand how certain parts of the city have been developed over time.1

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1 For instance, Oslo’s famous Aker Brygge is a good example of a neighbourhood with an industrial history that for some might not be so obvious any more.
The field of industrial heritage management that focuses on objects and areas defined as brownfields or post-industrial sites has been developing since the second half of the twentieth century. It has evolved over time from the concept of heritage that, according to the International Council on Monuments and Sites, has been traditionally divided into cultural and natural heritage (quoted in Loures and Burley 2012, 225). Such an understanding of heritage and patrimony, however, take into consideration predominantly only those monuments that were pre-industrial or non-industrial (Loures and Burley 2012, 225).

The industrial objects are so quotidian that they easily escape locals’ attention. Industrial archaeology recognizes this embeddedness in the everyday life of people, yet challenges the ease with which the technical objects documenting part of the history – the industrial production – can be wiped out. The institutionalization of industrial heritage was crowned by the Nizhny Tagil Charter for the Industrial Heritage from 2003 followed by the Monterrey Charter for Industrial Heritage Conservation from 2006 (Loures and Burley 2012, 227).

The protection of industrial heritage in the Czech context started with the disapproval over the demolition of a railway station in Prague-Těšnov in the mid-1980s. These reactions were extensions of the above-mentioned movements from abroad. The demolition that took place in mid-1980s was fueled by political and power subtext. Seeing the event from the perspective of that time period,

“[I]ndustrial heritage not only possessed historical and artistic values but served as testimony to the repeated interruptions to the continuity of economic and cultural development and resurrected the names of people and firms otherwise forgotten” (Fragner and Zikmund 2009, 11).

When arguing in favor of industrial heritage protection, The International Committee for the Conservation of the Industrial Heritage (TICCIH) sees industrial heritage as the remains of industrial culture infused with values. Industrial heritage provides evidence of processes with immense historical significance. They have social, technological, scientific and possibly, aesthetic value. Given the focus of this research study, the way social value is expressed is important: industrial heritage embraces the daily lives of ordinary people and in this way, it provides an important sense of identity (TICCIH 2003). The latter point is something that Byrne (2002) has also pointed out. He suggests
that the industrial incorporates more than just the production itself and proposes that the industrial past has been a part of identity, creating an industrial culture.

Despite the large amount of literature on the topic of post-industrial sites and their redevelopment, research has tended to focus on it as the result of a capitalist economy or on the interlocking of industry with local identity. While both of these avenues are promising, I believe a cultural sociological approach represents a valuable and rather innovative alternative in examining the role of post-industrial sites in today’s societies. I have chosen cultural sociology because as an approach, it is able to account for both the actors and the materiality at play. In addition, post-industrial site transformation and management is a long-term process. In order to account for the historical dimension, I combine cultural sociology with the insights of memory studies. While the theory of collective memory and the memory of places have been used predominantly for understanding traumatic collective events, the application of the theory to post-industrial places might provide interesting and novel insights. Post-industrial remains represent the transformation of society while preserving the passage of time, the past. Because of this, the proposed approach might challenge our understanding of the most recent history, especially in post-socialist countries. The perspective of cultural sociology is useful here because of its flexibility and ability to account for the complex. It encourages a researcher to keep meanings in focus while accounting for the political and economic events surrounding the object of study.
3 Methodology

This project is a qualitative study built on the case of the conversion of a post-industrial area, including its facility, into a cultural multipurpose installation in Ostrava in the Czech Republic. With the focus being on the meaning making processes in the Lower Area of Vítkovice and considering its recent transformation, semi-structured interviews with people close to the renewal project were chosen as a suitable method to investigate the research questions. In total, 15 interviews in the Czech language were conducted during fieldwork lasting one month (October-November 2015), out of which 14 interviews were used in the analysis. I also worked with chronicles, maps and other documentation related to the Lower Area of Vítkovice in order to understand the context, history and nature of the changes taking place there. Investigating the documentation, some of which was gathered during my fieldwork and some obtained from archives available online, was important for gaining an overview of the official actors and the system under which the changes were happening, and for understanding the broader context of the entire city’s development.

The cultural perspective encourages the researcher to explore the symbolic and discursive elements of her inquiry through the study of narratives and metaphors in which meanings are reflected (Reed 2009). Furthermore, meanings cannot be detected from social structure nor can they be substituted by description of reified values, norms or ideology (Alexander 2003, 13). Stressing the fact that meaning-making processes are contextual, the cultural approach invites researchers to utilize hermeneutical thick description, pioneered by Geertz (1973), in order to contextualize data. Hermeneutics is the theory and method of interpretation of social actions and institutions through analysis of what they mean to the social actors. With that in mind, I approach my research as study of narratives elicited through face-to-face interviews. Throughout the thesis, I contextualize the data to make them more meaningful to the reader. In what follows, I explain the process of data collection and analysis and I also consider the main challenges of the research.
3.1 Fieldwork and interviews

Fieldwork represented a unique opportunity to get as close as possible to both the local actors and the site itself within the given time frame. By the field, I mean the Lower Area of Vítkovice and the adjacent city center, namely, the area that is object of the research and its surroundings. I spent a month in the field – from October 7 until November 3, 2015 in Ostrava and after that I stayed in Prague until November 7, 2015 in order to conduct two interviews there. During the time of my fieldwork, I took notes in my field diary in order to keep track of various details from the opening hours of an archive to instant note-taking (for example, after an interview to take note of details that could not be voice recorded). When in Ostrava, I stayed with my family while commuting to the city center daily with my computer, camera and voice recorder. During the stay, I became a regular at the science library, the Vítkovice Company archive and the museum of Ostrava, as well as in the Lower Area of Vítkovice itself, going there to conduct an interview, take a tour, meet a friend or read the field material over a cup of coffee.

In total, I conducted 15 interviews with 16 persons. All conversations took place in the Czech language, 13 of them in Ostrava and two in Prague. One of the respondents asked for a transcription of the interview in order to check it and potentially revise it. The interview transcription was sent in January 2016 and until now, I have not received an answer. Naturally, I respect the will of the respondent and therefore, the interview has not been included in the analysis. Two of the interviews were not recorded as it did not feel comfortable for the interviewees. Admittedly, these particular interviews suffered from taking notes by hand, which did not allow me to record all interesting quotations and mark relevant metaphors; yet, the interview guide aided the note-taking and thus, the interviews were used in the analysis.

Interviews as a data-gathering method allowed for direct contact with the respondents, experiencing their testimonies not only through posing questions and noting the answers but by direct interaction and sharing time and space. So while other methods, such as focus groups or the study of written materials and documents, would be plausible methods to gather data on the transformation of the Lower Area of Vítkovice, given my

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2 For details, see Table 1.
research focus, it was crucial to discuss the issue in face-to-face conversations in order to access how people engage in the process of meaning making. Because I focus on how respondents structure their narration about the history of the Lower Area of Vítkovice, how they make sense of the recent transformation, how they accept and modify the collective narrations and not least, how they develop the narration by certain representations of the project in question, the fieldwork was necessary.

The interviewing was based on an interview guide. The interview guide was created in a way that allowed me to keep track of the main areas of interest I needed to learn more about (this is where factual information can be assigned). I needed to learn my interviewees’ reaction to the conversion of the area and the related long-term processes and at the same time, to follow the points in the conversation that seemed relevant, challenging and deepening. As proposed by Bertaux (1981, 39), the interview guide was modified for each of the interviewees in line with the progress of understanding or, on the other hand, the irrelevance of topics that I originally had thought would be important.

Some topics proved not to be relevant. For example, initially, I was interested in whether the need for environmental sustainability might have been one of the elements of the reconstruction and transformation of the area. Asking to what extent the people currently standing behind the project of renewal were environmentally concerned and applied relevant principles in designing the area, both content- and building-wise, was an inquiry leaving discomfited reactions.4

3.1.1 Selection of respondents

To choose respondents for the study, I combined purposeful sampling with snowball sampling. Purposeful selection is a strategy in which “particular settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately to provide information that is particularly relevant to your questions and goals, and that can’t be gotten as well from other choices” (Maxwell 2005, 97). Purposeful sampling can be seen as interchangeable with purposive or judgment sampling, which is, according to Bernard, a selection in which “you decide

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3 For the interview guide, see Appendix 1.
4 The environmental dimension seemed to be relevant only in terms of liquidation of the environmental load left behind by the industrial production process. This topic is further discussed in Chapter five.
the purpose you want informants (…) to serve, and you go out to find some” (Bernard 2006, 189). This kind of sampling is very common in social scientific disciplines (e.g. Elliott and Timulak 2005). In snowball sampling, the researcher uses “key informants and/or documents to locate one or two people in a population” (Bernard 2006, 193).

I based my choice of respondents on my online research of the current activities in the Lower Area as well as articles and other publications dealing with the transformation and its progress in various contexts (e.g. newspaper articles, city documents, organization documents, cultural bulletins, etc.). A list of prospective respondents was created and they were contacted via email (all email addresses were publicly available online). In the first email, I stated who I was, what the research was about and who the sponsoring institution was. I also explained my commitment to anonymity. Many of the chosen people responded quickly and they were available for an interview in the timeframe proposed. The snowball selection was not systematic and it was used only as an additional source of possible respondents. Yet, it proved very useful for the research. For example, arranging an interview with a representative of the local office of the National Heritage Institute in Ostrava was unsuccessful due to their lacking authority on the matter, yet I was provided contact details of a representative of the Institute in Prague. Similarly, I received contact information for a civil engineer and a part-time employee with a connection to the area via snowball sampling.

During the interviews, I approached my respondents in a way that they were welcomed and asked to give their account of the changes in the Low Area of Vítkovice, their perceptions and memories. I was eager to let them teach me about what they saw as important from their position and to share their knowledge, experiences and views.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fictional name</th>
<th>Description of interviewee(s)</th>
<th>Settings of the interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Hana</td>
<td>Cultural program leader of an institution in the area</td>
<td>Café in the LAV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Pavel a Petr</td>
<td>Architects active in Ostrava, focusing on public spaces, colleagues</td>
<td>Their atelier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Jan</td>
<td>A representative of the Environmental Department at the municipality of Ostrava</td>
<td>His office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Eva</td>
<td>A young woman working part-time in one of the institutions in the area; she studies brownfields and restoration at a local university</td>
<td>Café in the city center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Antonín</td>
<td>A representative of the Strategic Development Department at the municipality of Ostrava</td>
<td>His office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Tomáš</td>
<td>The head of one of the institutions within the area</td>
<td>His office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Rudolf</td>
<td>City engineer at the Technical University of Ostrava invested in the area</td>
<td>His office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Josef</td>
<td>An employee of the company originally using the area; he was working in the area 30 years ago</td>
<td>Walking in the LAV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Ivo</td>
<td>The head of one of the institutions within the area</td>
<td>His office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Roman</td>
<td>A representative of the Vítkovice urban district</td>
<td>His office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Sylvie</td>
<td>Active citizen, organizer of cultural activities in Ostrava</td>
<td>Her office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Marek</td>
<td>A representative of the Institute of the Chief Architect at the municipality of Ostrava</td>
<td>His office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Veronika</td>
<td>A representative of National Heritage Institute</td>
<td>Her office, Prague</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Adam</td>
<td>An architect working with the transformation of the area</td>
<td>His office, Prague</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. List of respondents. The names are changed and the positions are made more generic in order to make them less identifiable. The participants are listed in the order in which the interviews with them were conducted.

### 3.2 Analyzing data

I believe that the process of data analysis commences with the fieldwork and it includes all the considerations and processes related to the research material as, for example, Pink (2015) suggests. The complexity of “the infinitely metaphorical nature of urban discourse” (Barthes 2005, 163) had its implications for the methodological procedure. Keeping field notes enhanced not only the practical issues during the fieldwork but also the following stages of the data treatment and analysis that took place outside of the
field. Within a few months after my return to Oslo, I transcribed the interviews. I did not translate them into English; this was done only for those parts that were used as quotes.

I was interested mainly in how people talked about the Lower Area of Vítkovice, how they perceived the changes (in both the physical aspect and the content) and how they described them – what metaphors (if any) they used to make sense of the change and by what story (if any) they framed the transformation of the area.

My primary analysis started by repeated reading of the interview transcriptions, which produced descriptive coding: identifying main themes in the interviews, creating categories and marking them on the transcripts. My fieldwork notes helped me organize the development of my own understanding of the process of change in the Lower Area of Vítkovice, which also marked the initial data categorization. The categorization remained contextual thanks to the notes.5 Throughout the analytical chapters, I provide a thick description, hoping to mediate the contextualization for the reader.

In the next stage of the process, I conducted a search for the immediate meanings in the transcripts. By pairing them with other evidence from both the data (other respondents’ answers) and theory or relevant literature (documents, pictures, photos) I aimed to construct patterns of meanings. In order to facilitate the process of structuring the information in the data, I used the qualitative analysis software, NVivo, to construct meaningful nodes and to mind-map the patterns of codes, narratives and meanings.

### 3.3 Ethics

Firstly, all the respondents took part voluntarily in the study. Respondents were also promised and ensured that the data would be used only for the purpose of this thesis. All of them were provided confidentiality throughout the entire process of the research, including the storage of the data and the final thesis. I asked them for oral consent and to confirm their willingness to participate, which I recorded. They obtained all the information about the research via email when I first contacted them.

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5 Biernacki (2012) stresses the importance of strong contextualization of signs to be interpreted and warns social scientists from negligent coding that takes signs out of their context and changes thus their meanings.
In order to protect their confidentiality, respondents’ names were changed. The guaranteed confidentiality, I hoped, would encourage them to speak freely. Some of the respondents, however, mentioned they would not mind their name being mentioned in the thesis (this might be also understood in terms of their political position). I refused this offer, reassuring them that all respondents would be kept anonymized. On the contrary, some of my respondents double-checked orally during the interview if their name would be mentioned. Nonetheless, it is important to indicate the position of individual interviewees within the whole transformation project in order to provide the reader with the background for the testimonies. Therefore, changing the respondent’s name was not enough. In addition, I described their occupations and positions in rather general terms in order to make recognition less probable while keeping the sense of their connection to the Lower Area of Vítkovice.

Secondly, the majority of my respondents are high representatives of their offices or institutions. Moreover, the topic of the Lower Area of Vítkovice is nowadays very popular as it is generally seen as a success and from my point of view, there is the possibility that people would seek to affiliate themselves with the area. The latter might be the reason my respondents responded quickly to my request for an interview and were willing to meet me within a short time. Taking into consideration also my open approach, with no intention to confront my respondents, one might be wondering to what extent I was used as a channel for some people’s agendas. They were representing their office and justifying what they were doing. Admittedly, this is what my open approach suggested they do.

Nevertheless, interviewing generally brings up the same type of questions for the researcher. As Berry says, “Interviewers must always keep in mind that it is not the obligation of a subject to be objective and to tell us the truth” (Berry 2002, 680).

### 3.4 Challenges

The demarcations of disciplines are fuzzy (Mol 2002), and social scientific methods are promiscuous, serving multiple disciplines at the same time. This blurring of boundaries where “methodologies without methodology” occur make us more aware of the
contextualized character of the decisions one makes during the research process (Koro-Ljungberg 2016).

To illuminate the challenges of the research, I will comment on the data collection process. The theoretical framework guiding the analysis was mainly developed after the data collection had been conducted. In hindsight, including the theoretical approach into the data collection process might have guided me to conduct the interviews in a more focused fashion and supported me in asking more specific questions. On the other hand, many of the theoretical observations had only become clear as the project started to take shape. Also, various guiding textbooks assume that the interviewer is always fully in the control of the interview, always responding adequately and being very swift in the judgment of answers. This is rarely the case as the conditions under which interviews are conducted vary considerably (Kitchin and Tate 2000, 219). I see this challenge in my case as well. However, in the above, I have discussed the practical matters I experienced during the data collection process in order to provide readers with as transparent picture as possible.

Further, Biernacki’s critique of pre-determined samples shows how sampling choices shape the study findings (Biernacki 2012). In my case, the pre-fieldwork study that contributed to the choice of my respondents was extremely valuable and important as it helped me to enter the field and determine the focus. This fact is reflected upon in the methodology chapter, throughout the analysis and in the colligation of evidence. Further, the combination of two sampling strategies minimizes the risk of deliberate bias.

Thirdly, to tackle the challenge suggested in the ethical part, I aim to minimize potential bias by stating my respondents’ professions or relations they have to the Lower Area of Vítkovice in the list of respondents. Moreover, throughout the analysis, I have used a number of quotes from the interviews. By making those available in such a scale, I open the process of analysis, hoping to engage the reader in the process of the search for meanings.

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6 See Table 1 above.
7 For Alexander’s critique of lacking quotes in research see, for example, (Larsen 2014, 79).
4 Mapping the Lower Area of Vítkovice

“Se strachem v dole být nemůžete. Ale je třeba mít respekt z přírody.”
“You cannot stay in the mine with fear. But it is necessary to have respect for nature.”

A miner from Ostrava-Karviná region (Trachtová 2015)

The gradual decline of industrial production and extraction in the Ostrava region has left behind an array of brownfield zones that are often found in prominent urban areas due to Ostrava’s specific spatial development. Such areas habitually include industrial constructions that did not vanish when the industrial process ceased to function.

The Lower Area of Vítkovice is therefore not the only brownfield in Ostrava, yet as we shall see in the following chapters, it is unique for many reasons. Before I invite the reader for a walk through the meaning-scape of the Lower Area of Vítkovice, I would like to introduce some of its physical features, sum up the conversion project that has transformed the Lower Area of Vítkovice and provide some background information about the key objects that have been given a new facade and a new function.

The Lower Area of Vítkovice is part of an estate of 150 hectares and lies adjacent to the city center and peopled zones, yet it is not the only industrial area in the neighborhood. In Figure 2, we can see its position within Ostrava. Figure 3 shows us that the immediate surroundings of the area are both zones of industry and housing zones. The grey line visualizes the border between two urban districts that technically form the Lower Area of Vítkovice. The northern section is the Hlubina coal mine area; the southern section is the Vítkovice Ironworks area.
Figure 2. The land-use plan of Ostrava city. The Lower Area of Vítkovice is marked. Source: Statutární město Ostrava (2014).

Figure 3. The land-use plan of Ostrava city zoomed in. The Lower Area of Vítkovice is marked in the red circle. The pink color marks areas of public facilities. The orange color marks mixed-use zoning (housing and public facilities) – here, it is the city center located to the north. The two light blue colors mark heavy and light industry. Source: Statutární město Ostrava (2014).

The contemporary history of the Lower Area of Vítkovice hinges on a few milestones. The Lower Area of Vítkovice was, for almost two centuries, a place of work, production, and a source of local pride and financial resources. This history was disrupted by the revolutionary year 1989 and even further in 1998 when the production of coal and iron was closed down. The area became an object of public discussion and political wrangle. What do we do with what is left behind? And the underlying question at that time was – what is the Lower Area of Vítkovice, really? Is it ruins to be torn
down or is it heritage to be protected? As time moved on, it was privatized during the necessary economic transformation of the 1990s and its gates remained closed. Yet, interested people from time to time secretly set foot in there, either to explore what more the area had to offer besides the huge structures visible from kilometers away or to collect scrap iron to earn one’s living. Over the course of post-revolution changes encompassing society, politics and economy, the time for post-industrialism came, too. The Lower Area of Vítkovice was deemed the representation of the conundrum the locals had to face. Yet, in 2015, the Lower Area of Vítkovice found itself with a new façade and new functions, including culture, education and sports. Later the same year, I entered the field and asked my respondents what they thought and how they related to the area.

![Figure 4. Aerial photographs of the Lower Area of Vítkovice in 2003 and 2015. State of the area in 2003 on the left and in 2015 on right. Source: Moravskoslezský kraj (2016).](image)

**4.1 The key objects of the new era**

During the pendency of monument conservation and transformation proposals, which will be analyzed in Chapter 5, key objects important in terms of historical value had crystalized. These include the first blast furnace, the gas container and the central energy station in the ironworks zone and the mine tower, together with all the city-like facilities in the mining part of the Lower Area of Vítkovice. The central energy station, the first blast furnace, the gas container and importantly, some of the coke oven batteries have been also recognized as “remarkable and unique, forming the very core value of the National Cultural Heritage and [they are] irreplaceable in order to maintain
the urban and conservation integrity of the area (…)" (Národní památkový ústav and Vítkovice a.s. 2009, 2).

The first object to be reconstructed was the **electric central station no. 6** (U6), whose transformation was finalized in April 2012. The building is typical of the factory buildings from the beginning of the 20th century as it is built using red bricks, iron construction and glass. The electric central station served as the “lungs of the ironworks” thanks to its two blowers producing compressed air to power the blast furnaces (Šústková 2012, 11). The object was converted into the Small Science and Technology Center whose main objective is (technical) education. Exhibitions are interactive, which makes this project unique at the regional level (Šústková 2012, 37).

In October 2012, the **gas container** (Gong) built in 1924 underwent its final inspection. At the end of its service, the gas container was in poor technical condition. The gas container was cleaned and the inner bell was lifted. After that, the work on constructing the multifunctional aula could begin. The aim of the project was to reconstruct the gas container into a place that would be related to “educational activities and the cultural and social life of the region” (Šústková 2012, 29). Today, the former gas container bears the name Gong and contains the multifunctional aula with an auditorium and a café.9

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8 This includes also three objects (one fire tower, one water tower and a gas delivery station) that are not taken into account in this thesis because they were not part of the conversion project and are also less known. Yet, they are still important given their historical substance, being part of the whole complex.

9 Until 2016, it also hosted a gallery named Plato that now resides in the city center.
The last object transformed in the Ironworks area was the **first blast furnace**, whose reconstruction was intended to make it open to the public and involved building a superstructure on the very top of it. There were several forerunners before the present blast furnace was built, including the objects that follow-up on its operation (the air warmers, the lift, etc.) and the control station. Neither the blast furnace nor the control station were maintained between the end of their operation and start of the reconstruction, which influenced their technical conditions (Šústková 2012, 12). The blast furnace had been part of a guided tour since 2002, which was, however, very limited. Today, the furnace is open to the public and it offers a firsthand experience ranging from how the batch of limestone, coke and crude iron used to be transported into the bell opening to where the pig iron and slag used to flow out (Šústková 2012, 38). During the conversion in 2015, blast furnace No. 1 was turned into Bolt Tower by adding a superstructure to its very top. Bolt Tower serves as an elevated viewpoint and features a small coffee place.

![Image of blast furnace and Bolt Tower](image-url)

**Figure 6.** Blast furnace no. 1 in 1972 and 2015. The blast furnace in 1972 on the left and the Bolt Tower in 2015 on the right. Sources: Archiv VÍTKOVICE (2015) and Souček (2015).

In addition, a new building containing the **Great Science and Technology Centre** was erected in 2014 at the south-east corner of the area’s complex. It hosts and organizes interactive exhibitions and education programs for children and youth. It both cooperates with schools and is open to the public.
The newest element of the conversion in the Lower Area of Vítkovice is the reconstruction of **Hlubina mine area**. It was carried out as the project “Opening to the public and new utilization of the National Cultural Heritage Hlubina,” which is integral to the project “Opening to the public and new utilization of the National Cultural Heritage Vítkovice,” as depicted above. The conversion project was finalized in April 2015. Before the reconstruction, the area randomly hosted cultural events and served as a base for small businesses. The Hlubina mine area contains various buildings that were part of the non-stop operation of the mine serving both coal and the miners (Šústková 2015, 22).

The reconstructed objects include the storehouse, the distribution point, the trespassing canteen, the old bathroom, the compress hall, the mining tower and the connecting bridge. Now, the latter two do not have any other new function other than being a part of the guided tours. The first five objects serve as a base for non-profit, alternative socio-cultural and educational activities\(^\text{10}\) under the patronage of the organization Provoz Hlubina, which can be translated as Operation Hlubina. Some other buildings in the area are maintained by private entities, for example, a new climbing wall or a music and theater club. In this way, a cultural quarter was created that aims to attract the general public and stimulate culture, education and leisure activities (Šústková 2015, 25).

\(^{10}\) It contains rehearsal rooms, art studios, a cinema and similar features.
5 The industrial at stake

National Socialism in the Czechoslovak Republic was supported and perpetuated by the use of rhetoric (Pullmann 2011, Kolář and Pullmann 2014). As was shown later, during the events leading up to the Velvet Revolution, rhetoric played a role in its fall, too. The vigilant choice of words and terms depicting and presenting the reformation in the Czech context in the 1980s was accompanied by accenting the ongoing dedication to the basic principles of the state. This was a way to undermine the authoritative discourse that upheld the illusion of consensus at the end of the era of the communist regime (Pullmann 2011).

In this chapter, I will reconstruct the major milestones of the Lower Area of Vítkovice (LAV) taking place in the 1990s and 2000s. The collapse of consensus over the ruling power of the communist party in the late 1980s marks a pluralization of not only the terminology apparatus but also of the patterns of meanings related to places. This is, therefore, where our journey to understand the sedimentation of meaning in the LAV starts. What happens to a place when place making becomes deregulated? I will demonstrate that the newly established institutions complementing the post-revolutionary state reconstruction the area was exposed to (e.g. privatization) rendered its strong cultural image that persists until today.

In order to walk the path towards the reconstruction of the area as a cultural icon of the new age (Chapter 6), I will revisit here its earlier history. Transmitting how heavy industry and the LAV were understood as key assets in in the 20th century will provide the starting point of our journey. Then, I will discuss the cessation of coal and iron production in the LAV, enacted on the background of the new and diverting views of industry materialized in the LAV as the largest and most notable industrial complex in the city. The final section of the chapter deals with the reconstruction of the negotiations concerning the hereafter of LAV, in which binary oppositions will serve us as a tool to understand the cultural structure of social actions.
Before we begin the exploration, it is appropriate to point out the dynamics of memories. What my respondents shared with me regarding their understanding of the area has already been worked into their contemporary accounts of the past. However, the way social actors relate to the past and employ it in current structures of explanation and meaning production is an integral constituent of understanding how social actors make sense of the world. It is the meaningfulness, rather than historical accuracy, that rests in the cultural memory of social actors of today.

5.1 Advancing the industrial

The LAV was considered a strategic asset over most of its existence. Ostrava was founded in the 13th century and a crucial event in its development was the construction of the Emperor Ferdinand Northern Railway in the 18th century, connecting Vienna and Krakow. The high consumption of railway-building material and the central position of Ostrava meant the swift development of metallurgy in the region. The coal deposit in Ostrava is part of the so-called Ostrava-Karvina coalfield, which formed the core of wider settlement of the area, creating a settlement agglomeration (Kuta and Endel 2015, 39-40).

Coal mining and the metallurgical industry were booming and the area’s importance grew. During the Second World War, it was under the supervision of the Germans as a valued property (Šustková 2012, 10). The plans to develop the area during the war were sidelined because of its outcome. During the liberation battles, “the steel heart of the republic,” as the Ostrava region with its center in the LAV was known, was feared to be destroyed and thus, it was decided to let the factory stand still (Matěj, Korbelářová, and Tejžr 2014, 34).

In the post-war period, the region focused heavily on the development of the coal and iron industries. Heavy industry was central to the idea of economic progress that communist planners came to believe in as easily as their western counterparts (Maier 1991). After 1948, the communist government therefore provided this sector with a great deal of support (Mykhnenko and Turok 2008, 313). Industrialization fostered urbanization, leading to an inflow of the labor force (Ivan and Horák 2011, 117). The city was slowly swallowed by industrial facilities.
As ideology claimed its place in the urban landscape, the Vítkovice Ironworks were named after the then communist president Klement Gottwald.\textsuperscript{11} The Hlubina mine, or the Deep Mine, was renamed in 1946 after Bohumíl Laušman, a Czech politician at the time. Laušman, however, was persecuted by the new government after 1948; thus, in the same year, the mine was renamed Hlubina - the Deep Mine (Matěj, Korbelářová, and Tejžr 2014, 35, Šústková 2012, 11).\textsuperscript{12} The cityscape was a venue for the enactment of memory politics. Political semiotics narrated places on its own terms and the name of Klement Gottwald persisted in the title of the ironworks until 1989, when reinterpretation of the cityscape was enabled by the regime change (Diener and Hagen 2013, see also Tucker 1998, Plum 2005).

Heavy industry was the main pillar for the development of the socialist national economy in Czechoslovakia. The efforts of Soviet Union to influence economic and industrial decision-making of individual countries through The Council for Mutual Economic Assistance had been in the background of the happenings in Czechoslovakia from the 1950s (Matěj, Korbelářová, and Tejžr 2014, 37). Further, heavy industry was seen not only as the driver of the national economy, but it was also used to undergird an image central to the communist ideology that depicted miners and other workers as heroes triumphing over the hostile environment and working conditions. In turn, this position enabled the working classes to enjoy a certain political advantage (Riley and Tkocz 1998). Heavy industry was thus assigned a symbolic power that covered the economic, political and social spheres.

In the last decades of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, the area underwent further renovation, modernization and technological innovation. Still, the LAV was remembered in rather negative terms: as a zone accessible to authorized personnel only, it allowed others to see only the “fumes and dust” and the “dirt and noise.” The then walled area was remembered as “a little industrial city of its own” (Tomáš) with a “lively production process” (Veronika). Roman, from the local municipality of the Vítkovice city district, mentioned that the city district was almost cursed to be only full of factories; nothing else was allowed to be built there.

\textsuperscript{11} Vítkovické železárné Klementa Gottwalda in Czech.
\textsuperscript{12} Naturally, there were other plants in Ostrava city as well. For example the Klement Gottwald New Ironworks, a detached plant of the Vítkovice Ironworks, was turned into an independent ironworks in 1951 by starting its own blast furnace.
The long history of advancing heavy industry wove it into the cultural fabric of the society through the multitude of ways the area and industry have been connected to people’s lives. How the symbolic power of industry in forming the sense of nation building was enacted through the working class and transmitted in Czechoslovak media was commented on by Hana, who said,

Everyone knew who was working here. They were meeting them in the trams and they could see that there was a huge mine and ironworks here. (...) And everybody could see it in the TV news, those brave steelworkers targeting the plan [of the planned economy] (...) And miners, they also were those persons, everyone could see them in the news.

Rudolf enlarged the picture, saying that “they [miners] were proud of the occupation, not the mine in a sense of company or so, but proud of the profession.”

The close connection of local culture with industry has been further reflected in popular culture production. Jaromír Nohavica, a regional singer and songwriter perceived as a popular commentator on public affairs in northeast Moravia, merrily sings:

Ostrava Ostrava
Of all the cities
My bittersweetest
Ostrava Ostrava
Black star above our heads

God divided
Beauty among other cities
Rivers of steamboats
And ladies of silk
Ostrava
My burning heart
Our faith is sealed from the start

Nohavica here works with the colors of iron and coal; elsewhere, he comments on the political economy of the region:

My Black Ostrava, my faithful girl, tickets, please!
My Black Ostrava, my faithful girl, tickets, please!

13 Translation by Veronika Zahradníčková, used with permission.
Seven times I’ve been told that my book is overdue
My youth is screwed and our Karolinka coke-oven, too
Sell the whole Ostrava of mine
Just leave one thing alone – the mine\textsuperscript{14}

To sum up, in this section, I have pointed to not only the historical and pervasive physical presence of industry in the city but also its presence in the cultural structures of the locals. The LAV in particular, as a prominent element of Ostrava’s skyline, close to people’s daily lives yet inscrutable for some of them, has been connected with collective ideas of hard work and the social advantage of the workers. This establishes the basis for the iconicity of the area that given its cultural embeddedness embodies ideas, thoughts and sensations (Bartmanski and Alexander 2012). This section was the first step along our way towards decoding the contemporary logic behind the meaning-making processes in today’s LAV.

5.2 The termination of production

Looking through the lens of economics, scaling down heavy industry production in Ostrava and the end of operations in the LAV area in particular, is only one example of the global processes of weakened competitiveness and disinvestment given the need for privatization (Pike 2009). One can also understand the post-communist urban restructuring as a result of the interactions between institutional transformation, the transformation of political, cultural, economic and social practices and the transformation of urban change dynamics (Sýkora and Bouzarovski 2012). Yet, what the microsociology of the LAV can disclose is a finer look at how memory can lose its sharp contours and become a part of a larger narration. As we will see below, the way people remember the cessation of industrial production in the LAV is connected to the environmental and political burdens of the past.

For the entire urban environment, the post-socialist period was a time of “producing new contexts for the continuing exchange between urban form, function, and identity” (Diener and Hagen 2013, 496). The narratives that anchored the meanings of places had to be re-contextualized and re-negotiated after the end of the communist governance. The termination of production in the LAV makes a case for such re-contextualization.

\textsuperscript{14} Translation by Veronika Zahradničková, used with permission.
In what follows, I will demonstrate how the dissolution of the state’s place-making politics disrupted the local historical way of relating to industry. Facing the economic, political and social changes that altered the conditions heavy industry was operating under after 1989, the LAV was increasingly becoming contested terrain.

The production of both iron and coal had to adapt to the new economic order, which was rather unsettled at the time. In 1992, operations at the Hlubina mine were closed and the property was allocated to the DIAMO state enterprise in order to secure the area\(^\text{15}\) (Šústková 2015, 11). Between 1994 and 1996, the extraction of coal was ceased in all the local collieries of Ostrava (Koudela, Kuta, and Kuda 2004, 25). “It [the cessation] was natural,” said Sylvie, explaining that given the lack of coal, mining was considered unprofitable. “And the other industries were connected to it” (Sylvie).

On September 27, 1998, the last dose of pig iron flowed out of blast furnace No.1. This, however, did not happen during a normal workday. The day was marked by a symbolic ceremony that also attended by political representatives. Pavel Šmíd wrote in a report for the company’s magazine: “And the tears of sorrow wet also the manly faces otherwise resisting emotions” (Šmíd 1998, 4).\(^\text{16}\) This excerpt of nostalgia alternated with paragraphs describing the smooth political process of production termination. “It was a sad feeling for me,” said Veronika from the National Heritage Institute, who was also present the event, confirming the mood.

Roman, who works at the municipality of the Vítkovice district, explained the termination of production in the area as a somewhat natural result of strangling iron production worldwide. “Exactly in that time after the revolution, the production of iron and steel went down. (…) And [locally] there was not so much need for it anymore” since the neighboring countries of Poland and Germany were also established producers. Market forces and the economy of the industry were thus blamed for the termination of the area’s activity.

On the other hand, it was “the pressure from the city [municipality]” that urged the cessation “through agreement between Vítkovice and another plant where they would

\(^{15}\) DIAMO, state enterprise, evolved from a state administration dealing with uranium industry during the second half of the 20th century and its today’s objective is the remediation of various areas affected by extraction and industrial activity including management of given properties (DIAMO 2016).

\(^{16}\) See Appendix 2 for further details on the article.
move the crude iron production” (Josef). Jan, the representative of the environmental department at the municipality, also asserted that it was the municipality, the leadership of the city, who pressed for the termination because of the poor air quality in Ostrava. “You know, the Lower Area [of Vítkovice] practically is … is in the middle of the city,” he added. Veronika from the National Heritage Institute said colloquially that the company was able to carry on producing but such “fuming couldn’t be in the city center.” Tomáš, who moved to Ostrava to study at the technical university and now works in the LAV, was confident that it was simply a political decision by the political elite who “were convinced that this type of heavy industry doesn’t belong in the middle of the city.” The LAV was seen as a problem because of its prominent location in the vicinity of the city center. As Eva pointed out: “The Lower Area of Vítkovice stands out, it was too visible [to continue production].”

The concern for the environment was also indisputable. The long period of favoring heavy industry had resulted in extreme air pollution (Kaličáková et al. 2013). In the early period of democratization, the improvement of the environment in Ostrava became important and desired (Matěj, Korbelářová, and Tejzr 2014) which resulted in pushing iron production out farther from Ostrava’s city center because of demands to limit both the gaseous and solid emissions produced predominantly by the coking plant and blast furnaces in the LAV. Roman said that Vítkovice, the urban district, was seen in a very negative way: “Vítkovice was synonymous with dirt (...). The quarter where it is the worst.”

Many respondents were a bit unsure of their own memory of the process, yet they readily reached for narratives based on the changing market and shifting economic opportunities in the region as well as the environmental degradation and critical air pollution that finally become recognized as an urban issue. Some of the respondents did not perceive the end of industrial production in the LAV as something that would be surprising and needed to be debated in regard to the area’s conversion. For example, when discussing the termination of production with Ivo, he placed it into the “wild developments” of 1990s, mentioning both environmental protection and economic reasons and adding a rhetorical “blah, blah, blah” in order to proceed to what he

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17 The decision to stop the production of pig iron in the heart of the city was made by the Ostrava city council (resolution No. 359/13 from 1993) and through verification by the Czech government (resolution No. 485 from 1996).
considered more important stories that concerned the possible ways of handling the area after it was closed down. Yet, later on, he returned to the topic and downplayed the role of the environment since environmental problems “accompany us until today.”

Later in my conversation with Tomáš, it also became obvious that the place is occupied by the memory of the political burden that the failed communist regime left on the industry.

It was not so much about the fact that the sources of coal would be running out or that the production wouldn’t be promising, simply put: many of the things that worked well were after the revolution automatically regarded as wrong.

The favorable status of workers (especially those employed in heavy industry) perpetuated by the Socialist state narrative reversed. The collective representation of miners and ironworkers changed dramatically after the fall of communism and further with the end of many industrial (mine and metallurgical) operations. Since the miners had been long elevated as the “heroes of the region,” the end of the industry came as

… a big shock and a great misfortune, especially for the families [of the miners]. (…) It was no good to be a worker anymore. (…). It was rather shameful to say, “I’m worker, I’m from Ostrava.” That wasn’t as good as it used to be; it was stupid all of a sudden (Hana).

In addition, the termination of the production in LAV, with all the issues it attracted and represented, became part of the debate over the role of industry in the city:

Well… it [termination of production in LAV] was also a symbol of the change in the whole region, that the industrial is over and now something new must start. And nobody knew what the new would be (Hana).

Thus, the LAV has been rendered as a mighty epitome of the local industrial nature. As an emerging icon, it has been placed into the cultural structure of the local understanding of the industry – the burdens of the past and the expectations from the present collapsed into the problematic image of the LAV.

This is, however, bound to a picture of Ostrava’s culture as a specific one that persists within its population; yet, the critical stance has blended with a touch of pride for the
distinctiveness to which industry has contributed. Through pervasive self-narration, Ostrava’s population maintains the narrative and nurtures it.

It is important to recognize the historical embeddedness of industry in the region and while its narrative had been promoted as positive during communist governance, after the Velvet Revolution and further into the 1990s, it transformed into a negative one in which Ostrava occupies an inferior status. The narrative of Ostrava as a black and unprosperous city is further significant as it closely articulates with the meaning-making of the LAV conversion. This will be discussed in Chapter 6.

To sum up this section, which marks the beginning of the transformation of the area, it can be argued that the character of the termination highlights the multiple interests affecting the nature of place-making. With the transformation of the regime, new possible interpretations of industry emerged. The dissipation of the single narration of the LAV as the bread-winner of the city allowed for diversification in the meanings of the area. Institutional change made it possible to take measures that reflected the meaning-making processes. The environmental concerns that had the power to stop the factory in the 1990s were, however, not voiced later on.

The diversity in how the respondents tended to explain the crucial point in the LAV’s history suggests that there is not a single strong narrative or a united collective memory that would serve as a tool for current comprehension of such history. Yet, we could observe tendencies in their answers indicating that both the changing institution of the economy and the role of politics in the lives of the people rendered the area a battlefield of various interests: economic, political and civic-environmental.

5.3 Negotiations: Ruins or monuments?

With the termination of the coal and metallurgical production in the LAV, Ostrava’s cityscape became affected by a “new class of structures” (Gotham 2001) – the antiquated and abandoned area of the former ironworks and the coal mine facility. Albeit lighter on industrial noise and air pollution, the urban skyline stayed the same – blast furnaces rising over the associated buildings, creating an organism of metallurgy and the head frame, marking the hard work that used to take place underground. Competing narratives began to shape and structure the meaning-making processes.
Throughout the 1990s, the area had been subject to divergent interpretations that were redefining its past and sketching its possible future. The understanding of the area balanced between the ugly and the unique, the ruin and the monument, the former and the future. Such binary oppositions are part of culture as a classification system. Both as a part of a human society and as an analytical tool, binary oppositions help to simplify the complexity of symbolic production; they help us navigate social reality (Alexander 2003). By marking out the oppositions, we can deconstruct the symbolic boundary that lies between the two discourses. In the struggle for redefinition of the LAV, two ways of narrating crystallize. As the sacred and good, the value of the LAV as heritage should be protected; on the other hand, as the profane and evil, the LAV is looked upon as a defunct ruin not worthy of preservation. To reconstruct the two narrative frames in which the area was constructed as either a ruin or a monument, we will examine how the area was talked about and what role institutional change in Czech politics and business has had.

Although the material markers of industry stayed in place, the narration around it modified radically. After many years in which the city grew with the industry and people were moving to Ostrava, the opposite then occurred. People started to leave the region and as the area was not able to fulfill its promise of a bread-winner for the region, resentment grew. The radical change in the narration of the professions within heavy industry colored the collective memory of the local society. The wealth of coal and iron was transformed into increasing unemployment and even though emissions had been reduced in the late 1990s with the industrial cessation, the air quality was still poor and the health of the locals remained at risk (Jiřík et al. 2016). The LAV was no longer a zone of prosperity and vivid work life; it was a brownfield that required care. And “it was claimed to be a pile of iron scraps, something that harms the image of Ostrava and that would be better pulled down” (Sylvie).

At the same time, there was another discourse narrating the area as a place of historical and architectonical value, as a place of industrial heritage. The protection of the LAV as cultural heritage started as early as 1993, when the area of the Hlubina coal mine and its technology equipment was declared cultural heritage by the Ministry of Culture based on the recommendation submitted by the local Heritage Institute (Ministerstvo kultury České republiky 1993). In 1995, the whole area, including the Ironworks, became
protected as an urban conservation area by the Ostrava municipality. This decision, however, was not welcomed by the owner of the Vítkovice Ironworks area and the coke-oven batteries – The Vítkovice Company – as it limited the possible manipulation of the still-operating area (Šustková 2012, 14). Nevertheless, from the preservationists’ point of view, this was a very important step towards the subsequent proclamation of the whole area as cultural heritage, which took place in 2000. Yet, declaring the area cultural heritage was opposed by the company as well as by the municipality (Ministerstvo kultury České republiky 2000). The efforts for heritage protection nevertheless culminated in 2002,18 when the area was declared a National Cultural Heritage site 19 (Matěj, Korbelářová, and Tejzr 2014, 86).

Petr said he thought that there was pressure from the locals to turn the area into a protected zone, yet Pavel disagreed by saying that he thinks that “the broad public agreed with the [idea of] demolition because it appeared to them as ugly, because they didn’t realize that, because Ostrava was full of that [abandoned industrial objects]…” Rudolf walked the same line, saying,

I think that they [the locals] were used to the fact that there is something standing and rotting, those buildings… that nobody cared about… there were so many things in ruins, that nobody was really bothered….

Hana remarked,

The termination and the new times and everything is different, so these very people [before representing the industrial] started to deny it and wanted to tear it down (…). Well, that was a period when there was a threat that it would… it would … simply disappear, the various industrial buildings.

Both of these narratives drew upon a certain way of seeing materiality at play. On one hand, the cultural protection that had been developed during that period tried to elevate the unique merit of the LAV, of the technical objects and apparatus found there. It is the technological chain “coal – coke – iron” concentrated in a single area that makes this particular complex so valuable and important in terms of industrial heritage. As

18 Since 2001, the Lower Area of Vítkovice has been listed on the tentative list for a world heritage site under UNESCO as a part of “The Industrial complexes at Ostrava” (for more see UNESCO n.d.). The fact that the future of the listing is uncertain established further the contradicting views on the protection of the heritage.

19 Enacted by a government order (no. 337/2002).
Veronika put it, “The continuity of the [technological] process - that is what you will find nowhere else in Europe.” On the other hand, the Vítkovice Company was in a rather complicated situation and declared that it did not have resources to participate in sustaining the protected premises (Šůstková 2012, 15). The Ostrava city political leadership was also against the cultural protection of the premises and proposed complete liquidation of the facilities as a better solution (Ministerstvo kultury České republiky 2000) as the Ostrava landmarks were decaying:

… Really, it was like they left it (…). Really, it was like this, the machines shut down, materials scattered all around. It was just falling into disrepair and they were stealing there, those who would come there for the metal (Pavel).

Thus, despite the progress toward declaring the technological complex cultural heritage, the idea of maintaining it collided with the rather economistic and rational approach to the question of what to do about the LAV. As Kift points out, declaring industrial sites as heritage does not necessarily provide them with “a new lease on life” (Kift 2011, 381). And in the case of the LAV, the idea of razing the area to the ground was not turned down completely.

5.3.1 Private owner, concerned citizens and the search for funding

Around year 2000, post-socialist institutional change was in process. For some time, it seemed that the entire LAV would be transferred to the state company DIAMO. However, the governmental strategy desired to privatize the company as one unit, including the premises of National Cultural Heritage (Šůstková 2012, 16). The company managing the ironworks area, Vítkovice a.s., was privatized in 2003 and became a part of VÍTKOVICE Holding led by the director Jan Světlík, who was facing the challenge of administering the cultural heritage (Matěj, Korbelářová, and Tejžr 2014, 88).

Already in the 1990s, multiple proposals, visions and ideas emerged to tackle the thorny issue of what to do with the unproductive industrial zone. One of the options advanced was an open-air museum20. However, this was not desired by the Vítkovice Company

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20 This option would literally conserve the area as it was at that point (the so-called method of “the last day”) or put the monuments into the regime of controlled ruin that would leave them decaying.
(Michálek and Světlík 2012, 40), because of the high maintenance costs that the vast area full of technical buildings and facilities would require (Kubiček 2001, Moravec 2000). Other voices pursued reuse of the area and followed, among others, a series of studies conducted by Helena Zemánková and her students, which preceded the halting of both the Hlubina mine and the Vítkovice Ironworks and suggested possible ways of dealing with what was then the future industrial ruins (Matěj, Korbelářová, and Tejzr 2014, 80). Visions that proposed a mixture of tourism, education, cultural and leisure activities were coming from various sources (for example, from citizens’ associations) (see e.g. Bortličková 2002).

Yet, in August 2003, the new private owner expressed the opinion that the company would either sell the site to someone interested in its development or would find a way to remove the cultural heritage status: “Museum management is not what we do business in” (Kubátová 2003). In company sources, we can read that at the time, the owner saw a solution for the industrial zone, with a new type of industry taking over the area (Šústková 2012, 16).

Understanding the LAV as a sacred place was expressed through both civic and expert interests in the area that symbolically claimed power to re-defining it. As unauthorized persons couldn’t enter it, the area was a compelling mystery. For example, Ivo, who is now working as the head of one of the institutions in the LAV, remembered with nostalgia: “In my student years, when I would take the tram that passed through here, along the white head frame, I couldn’t imagine what was inside here.” Some of the respondents reported that the people who had not been able to look into the area during its operation started visiting the LAV after that. Sylvie recalls these “forbidden” trips: “… one climbed up an [electricity] pole and walked all around the Lower Area of Vítkovice on the pipes.” Later, Sylvie was also a part of the group that organized guided tours there; she told me they were very popular. Hana took part in unofficial events that took place in one of the area’s empty buildings. “… It was an amazing moment. All of the sudden, in the almost abandoned area (…), just out of nowhere, some hundreds of people arrived just for culture.” Such events aimed at pointing out the value the objects had. They were grassroots reactions to the decision-making process happening somewhere else by other people.
Offering practical solutions, the materialized interest by the expert public challenged the symbolic divide between the mundane, the ruin that is both financially demanding and an unpleasant reminder of the old days, and the sacred that must be preserved. Sylvie remembers,

(…) [W]e did some sort of protest and organized public debates. The public debates dealt with the future of the Lower Area [of Vítkovice]. This, as a matter of fact, followed the activities of the people who have been longer interested in it [the Lower Area]. (…) Then, we established a dialogue with him [the owner] and gradually, after two years or so, in 2005-2006, we managed to change his opinion … [I]t was of course his, in his head, he had to make the decision… so in that period he somehow understood that it is possible to get those European subsidies for the reconstruction (…).

In a similar vein, Pavel recollects, “[I]n its time, even the current owner was interested in demolition (…)”, and adds, “[L]uckily, he later realized maybe that there is a great heritage/legacy and huge potential and decided to use it in the right way.”

According to Sylvie, it was the concerned citizens who were ceaselessly pointing to the option of public funds that would cover a reconstruction of the cultural heritage. Based on the studies done over the years, the owner applied for funds. These requests were, however, repeatedly declined. Later, the study “National Cultural Heritage Vítkovice: Opening to the public and new utilization,” focusing on the objects of main importance in the area, was carried out and it established a new basis for the funding application. This application was successful (Matěj, Korbelářová, and Tejzr 2014, 89). In order to be able to apply for and receive possible funds, the owner had to create an interest association of legal entities since a private company could not be entitled to such support. The association Dolní oblast VÍTKOVICE was founded in December 2007.21

In 2009, a memorandum concerning mutual cooperation in the renewal and new usage of the technical heritage was signed between the Vítkovice Company and the National Heritage Institute and a new conception for the conversion of objects in the LAV was developed. Later in 2009, the ruling on granting a subsidy of 500 million CZK from the European Structural and Investment Funds was signed.

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21 It has four members; three of them are private companies within the VÍTKOVICE Machinery Group and the fourth is the Technical University of Ostrava. In addition, the voluntary association is in a partnership with the city of Ostrava and the Moravian-Silesian region (Dolní oblast VÍTKOVICE 2014).
Similarly, there were studies developing the conversion of the Hlubina mine area. In 2010, the two-part study “National Cultural Heritage Hlubina: Opening to the public and new utilization” was carried out, along with a subsequent urban study on the relations between the Hlubina area and the ironworks area (Šustková 2015, 15). The same year was marked by transfer of the property from the state organization DIAMO to the administration of the Moravian-Silesian region. Two years later, the regional administration gifted the mine area to the voluntary association Dolní oblast VÍTKOVICE, which had been renting it since 2009 (Šustková 2015, 22).

Jan stated matter-of-factly that “if the area hadn’t been declared National Cultural Heritage, then let’s lose the illusion that the area would exist in any shape today, because it would probably be hit by the same fate as the other industrial areas.” Therefore, we can say that although the importance of the local objects and their potential was clear, the legal protection that the heritage management enforced might have been of critical importance for survival of the area.

Nevertheless, as Veronika mentioned, the effort to obtain European subsidies by the formal actors in the area was substantial and it was naturally welcomed by the heritage management institute because it was very important to bear in mind that “restoration of such a large area would never be done from private money.” Veronika told me that resolving what was going to happen with the area after the closing of its original operation “was a difficult task faced by both the owner and the heritage management [institute] and de facto by those inhabitants of Ostrava, too.” Veronika’s claim highlights the connection between the area and the people and what is more, she sees the LAV as the symbol of industry, as something the citizens have to come to terms with, too.

The long process of reaching the formulation of the final projects that succeeded in acquiring money has been almost labyrinthine. On the backdrop of the two opposing views, we could see how the social action was formed and how it navigated through the democratic institutions. When subjectivity is socially constructed, the seemingly internal feelings aid the meaning-making process, providing social actors with motivation to take part in social action. (Alexander 2003).
The sacred side of the binary featured discourse that was idealistic and protection-oriented. It engaged with the civic sphere and the heritage protection institutions. The discourse based on the profane opposition was focused on efficiency and narrated the LAV as unfitting for the new post-industrial period, threatening with destruction (Smith 1999). It was connected to the company and the municipality. The different narrations of the LAV were in conversation. The activity of the three players that came to the fore (the owner of the area, the city municipality and the heritage management institute) was certainly influenced by the local resident group and their civic activities that promoted the appeal of the industrial zone, as well as by the formal declarations of the area’s historical and cultural importance.

Built on the past while eager to be the future, the industrial heritage project provides a space to negotiate the core tensions that have emerged with deindustrialization – between the past and future (Frisch 1998).
As we move into the new era of the LAV, the conversion project seems to dispel the fears of further need to deal with the decaying brownfield. While Ostrava has had to pay attention to many other burdens of both former and present-day industrial activities, the conversion of LAV has created a novel public arena in the declining city. According to Kunc and his colleagues (2014), embracing cultural heritage and engaging in private-public partnerships to deal with the challenge of brownfields are steps usually taken by western countries. In post-soviet ones, on the contrary, it has mostly been foreign capital striving for quick economic returns that have led investment in redevelopment (Kunc et al. 2014, 110).

Although the project of refurbishing the LAV might be perceived as the climax of such a debate in Ostrava, the discussion continues. If we understand the conversion of the LAV and the altered materiality it produced as a “non-verbal medium for symbolic communication” (Alexander 2008b, 12), then we can see that social actors have engaged in this communication. They decode and interpret the signifiers that are in place and incorporate them into the narratives they have used to talk about what has been happening around them.

How does the conversion of the contested site sway meaning-making processes further?

In the previous chapter, I argued that the historicity and semantic charge of the LAV was joined by its iconic potential, rendering it throughout the years an iconic object in both the cityscape and the cultural sphere. Through the “historical continuity of cultural orders” (Bartmanski and Alexander 2012, 2), the area has emerged as a “powerful and resilient cultural structure” (Ibid.). It can be argued that the transformation that has been taking place in the LAV has further strengthened its iconic power. This proposition will be examined in this chapter.
Has the material reconstruction of the LAV intervened into meaning-making processes, into the narratives about past?

In what follows, I explore how respondents talk about, explain and narrate the transformation of the LAV into an open urban site, finalized in 2015. I examine how memories of the area have been mobilized in order to make a meaningful impact on the present and the future (see e.g. Frisch 1998) and how the project further stresses the iconic power of the material complex at play. I also discuss how the respondents describe its new purpose and suggest that narration of the new LAV is tightly connected to Ostrava’s reputation.

Sattler claims that post-industrial places must find a new way to narrate themselves (Sattler 2013, 89) but it is people who embody power over the narratives and discourses connected to defunct places. The meanings do not come from the material surface but from society: “from somewhere outside the objects themselves” (Alexander 2012, 26).

6.1 Past in the present

As we have seen in Chapter 5, the navigation of the meaningfulness of the LAV has been aided through binary codes constructing the area as either the profane or the sacred. Because the area lost its primary function, the company and the municipality has considered the area a ruin that should yield to another project better fitting the post-industrial period. However, the civic sphere and the heritage institutes perceive the area as something that transcends this profane sphere and for its long life and uniqueness, it was hailed as sacred. If the negotiations between the two binary principles (the area as a ruin – profane, and the area as a monument – sacred) can be meaningfully placed on the cultural structure of the LAV, then the face-lifted, redeveloped site must contain both. As a lieu de memoire, site of memory (Nora 1989), the LAV contains both the binary codes. The battle over the need for historical continuity has been settled as it was decided to maintain the area in the mode of protected heritage. However, the hereby formed space contains both the sacred and the profane and becomes a hybrid on its way to stop the power of forgetting (Nora 1989).

Josef worked as apprentice in a workshop with heavy machinery in the LAV 30 years ago. During our conversation, he mentioned with smile a canteen that is no longer there:
“Basically, you could buy beer here, draft beer that is... Guys would hang around with those beers during the break.” What other people could only see from the outside, Josef saw from the inside as well. Back then, the area was noisy, dusty and surprisingly cold: “… it was [warm] only when the pig iron was being tapped, just around that place, but otherwise it was bloody cold around here.” Josef’s workplace was located in the basement of the electric central station no. 6, today the Small Science and Technology Center. When walking through the building together, hearing children’s voices all around, Josef said that everything, including the walls, used to be dirty, and unlike today, there were not so many bathrooms. “These are just some bits and pieces,” he said dreamily.

These pieces of memory can still appear as part of today’s conversations, even though some of the particular objects are missing or have undergone a physical change. Eva and Ivo, who both work in the new institutions located in the LAV and meet the visitors regularly, talked (in our respective interviews) about the older generation of visitors who still had a strong relationship to the area. The older visitors have expressed happiness over the fact that the industrial zone was saved from being torn down. Eva recounted:

They [the older visitors] think back how it was, how they worked here, and recall the work in very good way, which is surprising to me given the hard conditions and the money and such (…) There is kind of nostalgia in them; they are happy there is something happening there and that it was not torn down. (…) They are proud to have worked there, that there was something this big in Ostrava and they are proud to show it to their grandchildren.

Ivo talked about the former workers in a similar way:

When the men that used to go down into the pit and work here in Hlubina their entire lives, when they learned that there would be a reconstruction, they only scolded and they said: “You, the young, you only destroy everything, you don’t respect anything....” But when they come today and see that the buildings have been reconstructed and have a new purpose and there are no night clubs as they had thought, they completely melt and start telling stories (…) So one can see that even after those 20, 30 years, they still have a relationship to the colliery.
Because the present and the past are constantly negotiated and unstable concepts of time (Adam 1998), they intermingle. When I asked how Ivo looked at the history of the LAV, he excitedly told me:

When the plant was working and produced millions of tons of iron (...) I don’t have any direct experience with that, but the more I go deeper in that and meet people who have spent their entire lives here (...), so it is simply confirming to me in that it is a part of history, that what I saw before only as a part of something new. It is great to have this kind of job where from the old something new is arises.

In line with what Assmann (2008a) suggests, the present materiality of the LAV works as a certain form of mediation that eases the individual’s participation in collective memory. Although for some it might seem a “terrribly long time since it was closed down” (Josef), for others the idea of the area as an operating plant is still somehow connected to current society - to “us.”

The old history is such that it was long ago. But now, when one realizes that those workers were walking there in our days and we were walking there with them and there was the contemporary helmet lying around, not the old one, but the contemporary one (...), so then one realizes that we are still part of the history, that we have touched it. (Rudolf)

Memories have reference points in space and in turn, the alteration of the places might modify the memories settled there (Truc 2011). It was already Halbwachs (1992) who recognized that spatial images are central to the collective memory of a place. It is not the place itself, yet the collective representations that keep the imprint of a place within a group and provide the shared memories with a spatial framework. Burzová and her colleagues (2013) show how “ideational representations” can sustain collective memory as unchanged even when the physical characteristics of a place are destroyed. I would like to build on this proposition and, in light of the theory of iconic power, I propose that the ideational representation that renders collective memory at a place can be maintained and perpetuated by the very iconic power of the place. Iconic power is the ability of a material object to mediate meanings as well as collective representations.

Rudolf further said, “When it was running, it was a factory as any other here.” The value and the uniqueness of the area could be only understood “when looking back.”
Only when the context of a locality is changed, some of its inherited aspects are brought to the surface.

It is in ruins – physical residua of the past – where the past and the present meet (Assmann 2011). As long as stories are told about these defunct places, narratives are handed down and passed through memory, and the places stay to undergird it (Ibid.). In the LAV, the past and the present are connected through narrating the place as historically significant and this has provided the location with a meaningful frame. Yet, the LAV of today is not rendered only a place of memories. Even less, we can call the converted LAV “ruins.”

In the section that follows, I will extend the analysis to respondents’ understanding of the visual change that was part of site’s conversion. It will become clear that the redevelopment updated the industrial ruins into polished facilities, at least some of them. On our walk through the LAV of 2015, we will discover only one ruin that attracts attention, a coking plant. While the LAV is still able to retain memories, the conversion has minimized the historical places and focused on providing the area with a future.

6.2 Reconstruction: New aesthetics

In section 4.1, I described the key objects refurbished during the transformation. Here, I hope to capture the new aesthetics in the landscape of meanings. To examine the iconic potential of the LAV, we must see how the feeling of connection between depth and the surface (between the symbolic and the material) emerges in the data. What does the way people talk about the material surface reveal about its discursive depth?

Since the large area of the LAV is composed of various buildings and structures, it makes one feel differently about them when walking through. For example, Veronika likened the objects in the Hlubina colliery to houses. There, the most important processes of mining took place underground. In contrast, the structures in the ironworks area are technical constructions with a single purpose, noted Veronika. What is the consequence for the person who found herself there? The ironworks area imposes on a person the massiveness and heaviness of the iron constructions. On the contrary, the colliery makes one feel as if they are in a small town. “Hlubina, the mine, it has more of
a human scale as I like to say; it has a scale of a city (...). In the other part, everything is so monumental” (Hana).

The monumentality of the LAV is what forms the defining feature of Ostrava’s skyline. The complex of blast furnaces, smokestacks and towers has earned the label “Ostrava’s answer to Prague Castle” by its distinctive presence on the horizon. Being so close to the city center, it stands out from the otherwise rather flat skyline of the city peppered with a few church towers and high-rise apartment buildings.

Certainly, one might follow the aesthetic function of an object to find its meaning (e.g. Mukařovský 1970). Art has the ability to transmit meanings and deep symbolic codes through, for example, something as material as a sculpture. Since materiality can invoke feelings, it follows that a certain value for society can be signified through such (aesthetically shaped) material objects. This is what Alexander (2008a) calls iconic consciousness. It is to experience the meaning without the mind intervening.

The industrial aesthetics can be highly appealing. While not being exactly art suitable for a gallery wall, industrial objects incorporate an aesthetic element. For instance, coal-mining complexes have demonstrated the owner’s prosperity and thus, significant attention has been given to their architectonical design. Besides these qualities, they frequently illustrate the dominant architectonic style of their era applied to utilitarian industrial objects (Dvořáková, Fragner, and Šenberger 2007, 234). The attention the industrial objects and areas register might be provoked by an emotional charge, stemming from the ruins in the form of nostalgia, or the opportunity for a critique of the social consequences of ruined industries through, for example, photography (Gibas 2008). The conversion of the LAV has certainly worked with the aesthetic elements of the place.

When I asked Adam, an architect working on the conversion project, how he had planned and thought about what changes the reconstruction would comprise, he answered that he obtained a “quite concrete assignment” and his task was to figure out how to turn it into reality. He added:

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22 Ostravské Hradčany in Czech.
I had the opinion that it should intervene quite a lot and radically into the essence of the heritage, while taking into account the preservation of its authenticity and, I would say, the living memory. (...) I wanted the heritage to become something living, animate, a living city, to be able to make some money so that it doesn’t have to wait for other subsidies from Europe and the state. But, at the same time I didn’t want it to lose the magic of the industrial, rather the opposite - to manifold the magic of the industrial even more.

The purposeful work with the industrial aesthetics and the radical intervention has resulted in what we can see in the area now. Pavel said it is “nicely cleaned” and added that, as an architect, he thinks that it was necessary to focus the reconstruction on key objects and clean the rest. “Cleaning” the area, in other words, the removal of unwanted, useless or dangerous objects, can be connected to the demolitions that occurred in the first decade of the new millennium. Yet, stripping the area of some of its components that had been ensuring the interconnections in the operating industrial “organism” is seen by others as a loss of local authenticity.

For example, when walking from the Gong towards blast furnace no.1 on the new pavement and passing the place where a canteen used to stand, Josef told me,

Even when the sun was shining, it was dark here. Today, there is light, but before, there was always something above you… There were so many pipes, you couldn’t see the sky back then. When it was raining, it didn’t rain on you, because there was always some kind of roof over you …

Sylvie understood the transformation as a loss of the original beauty of the industrial area:

It was filled with buildings, but there were machines outside, too. We have some pictures; it looked the same inside the U6 as outside. It was filled with machines. That was so unique, beautiful. Everything got lost, and God knows where it is. It is cleaned and instead, there are parking places.

Like Josef and Sylvie, other respondents tended to talk about the new surface of the LAV in comparison to how it was “before.” And Petr acknowledged: “Yes, the area has been changed… the change was necessary. If it stayed [like it was], it wouldn’t have the value for the city.” Similarly, Tomáš pointed out that the interest in the industrial brownfield aesthetics would not help to maintain the site: “An industrial museum… that

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23 For more, see, for example, (Ryšková 2016).
would attract a couple of, as I call them, industrial romantics – people who take a camera, take a couple of pictures, good, but by this, the area would wither away.” Without an intervention, the area would decay.

Figure 7. The touristic map of the Lower Area of Vítkovice for visitors, in English. Source: (Dolní VÍTKOVICE n.d. a)

The new look of the LAV is depicted in the above map for tourists (Figure 7). It is a tool to help visitors navigate and understand the area, yet it is also a means of communication (Kitchin and Tate 2000, Kukkonen 2011). As a specific representation of the area, the map communicates where a visitor should go, how she can move around and ultimately, what a visitor should and should not be interested in. On the map, we can see the objects reconstructed under the project marked, namely the Bolt Tower, the Gong, the Science and Technology centers and the art facilities in Hlubina, including cafes, as well as some conversions that have been carried out by other private subjects,
such as the climbing wall and a theater bar. Yet what the map fails to mark is an important aspect of the LAV historical value and uniqueness – the coke-oven batteries that are part of the technological cycle. While their residue is still at place, not marking them on the tourist guide makes them invisible for those relying only on the map as their main source of knowledge about the site.

This partial removal of the coking plant was interpreted in various ways in the interviews. Adam mentioned it when talking about the connection between the two parts of the site:

Between Hlubina and the Lower Area [the ironworks area], there was a barrier, a huge coking plant, a coking plant that was impossible to step over by a human, so we managed to tear down half of the coking plant, so a connection has been reached…

In contrast to Adam, who understood the coking plant as a physical barrier, Eva upheld the view of the coking plant as a monument, and said that it is part of the core of the “uniqueness of the site.”

We can observe that the meanings settling on the new visual form of the LAV are based on comparison with how people felt in the LAV earlier; they mention what they value from before based on its absence today. The LAV after its conversion is not presented as a “collection of monuments” (Crinson and Tyrer 2005, 59). The site has been built and rebuilt, cleaned and cleared; it does not want to be historical. The purification of the area from unnecessary facilities makes the reconstructed objects rise; from them, blast furnace no. 1 protrudes as a contested element of the new era.

6.2.1 Building on the symbolic: Blast furnace no. 1 and Bolt Tower

The redevelopment of the area actively engaged in the cultural signification of the chosen elements in the LAV. Blast furnace no. 1 was extended by a glass café – an extension in a shape of helix. The extension was designed as a symbol of the gaseous flames that from time to time grew above the blast furnace. No matter what their technological origin is, their representation by the glass-metal structure is widely associated with the “most prosperous period of the area, when there is enough of everything and the iron is flowing” (Pavel).
Yet, the name of the blast furnace in the new coat, chosen in a public competition, refers to different work with the symbols. Firstly, the name Bolt Tower is connected to its real visual appearance of a helix seated on the top of the blast furnace as a crown. Secondly, the name corresponds with name of the athlete Usain Bolt, who has visited Ostrava several times on the occasion of the Golden Spike annual athletics event, and who eventually christened the extension. The authors actively engaged in meaning-making work and while blast furnace no. 1 is praised by everybody, Bolt Tower is despised by some.

After searching for the right words, Hana uttered “… it appears to me as needless… I mean, I’ll always call the blast furnace a blast furnace and not Bolt Tower. That is what appears to me as painting over the past.” Sylvie perceived the extension as “an unnecessary megalomania” and questioned its usability: “Because if I ask who needs it, then in case of the superstructure, we can say that no one. If it wasn’t there, nobody would miss it. (…) Why isn’t there something different, important, good for people?” Eva believed that the extension “is distracting. The blast furnace is nice in itself. It has its own architecture and simply: it is the original.” And like Hana, she was quite perplexed by Bolt Tower:

Well, he [the owner] is the one making big claims and big gestures (…) so they just used the opportunity that Usain Bolt was here, well… yes, I understand… but I see it as a stupid thing, nonsense… People who come here and don’t know the context they might ask: “Why not Bezruč Tower, or Nohavica Tower?”… Well, we can do nothing about it… and I think that nobody is going to call it like that anyway…

On the other hand, Josef, who experienced the blast furnace in its full operation, said in the interview that the current appearance of the Tower is “a little bit dry.” He explained it by saying: “When I saw it in the short movies in which he [the author of the extension] describes his visions and how it would look, it was supposed be a kind of bonfire.” And despite his failed expectations, he admits: “At night… it shines nicely over Vítkovice. I like it.” Veronika talked about the low interest in the industrial monuments in the Czech context: “Nobody cared, nobody was interested.” She continued explaining the system of monument protection until she finished by saying: “The tower means transferring the area into the future.”

24 See Appendix 3.
In the narratives, we can see how meanings structure peoples’ statements. The discursive depth is revealed when respondents voice their subjective feelings about the material objects at play. When they connect the defunct blast furnace with the past, the future and authenticity, or its lack thereof, the meanings emerge within the cultural structure. Furthermore, when the cultural structure is deliberately invoked, the discursive depth (the blast furnace extension made to symbolize the fire of old achievements) is materialized. Yet, in this case, the blast furnace’s superstructure is further connected to new symbols, to something modern and trendy. The symbolism of the past is offered together with the symbolism of the present or even, the future.

The blast furnaces found in the LAV have always been an inseparable part of the complex’s skyline, which is also one of the protected elements of the national cultural heritage LAV\textsuperscript{25} (Národní památkový ústav 2015). The panoramic view was changed with this extension on blast furnace no. 1. Whereas conservation experts worry about the extent to which the extension has ruined the panorama of the LAV,\textsuperscript{26} what I would like to stress here is the deliberate acknowledging of the importance of the skyline and the will to intervene in it.

For instance, Sylvie invites into her interpretation also other symbols found in Ostrava’s cityscape and asks rhetorically, “Why would the LAV have to compete with the city hall?” She draws this comparison because the extension of blast furnace no. 1 took over the primacy of Ostrava’s city hall tower as the highest point in Ostrava. Sylvie materializes the perceived discord between the LAV and Ostrava’s city center into Bolt Tower.

Before I move forward to discuss how the new purposes of the LAV are involved in how people make sense of the site, let me summarize what has been suggested in this subchapter. It can be said that the visual expression of the new form of the site is for many the proof of its change. The critique of the new aesthetics of the place points to the former clash of the binary codes. These binaries of sacred and profane, monument

\textsuperscript{25} A picture of the skyline can be found on page 2 above.

\textsuperscript{26} In a recent publication of National Heritage Institute, an article about the LAV asks: “How much can a heritage site ‘withstand’?” (Ryšková 2016, 147).
and ruin, take on another form when witnessing the quite radical intervention into the old structures.

The new objects placed there are symbols to be read and interpreted and the locals do so. With the old binary oppositions in the background, new binaries emerge. The new binary codes now could be understood as opposition between conservative and radical approaches. One side of the binary regards the monuments as “beautiful” and good in their “original” form and settings. They do not need to be rebuilt and should not be removed. The second side of the binary considers the LAV as a place of change. The objects need to be “intervened” into in order to be capable to sustain in the new era; otherwise, they should be removed or sidelined.

The high-profile (re)construction has culturally signified certain objects that fit the new purpose and the new view of the area, while sidelined others that are part of the complex of technological flow. If it is the iconic power that allows material objects to mediate meanings (Bartmanski and Alexander 2012), the LAV’s conversion further strengthens this power.

The intervention into the visual form of the LAV has been connected to the repurposing of the area’s function. The function itself does not undergird any meanings and hence, it is not what is of interest here. However, it is the respondents’ understanding of the new purpose and the way they expressed it in our interviews that compels us.

### 6.3 Repurposing

The industrial objects whose function has evaporated are not only important landmarks in their localities, but they can also be perceived as a focal point for the development of new activities (Fragner 2001, 7). In this fashion, the project of the conversion of the LAV has been motivated by finding a “new utilization” for the brownfield that was also a cultural heritage site. After a period of uncertainty, it was decided to revitalize the area, open it to the public and fill the old iron constructions with new activities. The change of the contents of the area went hand in hand with the aesthetic transformation. For this research, it is not important what the declared purpose of the new LAV is. In order to continue exploring meaning-making processes in the LAV, I will consider how
our respondents understand the new purpose of the converted area and how they incorporate it into their narration of the site.

As it had been “disconnected from the web of production” (Bangstad 2011, 279) that provided it with a certain stability in the local society, the LAV was during the conversion re-furbished with new purposes that give it a different position in the landscape of meaning. How is the place used today? What does that say about the sedimentation of meanings in the area? We will see that the new contents of the LAV are understood as a way to maintain the industrial objects. While the new diverse functions are created to attract the locals on a daily basis, the desire for more visitors is still present in the narrations.

When I asked Jan what he thought about the today’s aim for the LAV, he started to balance: “The architecture of the old buildings is beautiful, but in fact it is hardly utilizable for new industry or some kind of commerce.” Along a similar line, Tomáš said:

“Having the multifunction hall there, the area is also multifunctional,” said Marek after couple of seconds of hesitation when asked what the new purpose of the area is. He then added that the voluntary organization arranging life in the converted area presents the area as an entertainment industry. Also, he understood the LAV’s conversion as a business plan that required a high number of visitors: “[That is why] there is something happening all the time,” he explained. In contrast, Roman explains the number of activities and events as a way to take care of the objects: “The leadership of the organization there… they are interested in their objects and they do everything they can to have events there and to have visitors there, so that it wouldn’t be forgotten.”

Tomáš, Ivo and Eva, who all worked in the area at the time of the fieldwork, pointed out the educational activities. According to Ivo, the main goal of the revitalization is education as it was
the key thing for which the voluntary organization was established. That means – for one, reconstruct the property, the national cultural heritage, but via the renovated objects, get here an unconventional function of education.

Eva excitedly highlighted that the activities there are for anyone, from children to seniors, “Something like this hasn’t been here yet, so the locals found an alternative to spend their time… They can stay the whole day.” But more importantly, she highlighted, “They can come any time again since the expositions are changing.”

This function of education that is so well-defined and considered essential by some, is moreover understood as a “connection to the young generation. The Science and Technology Centers are nothing else but focused on putting the technical and natural sciences into a little bit more positive light” (Tomáš).

Counterbalancing the focus on technical education, the Hlubina colliery is focused on arts, culture and crafts. Hana explained what the Hlubina colliery was for her and what the motivation was for installing this content into the complex.

Concretely, here at the Hlubina mine, it is sort of a cultural quarter, because here … we felt the need to have people here every day, because they haven’t been here. So that it wouldn’t be a ghost town here where there is a party in the evening but just two people sending emails during the day. So, creation of a daily population… people from the art studios and rehearsal rooms and such, so that somebody is here all the time.

The desire to bring people in on a daily basis is something that was voiced by almost all of the respondents. While earlier, Roman evoked the fear of forgetting the area if there is lack of interest about it, later in our conversation, he provided a more practical explanation: “Well, one can have a beautiful theater but if no one goes there, the theater will close down and actors will go act somewhere else. (…) In order to run, the LAV needs to offer diverse attractions, diverse things” (Roman).

And in contrast to the large reconstructions in the ironworks part of the LAV, the conversion of the Hlubina mine facilities was seen as an opportunity to attract more daily life into the area. As, for example, Pavel explained:

…I was way more skeptical about the project before the cultural quarter was based here (…) It is starting to get under one’s skin, that there is
something interesting happening there [in Hlubina]; that it won’t be so that one just visits that place with family once a year – going to the Science and Technology Center and seeing a performance in the Gong... It wouldn’t work that way, I think.

People “come here from downtown to have coffee, for example, biking or just… also strolling, but … also walking their dogs here…,” was how Hana described the atmosphere in the former colliery. “In the summer, we were joking that it is almost like being in a cabin here. It is so calm here when there is no festival or concert taking place at the moment,” Hana shared. It follows that the respondents felt the wish to include the LAV in the urban life taking place just a few kilometers away in the city center.

There were also various expectations reflected about the background of repurposing the LAV, not only expectations of what the area is but also what it should be and how it should operate. This is what Jan saw as the problem with the current purpose of the area: “But that is the problem – one cannot use all of the areas, especially in an industrial city, for culture. Culture will not support it and someone will have to subsidize it.” As we learned earlier, Adam’s participation in the transformation of the LAV was driven by his belief that the monuments should be converted in a way they could “work” and “make some money” so that they do not have to “wait for subsidies.” Yet, Sylvie opposed this view, clarifying:

[Those] who think that the monuments should work [to make money], they know this is not true. The LAV is not able to generate enough money for the operation. The money for operation is so huge, it comes from city [municipality] and the region [the regional administration] and the monuments are unable to make so much.

Tomáš explained that besides the subsidies they obtain, there is “our own adroitness – entrance fees, rental (…) and partners.” Veronika, after stressing what she had said earlier during the interview that she believed the conversions are “the way to give the monuments a future,” pointed to the different uses of the conversions in the LAV. While the extension works as a viewpoint and the café where one must pay to enter, “How much is the entrance fee into Hlubina? Zero. Well, you see....,” she said, showing me a webpage where the general public was voting for their favorite part of LAV, and
the number of votes for Hlubina by far outweighed the popularity of the blast furnace extension.  

The transformation of the LAV also included economic factors that the respondents reflected on, placing finances and profit/loss into the narratives of both individual monuments and the LAV as a new urban space. These capitalist economic demands are, according to Alexander (2003, 7), a form of “material factors” and they are “never ignored”; rather, they are placed “into their appropriate place” (Ibid.) – within the cultural structures. So rather than a dictate of the relatively new economic system that the society has accepted in the past decades, we can consider this voicing of the economic factors as a cultural expression of a wish for a certain (financial) autonomy. Yet, unlike other directly capitalist for-profit projects, the national heritage monuments grouped in the LAV have the potential to challenge this profit-oriented way of organizing the cityscape. They do so through the historical and societal value for which they were dedicated to be protected and maintained.

The binary as an analytical tool continues to help us to understand the cultural structure of the LAV. Even now, we can gather the arguments around two opposing codes that build up two narrations of the LAV in its new era. One side of the binary persistently understands the area as national heritage that does not need to be incorporated into a profit-oriented renewal of brownfields or urban development in general. The contrasting side understands the area as a private project in which a commercial use is a natural part of management.

It seems that the intention to “use the objects for primarily educative and social functions” that would lead to “integration of the re-cultivated national cultural heritage into the educational structure and cultural and social affairs of the city and the region” (Národní památkový ústav and Vítkovice a.s. 2009, 1) was successful.

However, this declared goal that the owning company and the National Heritage Institute agreed on in a memorandum before work on the conversion of the LAV started

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27 For details, see Appendix 4.
28 Consider, for example, the redevelopment of the former coal mine, coking and electricity plant at the Karolina brownfield into the high-end and much debated shopping mall, Nova Karolina ("New Karolina"), with an office district. For more information about Karolina, see, for example, (Duží and Jakubinský 2013, Kune et al. 2014). Also, consult page 39 where Karolina appears in its diminutive form Karolinka.
is richer in meanings when we look at how the respondents incorporate it into the collective ideas of the place. The respondents described the newly implemented individual contents of the area (exhibitions, concerts) as flexible, altering and diverse; they praised the fact that there was “something happening all the time” (Atonín). The new purposes of the area were narrated in various ways: from a learning center with the noble purpose of promoting technical education in an alternative way to a cultural center for independent artists. What is clear is that the area’s purpose is divergent from that of a typical museum. Unlike other industrial heritage sites, the LAV is neither devoted to workers or labor history (see e.g. Kift 2011), nor is it devoted to the industry itself. The way the LAV is set up today doesn’t lean on the past in terms of trying to bring it to life again. On the landscape of meaning, the new contents of the industrial heritage are reflected as future-oriented. This orientation reveals that the LAV in its new era does not purport to be a place of mere display; it also wants to engage the visitors who should eventually populate the area on a daily basis. Yet, despite the above-expressed efforts to include the area in day-to-day urban life, “…it is dead there, more or less, during the day,” said Sylvie. She further explained,

“Notice for example, that there are almost no benches outside. For a regular person, who doesn’t want to pay entrance fees, and neither wants to drink beer or anything, but just wants to read a book and then go home… it is not possible to just be there and spend there some time.

Similarly, Rudolf considered the area to be insufficiently connected to the locals

…excursions, tourists, groups, all of that is already there, but seeing someone walking through with a shopping bag… that is not happening yet… The connection has not been made; there is nowhere to [go further]. It’s a terminal station; it’s not walk-through, in the sense that it would lead somewhere.

The desired connection to the city and the important urban population is therefore troublesome. On the contrary, the success among tourists and travelers is well recognized. The following section will discuss the role of tourism in the LAV through the meanings of the area assigned to it by the respondents. We will see that the excitement the LAV causes among non-residents provides a meaningful connection between the repurposed LAV and Ostrava.
6.4 Linking with the city: The Lower Area of Tourism

So far, we have explored the memories retained in the new LAV, we have walked through its new visual landscape and in the previous section, we have considered its new purposes, concluding that the area is not held in the realm of the past.

What Rudolf suggested by saying that the LAV is a “terminal station” is that, despite the miscellaneous functions and an enormous openness towards new ideas of utilization, the LAV is somewhat pushed aside in the network of urban communication. What are the various connections of the LAV to the city of Ostrava?

On one hand, we saw in Chapter 5 that it was the very vicinity to Ostrava’s city center and the stark visual presence of the area that underpinned the decision to terminate industrial operations there in the 1990s. On the other hand, later in its history, the position/location of the converted LAV is not convenient enough to ensure the much-desired, day-to-day stream of citizens. Yet again, I would like to propose it is the iconic power of the area that surmounts this obstacle. What will be explored in this section is therefore the potency of the area to link with the city in the landscape of meaning. No longer a center of heavy industry, in the new era, it is valued as an object of novelty interest for tourism. As the site has succeeded as a tourist destination, a strong symbolic connection between the LAV and a potential disruption of a negative discourse about Ostrava is created.

At the time of the fieldwork, a broader discussion was occupying the urban public discourse on Ostrava. Being used in the foreground of the national public discourse depicting Ostrava as a problematic place of smog, social inequalities, unemployment and decay (Ivan and Horák 2011), the local discourse was also concerned with decay (Rumpel and Slach 2012). The local discourse was filled with a threat of depopulation of the oldest part of the city, the city center. The then city center district manager in a newspaper interview described the process as “long-term and connected to both the change in property relations and lifestyle after the change of the political system” (Havlíček in Malchárek 2013, 22). The then city mayor, also in an interview for the newspapers, went even further back in history and said that “forty years [the communists] worked on abolishing the center (…) that was supposed to be undermined”
(Kajnar in Lesková 2014). However, the dominant voices blamed the large development of the Karolina shopping mall\(^{29}\) as well as the LAV, which, according to many, drew life away from the city center (Marková and Slach 2013). With the swift development of the area and its new position in the urban network, the role of the LAV was still unclear despite, or maybe because of, the number of activities taking place there. Therefore, Sylvie opined that “it should be said, what function the LAV should have (...) because they [the LAV] are just one part of the city and the city is a patchwork of functions.” The LAV thus became a contested terrain in regard to its relationship with Ostrava’s city center.

“Young people are asking why it is not connected to the city in a better way. Well, it was a heavy industry zone – why would it be connected to the city?” exclaimed Marek. Adam knew that and he was the one studying and planning “how to connect the isolated area with the city, how to make roads, a network of streets, how to define various zones in the area and so on” when working on the project of “opening and the new utilization” of the area.

So far it is only a potential part of the city. I’m saying potential because there hasn’t been enough of the connection to the city actualized yet. And I think that Ostrava’s people, those who are proud of it in a way, and consider it a part of their living environment, those are waiting for the connection.

Adam advocated for investment into the physical connection via roads and trails and although he has never lived in Ostrava, he justified his proposition by drawing almost an intimate connection between the locals and the area based on feelings of pride. Hana, on the other hand, employed rather practical terms: “Well, it is really close; it’s just nearby [the city center], but the journey is truly terrible. (...) on a bike along the four-lane road… [That is] no pleasure.”

The search for a physical connection between the city and the LAV reflected the fact that the LAV was failing to become a full-blown part of the city. On the other hand, a rather unusual function for the area was established – it has been seen as a popular tourist destination. How is this role of the area narrated? How is the touristic popularity of the LAV placed into the cultural structure?

\(^{29}\) See notes on page 66 for details.
Despite the fact that he wished the area to become part of the daily life of local residents, Adam acknowledged that “now it is more for tourists,” echoing the debates the conversion of the LAV has brought about:

because people in Prague talk about Ostrava more than people in Ostrava themselves, because the reconstructions which were carried out there got a hallmark of some rarity, uniqueness and finally, also admiration. It is interesting that also the European cultural public is interested in that.

Hana, like other respondents, mentioned one of the big festivals that either moved into the LAV or emerged there and at that occasion, she made use of a much broader narrative about the city: “All the time, there are other issues spinning around Ostrava – social problems, pollution and so on and suddenly, the one week in a year, Ostrava is an absolutely great place to be where everyone wants to go to and have fun.” Hana in this way pointed to what Pavel depicted as the “generally bad image of Ostrava in the rest of the republic.” This narrative is rooted in the unsettled times of the 1990s when the role of heavy industry in the urban environment had been drastically disturbed. As was suggested in Chapter 5, it was the very crucial change in framing heavy industry that swayed Ostrava’s position in the cultural structure. Relating to and narrating Ostrava as unsuccessful “black city, a city full of smog” (Marek) has persisted until today and can be illustrated by what Pavel shared with me: “When I come to Prague, and I’m not the only one saying that, I always get to hear ‘Yeah, you are from Ostrava. And what are you guys doing there? Climbing trees?’”

However, since the LAV is broadly understood “as an alternative tourist destination and (...) it is a certain uniqueness that is in our city. It helps quite a lot in negotiations with investors, with people that are outside of Ostrava, in a positive sense,” said Antonín, who works at the city municipality’s department of strategic development. The LAV is directly narrated and associated with the desired in-flow of money into the city. “Any investor, any visitor, who comes to Ostrava, is taken there and everybody is excited” (Antonín).

A similar narrative was also invoked by Marek, who said that because Ostrava is “on the east and therefore, it is pushed a bit aside and associated with Poland, the investors

30 In recent years, the LAV has been hosting large events of national and international importance. One of them is the music festival Colours of Ostrava, which attracts international visitors not only through the big name line-up but also by the very locality in which it is taking place.
don’t surge into the city as they do into Prague.” Although calling the LAV a tourist destination sounds “a bit stupid,” according to him, what could be found in Ostrava “surprises a lot of people, especially those from Prague.”

When considering whether the projects settled in the LAV are visited and popular, Rudolf concluded that the “fears” some people had that the area would not gain popularity were unnecessary, and added:

I think so because it is the people from outside who keep it up, not the locals. That it is not for the people from Ostrava (…). This here is three times bigger than any area of this kind in Europe and the people in Ostrava, they don’t realize that. People from Belgium, for example, look with their mouths open…. And the locals, well…. So, I think it [the LAV] has really swung Ostrava up on the outside ladder.

“When I talk with, for example, architects from London, or other people from abroad, they say, ‘For heaven’s sake, this is the only thing you can build on here, otherwise Ostrava is completely insignificant,’” Antonín echoes from a recent conversation he had.

Tomáš made the benefits for the city of Ostrava clear and insisted that “everybody needs to acknowledge [the fact] that if the LAV prospers, Ostrava in general will prosper. There is no better PR for Ostrava, or for the Moravian-Silesian Region, than this.” And the municipality seemed to know this - the objects reconstructed in the LAV can be found “in every promotional leaflet of city” (Rudolf).

When I asked Ivo if the LAV has any broader urban advantages or disadvantages, his immediate response was concerned with how many tourists come to visit the site:

Yeah, I think so, just when considering that after the three Prague attractions, the LAV together with Landek31 is the fourth most visited destination in the Czech Republic. And we are aiming higher… we’ll see how that goes. And by the way, now, we are soon expecting the year’s millionth visitor so it definitely means an improvement in comparison to the last year.

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31 Landek is an area of former colliery. It is also protected as cultural heritage; one can find there a mining museum and the entire area has undergone a major development in recent years. It is a part of the voluntary association “Dolní oblast Vítkovice” (for more see e.g. Landek Park n.d.).
In a similar vein, Roman welcomed the LAV as a great incentive for visitors to wander in the Ostrava and Vítkovice city districts in particular because “those people who come to the LAV, they get to know about this cake shop, and so they come to us and they can have a look at the square and the houses that are very interesting for tourists (…).” The LAV is understood as a place that was missing in the city, as a place to be shown to others: “When there were any visitors coming to Ostrava, there was nowhere to take them; now, you take them here. It’s like the castle in Prague” (Josef). And as the Prague castle is the emblem of the Czech capital, the LAV has become the emblem of Ostrava. But in contrast to the past, the LAV has been sensed as a positive icon in the urban landscape and according to Tomáš, the recovery of the industrial remains awakened this affirmative sensation:

Before the situation was that people were ashamed for where they come from, yes, ashamed. They didn’t want to comment on where they are from. Ostrava has always been a black, dirty city with a high unemployment rate. The fact that Ostrava has the highest number of green areas per capita is never told; that isn’t so popular… but the phenomenon of the recovery of the industrial beauty, this created the feeling of patriotism, the feeling of pride.

The unusual role of Ostrava as a host to multiple guests from various corners of the world has been highly appreciated by the respondents. In their statements, they stressed the “surprise” and “excitement” that visitors experience. They also invite their acquaintances to the area to nurture its new character and the touristic appeal it creates. The same area that had been perceived as a symbol of the decaying Ostrava is now narrated as a salvation for the very problem.

Yet, the general jubilation has its limits.

When I have visitors, I take them there to show it to them, because it is unique. It simply is a touristic attraction which deserves that. So, we go there, we visit an exhibition and then we go away, and the following day why should I go there again? (Sylvie)

By this comment, Sylvie brings us to the roots of the discussion in this section. For her, the lure for tourists is not in the new LAV, the Bolt Tower or the Great Science and Technology Center; it is in the original. It is the original structures that deserve her attention; besides them, she has nothing to come there for. Petr also voiced a critique in
our interview: “I’m not completely sure if it doesn’t work a little bit like Disneyland (...) I perceive it now as a touristic center, rather than a full-blown part of the city.” His testimony illuminates the fact that the area as a touristic center stood in opposition to the area as an appropriate part of the city. He put forward the view that the function of a touristic center is not what the LAV should be.

This points to the dynamics of the urban context. By being able to use the area for positive promotion of the city, it is becoming an urban asset, an advantage (Cossons 2009, Byrne 2002). Tourism creates a meaningful link between the LAV and the city of Ostrava. The LAV has captivated people not only as a place of memories. Virtually all of the visitors who are directed to the LAV are amazed. As an “agent of seduction” (Bartmanski and Alexander 2012, 4), the site of former industry has become an attraction. The growing amount of extracted coal that shaped the discourse of success for the LAV as well as for Ostrava in the past are substituted today by counting the ever-growing numbers of tourists visiting the area each year. Once again, the LAV is narrated in the future, rather than in the past: “Tourism has a bigger future than a factory” (Roman). The newly gained touristic spark to the area seems to only strengthen the tendency to approach the history settled in the area obliviously. Tourism is connected to the future, to investment, and therefore, to further development. However, it is not the tourism industry itself that made our respondents this content; rather, I argue, it is the fact that the LAV has given them a chance to narrate the story of Ostrava city in a different way. The discursive depth of the material surface has been transformed and new meanings have been constructed (Alexander 2012).

In this subsection, I have demonstrated how the LAV as a tourist destination or more precisely, as a destination enjoying a vigorous public interest, refutes Ostrava’s wider image as a black and uninteresting city. The narrations of the touristic success of the LAV are closely associated with the larger narration of Ostrava. The unpopularity of Ostrava sits in stark contrast to the newly acquired positive attention to the LAV. The social actors engage with the iconic power of the LAV and nurture it by presenting the place as unique, special and important.
To sum up, this chapter has walked us through the meaning-making settled in the converted LAV. We could see that the converted LAV is narrated in conflicting ways. The area still serves as a place of memories where collective memories pair with collective representations and render the area an icon on Ostrava’s landscape referring to the past. At the same time, place-management in the form of conversion of both the physical element and the contents has departed from strengthening the area as a historical place, let alone a place of commemoration, which would periodically bring the memory into the realm of the collective (Assmann 2008a). Without such social rituals that would follow up on the richness of the past that the area contains, the LAV is rendered rather as a place of the future, only utilizing the past to build on it something new. Yet, while the role of the LAV is not clear in the eyes of respondents, through situating the stark success of the area within the perceived broader narrative of Ostrava city as an impotent location loaded with burdens of the past, the LAV emerges as a powerful icon steering the collective representations towards the future.
7 Concluding discussion

At the very beginning of this research, there was a wish to understand the transformation of the Lower Area of Vítkovice – a curiosity about how a big industrial complex in the heart of a city has been rendered important throughout its unsettled history and how it became celebrated after being close to demolition.

Places are more than the physical space and the material structures that we can see and touch. Even less so are they merely the scene of people’s rational actions. Rather, places are meaningful locations filled with collective representations (Cresswell 2004). Departing from this view, I have sought to show how meaning-making processes have been occurring in the Lower Area of Vítkovice.

This exploration was guided by two research questions:

*In what ways have people considered the area important throughout its history?*

*How do people make sense of the changes that took place in the area?*

Giving a straightforward and simple answer to these two questions is not an easy task. Therefore, in the following sections, in addition to answering the questions based on the preceding analysis chapters (Chapters 5 and 6), I wish to also discuss the conclusions and observations in light of the ramifications of the transformation of defunct industrial objects, areas or places – from the global economics influencing urban development to role of local actors in redevelopment projects. After that, I will also reflect on the theoretical approach, its contribution to the study and suggest where future research could shed more light.

7.1 The Iconic Lower Area of Vítkovice

Throughout this thesis, it has been shown how the LAV has been seen as important. During the communist regime, industry and the industrial way of life of the city had been woven into the cultural structure of the local society, in which heavy industry has been culturally rendered part of the region. The LAV as the center of industry in
Ostrava was an important part of urban production networks. After the Velvet Revolution, marking the fall of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia, heavy industry had to face new economic conditions. In the cultural sphere, the change was reflected by degradation of the role of heavy industry along with its workers. The cultural image of Ostrava as an industrial center had changed from a lionized one into a negative one in just a few years during the aftermath of 1989. The LAV was a place where the post-revolutionary relationship between the local society and heavy industry was formulated and enacted. The place had to face multiple expectations and new visions that entered the public discourse, such as the concerns over hazardous urban pollution. With cessation of production in the LAV, which can be understood as a result of the new discourses acting through newly established institutions, the unique complex that incorporated the entire technological process from coal extraction, through coke making to pig iron tapping, came to a stand-still.

Oláh (2016) notes that the struggles with one’s own past can be seen as one of the elements shared by post-soviet countries. While the interpretation of their distant past seems to be unchallenged, the more recent past is challenged and tested through chaotic explanations (Oláh 2016). This observation is relevant to how the LAV has been understood and considered (un)important in the time after production stopped there. In this period, the LAV was a site where the value of the past, so tightly connected to heavy industry as a political project of the fallen regime, was negotiated. On the one hand, the LAV was seen as a valuable part of the city for its embeddedness in the local culture while it was also historically unique due to the arrangement of the technology (the facilities and plants) into one complex, not seen elsewhere in the Czech Republic or in Central Europe. On the other hand, after production was shut down, it was seen as useless reminder of the past with no further potential, and as such, it became a burden for the private owner as well as for some of the local population, as the stories told by our respondents revealed.

Nevertheless, the new importance of the LAV emerged when it was converted into a center for education and culture. It would be easy to jump to a conclusion stating that the transformation of the site from a neglected and decaying area into a vivid, blooming and educational public space marks the awaited historical shift from the industrial to the post-industrial period. Such a conclusion might be valid, but it would also neglect the
deeper meaning-making processes at play. Just as it was not the actual fall of the Berlin Wall that caused the fall of communism (Bartmanski 2012), the restoration of the area does not necessarily imply a reconciliation with the industrial past.

It has been found that heavy industry in decline, together with the objects that signify it, can be understood as both positive and negative – it may be simultaneously admired and detested. This observation is supported by other studies in various regions (see e.g. Byrne 2002, Duží and Jakubínský 2013). Yet, my research has also revealed the transformation of the meanings over time. Throughout this thesis, we could observe how binary oppositions, drawing on codes and narratives, construct the cultural structure of the LAV. The transformation of meanings can be demonstrated by a shift in the binary that served as a tool to map the discourses on the LAV.

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<tr>
<th>The LAV</th>
<th>The converted LAV</th>
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<td>Sacred</td>
<td>Profane</td>
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<td>good</td>
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<td>beautiful</td>
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<td>protection</td>
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<td>idealistic</td>
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Table 2. Illustration of the binaries used to describe the LAV before and after its conversion.

I argue that throughout the years, when it was both functioning as well as already defunct, the LAV became an icon in both the urban landscape, as a key marker of the Ostrava skyline, as well as in the cultural sphere (Alexander 2008a). As an icon, it has been able to transform and structure meanings as well as aid people’s ability to understand and remember events of the past (Bartmanski and Alexander 2012). I have also argued that the conversion of the LAV further strengthened the iconic power of the area and established it as a new emblem of Ostrava. I base this observation on the fact that in the respondents’ narration of the transformation of the LAV, there has been a profound connection between the renewed site and Ostrava city. This seems especially true in regard to the negative discourse on Ostrava that had been woven into the cultural structures of the city after its industrial fame ceased with the post-revolution deindustrialization.

As the area has been growing in popularity among tourists and visitors, it challenges the cultural image of Ostrava through its iconic power. Although the transformed LAV was
built as a place of memory, what is celebrated there is not the successful past but the seemingly successful overcoming of a challenging past.

Gibas (2008) claims that the industrial world of today originates in the image we hold of our past and because of that, he argues, the perception of industrial objects occurs mainly through nostalgia. I suggest that the evidence from LAV is in contradiction with Gibas’ interpretation. While the LAV certainly is a place of memories, the transformation has changed the area into a forward-looking site. The past is not rendered an element of commemoration, and while nostalgia arguably has a place in how people retell their stories and memories connected to the location, the LAV in the new era symbolizes the future rather than the past.

Despite this, the engagement of the locals with the iconic LAV has been a negotiation of the “historical continuity” (Nora 1989) of Ostrava’s urban landscape, which can be likened to, for instance, specific agricultural practices that support ideas of nationhood through actively rendering and relating to the historical natural landscape in Norway and Scotland (Syse 2013).

Can we say that walking around in the iron mightiness of the LAV and feeling the genius loci is “immersion in the materiality of social life” (Alexander 2008b, 6)? I believe so. The iconic experience, understanding the material as a surface for something much deeper, is how we feel part of our surroundings socially and physically. The LAV as an icon structures our understanding of the history of the city and the region, and channels our remembering of the industrial past. In the same way as a church or a nation do not have their own memory, they fashion one for themselves with the help of symbols, texts, monuments, places and similar objects (Assmann 2008a, 55). In a similar vein, industry in the Ostrava region has managed to make a memory for itself with the help of the LAV.

7.2 The role of declining areas in urban development

Urban development is increasingly understood in terms of economic globalization. As a consequence of the notion of competition, which is part of such an approach, cities are polarized between “successful” ones and “unsuccessful” ones. Urban success lies in the
ability to attract the mobile capital of investments and human capital, which industrial and post-industrial cities tend to lack (Marková and Slach 2013). Harvey (1989) explains urban development by the capital accumulation that variously influences the growth of cities and creates arenas for profit making. It is then real-estate investors who shape and reshape the urban areas in a process of “creative destruction” (Harvey 1989). This logic of the socio-spatial reorganization of cities turns post-industrial urban complexes from places of production into places of consumption (Zukin 1991 quoted in, Burzová et al. 2013).

Post-industrial cities can turn into such places of consumption through, for instance, tourism, which is a widely recognized strategy for ailing urban economies (Guano 2015, Abad 2016). In a similar vein, Richards (2000) suggests that cultural tourism is gradually becoming a more important part of urban development. Cultural tourism is based on the diversity of cultural facilities as well as on theming and storytelling that links local knowledge with consumers and is an increasingly important means of fueling consumption in cities (Richards 2000, 165).

In the case of the LAV, we could see that the redeveloped site has served as a tourist attraction, which was widely recognized as a positive aspect by the study respondents. They connected the increased touristic interest in the area with the potential gain of investments. Yet, my approach has stressed that it is also through the existing cultural structure that tourism matters for local populations – it is not only a possibility to enhance the economy of the city but, as our case has shown, tourism (through the positive attention given to the LAV) was predominantly narrated as potentially disrupting the otherwise disagreeable discourse on Ostrava city. This finding might be seen as connected to what Pløger (2001) calls “discursive planning”, which is a tool of urban planning based on recognizing the social meanings of places and the sense of belonging by local communities.

In regard to preservation in the urban context, Hepworth (2015) argues that the political memory connected to places or objects may negatively influence their chances to be preserved as cultural heritage. While making a similar claim in the case of the LAV would require a particularized historical analysis, this research shows that the area in question is not exempt from the political dimension that it has been in conversation with
throughout its history – from communist propaganda through post-revolution privatization to the complicated process of transformation.

Through preservation or redevelopment, industrial areas can be understood as prime examples of turning unwanted liabilities into urban assets (Cossons 2009, Byrne 2002). Reconstruction of valuable pieces of architecture or urban complexes go hand in hand with preservation of the character of a place. This way of preserving a city’s distinctiveness is believed to be able to uphold its significance and authenticity (Gieryn 2000). Also, in our case, saving the LAV from being torn down was understood as saving a valuable part of the city that has been inherently connected to what the city both was and is in the eyes of the locals.

Nevertheless, we saw that the authenticity of the LAV itself has been challenged (section 6.2). Depriving old industrial objects of their context and thereby creating mere torsos of the original value is seen as controversial (Strakoš 2011). The controversy lies in the fact that by such de-contextualization the objects lose their ability to be carriers of information and of (original) value. The limitation of their complexity then leads to their reduction into a sheer sentimental reminder of the “place’s past” (Strakoš 2004, 14). The conversion in the LAV has focused only on some key objects that were chosen based on their potential for a new function. This observation is based on the diverted reading of the individual components of the LAV. For example, blast furnace no. 1 is seen as the prime element of the LAV, while the coking plant, equally important in terms of heritage value, has been sidelined – partially torn down and considered a physical obstacle or hindrance. Relying on the iconic power of old industrial facilities, the place of memory is reduced to a shadow of the new functions.

The conservation of important, meaningful places and objects can thus paradoxically be seen as their doom. Yet, according to Assmann (2011), there is no other way places of memory can survive. Conservation that aims to protect authenticity can in fact cause loss of authenticity. The LAV will never be able to return to the same fame it had when it was fully functioning; nor can it embody the living mixture of sentiment and despair as when it was defunct and waiting for action to be taken. As Assmann puts it, “With the passage of time, authenticity must rely more and more on the simple ‘here and now’ of location instead of on the actual relics” (Assmann 2011, 317).
What our urban areas must rely on more is the powerful role of public and local actors. Kift (2011) describes the history of Zollern II/IV in Dortmund and the small grass roots movement of artists and architects who protested its planned demolition in the 1960s. These protests furthermore pointed to the general practice of demolishing industrial sites in Germany at the time and, according to Kift, these actions managed to reverse their destruction. In the case of the LAV, 30 years later, we could observe similar social engagement of the interested public in times when industrial architecture was otherwise unnoticed (Fragner and Zikmund 2009).

In regard to the thesis, I believe that the historical perspective employed here, joined by the will to put meaning as the primary focus, has allowed me to understand the transformation of the LAV more fully. Not discussing in proper detail the way the area has been talked about in different periods can cause oversimplification. Such oversimplification, which might seem harmless, perpetuates discourse that portrays the private owner as the sole advocate for the renovation of the area and leaves other actors and the development of their opinions aside (for example see Klempa et al. 2015). Leaving aside valuable actors that come from the informal and civic sectors undermines the power that they have in public-space development and urban development. It also perpetuates a discourse claiming that neither active citizens and the extended public, nor other concerned institutions, such as the National Heritage Institute, are able to influence urban redevelopment projects that involve not only the city but also a private owner.

In addition, environmental restoration is a crucial part of industrial brownfields, and speaks to a broader obligation to take responsibility for our environmental actions (Foster 2005). Places of former industry can therefore be increasingly recognized as potential contributions to ecological restoration and environmental protection, despite their often environmentally harmful history. It is not only the greening of urban landscapes that apparently nourishes a city’s sustainability but also the very sustainable nature of utilization of the old and unproductive that makes scholars consider industrial remains from an environmental perspective (Foster 2005, Langhorst 2014, Sandberg 2014). However, in the case of the LAV, environmental concerns were apparently at play at the commencement of the area’s transformation into a brownfield, yet the efforts to stress the environmental problematics in Ostrava did not follow up in the further
development of the area in successive years. On the other hand, for example, a project in Malmö has engaged actively with “green restoration” (Holgersen 2014, Sandberg 2014).

It is therefore possible to conclude that post-industrial landscapes are never completely deserted areas, but they contain “living histories that need to be remembered and problematised” (Sandberg 2014, 1081). Not only are they part of the cultural sphere of local communities, they ultimately are places of “re-imagination and re-invention of contemporary cities” (Langhorst 2014, 1111).

### 7.3 Reflections on approach and future research

Seeking to map the meaning-making processes in the LAV, cultural sociology has been a very useful approach. It has allowed me to focus on the narrations in the interviews and to put emphasis on what people actually say. This thesis has, in essence, been about how people relate to their environment and to the places where they live their lives. This has been addressed by the concept of iconicity (Alexander 2008a, b, Bartmanski and Alexander 2012), which allowed for understanding the area as a material surface transmitting meanings through its iconic power and provided for the connection between the material and the social and symbolic. Furthermore, the tool of binary oppositions (also Smith 1999, Alexander 2012) has been employed, allowing me to map the different discourses and their shifts.32

One of the concepts introduced by memory studies that has been utilized in this thesis, was the idea of collective memory (Halbwachs 1992, Assmann 1995). This, as I have suggested, can be seen as an element of the collective representations transmitted via iconic power. In addition, I used the term *milieu de mémoire* by Nora (1989) in order to understand the passage of the LAV from a functioning facility into a place that remembers this period. However, the connection between the two theoretical approaches warrants further attention; it might be therefore interesting for future research to develop the suggested intersections.

32 For details, see Table 2 above.
Furthermore, cultural sociologists often apply their analysis to public speeches and discourse utilizing television, newspapers and other mass media as primary sources of data (see e.g. Larsen 2014). As I used interviews as the main data source, which was only partially enriched by newspaper articles and other textual sources, my cultural analysis may be limited. I was able to enlighten only a piece of the mechanism at play when considering the making of meaning in a post-industrial area, and I therefore suggest that my findings can be bolstered by further investigation into the discursive depth of such places.

The concept of iconic power is intriguing and further questions have emerged with the finalization of this study. We can ask, where is the end of the iconic power of the LAV? What would be the death of the icon? As we have discovered, it is collective representations, the shared ideas of past and future located in a material subject that relates to iconic consciousness. For future research, it might thus be theoretically stimulating to explore not only how icons emerge but also the ways in which icons perish from the cultural sphere and remain only uninteresting objects in the material world.

Future research could also extend academic inquiry into the realm of identity. Although there has been documented a substantial connection between place, memory and identity (e.g. Assmann 1995, Roca, Claval, and Agnew 2011, also Somers 1994), I deliberately opted not to make such an extension in my study since I primarily wished to explore the process of meaning-making. Lastly, I believe that the topics of defunct areas, post-industrial landscapes and industrial heritage are fertile arenas for interdisciplinary studies as well as development studies, which could focus on other world regions infused with industrial activity.

### 7.4 Final remarks

Based on the above, I argue that the LAV has emerged as an icon in Alexander’s sense (Alexander 2008a, Bartmanski and Alexander 2012). This redeveloped brownfield is not only a meaningful location but an icon. While a meaningful place contains individual and collective attachments, social interactions and representations, the LAV as an icon has the power to transmit such contents. One who comes across its
emblematic panorama will feel the past experiences, at least in how they are collectively narrated; one will engage with the icon and try to read the codes it contains.

Defunct areas, objects and places do not tell their past themselves. As objects filled with social meanings and collective representations, and possibly as iconic objects for their local communities, they invite us to engage with them and intuit the meanings, to interpret the signifieds to which it is a signifier. It then depends on people to retell the history through the memories embedded in a place and connected to iron structures, brick barracks, smokestacks or other industrial objects.

Following Frisch’s concluding thoughts inviting us to stay engaged with public dilemmas, we should understand industrial heritage places not as contested terrains but rather as “generative domains” (Frisch 1998, 249).

7.5 The future of unused industrial objects in Ostrava

It would not be groundbreaking to say that cities are never finished; they are a never-ending process of layering – of adding the new, getting rid of the old, changing what we have and dreaming of what we want. And this goes for meanings as well.

As has been mentioned throughout this thesis, the reconversion of industrial objects is unusual in the Czech Republic. The Lower Area of Vítkovice is one of the largest areas protected by the National Heritage Institute, and it is the largest renewed brownfield in Ostrava. What is more, it can be seen as a project that has awakened an interest in neglected areas and buildings by the local people. During recent months, we have been able to hear and read about more redevelopment of formerly neglected spaces and objects. This might indicate increasing interest in such spaces as well as growing urgency to deal with those areas that might not be compatible with the vision of the modern and developed city. To name some of these projects, it is the reconstruction of the historical building of the former Hotel Palace that now serves as student housing and a campus (Lesková 2016) and the newly reconstructed Alexander Mine building and head frame (Mlčák 2016a). Another example of activities towards revitalization of unused properties is the planned revitalization of a former slaughterhouse that had been
neglected for many years. Now that the Ostrava municipality has bought it back from a private owner, it plans to use it for cultural activities (Jiřiček 2016).
Epilogue

In the same scale as this research has dealt with the past, I wish for it to deal with the future. There are things to learn from how we engage with our past through the materiality surrounding us. The commemoration of industry is the commemoration of human progress. I wish it would be in the same way a commemoration and appreciation of nature, which, after all, was at the beginning of everything.
Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview Guide

The following interview guide established a framework for the semi-structured conversations with study respondents. The set of questions was adjusted for each individual respondent to better reflect her or his role and/or expertise (e.g. questions were made more specific or new ones were added). The following is translated from Czech.

Perception of the Lower Area of Vítkovice (LAV) and personal attitude/view

- What is your relation to the LAV? How do you perceive it? What does it mean to you?
- What does it mean to you in regard to your work/occupation?

Perceived history and developments in the area

- How would you describe the distant past of the LAV?
- How would you describe the recent past of the LAV? (Why was the production closed down? What was happening with the area after the production was closed down?)
- How is it different today (as of 2015) from what it was historically? Could you describe in what ways the area has been changed?
- How do you think the changes started?
- Could you describe how you have perceived the process of transformation of the area?

The involved actors

- How were the changes in the LAV discussed? What were the main dimensions of the project discussed in regard to the transformation of the LAV?
- Who were the people or organizations involved in the transformation of the LAV in your view? Who do you think participated actively and who passively? Why do you think so?
- Who was the main planner of the transformation, as far as you can tell?
- Who had responsibility for the project? (Was it the owner, the organization, the municipality, individual actors or someone else…?)

The LAV and the city

- How do you perceive the relationship between the LAV and Ostrava’s city center?
- How about other parts of the city?
- Do you think that the transformation of the LAV has or has not influenced development in the city?
Concluding questions

Why do you think that the transformation has taken place?

What is the purpose of the area today from your perspective?

How/what do you think about the future of the LAV?
Appendix 2

The company’s magazine from October 10, 1998 depicting in both text and pictures the last symbolic tapping of pig iron in the Lower Area of Vítkovice.

Source: (Šmíd 1998)
Appendix 3


Source: (Vítkovice Machinery Group 2015)
Appendix 4

Print-screen of the webpage “Building of the year,” in which the extension of blast furnace no. 1 and the Hlubina colliery reconstruction won first and second place respectively in 2015. Yet, the popular vote gifted the Hlubina complex with more than 55,000 votes, while the extension of the blast furnace no. 1 received 2,442 popular votes.

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