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BI.Δ.A¹: An online collective platform for archiving Greek Industrial Heritage

Abstract

Industrial heritage in Greece is a downgraded subject because of a widespread national “myth” that Greece never had any worth-mentioning industry infrastructure. Greece indeed didn’t reach the high levels of industrialization the western countries achieved. Nevertheless, during 19th and early 20th century Greek industry’s progress was comparable to most European countries of the time. Many factors contributed to bring this development to an abrupt halt.

Highly overlooked, industrial remnants are scattered all over Greece and their significance and importance, their role in economic and social life are quickly fading away. Most of them deserve to be rescued, at least in memory.

Since March 2015, a group of enthusiastic volunteer researchers of Greek industrial heritage created a Facebook group (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/411494725690017>) to communicate, connect and seek out like-minded people. In 2017, it was made apparent that the FB group, however successful (4680+ members on Sept 2018), was unable to act as a long-term information and archival hub.

As a result, a blog was created (<https://vida-omada.blogspot.com/>) to locate, gather, save and record all available information in every possible format and from every possible valid source in order to help digitalise the Greek industrial heritage.

Since October 2017, that the blog went online, and until September 2018 this collective platform has managed to collect records for more than 360 industrial sites, to engage more than 90 contributors, to gather hundreds of pictures, to verify information, to validate sources and to save knowledge on the brink of extinction.

The BI.Δ.A (Industrial -Card- Records) platform is an ongoing and growing effort that aims to become a focal point in helping saving records, evidence and testimonies of Greek industrial heritage and hopes in -and welcomes- everyone’s contribution.

¹ ΒΙ(ομηχανικά) Δ(ελτία) Α(πογραφής), hence ΒΙΔΑ, which means “bolt” in Greek. It stands for “Industrial (Card) Records”.

➤ **Industrial Archaeology and Industrial Heritage**

Industrial Archaeology (IA)² is the science that deals with the systematic study of the industrial material evidence of the past. This evidence is collectively referred to as **Industrial Heritage (IH)**, including buildings, machines, artefacts, sites, infrastructure, documents and any other items associated with producing, manufacturing, extracting, transporting or constructing products³. The field of IA incorporates traits from archaeology, architecture, construction, engineering, historic preservation, museology, technology, urban planning etc, in order to “reconstruct” the history of past industrial activities⁴.

The term Industrial Archaeology was popularised in the mid-1950s when the first signs of deindustrialisation emerged⁵. Over the time the increased interest for IH gave birth to numerous relevant organisations (TICCIH⁶, SIA⁷, AIA⁸, E-FAITH⁹, ERIH¹⁰) or the involvement of others specialised in heritage and culture (UNESCO¹¹, ICOMOS¹², WHC¹³, Europa Nostra¹⁴). All this activity led to a surge in research, documentation, restoration and reuse of IH sites worldwide.

➤ **Industry in Greece**

IH in Greece is downgraded because of a widespread national “myth” that Greece never had any worth-mentioning industry infrastructure. Greece indeed didn’t reach the high levels of industrialization the western countries achieved. Nevertheless, during 19th and early 20th century Greek industry’s progress was comparable to most European countries of the time. Many factors contributed to bring this development to an abrupt halt.

Highly overlooked, industrial remnants are scattered all over Greece and their significance and importance, their role in economic and social life are quickly fading away. Most of them deserve to be rescued, at least in memory.

➤ **Greek Industrial Heritage awareness**

The attitude towards Greek IH (GIH) started slowly to change since 1980, with initiatives, training courses, conferences, publications and restorations from Ministry of Culture, Universities¹⁵, museums¹⁶, municipalities¹⁷, private¹⁸ and public organisations¹⁹.

In one of these initiatives the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens created a series of specialised programmes for university graduates, one of which was about IA²⁰. Some of the graduates of that programme become amateur researchers of GIH. Since March 2015, they created a Facebook (FB) group (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/411494725690017>) to communicate,

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Industrial_archaeology, see for references, books, list of organisations.

³ The Nizhny Tagil Charter For The Industrial Heritage/July, 2003: <http://ticcih.org/about/charter/>

⁴ Labadi, S. (2001).

⁵ Buchanan, A. (2005)

⁶ The International Committee for the Conservation of the Industrial Heritage: <http://ticcih.org/>

⁷ Society for Industrial Archeology: <http://www.sia-web.org/>

⁸ The Association for Industrial Archaeology: <https://industrial-archaeology.org>

⁹ European Federation of Associations of Industrial and Technical Heritage: <http://www.industrialheritage.eu/>

¹⁰ European Route of Industrial Heritage <https://www.erih.net/>

¹¹ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization: <https://en.unesco.org/>

¹² International Council on Monuments and Sites: <https://www.icomos.org>

¹³ World Heritage Centre: <https://whc.unesco.org/>

¹⁴ Europa Nostra: <http://www.eurapanostra.org/>

¹⁵ <http://www.ltp.ntua.gr/home>

¹⁶ <http://www.piop.gr/el/diktuo-mouseiwn.aspx>

¹⁷ <http://www.technopolis-athens.com>

¹⁸ <https://heritagemanagement.org/>, <https://www.monumenta.org/>

¹⁹ <http://ticcih.gr/>

²⁰ http://www.plato-academy.gr/en/web/guest/viomixaniki_arxaiologia

connect and seek out like-minded people. By 2016, it was made apparent that the FB group, however successful (currently 4680+ members: Sept 2018), was unable to act as a long-term information and archival hub.

➤ **The BIAA group**

So, in 2016, some dedicated GIH enthusiasts came together forming a volunteer group, looking for a way to advance their efforts in informing the public about and archiving GIH. The group decided on the following guidelines, i.e. to:

1. Use the internet to inform as many people as possible about GIH.
2. Create a standard form to gather info about GIH.
3. Appeal to the general public for contribution.
4. Create an internet site to gather, store and present their collected GIH info coming from the completed forms.
5. Maintain and enhance the connection with the previously mentioned FB group.
6. Keep the whole procedure as user friendly as possible.
7. Keep the project free and accessible to all.
8. Use free tools to achieve all the above.
9. Maintain the not-for-profit, volunteering character of the project.
10. Ask for technical help.

➤ **The BIAA blog**

An external volunteer was introduced into the project following the mentioned guidelines, and, as a result, a blog²¹ was created (<https://vida-omada.blogspot.com/>) to locate, gather, save and record all available information in every possible format and from every possible valid source, in order to help digitalise the GIH. The group and the site was named ΒΙ(ομηχανικά) Δ(ελτία) Α(πογραφής), ie BIAA (or Industrial -Card- Records), which means “bolt” in Greek.

Priority was given to the collection of any possible relevant information on any Greek industrial site, rather than evaluating the importance of the presented sites. Evaluation would follow on a later time, when adequate data will have been collected, enabling the group to proceed to comparisons.

In order to facilitate the process of collecting info, an archiving record card was created, having its ease of use as its main goal, detailed information was put together, and 3 instructional videos were created.

Since October 2017, that the blog went online, and until today (23-Sept-2018) the platform managed to collect records for more than 360 Greek industrial sites, engage more than 90 contributors, categorise the collected information under 390 labels/tags, receive 149 monitored comments²², gather hundreds of pictures, verify information, collect first-hand information, validate sources and save knowledge on the brink of extinction.

It also managed to draw an international audience rising to 84.325 views (Sept 2018). Its interactive map helps viewers to navigate to their place of interest and its detailed categorisation will help them to proceed to many interesting comparisons, according to their general interest or specific research.

It should be kept in mind that this effort is fairly recent (less than a year old), it is not subsidised or funded by any means, was not generally publicised, and it is run by a very small group of dedicated volunteers.

²¹ The selected free online tools that were used to achieve the agreed upon group guidelines were: Facebook, Blogger, Google Maps and YouTube.

²² Monitored comments are comments that contribute extra information on any given industrial site that is presented on the blog.

Yet, the BI.Δ.A platform is an ongoing and growing effort that aims to become a focal point in helping saving records, evidence and testimonies of GIH and hopes in -and welcomes- everyone's contribution.

➤ **Conclusion**

Industry, and hence IH, has played an important role in shaping modern culture as an integral part of the cultural heritage and a primary element for change and development of society. Considering a technical monument as an information carrier is important, because it incorporates cultural and environmental influences. Through the understanding of the IH, the historical knowledge and the perception of modern social history are safeguarded. Therefore, in IA, the rescue approach has gained considerable momentum. As part of this effort, the concept of restoration and reusing old industrial complexes has been put forward. Recording and documenting the remains of the IH is therefore the first step in their preservation and defines the guiding principles for their reuse for society's benefit.

That is exactly what BIAA is trying to contribute to.

Sources

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Acronyms used

BIΔA (in Greek): ΒΙ(ομηχανικά) Δ(ελτία) Α(πογραφής)

AIA: Association for Industrial Archaeology

E-FAITH: European Federation of Associations of Industrial and Technical Heritage

ERIH: European Route of Industrial Heritage

FB: Facebook

GIH: Greek Industrial Heritage

IA: Industrial Archaeology

ICOMOS: International Council on Monuments and Sites

IH: Industrial Heritage

SIA: Society for Industrial Archeology

TICCIH: The International Committee for the Conservation of the Industrial Heritage

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

WHC: World Heritage Centre