



Landscape and houses: The storytellers

When a stranger arrives in the region of Schneeberg, they will observe the picturesque surrounding and see some unexpected things in the landscape. What seems to be a natural part of the scenery is not always the case! One can see tranquil small lakes, substantial mounds, and hills with nicely formed forest areas on top of them. All these supposedly natural features of Schneeberg's countryside are in fact shaped by specific human activity over the past 800 years.

Everything came from the mining

The lasting impact of the mining activity in the region is visible nowadays both nearby and inside towns and villages. Remarkable steep mounds appear to be his-

torical depositions of mining material, and they hide thousands of meters of mining tunnels beneath the surface. They also pinpoint the locations of former minefields, with shafts, tunnels, and safe exit doors at the end of the hill. Most of the woods in the area were cultivated with fast-growing trees, and used in the past for constructing the mine tunnels. There are plenty of artificial lakes, formed to retain the main valuable source of energy for processing mining materials in various locations. Those were parts of the cultivated water management system with channels, today only used by locals for fishing and relaxing. Also, the view of mild natural forms is sometimes interrupted by unexpected phenomena in natural vistas that rise abruptly from the greenery in its sizes, such as chimneys,

factories, processing plants, mining shafts constructions, or stamp mills in the meadows.

Understanding the evolution of the mining cultural landscape is difficult without knowing the long rich history of mining, dating from the 12th century until the 1990s, which defined the landmarks and influenced today's characteristics of the townhouses.

Imposing landmarks

If we time-travel through the past, we will see how landmarks bear witness to the change of focus in human activity in the area. As the most visible thing in the landscape, landmarks provide a unique look to the area of Schneeberg. The construction of the highest church tower of St. Wolfgang church in Schneeberg has been a focal point for the community ever since it was constructed in the 16th century and still dominates the modern townscape. With the industrialisation of the region came the shift in perspective. New landmarks emerged because of the post-mining production activities. The "Schindlers Werk" blue dye factory emerged because of the extraction of cobalt ores and the production of blue dyes, and it is still active today. Among the manor and storehouses is a high rising chimney that symbolises the strive for production. The extraction of uranium during the 20th century was de-

finied by its own ostentatious monuments such as the uranium factory and the miners' hospital in Erlabrunn.

Unique houses decorations

Mining has not shaped only the landscape, but also influenced art, architecture, and culture. Black stone slabs roofs are characteristic of both old and new houses of Schneeberg, and that perfectly evokes the view of the city from the church tower. Slate slabs – long-lasting, easy formable for steep and rounded roofs and even façade decorations – were one of the products of the region, a local material significantly exported in history.

Locals have a special way to tell the story of mining history with special features they embed on the façades of their houses and in gardens. Some symbols, some urban ornament or furniture, or models of children's toys, made of metal or more often wood, because handicrafts were additional incomes in the region, arose as a result of working with wooden remains from mining.

Hammer and chisel, basic tools for the most common method of mining, when laid across each other make an international symbol of mining, and can be seen on almost every house or building. So-called Schwibbögen – carved light holders as a reminder of the value of the light in mining – as well as wooden figures of



the miners and incense burning figurines on houses are very common, too. They are also an integral part of the Christmas mountain models or of the pyramids, the front garden models and decorations in the stylised form of the mining hill showing the story of the mining process. Also, little black wagons in the backyards decorated with flowers marked with the well-known mining greeting "Glück auf" – Good luck – are an addition to the storytelling of the mining.

The connection with the ancestral miners is still alive! All these living testimonies of mining heritage visible in the landscape and on homes convey the strong relationship with the past and build an unbreakable bond within the local community in and around Schneeberg.

■ Joanna Markova & Mina Plančić



The secret behind the blue colour

The fascinating history of the blue pigment in the Ore Mountains is quite mysterious. We all remember how we felt when we first saw the flashing blue colour hidden in the blue factory's storage! We loved the moment we opened the box, and the blue colour was the very thing to which our desire clung.

We discovered how the cobalt-blue was extracted from the mineral through traditional process. And who would have imagined that this shiny and brilliant blue pigment derived from the purple raw material becomes blue after being fired in a certain way? Yet this prestigious cobalt-blue pigment has been exported in many countries causing the creation of various artistic traditions all over the world.

So, dive into the world of blue!

From purplish to the blue pigment

The mining town of Schneeberg was founded in response to silver ore mining, but the Baroque aesthetic which the town has today is the result of cobalt ore mining. The Schneeberg mining landscape played an essential role in cobalt mining and blue dye production from the 17th to the 19th century and was the leading producer of blue pigments in Europe. Colours of cobalt-blue were most often used on porcelain, tiles, and even laundry – to turn yellowish laundry white again. Essentially, cobalt-blue pigment was shipped from Saxony worldwide.

The story started with this silvery appearing mixture, containing cobalt. The blue pigment was known at least since the Middle Ages, during the smelting process of the silver and called the "silver robber". It was discovered in the Ore Mountains that cobalt could be used to

produce the blue pigment. However, the milestone was accrued in the first half of the 18th century when the former miners took advantage of the cobalt mineral. The word "cobalt" was most probably derived from the German word "Kobold" which means gnome or unscrupulous rascal. The cobalt mineral has a silvery appearance but when it interacts with the weather, it shows purple colour. It is a mysterious thing that men could have known how to produce blue pigments from this silvery and later purplish material back in history.

Schneeberg and its surroundings became an important industrial place for cobalt-blue pigments through five active blue colour factories, and the production process has been constantly developed so that the cobalt-blue produced in the 19th century was significantly improved from the one previously used.



Processing of the cobalt-blue and transition to the ultramarine-blue

The production process of the cobalt-blue had three steps: The first phase was to distinguish the elements and minerals from the raw material to proceed. For example, arsenic – a very poisonous substance – was one of them! Then, the workers had to combine cobalt ore with other raw materials, and finally to heat it up, melt it, and pour it into the water.

The oldest of the blue dye factories was the "Schindlers Werk" smalt works which Erasmus Schindler founded in Zschorlau in 1650. The manor house and the warehouse which do exist till today are two of Saxony's oldest and most characteristic blue dye factory buildings. This factory is still operating and had been producing blue dye till recent times even though cobalt-blue production stopped in 1860. In the same year, the cobalt-blue production was replaced by the production of ultramarine-blue since ultramarine was less expensive to produce and provided better results for colouring paper and laundry. Additionally, the ultramarine-blue required less amount of colour than cobalt-blue, which took up a great deal of raw materials.

There is something special about the ultramarine process: The workers had to be trained for up to ten years to produce a quality ultramarine-blue colour. All the mixed materials needed to be heated up for three days to 900 degrees. Workers controlled the temperature with a metal tool, but also with their eyes as optical measurement tools for this heating process. In other words, workers had to go through ten years of training to control the process by using their eyes as an optical device



to calculate when and how to lower the temperature!

The ultramarine colour was used mainly for internal and exterior wall paints. However, ultramarine production stopped in 1996 because of environmental regulations.

Blue colour as representation of richness and wealth

Who would have imagined that this famous cobalt-blue would become a representation of the wealth, richness, and pride of the Ore Mountains region? Interestingly, did you know that the blue pigments produced in Schneeberg were used to colour Venetian glasses, Portuguese tiles, Meissen and Chinese porcelains and ceramics, and Holland's wares as well as applied by artists from many countries?

Blue exists in every piece in Schneeberg, and it represents the symbol of richness, wealth and being superior as well as pride. For example, when you check the traditional miners' costumes

during their Christmas celebrations, the miners with blue pants were superior to the others hierarchically. Yet, they wanted to incorporate white colour into their costumes to demonstrate the "whitest appearance" possible because the blue pigment was tough to remove from clothes. Their goal was to convey a clear message that the blue pigment was processed flawlessly by the workers.

For people living in the region, blue was something more, a sense of pride and rich history; for us too – the cobalt-blue is not just a colour. It is a witnessing story of the technological mining advancement, living and working environment, as well as the culture and traditions of the Ore Mountains. In short, the blue dye production in Schneeberg is a symbol of remarkable events in the mining history, and perhaps, in us, someone very old still hears the mechanical sound of the process of heating the living pigment of the blue.

■ Rea Terzin & Gözde Yildiz