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The Mining Region of Krušnohoří/Erzgebirge on its Way to Becoming a UNESCO World Heritage Site

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to introduce the story of a successful inscription of the Mountain region Krušnohoří/Erzgebirge onto the UNESCO World Heritage List. The paper sums up the historical development of this region, emphasising the most prominent periods of ore mining. The paper also describes the cultural and historical value of selected mining locations and their most significant monuments. Other preparatory research projects are described to the extent that they contributed to the successful inscription. Ongoing projects are described as well, to the extent that they try to promote this mountain region and its cultural and historical values used for promotional and educational activities.

Keywords: UNESCO, World Heritage, Krušné hory, Erzgebirge, Montannregion, Education

Słowa kluczowe: UNESCO, światowe dziedzictwo, Góry Kruszcowe, edukacja

The Story behind the Inscription

The undergoing inscription of the Krušnohoří (Ore Mountains Region) into UNESCO is connected to the activities of local institutions on the Saxon side of the Czech-German border. In 2003, the Montanregion Erzgebirge Freiberg Convention was established. It is an organisation that examines the process of the Krušnohoří becoming a UNESCO World Heritage Site and looks for suitable localities in Saxony. In 2009, the Czech side joined the Convention and the first action was taken to that respect by the Regional Museum in Most.

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In the years 2010–2012, a Saxon-Bohemian initiative called “The Central European Cultural Landscape Montanregion Erzgebirge/Krušnohoří – On Its Way to Becoming a UNESCO World Heritage Site” was established. In collaboration with the Region of Ústí and the Technical University (*Bergakademie*) of Freiberg, it has selected historic mountain sites in both countries that had the potential of becoming World Heritage sites. The turning point in the research of mountain relics were the studies carried out by a geologist and historian of mining, Dr. Michal Urban, which were used as the core of the application to UNESCO. Some places were nominated as cultural sites, and others even received the status of national cultural sites, thus gaining the position of protected localities at various administrative levels. There were managing and operating boards to prepare for the inscription, comprised of the representatives of the Czech and Saxon Ministries of Culture, the National Heritage Institute, along with its local branches, as well as the Karlovy Vary Region Authority¹.

In 2014, the first attempt at the inscription took place. However, the application was returned for redrafting. In the same year, the project *Good Luck!/ Glück Welterbe!* started. The patron of this project, which followed the activities of local patriots and current historical and geological research², was a newly established institution, Montanregion Krušné Hory – Erzgebirge. In 2017, another project, *Unsere Welterbe – The Mining Region Krušnohoří/Erzgebirge*, started, focusing on the popularisation of the question through lectures and educational activities for regional schools by the Faculty of Arts at the Jan Evangelista Purkyně University and Institut für Industriearchäologie, Wissenschafts- und Technikgeschichte (IWTG) at the TU Bergakademie Freiberg. The National Heritage Institute and other institutions participate in this project as well³. The cross-border cooperation between archaeology institutions was also encouraged in the context of the nomination process, collaboration. The project ArcheoMontan, carried out by the Saxon Land Authority for Archaeology in Dresden in partnership with some Czech partners brought forth many relevant results⁴.

These projects were funded from the funds of the European Territorial Cooperation from the Programme of the Cooperation between the Free State of Saxony and the Czech Republic, 2014–2020. A significant development was the exhibition called “Without Borders. Arts in the Krušnohoří between the Gothic and Renaissance Eras”, created as a result of the cooperation between the following historical and art historical institutions: Faculty of Arts of Jan Evangelista Purkyně University, Faculty of Arts at Charles University, and the National Gallery in Prague. The exhibition took place at the turn of 2015/2016,

¹ This cross-border Czech-German nomination was filed under the title “Mining Cultural Landscape Erzgebirge/Krušnohoří” in the year 2012 in the national indication list. During the evaluation process, on the recommendation of expert organisations, in 2017 the title was changed to the “Mining Region Erzgebirge/Krušnohoří (EN), Montanregion Erzgebirge/Krušnohoří (DE), Hornický region Erzgebirge/Krušnohoří (CZ).“

² <http://montanregion.cz/cs/>

³ <https://tu-freiberg.de/unser-welterbe>

⁴ <https://archaeomontan.eu/cs/publikationen/monografien.html>

in Prague, and it enjoyed attention mainly for its variety and quality of preserved artefacts from the Krušnohoří mining towns⁵.

The Department of History at the Ústí University carried out the project: “Ars Montana. Artistic and Cultural Transfer in the open space of the Bohemian Saxony Krušnohoří on the verge of the Early Modern Ages (1459–1620)”. The goal of this project was to clarify the cultural and artistic contacts in the Czech-German borderlands during the contemporary period of intense development of mining towns⁶.

The mining region Erzgebirge/Krušnohoří was inscribed onto the World Heritage List on 6 June 2019 — the National Holiday of Czech church reformer Jan Hus, known as John Huss — in Baku, Azerbaijan. As a result, the Czech Republic now has 13 sites inscribed onto the World Heritage List, with one on probation. The Erzgebirge/Krušnohoří region appeared as consisting of 85 parts in the original draft, out of which 6 are situated in the Czech Republic.

After the nomination, which was focused on mineral mining, the region was reduced to 22 parts: 17 in Germany and 5 in the Czech Republic. The parts in the Czech area are comprised of 3 geographically large sites with significant ore districts and respective mining towns (Mining Culture Landscape): 1) Jáchymov, 2) Abertamy – Boží Dar – Horní Blatná, 3) Krupka. There are also two sites of a minor range: Rudá věž smrti (Red Tower of Death) near Ostrov; Mining Landscape Vrch (Hill) Mědník. On the Saxon side, there are 17 significant parts famous for their historical ore sites around the mining towns such as Altenberg, Freiberg, Marienberg, Annaberg, Schneeberg and Schwarzenberg. In these mining areas, some other Saxon individual mining settlements, mining infrastructures, mining landscapes and mining complexes are nominated as elements of the World Heritage⁷.

Historical Context

The area near the northwestern and northern border of the Czech lands has played a significant role since the very creation of a Czech state. The nature of settlement in the region and its social structure — the structure of land property — were a direct function of the interests of Czech rulers, for whom the region was an important area of expansion beyond the borders of their state. It was also a significant source of income, which was connected to both the transit character of most localities along the Elbe River and to the important land trade routes crossing the Krušnohoří. The wealth hidden in the mountains, whose ridge made for a natural land border, made the region one of the

⁵ Katalog výstavy: J. Klípa, M. Ottová, 2016.

⁶ M. Hrubá, J. Royt, M. Ottová, 2016. This was the completion of the long-term interest in an artistic development in the cross-border Bohemia-Saxon region. For more, see: M. Hrubá, J. Royt, 2007; M. Hrubá, M. Ottová T. Nejezchlebová, 2014; M. Hrubá, 2014.

⁷ See more on the common nomination on the websites: <http://www.montanregion-erzgebirge.de/cz.html> a <http://www.montanregion.cz/cz/>

wealthiest and most dynamic areas of the country toward the end of the Middle Ages and at the beginning of the Early Modern Ages⁸.

The Krušnohoří is one of the areas to which a thesis recently repeated by Josef Žemlička can be applied: the mining industry was an impulse for a cultural and civilisational rise of Medieval society⁹. It was the ore that gave the name to the Krušné Mountains; the Saxons called the mountains *Erzgebirge*, or the Ore Mountains. The Czech name is derived from the verb *krušit*, or to mine (extract) ore. Though the first signs of exploitation trace well back to the Middle Ages and the written history of metal mining goes back to the fourteenth century, we cannot say that there was a significant ore mining boom. Similarly, as in other forested and unsettled border areas, there were no clear borders in the Krušnohoří¹⁰.

After the Hussite wars, mining gradually resumed in some older localities, but there was a crucial shift only after the discovery of large deposits of silver ore near the settlement called Konradsgrün, renamed first Thal (Valley) and then St. Jáchym's Valley, where exploration started around the year 1510 and mining a few years later. The settlement on the estate of the Šlik nobility grew quickly: shortly after its establishment around the year 1516 it already counted 400 houses and the town of Jáchymov was founded. The mines of Jáchymov produced, according to one estimate, about 20% of the European silver production between the 1520s and 1540s. Jáchymov, the second largest town of the Kingdom of Bohemia, became the centre of the Krušnohoří ore mining, as the potential for high revenue and population subsistence was generated overnight. Jáchymov became the crossroad for experts, intellectuals and artists attracted by its prosperity and potential, becoming the engine behind the region's rise. Its greatness is reflected in an anonymous metaphoric poem from the beginning of the 17th century on the birth of the town Marienberg on the Saxon side, whose mother is the Saxon town of Annaberg and the father is the Czech town of Jáchymov¹¹.

The Krušnohoří area can be considered the most significant and distinct part of the Bohemian-Saxon borderland, and its history has been rather well researched. It is perceived by most Czech and German researchers as a story of a relationship, or of shared space whose integration—based on intensive inter-migration and communication in economic, social, religious and cultural spheres—was in different periods of time influenced by great historical events: variable, yet latent.

Some historians claim that the Bohemian-Saxon concept of a shared space is a prominent example upon which current historical topics such as the concept of social, cultural and linguistic borders have been studied. The concept of a collective identity and social and cultural transfer is connected with this

⁸ M. Hrubá, 2016.

⁹ J. Žemlička, 2014, s. 337.

¹⁰ H. Kenzler, 2013.

¹¹ P. Jančárek, 1967; idem, 1971; G. Hofmann, 1987; J. Majer, 1995, s. 42–43; L. Nemeškal, 1987.

issue as well, not only as an object of historical but also other sorts of research: historical sociology, anthropology, ethnology, cultural geography and political science. The topic of migration and integration is found in research on the Bohemian-Saxon borderlands: not only because the movement of the population across the border is a natural and important phenomenon that has long been studied but also because this issue has recently become one of the most relevant in public discourse on both sides of the border.¹² The Krušnohoří ridge (area 150 km x 50 km) can be considered one of the most interesting borderland regions not only of the Czech Republic. As will soon be demonstrated, when trying to define the penetrable territory shared between Bohemia and Saxony, the Krušnohoří borderland on the ridge of the Krušné Mountains intersecting this territory is the oldest defined border of the Czech state and the oldest precisely delineated border in Central Europe overall.¹³

One potential problem facing the Krušnohoří might be the absence of an easily recognizable media symbol. Compared to Egypt or Lesser Poland, the region lacks pyramids or a castle similar to Wawel, respectively. Instead, its symbol might be Freiberg, the tolar coin, one of its sacred sites, the Death Tower, its low-key landscape, or borders themselves.

Below are some specific aspects of the Mining Cultural Landscape Erzgebirge/Krušnohoří that make it one of the exceptional localities of World Heritage¹⁴.

Category C

- (C1) Records about the mining and manufacturing of raw materials: above ground and underground sites such as mining shafts and mining tunnels, heaps and mining ditches, metal mills and preparation plants and other plants.
- (C2) Mountain infrastructure: devices for mining and raw materials used in manufacturing, for example water moats and water canals, mining ponds, water roads and others.
- (C3) Mining landscapes: landscape terrains with traces of mining and raw materials used in manufacturing.
- (C4) Craft and industrial productions related to mining and post-mining activities: productions that developed in connection with mining such as the production of blue cobalt colour; or as its consequence; for example, woodcarving, lacemaking etc.
- (C5) Mining towns and their social and administrative structures: sites reflecting the development of mining towns and smaller settlements including all their aspects.
- (C6) Places of special significance for mountain sciences: development of mountain sciences and Earth sciences.

¹² P. Hlaváček, 2005.

¹³ P. Jančárek, 1993; J. Fiala, 1997; O. Šrajetrová, 1999, s. 314–315.

¹⁴ Basic information accessible to lay persons interested in the issues of the Krušnohoří are provided in M. Urban kolektiv, 2014; idem, 2015. See the comprehensive survey of the nomination in J. Šrejberová, L. Sváček, 2015.

Cultural values (V)

- (V1) Cross-cultural character of the mining cultural landscape: preserved sites reflecting shared development of both mining regions in Bohemia and in Saxony.
- (V2) Significance of mining for manorial lords and land administration: development of mining significantly contributed to the fact that Saxony and the Kingdom of Bohemia became economic, cultural and political regions of high significance in Central Europe. The mining was the force that brought economic growth and enhanced the birth of municipal settlement and population growth.
- (V3) International impact of the Krušnohoří mining on education, science and technology: mining contributed to the development of mining sciences and Earth science and to the establishment and development of mining education. The father of mineralogy, Georgius Agricola (1494–1555), worked in the region, and there was also the first globally established and still running mining university in Freiberg (1765). Dozens of technical and scientific discoveries and inventions came from the Krušnohoří. The Krušnohoří was the world's best known centre of ore mining in the 16th century and significantly influenced the development of mining regions elsewhere.
- (V4) Art, art crafts, music and literature: mining and coal mill activities were the economic base for arts and became themes in both sacral and secular artwork in the region, ranging from architecture via painting and sculpting to music and literature.
- (V5) Folk art and traditions: there are typical, specific art forms of folk art often based on and influenced by mining, including traditional woodcraft, textile manufacturing, and folklore.

The Krušnohoří Mining Periods

To understand the development of mining and other regional activities, it was necessary to set up a survey of time periods related to mining, which is a crucial method of relating world heritage to the public.

Historical records on ore mining in the Krušné Mountains date back to the year 1168, in which the first silver ore minerals were discovered near Freiberg. The history of mining in the Krušné Mountains starts with that discovery.

- Period I: mining begins (1168–1450)
- Period II: mining boom period and establishment of towns (1450–1620)
- Period III: recovery of mining after the Thirty Years' War (1620–1750)
- Period IV: the beginning of industrialisation (1750–1850)
- Period V: liberalisation of mining (1850–1945)
- Period VI: mining during socialism (1945–1990)
- Period VII: new development of mining (1990–present)

Teaching challenges for school history classes¹⁵.

The Challenges of Teaching about the Region in History Classes

The introduction of the Erzgebirge/Krušnohoří region into the school system has been through history classes on the Czech side, which tackle the subject from multiple perspectives and borrow from other disciplines and fields.

To be able to teach about such a vast span of history, we need to limit the content and focus on selected issues:

- 1) The beginning of mining in the Krušné Mountains and the Podkušnohoří (Lower Krušné Mountains)—Neolithic quartzite deposits in Tušimice, the attraction to mineralogy (decorations at the St. Vitus Cathedral in Prague and Karlštejn Castle, amethysts and jaspers from Ciboušov in the vicinity of Klášterec nad Ohří).
- 2) The Bohemian-Saxon mining boom in the 16th century (new German settlements, establishing borders, Lutheran religion) – development of arts in between the Gothic and Renaissance Eras.
- 3) Quest for alternatives after the transformation and decline of mining; the Krušnohoří craftsmanship (lacemaking, glove making, wood craft: musical instruments, toys; the role played by pouching and smuggling since the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries, when the modern bureaucratic civil service was established¹⁶, the smuggling of the Czech drug pervitin (amphetamine, called “crystal”) to Germany.
- 4) Industrial and craft businesses. The Saxon “Christmas “industry” town of Seiffen was a tourism centre, with its local toy museum being a major producer until the mid 20th century. Today, the museum offers tours in German, English, Czech and Japanese.
- 5) Period of National Socialism.
- 6) Uranium for the USSR – forced labour camps for political prisoners of the communist regime. We assume that all elementary school pupils should visit at least one historical site related to the communist regime. We see potential in presenting Jáchymov as a target for school trips in the Bohemian region.
- 7) Tourism prospects: recreational-wellness area, natural reservation, supply of lithium and other possibilities such as mining and its traditions.
- 8) Bohemian-Saxon relations from the 13th-century settlement to the present.

¹⁵ We deliberately resign on the possibility of teaching about the issues of the Krušnohoří/Erzgebirge anywhere else than in history classes; nevertheless, a modern concept of school history is now interdisciplinary. See in detail in J. Märc, 2010, pp. 9–27. The submitted concept is based on the current state of didactics of history that has been recently comprehensively summed up by Z. Beneš, 2014.

¹⁶ We come across this even today in some cases – apart from migrants heading to the promised land of Germany.

Example of Educational Challenges

Uraninite and Jáchymov¹⁷. Knowledge about “uraninite” dates back to the Middle Ages. It was called *smolinec* in Czech, *pechblende* or *pechstein* in German, and pitchblende in English, which is derived from the Czech ‘the rock that brings bad luck’ (*pech, smůla* in Czech), for when miners came across this mineral, it indicated the absence of silver or other metals. As a distinct element, uranium was discovered toward the end of the 18th century on the Saxon side of the Krušnohoří. During the 19th century it was used in glass making (yellow or green, always glittering glass) and became a desired commodity. The centre of manufacturing in Bohemia was Jáchymov. There, at the beginning of the 20th century, the healing effects of radon and radium were used in spa therapy (musculoskeletal, vascular and neural diseases) and eventually in radiation. Marie Curie-Skłodowska worked with the pitchblende from Jáchymov and visited Jáchymov in 1925; the local spa house and elementary school bear her name in commemoration of that visit¹⁸. Jáchymov was of particular interest to both Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. The Russians secured access to and possession of the Jáchymov uranium ore by the summer of 1945.

Teaching concept:¹⁹

- 1) Classes held at memorial sites; school trips reintroduced²⁰.
- 2) The Unity of Mountains and Mines, and the Contradictions between them²¹;
 - a) Puns on Czech terminology – the word for “miner” (*horník*) refers to the word for “mountain” (*hora*); whereas the word for “mine” (*důl*) refers to something low (*dole*);
 - b) Relationship between lower mountains and mining centres — many localities in the mountains profited from mining by supplying miners with farming and craft products;
 - c) Since most pupils come to the mountains from foothill regions, we can partly imitate a sixteenth-century journey of an old miner from Krupka to Jáchymov. It would be desirable if pupils could spend at least two days in the Krušnohoří, beginning the trip in Krupka, making a stop at a memorial site, and continuing through the brown coal mining basin.

¹⁷ We assumed that “education by Jáchymov” could become one of the cornerstones of modern Czech interdisciplinary approaches to school history classes. The Krušnohoří as a “bare and impervious” borderline mined and defined since the beginning of the 16th century is exemplified by Jáchymov as a subject in a laboratory; it is similar to birth of a modern human being aware of its reflection. We name at least one of several subjects on education related to the Jáchymov case not only for school purposes but also in connection with the association called Political Prisoners or prisoners of conscience. <http://www.politicalprisoners.eu/>

¹⁸ <https://www.laznejachymov.cz/ubytovani/komplex-curie;> <https://www.palfi.cz/clanky/osobnosti-jachymova---mistni-i-hoste/osobnosti-v-detailu/curie-sklodowska-marie-7.-11.-1867-4.7.1934-.html>

¹⁹ For three crucial impulses for a didactic grasp of this issue, see: <https://historiana.eu/#/>; V. Kratochvíl, 2019 a R. Stadling, 2003.

²⁰ H. Havlůjová, J. Najbert a kolektiv, 2014.

²¹ E. Mušková 2014; H. Lencová, 2012; eadem, 2013.

- 3) Primary sources:²² pupils can analyse texts, illustrations, coats of arms, maps, landscape, thus discovering their region's history, with the aim of learning interpretation strategies.
- 4) The peer-to-peer model of learning is desirable, with pupils themselves becoming guides to the local area and adopting historical personalities, thus reproducing knowledge²³.
- 5) Personal stories: pupils are introduced to the biographies of Georgius Agricola, Johannes Mathesius, Peter Demetz, Helga Pašková, Jaroslav Šlezinger, Josef Bryks, Zdeněk Mandrholec, Jaroslav Cibulka, and others. They also assume the roles of fictional characters such as miner, harp player, Lutheran, political prisoner of the communist regime, victim of a death march. Pupils would thus be encouraged to understand the impact of historical events on actual people's lives.
- 6) The preservation and protection of cultural and historical heritage²⁴. We would like the Krušnohoří landscape to be perceived by younger generations as something exceptional and naturally deserving of care and protection.
- 7) Czech schools are trying to eliminate the focus on the mere memorisation of facts in teaching — a criticism that appeared more than a hundred years ago²⁵ — as pupils have to memorise too many pieces of information in class. We would like to follow this trend and assume that teaching about the Krušnohoří shall be a part of the regular curriculum on particular periods and topics. At the same time, in the long run, the Krušnohoří topic would cross topics defined strictly chronologically, including s
- 8) Imilar histories of the Přísečnice and the development of mining in the 16th century and the potential employment of inhabitants during the period of decline in the 17th century).

Conclusion: Returning to the Roots

The best COLA is AGRI!! “Firstly, a miner should learn the ways and philosophy of mining to understand the underground. Only then can he find the right mineral veins and mine larger quantities. Secondly, a miner should understand medicine to be able to look after miners and other workers and to avoid falling ill himself, as miners tend to be ill more often than other people.

²² V. Kratochvíl, [in:] <http://www.moderni-dejiny.cz/clanek/skolni-historicky-pisemny-pramen-ve-vyuce-dejepisu>

²³ Navazujeme zde na aktivity vznikající ve spolupráci Univerzity Jana Evangelisty Purkyně s Antikomplexem, Collegiem Bohemicem a dalšími subjekty. *Tragická místa paměti/Tragische Erinnerungsorte. Průvodce po místech paměti jednoho regionu (Tragical places of Memory – a Guide to Memorials of One Region)*, 2010; V. Kupková (ed.), 2019.

²⁴ H. Havlůjová, K. Charvátová, M. Indrová, 2015.

²⁵ We emphasize two out of many personal and narrative stories. The first one is based on the book by H. Brenner – Wonschick, 2011 and is available at: <http://vachek.cz/2014/02/10/vvbn/>. The second was made by a beneficial society called Live Memory and is available at: <https://nucenaprace.cz/>

Thirdly, a miner must know astronomy to know the cardinal directions and the directions of mineral veins. In the fourth place, a miner must know to take measurements to know the depth of shafts in order to reach tunnels as well as the borders and limits of each mine. He also needs to know mathematics to calculate the costs of machines and labour. Knowing construction is useful, too, so that he can build various machines and explain them to others, as well as drawing, which is necessary for drawing machine designs. Finally, he should know the law so as not to get fooled and be able to give legal counsel to others²⁶.

Miners adopted this identity and these values during the period of “silver rush” in the Krušnohoří mining coalfield on both sides of the Bohemian-Saxon border. They created a distinct modern centre of civilisation that was at once intellectual, business-oriented, and progressive for the 16th century, given that it promoted education for girls, health and social care, art, science, technology and law.

Miners’ values also played a crucial role in the successful transformation in the second half of the 18th century, which allowed for the emergence of a range of typical Krušnohoří crafts and farming activities such as toy making, musical instruments, lacemaking, textile manufacturing and herb growing. These, in turn, have contributed to the successful Bohemian-Saxon cross-border nomination for the inscription as a World Heritage UNESCO site.

The North-West Region that is part of the unique Krušnohoří mining landscape on the Czech-Saxon border is now listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site. It is a new challenge for this borderland plagued by many issues. Natural resources hidden under the ground have simultaneously been the region’s source of wealth and curse. Since the end of the 19th century, when the opencast coal mining started, most of the region was devastated. It suffered the greatest blow after the Second World War, when the original German population was expelled to Germany. Many places ceased to exist, with historical settlements as well cultural and natural landscapes destroyed. In many ways, the North-West Region has been the most troubled region in the Czech Republic, with its prevailing poor environment, low education rate and many socially excluded localities. The cultural heritage of the Krušnohoří mining landscape is therefore a great challenge for the region, which needs to be supported through the corroboration between local governments, professional institutions, and by the education system as well, which ought to motivate all generations to take interest in and develop it.

²⁶ Agricola’s text from *De re metalica libri XII* is cited by J. Royt, 2016, s. 55.

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