

Summary of Project

Revitalizing Mining Landscapes and Communities: Ecological Restoration, Heritage Preservation, and Economic Development in the Age of Mass Destruction Mining

If you've ever taken a spin in a '57 Chevy, there's a good chance you would have been driving around little chunks of the mining cities of Butte, Hibbing, and Asbestos. If you happened to try the wheel of a Skoda Spartak Roadster, from across the Iron Curtain, you'd be mobilizing embedded energy from the coal fields that displaced the city of Most, and materials from the massive mining cities that fed the Soviet Bloc's voracious demand for copper, iron ore, and asbestos. The heyday of Chevrolet's iconic personal automobile was also the height of mining booms in these four cities that hosted some of the world's largest mines and provided significant quantities of the metals and minerals that drove industrial economies during the "Great Acceleration" of the second half of the twentieth-century. Ordinary consumers—all of us—in the age of mass consumption, are intimately, but for the most part invisibly, connected to the enormous pits of Butte, Hibbing, Asbestos, Most and so many other landscapes and communities that provide the materials for our materialism.

This project uses these four large mining centres in Europe and North America to examine the vast transformations of economies, labour, and the physical and social contours of mining communities in the twentieth century. Existing mining histories offer ample evidence of economic decline and the toxic traces of mining, but there is much less work on efforts to reclaim and rehabilitate mining landscapes, while also commemorating mining pasts. My project excavates and evaluates a range of efforts by mining companies, governments, and local inhabitants to memorialize mining histories and to revitalize economies, landscapes, and environments. Along with mining itself, these rehabilitation efforts have fundamentally reconstituted the material, social, and cultural landscapes of mining regions, and they speak to broader questions about the rhizomatic reach, across space and time, of our environmental footprint in the Anthropocene/Carbocene/Capitalocene.