



TRADITIONAL WOODEN SHINGLE MAKING

Ore Mountains · Germany

We split the prepared logs into smaller pieces of around ten degrees angle to form base billets for roof shingles.

The next step, the shingle shaping, is a meditative repetition of actions; it gives strength in your hands and legs and peace to your mind. You sit on the shaving bench – a type of carpentry bench – and step on the pedal to fix in one position a billet of the future shingle.



Then you start using a drawknife to finalise the shape of shingle into the ideal proportion, careful to craft a straight surface, without spikes. Master Kai taught us how to feel the surface of a correct shingle and how to replicate it through shaping. The best shingle is one that does not have branch nodes and tissues breaks, which means that the natural structure of the tree is not damaged. Meanwhile machine-made shingles last only for ten years and soon start to rot; correctly handmade

shingles, whose wooden structure is not damaged, remain water-resistant for a longer amount of time and can last up to thirty or even forty years.

Overall, the training course was a very interesting experience because to occupy oneself with intangible cultural heritage is the best way to learn about the best practices of our past. The European Heritage Training Courses provide

an affordable experience to expand your heritage knowledge and to gain practical skills. It is enriching and useful for everybody – not only for heritage professionals, but also people who are not related to the cultural heritage field, because it will help you in your everyday life.

■ *Albina Davletshina*
Participant

From underground to the shingled rooftop

The Ore Mountains are a transboundary region in Germany and Czechia characterised by the mining and processing industry. But that is not the only natural resource that one can find there.

Wood is essential for mining activity. It is needed to build tools and transportation material such as barrels. But mostly, wood helps to control a third natural element: water. Water is both a problem and a solution, while wood is the resource in the middle. To take water out of the mines, wood is used in a pumping system powered by the strength of the water itself. Mechanisms as water wheels are built from wood that resists harsh conditions and the passage of time.

Expansion of the mines brought a consequent need for more wood. The growth cycle of trees was not sufficient for the rhythm of work in the mines, and the negative impact of such depen-

dence was causing massive deforestation. Fortunately, among the brilliant local engineers and craftsmen who earned statues located in the surrounding cities, there was also Hans Carl von Carlowitz. His solution to wood scarcity was based on a careful timber management plan for the land. Even though this happened in the 17th century, this concept of sustainability seems to fit quite well in the current era. Each tree is precious for many reasons and they are still needed to keep the traditional landscape alive. This resource was the central topic for the European Heritage Training Course “Traditional wooden shingle techniques”.

We arrived and huge tree logs were waiting for us. If one day I was excited and cutting logs in slices like a pizza, the next day my muscles were sore. Working with wood is a hard task. There was wood everywhere, combined with iron,

creating an industrial atmosphere. Even the work bench was made of wood. We were fortunate to have a building of the *Alte Elisabeth* mine, which is a beautiful monument itself, as a workshop.

The fact that we were an international group sharing our stories also contributed to a nice atmosphere during the daily work. But we had to keep focused on the execution. Even though it looked easy, not everything was what it seems. Each shingle had to have a perfect degree of inclination and a precise space where the shingle would fit into the next one. Our eyes were still not skilled enough for such detail, and the first pack of shingles was so imperfect that it had to face a destiny other than becoming roof shingles. But practice makes perfect, and soon we were working well.

And the work of an apprentice can only be successful with a good work instructor. Even though the language could be an obstacle in some situations, such as naming the tools and techniques, such difficulty was quickly overcome with the learning-by-doing method. The transmission of knowledge between different generations was just wonderful. Not only the fact that experienced people were available and happy to share what they know with a younger group, but also the willingness to learn and absorb every detail from the side of the participants. Although I was not very talented in this task, I still remember

some details that, if I had not made them with my hands, I would have forgotten then by now.

But the transmission of knowledge goes beyond the work and respective work instructors. The course was completed by an intensive educational programme where we were introduced to different perspectives that complemented our work and put the whole region into context. We learned about the mining traditions of the region and about other handicrafts that were part of the daily reality of the Ore Mountains, like blacksmithing and lace making. But the most special thing was hearing stories from the locals. Can you imagine how funny it was to hear an 80-year-old man say he thought there was a ghost in the mine? In the end, there was no ghost – it was just a water wheel that was not blocked when the mine had been deactivated and occasionally turned, making noise.

But the thought of ghosts is not even half as scary as when I first went down into a mine. After what seemed to be an endless elevator ride, we entered the dark underground. But then, the lights were turned off and there was only candlelight. I couldn't see my feet – yet this is all the light each miner had. I still get goose bumps just for thinking about it. And I was told that I – just one and a half metres tall – had the perfect miner's size, so you can already imagine how small the corridors were. Looking



at that, the basic tools, and the noise of trying to drill a couple of millimetres per day into the stone wall, made me think how brave the miners were.

It is impossible not to feel emotional when faced with this tangible reality, and even more so when witnessing the intangible mining atmosphere. Hearing the miners singing is one memory I will never forget. I was amazed by the traditions and the artwork that you can find in many museums in the region. Like the *Schwibbogen*, a candle holder made out of wood, which is another use of this raw material in the region. This connection between men, ore, wood, technique, art, and tradition were some of the reasons to justify the region's inscription in the UNESCO World Heritage List. But for us, participants in this training course, being there was more than learning the history. It was also about living this experience. When going down into the mine or climbing up to put wooden shingle in the roof, one could always hear a warm *Glück auf* – the regional greeting, which means “Good luck”.

■ *Mariana Martinho*
Participant