



The European Route of Industrial Heritage

Many areas of Northwest Europe have been characterised in recent centuries by heavy industrial activity. Industrial buildings are both the witness of economic and social development and the expression of regional identity. Preserving them and making them available to the population helps to keep this important aspect of European history alive, and creates a potential basis for new economic and regional development. Recognising their intrinsic worth as destinations, and their potential as drivers of tourism-led regeneration, the European Route of Industrial Heritage (ERIH) will be a valuable initiative to breathe new life into historic industrial sites across Europe. Here, **Dr Wolfgang Ebert, Secretary of ERIH**, reports on work to date and outlines the project's goals.

The European Union's INTERREG II C programme is a community initiative concerning transnational cooperation on spatial planning for the period 1997-2001. Originating in the North Western Metropolitan Area, one of INTERREG II C's seven dedicated cooperation zones, a major new initiative has recently been established to promote the integration of European nations, to heighten public awareness of Northwest Europe's shared industrial heritage, and to encourage cultural tourism throughout the region. It will involve the further development of North Rhine-Westphalia's Route of Industrial Heritage and the creation of a European Route of Industrial Heritage (ERIH). The government of North Rhine-Westphalia is project's main organiser. The main objective of the initiative is create an international network of key industrial monuments, each of which has the potential to become a tourist destination. As part of the project, it is proposed that existing and proposed routes that celebrate industrial heritage in other European regions, including the Ruhr, Burgundy and Catalonia, should one day be integrated into the ERIH.

A new basis for tourism?

The empty shells of a stormy past, encompassing 200 years of industrial history, which are now supposedly of no use to anyone, are not just places full of memories. Factory halls and administrative buildings often stand out due to the high quality of their architectural design. And they can be used 'productively' again, as



Voelklingen Iron Works, World Heritage Site, Saar: planned for inclusion in the initial section of the ERIH

museums, for example, and venues for creativity, art and culture. Such interpretations offer these sites a viable economic future as destinations for new types of tourism, and offer new forms of employment to their local population. The main aim, therefore, is for these sites to have a positive impact on the regional economy.

The push to encourage new types of tourism in traditional industrial regions also incorporates a valuable environmental perspective: the very principle of 'recycling' the architectural fabric of former industrial buildings for new applications is important in terms of environmental sustainability. In addition, 'industrial tourism' offers ecological benefits, by freeing up existing municipal sites used by the tourism industry for alternative usage. From the international perspective, it can also help to reduce the large number of long-distance holidays currently taken each year by European citizens, which are so detrimental to the environment. And at a global level, the ERIH will make a major contribution to the sustainable development of European culture, in terms of its economy, society and environment.

ERIH: form and content

Good publicity and marketing will play a crucial role in determining whether the ERIH can succeed. Clearly, not all of its sites will be capable of generating the type of positive coverage required. So a set of 'anchor points', key European sites of industrial heritage, will be nominated. These locations, which sit at the top level of the



Zollern Colliery, Dortmund, North Rhine-Westphalia: industrial sites can be transformed into important destinations for visitors and the local population

project's hierarchy, will be promoted as highlights of the route. These locations, which are also known as anchor points, form the top level of the network hierarchy. Crucially, as well as driving interest in the project as a whole, these destinations must be capable of becoming viable tourist propositions in their own right.

Directly beneath this level, it is planned to create regional sub-networks, comprising 'themed routes' of other former industrial destinations within a particular region. These sites will not be subject to the same criteria as the anchor points, but will offer instead as complete a picture of an area or special theme as possible. Each themed route will be linked to an anchor point, which will be symbolic for the orientation of its content.

The objectives of these regional routes will be twofold. They will enable the extensive development of landscapes on which industrialisation has made its mark, with the intention being to familiarise the target group - primarily the local and regional population - with the historical development profile of their region. Simultaneously, regional routes will offer excellent opportunities for local themed tourism initiatives, such as a coal-mining route in Wales.

The third level of connection between sites will be at the transnational level, also involving themed routes. A European Iron Way, for instance, could be significant from a tourism point of view. The option of integrating themed routes offers the possibility of incorporating many regional interests and activities into the ERIH. The system will be open-ended and flexible as far as future additions are concerned.

The geography of Europe's traditional industrial regions does not lend itself to the creation of a continuous linear network, nor would this be appropriate. A true European Route of Industrial Heritage should, in fact, be star-shaped. The route should ideally start at an outstanding location in Britain, the birthplace of the industrialisation process (encompassing the Ironbridge/Manchester/Liverpool region, Glasgow, the Black Country and Wales) and then lead onto the continent, through the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg. On through France (Pas de Calais, Lorraine and Burgundy) to Spain (Catalonia), through Switzerland to Northern Italy. From there via Austria to the Czech Republic (Ostrava), Poland (Upper Silesia, Starachowice, Gdansk), through the Baltic States with a quick foray

into Russia (the Urals). Then to Sweden (Bergslagen) and on to Denmark (around Copenhagen) and a number of regions in Germany. The final destination, should the route follow this configuration, would be the Ruhr.

Planning the first phase

It is only possible to realise such a far-ranging project in a number of phases. Planning the first of these has run from autumn 1999, and resulted in a feasibility study, which will be published in December 2001 and made available on the internet at www.erih.de.

This study deals with the following issues:

- development of the structures of a European Route and its organisational forms for this initial section;
- selection of locations in the participating countries by the national partners and joint agreement by all partners;
- proposals for suitable publicity media, information systems and tourism packages;
- definition of the cost of specific implementation.

The end results of this first planning period are:

- a list of future anchor points;
- a routing proposal;
- a list of proposals for potential themed routes;
- a corporate identity system;
- marketing proposals;
- an advertising flyer for the project;
- a website containing additional information;
- a cost and organisation plan for definitive implementation;
- presentation forums for work undertaken in the participating countries.

The aim is to set up an initial section of the route in the area of Northwest Europe covering the UK, the Benelux states, the Saar and North Rhine-Westphalia - the historical heartland of European industrialisation - with the promotional support and cooperation of strand B of the EU's INTERREG III programme (devoted to transnational cooperation in the field of territorial planning). We hope to take our first concrete steps in 2002. During this phase, the project will aim to establish model solutions for individual sites and how they can be effectively connected, thereby laying the foundations for future work.

The hope is that work on the creation of the wider route can begin in earnest from 2003 onwards, within the framework of the EU. A particular objective is not only to establish a tourist network but also simultaneously to contribute directly to the development of individual sites (in the context of maintaining and extending the infrastructure). A major step towards this longer-term goal would be the incorporation of former industrial sites in future member countries in Middle and Eastern Europe, in order to further secure the historic heritage of the Industrial Age at the Pan-European level.

Images courtesy of ERIH