

Faculté de philosophie, arts et lettres

# The issue of heritage of coal mining sites and former industrial plants

With a focus on the Benelux and the United Kingdom

Auteur : Nicolas Pitot

Promoteur(s) : Paul Arblaster

Année académique 2022-2023

LMULT2MS : Master en communication multilingue, finalité langue des affaires



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# Introduction

The industrial Revolution of the 19th century brought about significant transformations in the Belgian Pays Noir [black country] and the English Black Country, leading to a shift from agrarian and craft-based economies to industrial powerhouses focused on coal and steel production. However, the closure of coal mines, motivated by the questioning of working conditions by the European Coal and Steel Community, and the relocation of industries during the latter half of the 20th century tarnished the image of these regions, impacting their socio-economic system and leaving behind a legacy of unemployment and social trauma. In this thesis, I will primarily focus on the Belgian Pays Noir, with a particular emphasis on the city of Charleroi, which has recently witnessed a remarkable revitalization, incorporating its industrial heritage as an asset. The objective is to explore how coal mines and former steel industries, which once shaped the city's identity, can now be transformed into collaborative projects promoting new forms of tourism, such as urban exploration trails. Various cities and former industrial sites across Western Europe now seek to preserve their industrial heritage, with steel structures and former coal mining sites often holding significant socio-cultural importance for the local population. Many efforts, sometimes leading to protests, are being made by local committees, and authorities, along with public actors to integrate these former industrial structures into cultural and educational initiatives, resulting in the emergence of notable cultural centres like Rokerill, SPARKOH!, Blégny-Mine, C-Mine, and Be-Mine. Notorious museums have emerged as well, such as the Black Country Living Museum in Dudley, the Dutch Mining Museum in Heerlen, or Bois du Cazier in Marcinelle, which have become well known institutions that offer visitors a unique experience. It appears that, while some regions, like the Dutch Limburg, have opted to erase traces of their heavy industry and coal extraction, focusing on a "from black to green" approach, other countries, like Belgium and Luxembourg, are embracing their industrial heritage and promoting it as a symbol of their history and identity. Throughout my work, I will explore the reasons behind the differing approaches to coal mining heritage in the Netherlands and in Belgium. Additionally, I will highlight the innovative strategy employed by the University of Luxembourg to repurpose a former industrial plant in Esch-sur-Alzette, serving as an exemplary model of successful conversion in Western Europe. It must be noticed that, despite de fact that the closure of many mines has resulted from decisions of the ECSC, the European Union is now actively engaged into the conversion of closed industrial plants and is promoting the industrial heritage and the symbol it represents. Another essential aspect of my research involves education and the significance of teaching local heritage in schools. Initiatives by the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles and schools in the UK, supported by

organizations like the Historical Association, provide valuable insights into the relevance of incorporating regional heritage into the curriculum. To gain further insight, my study will also be punctuated by a survey that I conducted in Belgium through an online questionnaire, in which respondents were asked about their perspectives on the place of local heritage in the education of younger generations. The study is also gauging people's sentiments towards industrial infrastructures and related projects of preservation of industrial heritage and its role in education and regional identity.

## List of abbreviations

ECSC: European Coal and Steel Community

EEC: European Economic Community

ERDF: European Regional Development Funds

ERIH: European Route for Industrial Heritage

EU : European Union

FWB: Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles

HA: Historical Association

PGCE: Post Graduate Certificate in Education

PIE: Netherlands' Institute for industrial heritage

PTSD: post-traumatic stress disorder

SNCB: Société Nationale des Chemins de fer Belges

TICCIH: The International Committee for the Conservation of Industrial Heritage

UK: United Kingdom

# 1. The issue of local and national heritage

## 1.1. Are old industrial structures considered as being part of any cultural identity?

### 1.1.1. What is exactly a cultural identity?

From my formative years to the present day, I have keenly observed that individuals who have spent a significant portion, if not the entirety, of their lives in a specific area tend to develop a profound affinity for the distinct attributes of that region. Growing up among the undulating hills and the formidable steel industries of the Belgian Pays Noir, I became attuned to the fact that the aged and often forsaken structures bearing testament to a weighty, yet illustrious industrial legacy might not necessarily hold the same allure for those hailing from other geographical areas.

Interestingly, the majority of my peers who shared the backdrop of Charleroi and its environment also exhibited a deep-seated attachment to the industrial tapestry that defines the region, and it ignited my contemplation on the potential emergence of a cohesive cultural identity capable of uniting people under a sense of belonging. This notion encapsulates a psychological phenomenon characterized by an intrinsic affinity towards a specific locality, faith, ideology, community, or tradition, all being interactive with each other. Importantly, this sense of belonging can often operate at a subconscious level. Some individuals might not openly express their sentiments regarding their connection to their surroundings. This could be attributed to the pervasive routine of encountering the same landmarks, individuals, or landscapes day after day, leading them to forego verbalizing their thoughts. Alternatively, it might stem from a reluctance to openly embrace a cultural identity, even though such sentiments are latent.

In my observations, I have encountered instances where a segment of the population appears hesitant to articulate their bond with their environment. However, what has struck me profoundly is the remarkable propensity of individuals – irrespective of whether they harbour affection, indifference, or reticence towards their homeland – to spontaneously exhibit their attachment when encountering aspects of their region in unexpected contexts. The mere mention of their city's name, visual depictions in a televised documentary, an international news report, a literary discovery abroad, or even a classroom lesson incorporating the name of their city can trigger a sudden surge of astonishment and captivate one's attention, thereby revealing the enduring connection they hold with their roots.

### 1.1.2. Post-industrial coal-mining landscapes and the evolution of mining memory

Unlike Belgians or Germans, the Dutch people aims to forget its mining past and what seems to be a 'trauma' of the coal and 'a world they have lost'. Very few infrastructures of the coal mining past in the Netherlands are left and the local population of former industrial cities tries to move forward and focus on innovation instead of the duty of memory. They moved forward under the idyllic motto 'from black to green', as head frames, heaps, engine houses, extraction tower and other coal mining structures have been gradually removed from the landscape. That is what stands out of the study led by Felix van Veldhoven in 2015 and published by the Amsterdam University Press. In his work, the author compares the behaviour of the population in the Belgian Limburg and the Dutch Limburg towards the remaining coal mines. He also tries to understand how the ideas on remembering and forgetting can be tied to landscapes in coal districts. (van Veldhoven, 2015)

Linking the ideas of remembering and forgetting can be used in different contexts, like the Second World War, to which a large number of memorial sites and landscapes are dedicated or implicitly linked to. It can therefore be employed for other forms of 'painful heritage'. Concerning cultural heritage and identity, memory has become a key concept and heritage can change into a theme park of memory and interpretation, the author claims. The remaining structures and objects of the past cannot be separated from memory and the remembrance of past events. In fact, the question of heritage is open to interpretation and the thoughts may vary from a population to another (for example the opposed Dutch and Belgian interpretations of the coal mining industry and its remembrance). This variety of interpretations is one of the reasons why there is still an ongoing debate about the preservation of these sites, which are less likely to vanish from the Belgian landscapes. But then, will the memory of these places that have made the country so rich also evaporate in the Netherlands, as the country removes these sites from the landscape one by one? While citing Cicero, the study claims that mental images and place together create memory and that place and memory are condemned to each other. So, if a memory will last when it is connected to a place, it appears clear that the memory of the former coal mining industry in the Netherlands is more likely to disappear over the next generations, whereas the numerous Belgian heaps preserve this memory, even when they have not been converted into a cultural or educational attraction. The author also cites Edmund Husserl:

"In this unique world, everything sensuous that I now originally perceive, everything that I have perceived and which I can now remember or about which others can report to me as what they have perceived or remembered, has its place" (Husserl, 1997)

In that sense, memory and place form a certain unity that helps us to situate our memories. Also, the philosopher of history Frank Ankersmit (2002) states that the most reliable support for a memory is its association with a place. For example, when someone speaks about the attack on the Twin Towers in 2001, the particular place we were in is almost as important as the memory of the event itself. This demonstrates that memory and place are united and that the place of a particular event or industry plays a big role in the functioning of our memory. Landscape is the central point of the process and, since it is constantly observable and present in our daily life, it shapes the collective memory. However, a landscape is never still, and memory is not 'grounded' into it. But it requires people and their thoughts as the landscape evolves and is being transformed. It is said in the study that landscape can serve as a mnemonic device.

#### 1.1.2.1. The significant difference between Dutch and Belgian Limburg

The author of the study has chosen two post-industrial mining regions to illustrate his work: Dutch and Belgian Limburg, where the nature and extent of the preservation of former coal mining sites differ significantly. While many of the coal mines have been fully removed from the landscape, as if the vast influence of coal mining had never existed, some of them still show proudly most of their steel structures, offices and heaps, offering all kinds of experience to visitors. We will see further in my work that some of those sites have been turned into educational, cultural, or event centres, while local committees are still fighting for the survival of former coal mines or sites of the steel industry.

Most of the coal mines of the Dutch Limburg are flooded by groundwater or destroyed by nature. At the surface, the shafts are sealed, and the structures demolished, often to be built over and offer new spaces for residential quarters. A few heaps are still intact but most of them have been levelled or overgrown. The last active coal mine, the *Oranje-Nassau I*, ceased production in 1974, and already four years later, there was nothing left that could make people think that there was an active coal extraction process on the site. Dutch people and their collective memory are focused on one idea: forgetting. Although erasing what was left of the coal mines could mean a new start for the deprived region and goes along with the motto 'from black to green', there is a risk that with only the collective memory remaining, the next generations will definitely forget about the history of the region and its industrial culture, which blossomed for decades and provided a living for one third of the South-Limburgers in its early days. Today, of the 36 head frames that linked the Limburg landscape with coal mining, only two remain.

#### 1.1.2.1.1. *The Dutch Mining Museum*

Until 2022, one of the two remaining head frames was hosting the Dutch Mining Museum at the time located at Shaft II of the *Oranje Nassau* mine in Heerlen; the last Dutch coal mine to close, as we said earlier. Nowadays, the museum is housed in the city centre of Heerlen. The museum tells the global study of the entire Dutch coal mining basin, rather than a site in particular. Each of the four floors are dedicated to a different theme. The ground floor is dedicated to the mines and its workers, the first floor to the prosperity that the coal industry brought to the region, the second floor depicts the unsafe and unhealthy working conditions, and finally the top floor recalls how the landscape has been transformed after the closure of the last coal mines. The foundation of the museum was an initiative of the organization *Stichting Carboon* ('Carbon Foundation'), which foster the (late) resurgence of a need for preserving mining memories.

#### 1.1.2.1.2. *The Belgian mining heritage*

Although the last coal mine to close in Wallonia was the site of the *Roton* in Farciennes, near Charleroi, the last Belgian coal mining site that closed its doors was the mine *Zolder* in the Belgian Limburg in 1992, after 62 years of exploitation. At the time, the local population would first of all have the need to forget and to move forward the future, expressing exactly the same thoughts as in the Dutch Limburg. The remaining structures were the representation of painful memories for about 300,000 families that have been implicated into the extraction of coal. The priority was to get rid of them as soon as possible, and many coal mining sites have since been completely cleared of the mining structures and underground galleries were refilled. However, compared to the Netherlands, a large part of the mining legacy has survived thanks to Flemish Minister Johan Sauwens who saved approximately 50 mining structures from the demolition and listed them as a monument under the so-called 'industrial-archaeological value' criterion (*industriële-archeologische waarde*), which helped preserve 500 industrial structures since its creation in 1976. In the Belgian Limburg, three slag heaps were preserved in their original shape, while the others have been exploited for tourist or cultural purposes (I will talk about *C-Mine* and *Be-Mine* further in my work). In addition to the preserved heaps that artificially shape the hilly country of Belgian Limburg, six of the seven Kempen mines still feature their steel construction that marked the extraction work of the site, sometimes over 60 metres high.

#### 1.1.2.2. *What are the reasons of this diversity in the preservation and reuse of the mining heritage?*

To explain this disparity, the author highlights two main reasons. First of all, the UK has been the precursor of a movement of recognition of former industrial plants and their role into the collective memory. This growing interest started in

the late 1950s but from the 1970s reached the recognition of the national government and the National Trust. From there, the interest in remaining industrial structures have spread over Great Britain, especially with the foundation of the International Committee for the Conservation of Industrial Heritage (TICCIH) in 1975. The movement was to spread across Western Europe and in Belgium as one of the first countries. The closure of the Flemish coal mines happened fortunately during this period of growing recognition of industrial sites, which helped their conservation. In the Netherlands, this interest in industrial culture has imposed itself much later, in the 1990s. Despite the establishment of the Dutch Institute for Industrial Heritage (PIE) in 1992 and the *Year of Industrial Heritage* in 1996, it was too late to preserve most of the Dutch coal mining infrastructure as the last coal mine in the Netherlands (*Oranje Nassau*) had been closed and demolished nearly 20 years before.

The second reason that is put forward by the author is the different length of the period in which coal mines closed. For example, in South Wales, the mine-closing process was much longer than in Belgium or the Netherlands, stretching over several decades (in 1947, half of the exploitation sites had closed already, and the remaining active sites closed gradually until well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century). This created a counter-effect of neglect towards the remaining industrial structures. In Belgium and the Netherlands, where coal mines closed over a much shorter period of time, people feared that the infrastructures would be demolished in the process. As a result, protests were made against their demolition while in South Wales, the industrial structures disappeared one by one over time and became less important in the collective memory. The fact that coal mines in the UK didn't close at once or at least during a relatively short period of time has damaged the industrial heritage of the UK. The Dutch mining sites could have benefited from the fact most of them had closed in roughly 10 years, but the late spread of recognition of industrial heritage must be considered. At the time of the closure process (1960s-70s), the recognition of mining heritage didn't reach the Dutch Limburg yet, mainly because of the feelings of uneasiness and embitterment that resulted from the harsh mining conditions of and the living conditions working families.

## 1.2. The controversy of the local heritage

### 1.2.1. Controversies in Belgium

Continuing with my exploration, I will delve into conservation initiatives surrounding former industrial facilities that remain focal points of contention between local authorities and the community. Two prominent instances stand out: the Haut-Fourneau 4 blast furnace near Charleroi and the Haut-Fourneau B in Ougrée, near Liège. These sites serve as illustrative case studies of ongoing debates, and the pivotal role played by conservation committees, orchestrated by grassroots organizations, warrants significant emphasis.

In Belgium, the resonance of these committees holds particular significance, as they command considerable attention and often facilitate a constructive dialogue with both public and economic stakeholders. This interplay between divergent interests underscores the complex dynamics at play, reflecting a nation's commitment to preserving its industrial heritage while fostering a harmonious engagement between heritage conservation and contemporary development.

### 1.2.2. Controversies in the UK

In the United Kingdom, the cessation of coal mining unfolded over an extended timeframe, an elongated narrative that inadvertently fostered a gradual erasure from collective memory. Unlike the swift and seismic shifts observed elsewhere, the closure of these mining sites followed a more measured trajectory, rendering the local populace less attuned to their preservation imperative. The absence of an abrupt rupture dimmed the urgency of safeguarding these historical sites, casting a veil of disregard over their potential for future reconversion projects or their transformation into poignant repositories of remembrance.

Moreover, the legacy of mining's arduous past casts a shadow that has influenced the swift demolition of shuttered mines. While the trauma echoes less resoundingly than in certain other regions, its vestiges still play a role, nudging authorities towards hastening the dismantling process. This contrasts with the Netherlands, where the resonance of this trauma is more pronounced. Regrettably, a substantial fragment of the once-vibrant tapestry of the English Black Country's identity has been irretrievably lost to the annals of time.

Yet, in the wake of this dissolution, a glimmer of hope emerges: a testament to the tenacity of the population and dedicated committees. Driven by a resolute commitment to recapture the essence of their industrial heritage, these individuals are striving to rekindle echoes of the past.

## 2. Emerging turnarounds projects as an alternative

### 2.1. Esch-sur-Alzette (Luxembourg), European Capital of Culture 2022

Esch-sur-Alzette, Luxembourg's second-largest city, stands as an illustrious exemplar of industrial rejuvenation, heralding a triumphant narrative of revitalization on the European stage. The city and its encompassing industrial domains have orchestrated a remarkable metamorphosis, undertaking a captivating transition from a waning steel industry hub to an epicentre of culture. Distinguished as the European Capital of Culture for the year 2022, alongside two other cities in Europe, Kaunas in Lithuania and Novi Sad in Serbia, Esch-sur-Alzette's ascendancy to this prestigious mantle has beckoned forth a generous influx of \$54.8 million from an array of benefactors, including the European Union. This infusion of investment has fuelled the genesis of an impressive assemblage of 130 cultural projects, a substantial portion of which ingeniously reanimate industrial plants into vibrant centres of creativity and erudition, extending their influence even across the French frontiers, encompassing towns like Micheville and Villerupt.

The *Esch2022* program also comprises the acquisition of shy-high remnants of the steel industry, in order to offer them a new life by including them into new cultural and/or educational projects. The aim of the project is to promote “a transformation from an industrial society to a society of knowledge” (Beautyman, 2022). In fact, the city was already designated as European Capital of Culture in 2017, but the projects undertaken by the authorities in 2022 were of an unparalleled scale.



Among the towering renaissance ventures stands Belval, an integrated residential and commercial enclave that harmoniously embraces two towering sentinels of industry: colossal, retired blast furnaces that had long ceased their activity. These imposing giants, stilled since 1993, now stand resplendent amid verdant gardens and reflective pools that bespeak a rich heritage. Furthermore, the artful interplay of luminous accents bestows upon these behemoths an enchanting nocturnal visage, endowing the cityscape with an entrancing choreography of light and shadow.



Belval during the inauguration of Esch2022 (source: infolux)

The district has been splendidly transformed, now proudly showcasing the Rockhal, a colossal concert arena that stands as the crowning jewel of the Grand Duchy. With its vast expanse accommodating up to 6,500 attendees within its grand hall and an additional chamber that seats 1,200, the Rockhal commands the spotlight as a paramount cultural venue. Yet, its offerings extend beyond music; within its walls, one discovers six resplendent rehearsal chambers, a state-of-the-art recording studio, and a haven of knowledge in the form of a media library.

This architectural project amalgamates cultural splendour with educational essence, seamlessly transitioning into the realm of intellectual enrichment. The Cité des Sciences, a scientific epicentre located within the University of Luxembourg's ambit, amplifies this facet. The district resonates as an educational centre of considerable prominence, fostering a vibrant ecosystem where both scholarly and cultural aspirations converge harmoniously. Within its reconfigured confines, the transformation comprises classrooms, administrative offices, and the expansive expanse of a university library, spanning over 200,000 square feet and giving access to more than 800,000 books and 1,000 workstations meeting diverse fields of study. All these university assets are located into the 670,000-square-foot Maison du Savoir (House of Knowledge), around which the campus grew.

(Beautyman, 2022)



The campus surrounded by furnaces. (Beautyman, 2022)

The Massenoire building, a stuffing production hall that is located near one of the two blast furnaces has undergone a transformation as well and became an exhibition space into the heart of the Cité des Sciences. The building was used to make the taphole tamping mass, also called black mass (*masse noire* in French), which gave it its name Massenoire. This Visitors enjoy an audio-visual journey through the history and industrial heritage of Luxembourg and the development of the new university quarters on the site. (*Massenoire Belval - Visit Minett*, n.d.)



The Massenoire building. (Beautyman, 2022)

Esch2022 and the transformations that it has entailed are the perfect example that the success of enhancing the heritage of a region or a city through ambitious cultural projects is not to be proven anymore. Once again, the European Union and its investment into projects of conversion of former industrial sites have been key actors into the region's economy. Further in my work, I will present other conversion projects that have benefited from European funds, namely the ERDF funds that have been heavily invested in the region of Charleroi and the Belgian Black Country.

## 2.2. Haut-Fourneau 4 and military quarters

The Haut-Fourneau has been the subject of many debates and dilemmas in the region of Charleroi. The contentious discourse regarding its destiny, oscillating between demolition and preservation, unfolded over the span of several years. Following a prolonged period of uncertainty, a last-minute accord was brokered, forging a pact between the municipality and the Belgian Army. A reprieve from the spectre of destruction emerged as the Sogepa Group stepped forward, poised to acquire the expanse, with ambitious designs to incorporate the blast furnace into their visionary project. Concurrently, the Belgian Army is slated to commandeer 45 of the site's sprawling 109 hectares, a venture heralded as "the district of the future. The construction of the new military quarters and facilities is expected to start in 2024 (Vande Velde, 2021). In an interview for the Belgian information website 7sur7, the Minister of Defense, Ludivine Dedonder, talked about a cutting-edge cooperation with economic players and public institutions:

“The ‘District of the future’ is not just a real estate project, but a real human and economic opportunity. Its semi-open design will enable extensive sharing and cooperation with economic players and public institutions. It is the development of a Defense (...) that works for economic recovery, contributes to industrial and academic innovation, and above all offers future prospects to those who join it. It’s a vision for Defense that will take shape in Charleroi”. (Hadrich, 2021)

## 2.3. Using Culture as a driver of development

### 2.2.1. Le Rokerill in Marcinelle, Charleroi

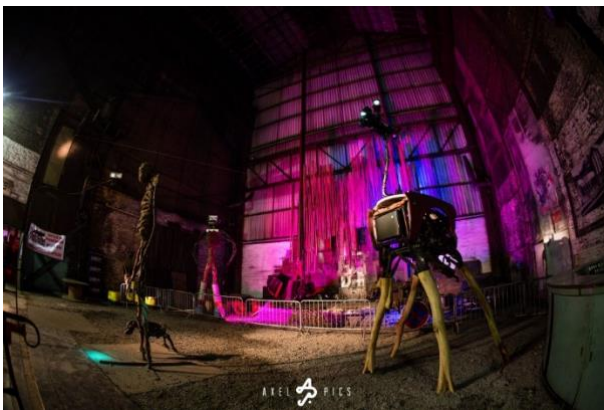


Charleroi, propelled by a resolute vision to unveil its reinvigorated and innovative spirit, has artfully transformed the venerable industrial site of La Providence, a relic from the 19th century, into a vibrant cultural haven where festivals and communal gatherings flourish. With roots stretching back to 1832, the forges, forged by the hands of the

blacksmith Puissant d’Argimont and the industrial luminary Thomas Bonehill, etched their indelible mark upon the very fabric of Charleroi, shaping its industrial landscape. Their fiery furnaces blazed through history, weathering the tumultuous waves of the First World War, only to be resurrected and kindled to life anew, albeit under the aegis of the Cockerill group, a harbinger of the subsequent industrial decline that shadowed the 1980s.

In this narrative of revitalization, the Rokerill Art Industry project emerges as a masterful orchestration, seamlessly fusing an industrial vestige plagued by decades of neglect with an unwavering link to its storied past. Anchored in the city's illustrious history from the 19th century to the mid-20th century, the venerable edifice now pulsates with renewed vitality as the Rokerill, an urban cultural hub dedicated to the symphony of music, artistry, theatrical ensembles, digital spectacles, convivial aperitifs, and a tapestry of creative expressions.

The building is composed of four main parts, each of them having its own history and a specific purpose:



The Cathedral: it is the lobby of the Rokerill and it is also used permanently as an exhibition hall where pieces of art of artists close to the non-profit-making organization are displayed.



The Forges: rebuilt after the WWI, many Aperitifs are organized around the furnaces, it welcomes the collective of the blacksmiths of Providence and is also used as an exhibition hall.



The Rockerill: concert hall with a capacity of 250 people.



The Great Hall: the hall accommodates larger events, like the Uzine Festival, the Flesh Factory Festival, as well as exhibitions and concerts.

Since its inception in 2005, within the very heart of those ancient furnaces, a wide range of artists and kindred spirits coalesced to manifest a vision. Their collective ingenuity birthed a multifaceted haven, an intrinsic centre for street artists and passionate art connoisseurs to unfurl their masterpieces. As an embodiment of its potential, the project garnered support from the regional powerhouse, Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, and the City of Charleroi, further fuelling its trajectory.

In this transformation, Le Rockerill has evolved into an international magnet, drawing myriad individuals and artists from across Europe, spanning the kaleidoscope of genres, from techno to pop, and beyond. A symphony of over 300 artists graces its stages each season and offers an illustrious tapestry catalysed by its union with the Club Plasma, an association that engineers architectural metamorphoses to nurture musical and communal resonances. Yet, the implications transcend mere tourism; Le Rockerill stands as a luminary, radiating transformative influence that has revitalized the very essence of Charleroi. Cultures diverse and vibrant have burgeoned, all underscored by a potent reminder of Charleroi's vast potential. Notably, the site extends its

embrace to young minds aged 8 to 16, offering an introduction to blacksmithing, a living link to their industrial legacy, fostering a connection that traverses generations.

In this narrative of metamorphosis, Le Rockerill stands not just as a haven of creativity, but as a testament to Charleroi's indomitable spirit, rewriting the city's story from an industrial epicentre to a cultural dynamo.

(Rockerill, n.d.)

### 2.2.2. The Silver Building in London, England

Located within London's Royal Docks, the former Carlsberg Tetley HQ, an imposing brutalist edifice spanning over 60,000 square feet, languished in neglect for 15 years before its revival in 2017. This renaissance aligns seamlessly with the comprehensive transformation unfolding across the entire area, shaping it into a vibrant hub for creative enterprises and cultural dynamism. Spearheading this metamorphosis is the Silver Building, a brainchild of the visionary collective Projekt, masterminded by its founder, Nick Hartwright, acclaimed for his pioneering Green Rooms Hotel – heralded as the UK's inaugural arts hotel and social enterprise.

*“The Silver Building is an incredibly existing project and a perfect example of how modern regeneration should be carried out. Over the coming years we’re going to put Silvertown on the map. We’re going to engage with existing Newham-based businesses and we’re going to bring new enterprises in the area. Everyone will benefit, and together, I’m sure we’ll produce some brilliant outputs”.* (Nick Hartwright cited in *The Silver Building, creative workspaces*, n.d.)

Originally erected in 1964 under the aegis of the Carlsberg Tetley Brewing company, the building faced abandonment in 2001, casting a pall of uncertainty over the neighbourhood. During its desolation, it hosted illicit rave gatherings and nefarious dealings, engendering trepidation within the community. A tinge of apprehension surfaced when a nightclub procured another industrial structure nearby, stoking fears of a replication of nightlife tumult. However, the leader of the project reassured: *“I understand there were concerns we would be running something like a nightclub nearby, but this will be the polar opposite. (...) We will not be putting on late night raves. We will be focusing on culture and the arts.”* (Nick Hartwright cited in Burford, 2018). The Silver Building was supported by the Mayor of London's office and re-purposed by award-winning studio of architects and designer SODA.

*“London’s creative industries are unrivalled, but the capital is growing and we need to make sure we built great creative infrastructure into major development projects. As property prices rise, artists are finding it more difficult to put down roots here and that’s why they need access to genuinely affordable workspace.”*

(Mayor of London Sadiq Khan cited in *The Silver Building, creative workspaces*, n.d.)

The Silver Building, through its economically viable spaces, wields an irresistible allure that beckons the most trailblazing creative luminaries, including the likes of Graig Green, Liam Hodges, and even Block9, the collaborators of Banksy. Worth noting is the fact that, since its revival in 2017, the area has birthed new commercial zones, while the advent of spring 2022 ushered in a quantum leap in transportation connectivity with the inauguration of the Elizabeth Line and the Custom House station nearby, and thus fortifying the area's accessibility.

#### 2.2.2.1. Projekt group

Projekt helps to develop multifunctional projects intended for creative companies, artists, designers, events any kind of businesses in London and the South-East. The collective supports already 250 creative businesses, with a network of over 6000 creative enterprises and operates 300,000 square feet of multifunctional space across the capital.

## 3. The Belgian and English Black Countries

### 3.1. The Belgian *Pays Noir*

In Belgium, the term "Pays Noir," which translates to "Black Country" in English, predominantly encompasses the city of Charleroi and its adjacent regions. However, it also encompasses the area stretching from Charleroi to the Borinage, two regions profoundly shaped by coal mining and heavy industry over the past two centuries. The coal mines within the Pays Noir played a pivotal role in Belgium's industrial development, propelling it to become the first country in continental Europe to embrace the Industrial Revolution. This marked Belgium as one of the world's most densely industrialized nations, boasting significant coal mining, manufacturing prowess, a thriving export sector, and a robust railway network. While the United Kingdom had already established a formidable heavy industry and rail network, the ripple effect of the Industrial Revolution soon reached Belgian shores.

In 1878, Jules Cornet, a distinguished Belgian geologist and professor at the Polytechnic Faculty of Mons, which was then known as the Ecole des Mines (School of Mines), eloquently stated, "In view of its small size, Belgium is, as far as minerals are concerned, one of the most favoured regions on earth." An enduring marvel that continues to resonate today is the astonishing diversity of Belgium's production, all encapsulated within a relatively compact geographical expanse (Evens, 2021).

The Pays Noir once teemed with coal mining communities, where miners and their families dwelled in close proximity to the mines. The 1880s saw the portrayal of these communities through Emile Zola's literary masterpiece, *Germinal*. Within this backdrop, workers and their families grappled with arduous living conditions marked by impoverishment, cramped dwellings, rampant diseases, perilous mine incidents, floods, and limited access to basic necessities. The Black Country was a tapestry of multiculturalism, with communities hailing mainly from Italy, Greece, France, Poland, Spain, Morocco, Turkey, and northern Africa.

After the Second World War, the region faced even greater tribulations, leading to a chasm between Flanders, where industries diversified, and Wallonia, caught in an unprecedented decline. The formation of the European Coal and Steel Community, a precursor to the European Union, sparked widespread worker discontent and strikes across the region. In Quaregnon, a border town with France, banners bearing slogans such as "Work, not charity!" and "Death to the Coal and Steel Community!" adorned the streets as 20,000 strikers and sympathizers protested, causing rail disruption and barricades.

Concerns centred on job losses, fears that supranational institutions would undermine national sovereignty, and apprehensions about deteriorating working conditions, particularly in the Borinage. The emergence of potential unfair competition loomed large in the minds of protestors. Despite the Community's benefits, including improved materials for Belgian mining sites, infrastructure remained dilapidated compared to Germany, the Netherlands, and France. The Community sought to foster a common market among France, Italy, West Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg. Crucially, it aimed to prevent a resurgent Germany from dominating the steel industry and potentially posing a threat to European stability.

While the project yielded success and ultimately led to the creation of the European Economic Community (EEC) six years later, it was the Suez Crisis and the subsequent diplomatic isolation of France and Great Britain that underscored the need for collective, unified actions to exert significant influence over global superpowers. This realization paved the way for a united Europe, driven by shared objectives and aspirations (*BELGIUM: The Black Country*, 2021).

Some illustrations of the Belgian “Pays Noir”:



Heaps and blast furnaces.



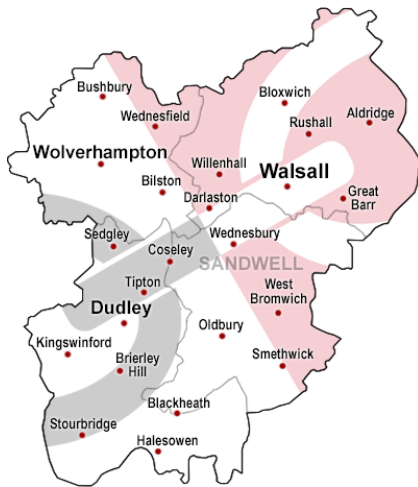
Terril des Piges in the front, terril des Hiercheuses, terril Saint-Charles in the back, and terril n°24 Fiestaux on the left.



Marchienne and the Charleroi-Brussels canal

### 3.2. The English *Black Country*

In the UK, and more precisely in the English midlands, the Black Country refers



to the industrial heart of England and to the metropolitan area of Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton, all lying to the west and north-west of the city of Birmingham (purists will say that Wolverhampton isn't actually in the Black Country). The boundaries are still to debate but unlike in Belgium, official boundaries have been determined by the local authorities (*Black Country | Industrial Revolution, Coal Mining, Ironworks | Britannica*, 2023). In fact, the region has obtained its name "Black Country" for the same reasons as the Pays Noir in Belgium. The area is said to be

the region where the coal seam comes to the surface. It includes the towns of Bilston, Coseley, Dudley, Tipton, Walsall, Wednesbury and West Bromwich, but not areas like Smethwick, Stourbridge and Wolverhampton no coal mine was to be found. However, the debate is still goes on as RR Angerstein's *Illustrated Travel Diary (1753-1755)* shows coal mines in Wolverhampton. Still, the Black Country Society has stated clearly that the borders of the Black Country lie on the area of the 30-foot coal seam, which exclude Wolverhampton. (Williams, 2007)

In fact, the Black Country has since many years inspired a strong sense of belonging within the local population: a Black Country identity! Like Charleroi and its region, the midland's Black Country has abandoned the trace of the industrial decline and fostered a sentiment of pride. A pride to be part of the region that pushed the country at the top of the steel and coal market for well over a century.

From the dawn of the 20th century, the Black Country emerged as a powerhouse of industry within the UK. Its landscape was adorned with coal mines, iron foundries, glass factories, brickworks, and an array of industries that etched a global reputation, with their products traversing continents. The last coal mine in the Black Country ceased operations in 1968, marking the end of an era of prosperity. Meanwhile, the Belgian Pays Noir witnessed the closure of its final active coal mine in Farciennes 16 years later, on September 30, 1984.

A significant milestone in the regional identification journey was the creation of the Black Country tartan in 2009. This striking design, crafted by Philip Tibbetts of Halesowen, was followed by the unveiling of the official Black Country flag on July 14, 2012 – a day now celebrated as Black Country Day. The flag, masterfully designed by Gracie Sheppard, pays homage to American Consul Elihu Burritt's

vivid portrayal of the region as 'black by day and red by night' in 1862. Notably, the flag's elements include a chain representing industry and the working class, while its black and red hues harken back to Burritt's depiction. The Black Country Day reveres the region's industrial heritage and intriguingly aligns with the anniversary of the 1712 invention of the Newcomen steam engine, birthed at the Conygree Coalworks near Dudley – an embodiment of progress and innovation (Franks, 2018). This collective celebration underscores the Black Country's vibrant legacy and enduring significance.



The official flag of the Black Country.

The Black Country even has its official anthem. 'I Vow To Thee, Black Country' was released in 2014 and played by local band The Empty Can.

### 3.2.1. The Black Country Folk Festival

In the heart of the English Black Country, a spirited community, along with prominent figures, diligently advocates for their homeland's identity and rich culture. They take immense pride in the region's robust industrial heritage. This spirited drive is reminiscent of similar efforts in Belgium. In 2023, an exciting milestone unfolds with the inaugural Black Country Folk Festival slated for the last weekend of July in Himley. This event is a harmonious blend of the region's most accomplished artists over the past decade. The festival's architect, James Stevens of Empty Can, who composed the emblematic Black Country anthem discussed earlier, expressed his enthusiasm in an interview with Express & Star, the West Midlands' regional evening newspaper. He anticipates a diverse musical line-up that caters to all age groups, ensuring family enjoyment (James Stevens in Jenkins, 2023).



“Last year event was just a curtain raiser to this one which we are hoping will be bigger and better than ever, particularly with people able to camp overnight making it easier for them to attend both days. (...) The festival will also feature craft stalls, a beer bar and street food”, Stevens added. The event offers music

and entertainment for all ages and is free for children under 14. (*Black Country Folk – The Inaugural Black Country Folk Festival, n.d.*)



The official poster of the 2023 edition.

### 3.3. Sites of memory in both Belgium’s Pays Noir and UK’s Black Country

#### 3.3.1. The Black Country Living Museum in Dudley, UK

The Black Country Living Museum sprawls across 26 acres as an immersive open-air experience, delving into the history of the Black Country through meticulously reconstructed shops, residences, and industrial facilities. This visionary project took root in the 1960s, a prelude to the closure of the last active coal mine in 1968. As industry waned and transportation routes lay abandoned, Dudley hosted a pivotal 1967 exhibition spotlighting the region's heritage. This catalysed the formation of the Black Country Society, and the ensuing decades saw the establishment of the Black Country Living Museum on a reclamation site along Tipton Road. What began under the aegis of the West Midlands County Council later gained autonomy, unveiling a preview season in 1978, a decade after the coal mine closure, to unveil the potential that the site could have for future development.



One of the original museum plans. (Franks, 2018)



The construction in the late 1970s.

The turning point arrived with the 1980 implementation of a tramway system, which facilitated visitor transit to the adjacent canal arm. This enhancement, coupled with burgeoning interest, propelled annual visitors to soar to 250,000 by



1985, surging further to 305,000 in 1990. While an economic slump in the early 1990s led to a dip in attendance, resilience and adaptability revived the numbers over time (Black Country Living Museum, n.d.). In sharp contrast, Bois du Cazier in Marcinelle, near Charleroi, Belgium, hosted 64,493 visitors in

2019 (Bois du Cazier, n.d.). The same year, the Dudley museum tallied a remarkable 358,000 visitors, earning a reputation as a premier heritage

destination and a vanguard of Europe's open-air museums. I am going to talk about the Bois du Cazier in the next point.

In 2010, a significant £10 million development project introduced the reconstruction of a 1930s high street. Following that success, the museum obtained approval for its most extensive development project to date, known as “Forging Ahead”, which started in 2019 (depicted in the picture). The ultimate vision is to complete an entire 1940s-60s town centre by 2023, continuing the narrative of the region’s post-war period. This reconstruction strategy evokes a vivid experience of strolling through time, encapsulating the essence of earlier eras. The Black Country Living Museum is registered as an educational charity and stands as an award-winning open-air institution. It imparts a profound understanding of the 20th-century Black Country landscape, illuminating the living conditions of the working class and the transformational impact of steam power and interconnectedness on this industrial hub.

Expert guides, personifying historical figures, lead visitors through this immersive journey. These specialists tell stories to portray the region's industrial growth era, creating a dynamic and immersive learning encounter.

Since 2018, the museum is counted among the 77 institutions designated as National Portfolio Organizations of Arts Council England, a category encompassing over a thousand arts and culture entities. This coveted status ensures a public sector investment (approximately 9% of their annual revenue) through 2026, earmarked for diverse ventures and endeavours, including:

- Establishing a Learning Centre, augmenting school visits and fostering lifelong learning via the 'IgnitED heritage skills program'.
- Enhancing the core visitor experience by crafting the 1940s-60s town and other immersive landscapes, providing a comprehensive understanding of life in the Black Country throughout the 20th century.
- Pioneering novel activities to nurture creative skills and stimulate careers in the creative industry. Initiatives like 'Little Makers' will empower Key Stage 1 pupils across the Black Country to use their creative talents.

### 3.3.2. Bois du Cazier in Marcinelle, Belgium

Bois du Cazier, situated in Marcinelle, a suburb of Charleroi, stands as a



a prominent and poignant memorial in the region. Bois du Cazier was established in 1822, i.e. long before the funding of the European Coal and Steel Community. The former coal mine has been the scene of one of the most important mining catastrophe in Belgium, when on 8 August 1956 an underground electrical fire spread into the mine and the winch mechanism, trapping hundreds of workers into the galleries. Smoke and carbon monoxide spread

down the mine, killing 262 miners. Of the 274 people working into the mine this precise morning of 8 August 1956, only twelve survived. The liquidation process of the coal mine started in 1961 and the site closed definitely seven years later. (Piotr, 2019)

A few hours after the catastrophe, the King of the Belgians, King Baudouin, and the Prime Minister Achille van Acker, went on site to see the extend of the disaster and to support the families amassed at the gates, waiting for news of their loved ones. At the time of the King's arrival, 254 men were still missing, and only 13 were rescued.

Of the 262 victims, 136 were Italians, 8 Poles, 6 Greeks, 5 Germans, 5 Frenchmen, 3 Hungarians, one Englishman, one Dutchman, one Russian and one Ukrainian. 95 men were Belgians. Right after the incident, Italy has stopped sending workers to Belgium and asked for measures to prevent this kind of tragedy and increase the working conditions in the mines. This decision breaks the "coal agreements" that had been set up in 1946 in order to provide manpower to Belgium after the Second World War. The protocol signed between Belgium and Italy will be published under the title: "Protocol concerning the recruitment of Italian workers and their establishment in Belgium (with exchange of notes), signed in Rome on June 23, 1946, and annex to this protocol, signed in Rome on April 26, 1947". In 1948, the official texts will be presented to the United Nations (Evens, 2021).

In the 1990s, the preserved headframe of the mine was enlisted in a national heritage program. Subsequent efforts transformed the site from a defunct mining facility to a revered museum and memorial. Bois du Cazier became the heart of

a movement honouring the miners who lost their lives within its depths. In March 2002, with backing from the European Union, the site was officially inaugurated as a public utility. (Piotr, 2019)



Memorial dedicated to the Italian victims. (source: UNESCO)

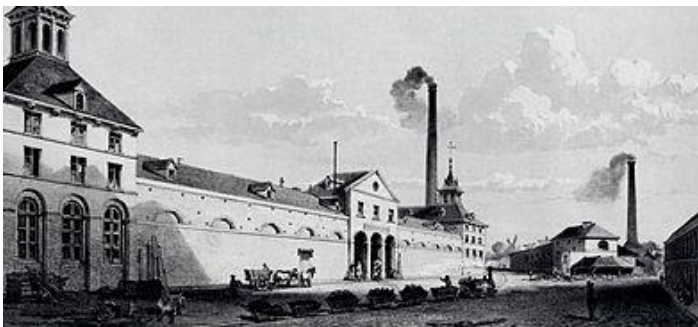
The memory of the catastrophe remains ingrained in Belgium's collective consciousness, with an annual ceremony held on August 8th to commemorate the victims. The tragedy touched lives beyond Belgium's borders, as many victims were immigrants seeking work. Today, Bois du Cazier houses the Museum of Industry, the Glass Museum, and a memorial space known as Espace 8 août. Its UNESCO listing in 2012 and inclusion in the European Route of Industrial Heritage (ERIH) underscore its significance alongside Europe's most renowned former industrial sites.



(Source: Visit Hainaut)

### 3.3.3. *Le Grand Hornu, Hainaut, Belgium*

Le Grand Hornu is another example of the revitalization of former mining sites in Wallonia. This former colliery has been turned into a cultural hub and hosts many museums in its buildings, which have been constructed in the 1820s. The idea of its creator, Henry J. Degorge was to build an industrial complex where the workers could also live. The site will host 425 houses build in a quarter of six cobbled high streets. At the time of its inauguration, the site was a witness of the innovative dynamic of the region, which was developing its production of steel and coal at full speed. The site included a school, where education for children was compulsory, as well as public squares for the workers and their family. The central courtyard has been renovated and has become a main tourist attraction of the site. The courtyard was surrounded by construction workshop, inn which machines, wood pieces and steel pieces were produced. Another workshop was called Maison des Ingénieurs [House of engineers]. The coal mine has closed its doors in 1954 after measures of the European Coal and Steel Community.



The site in activity. (Source: Wikipedia)

The site of Le Grand Hornu has entered the UNESCO List in 2012, along with the Bois du Cazier in Marcinelle. The 12 extraction shafts of the site have all been filled but a stone is marking every shaft and their depth. The maximal depth is 998 metres.

When the site was bought by the province of Hainaut, the authorities wanted to give it a new lease of life, and combine the memory of this major centre of the



coal and steel industry with modern art. The “MAC – Musée des Arts Contemporains” [Museum of Modern Arts] opened in 2002.

View from the interior of the courtyard. (Source: Visit Wallonia)



View of the site from above.  
(Source: MACS)

Major investments have been made over the years to enhance the cultural and tourist character of the place. They have been partly financed by the ERDF funds attributed by the European Union, which we talked about earlier. Again, Europe has played a paramount role in the revitalization of a major industrial plant of Wallonia, which has highly contributed to the region's rapid development in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century.

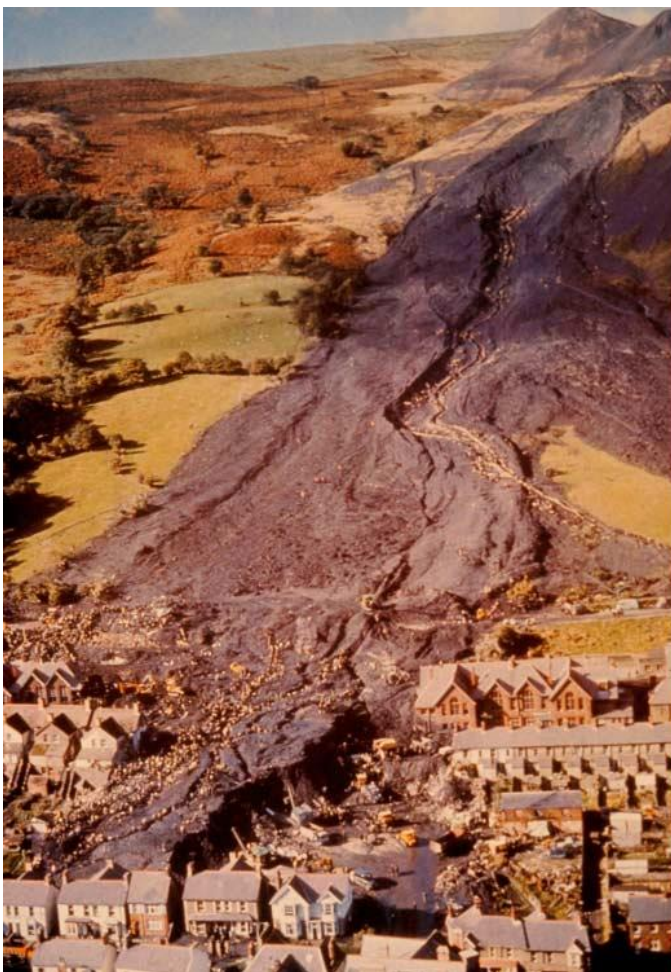
Of the 15.241.685,59 euros that have been invested, 4.363.205,69 euros came from the ERDF investment. These investments have focused on:

- Fitting out a multi-purpose room and a reception area to make the site more user-friendly.
- Signposting and marking out the footpaths and creating explicative signs for visitors.
- Equipping the reception area (ticket office, shop, cafeteria, etc.).
- Equipping educational areas (children's reception, library, auditorium), administrative areas and museum areas.
- Landscaping the surrounding area through signage (in conjunction with other projects in the region).
- Facade treatment.

This revitalization including modern art goes hand in hand with the site's vocation, which was to be at the cutting edge of innovation. The site hosts three exhibitions every year to show that design arts stay in the scope of industry, but in this case, it is adapted to new forms that triggers the visitor's eye. (Source: Télésambre)

### 3.3.4. Aberfan, a forgotten disaster

Unlike the sites of remembrance that we have just mentioned, Aberfan has fallen out of the public eye in the recent years, only to regain popularity after it has been reconstructed in the recent hit Netflix series “The Crown”. In 1966, the worst mining disaster in British history occurred when, on 21 October, the slag heap overlooking the Welsh village (at the time one of the highest in the region) collapsed and slid into the town centre (as depicted in the picture), sweeping away everything in its path. The heap started to move before 7 in the morning, before it could not hold the pressure anymore and started to collapse in a deafening roar. In its course, the flow hit a canal and broke the water main, mixing mud with water and increasing its speed. The 107,000 cubic metres of black



slurry destroyed several farms, 18 houses and hit two schools, including Pant Glas Junior School, which was completely destroyed. Bodies were still extracted days later from the filthy morass. 116 children aged between seven and ten, as well as 28 adults were killed. Of the 144 victims, 109 children and five teachers died in the junior school on the last day before half term. The disaster marked the start of a real trauma for the local population, since dozens of children were implicated. A study published in the British Journal of Psychiatry in 2003 stated that 12 of the 19 survivors had experienced PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), and for those

children, PTSD can persist as long as 33 years into adult life (Morgan et al., 2003).

The disaster has also led to political tensions, as H.M. Queen Elizabeth II went on the site only eight days later, which was judged late by many. However, the Queen confessed years later that this delay was one of her greatest regrets.

In the industry of coal mining also, the lessons learned from the disaster lived on in the collective memory of ground engineering and decisions had to be taken. One of them is the creation of new laws and regulations controlling the exploitation of mines and slag heaps and their eventual overexploitation. This aspect has been carefully scrutinised after the events in Aberfan and research was made to determine what could be the causes and the first signs of the instability of a heap. Thanks to the National Coal Board and the Welsh Development Agency, millions have been invested into investigations and improvement of existing heaps.

Today, the Aberfan Memorial Garden stands on the site of the former Pant Glas Junior School and commemorates the victims of the disaster. Although no mine museum was created in Aberfan, as it would be expected, the Garden is of huge importance for the collective memory and especially for the bereaved parents, survivors, and the whole community.

## 4. How the surviving coal mines affect preservation of the identity of cities and regions historically related to coal mining: a Cracow University study

### 4.1. The study

In 2019, Piotr Langer, affiliated with the Institute of Cities and Regions Design and the Faculty of Architecture at the University of Cracow, conducted a study addressing the impact of surviving coal mines on the preservation of the identity of historically coal-related cities and regions. This study aimed to shed light on the condition and revitalization of former mining sites in Western Europe, focusing on Belgium and France.

Previous research had revealed that numerous coal mining facilities in Western Europe underwent complete liquidation, involving the closure of underground galleries and demolition of surface structures. Among those that remained, many were left dormant or repurposed for activities unrelated to coal mining. Notable exceptions were instances of revitalization projects aiming to conserve the cultural heritage tied to these former mining operations. This study focused on two Belgian cases, namely C-Mine in Genk and Bois du Cazier, which was previously discussed in section 3.3.2.

The study sought to address three key questions:

1. What are the scope and methods used to adapt former coal mines for public utility functions?
2. How do preserved former mining sites contribute spatially and compositionally to their surrounding environments?
3. To what extent do these sites impact the social sphere and influence the maintenance of cultural identity in cities and regions historically linked to coal mining?

Despite encountering various challenges—ranging from economic constraints to technical hurdles—the study showcased the preservation and current utilization of these aged mining sites. The author delved into the strategies employed for site preservation, considering factors such as functionality, accessibility, spatial layout (including structural renovation and new constructions), and the sites' role in nurturing vitality and cultural identity within the region.

By delving into examples like Bois du Cazier and C-Mine, both associated with redeveloped mining sites, the study underscored the importance of safeguarding cultural values originating from the mining legacy. In essence, the study illuminated how these transformed sites contribute to the broader urban fabric, enhance regional identity, and provide valuable insights into the multifaceted role of former coal mines in contemporary urban contexts.

#### 4.1.1. C-Mine in Genk, Limburg, Belgium

In the early 20th century, like Charleroi, the city of Genk experienced dynamic growth fuelled by fossil material extraction and steel industry expansion. The establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community in the 1950s further propelled demand for coal and iron, essential materials for steel production. The coal mine featured in the C-Mine project was known as "Winterslag" during its active underground operations. Its production peak coincided with the closure of Bois du Cazier in Marcinelle during the 1960s. Operations ceased in 1988, and after a series of filling-in operations and infrastructure removal, management of the coal mine transitioned to the municipality of Genk.

A revitalization initiative was initiated to preserve the site's symbolic value for the city and its surroundings. Though the underground galleries are inaccessible at both "Winterslag" and Bois du Cazier, a handful of coal mining sites across Western Europe still offer public access to their underground workings. Notably, the mine of Blégny in Liège province allows visitors to descend up to 60 meters underground for an immersive experience of subterranean work conditions.

Contrasting the location of Bois du Cazier on the outskirts of Charleroi, C-Mine is intricately woven into the urban fabric of Genk, situated in Belgian Limburg (Flanders). This integration makes C-Mine an essential part of the cultural and urban development of the Flemish city. The harmonious blend of historical industrial structures with contemporary elements presented challenges, but both Charleroi and Genk have successfully maintained the essence of the mining site while introducing modern facilities to enhance living and educational experiences.

Through collaborative efforts between local authorities and the population, the site has been adapted for public functions and educational pursuits related to its mining heritage. In 2017, C-Mine drew an impressive 800,000 visitors, while Bois du Cazier welcomed around 50,000, a substantial number in its own right. Bois du Cazier predominantly educates through museum exhibitions and guided tours, whereas C-Mine encompasses an educational centre, including the LUCA School of Arts offering higher education courses in animation, industrial design, photography, and multimedia.

The site houses permanent and temporary modern art exhibitions, often held within the transformed former power plant and hoistroom building. This innovative approach showcases art pieces alongside original coal mine elements, preserving both historical and technological facets. C-Mine also boasts panoramic views, notably from one of the Limburg's tallest extraction towers, which is 60 meters tall and offers breath-taking view of Genk and its surroundings.

To mark C-Mine's 10th anniversary, a steel labyrinth spanning 37.5 meters on each side with a 1-kilometer-long layout was introduced. This structure provides visitors with unique perspectives of the surrounding countryside, enhancing the immersive experience and contributing to the site's allure.

#### 4.1.2. The results of the study

The author contends that the conversion of former coal mines into public utility facilities is not a standardized or universally followed practice in Western Europe. Typically, these extraction sites undergo complete liquidation, often involving the demolition or transformation of buildings that may erode the place's intrinsic values and identity. The fate of these coal mines signifies a pivotal historical juncture for the region and its inhabitants. It initiates a comprehensive process of site revitalization, preserving historical significance, educating people about the erstwhile emblematic role of coal mining, and safeguarding local identity threatened by the closure of many coal mining sites.

The study also underscores the variable time gap between mine closure and post-industrial revitalization. C-Mine, for instance, achieved its transformation in 13 years, while Bois du Cazier underwent its metamorphosis 35 years after ceasing industrial operations.

Both mining sites examined in the study share commonalities, serving as perfect examples of coal mine revitalization into multifunctional cultural centres, encompassing culture, art, and museum functions. These sites also captivate photography enthusiasts, offering a harmonious blend of historical industrial structures and modern facilities. This juxtaposition, achieved during the revitalization project, harmoniously integrates nature with the remnants of the coal industry, fostering a unique regional pride.

The substantial influx of tourists to these adapted former coal mines underscores their role in engaging the populace to preserve a cultural identity rooted in mining history. These sites have evolved into crucial service centres for the local community, contributing to the vibrancy of city life. Through these transformative projects, former coal mines are bestowed with renewed purpose, emerging as what the author calls a "POST-MINING reality".

(Piotr, 2019)

## 5. The stigmas of a post-industrial city

### 5.1. Charleroi in the 2000s: a total left-out

In the contemporary landscape, the name Charleroi often evokes less-than-positive perceptions, especially in the wake of the coal mine closures in the early 1980s. Once a powerhouse of 19th-century European industry, the city's reputation has taken a dramatic downturn, leading some to wonder how it went from industrial glory to being labelled the "ugliest city in the world." As a first-hand witness to Charleroi's transformation, I've seen this decline unfold, a process that began even before my time in 2000.

Throughout the late 2000s, the last vestiges of commercial vibrancy clung tenaciously to the streets. However, the attention of local authorities seemed to wane, their responses sluggish. By the early 2010s, what remained of the heart of commercial activity—Rue de la Montagne, Rue Neuve, Rue de la Régence, and Boulevard Tirou—succumbed to the city's deteriorating reputation. Many mourned the loss of a bygone era, a time of industrial toil juxtaposed with urban prosperity.

Though a tinge of nostalgia still lingers, Charleroi's trajectory is on an upward swing, a positive shift partly attributed to European subsidies such as ERDF funds. This renewal signals a glimmer of hope amid the challenges. In subsequent sections, I will delve further into this revitalization process.

### 5.1.1. Charleroi: the “ugliest city in the world”

To make matters worse, in 2008 the Dutch newspaper *De Volkskrant* described Charleroi as “the ugliest city in the world” in their headlines and one year later as “depressive city” by the English *Telegraph*. The term had a shocking effect in Belgium and especially in Charleroi and many international newspapers reused the denomination. In fact, it has had two effects: on one hand many readers just stuck to the headlines, knowing that they won’t chose Charleroi as a future trip destination, and on the other hand some people tried to look further. They asked themselves; can a city be really the ugliest in the world? To some people and therefore “thanks” to the reputation that these headlines caused, some people have decided to make their own idea of Charleroi. Many projects of urban exploration have seen their success skyrocket after the publication of the article in the Dutch daily morning newspaper. But is that the kind of tourism that Charleroi wanted? For the authorities, this article has had the effect of a bomb. (*Charleroi, ugliest city in the world?*, 2018)

### 5.1.2. The regeneration of Charleroi: to go back up the slope

Charleroi is seizing control of its destiny, embarking on a robust urban regeneration endeavour under the guidance of its current Mayor. Drawing inspiration from the success stories of Bilbao, Liverpool, and London's Silver Building, this comprehensive urban development initiative is artfully weaving the city's industrial heritage along the Sambre River into a vibrant tapestry of Culture and the Arts.

Charleroi has long cultivated a rich cultural landscape, boasting attractions like the Fine Arts Museum and the continent's largest photography museum, among others. Aiming to extend this revival until 2025, the project has secured substantial European Union ERDF funds amounting to 145 million euros and the architect Georgios Maillis, known for his work with renowned firms like Foster and Partners and Zaha Hadid Architects, has been entrusted with overseeing this transformation.

A striking example of Charleroi's cultural rejuvenation is the metamorphosis of the former Banque Nationale de Belgique building. This iconic Brutalist structure, erected in 1966, has been imaginatively reborn as an arts and cultural hub. Housing a four-screen cinema, a subterranean gaming centre, and a 500-seat restaurant with a commanding view of Charleroi, this centre exudes an intriguing fusion of past and present. A visual ode to history is etched in the adjacent urban canvas, depicting Charleroi's fortified cityscape from its inception in 1666. Each visitor can tell that the place highlights the new dynamic that the city is adopting since many years now: offering people a new experience and a revitalized city, offering various activities in an atmosphere that reminds the “renaissance” of the

Belgian 'Pays Noir'. The decoration of those new cultural poles is often modern and put the mining and industrial culture of the region at the fore front. It is also the case for the cultural pole and theatre *Eden* in Charleroi. Black is omnipresent and the atmosphere always make us feel that the building has had a history before and has helped build the glorious past of the region. (Beaumont, 2018)

Culture has become the main key for cities that try to go back up the slope, especially in Europe. We can cite cities like Manchester in the UK, Essen in the Ruhr area and in the present case, Charleroi. Large investments are made into the foundation of museums and in the creation of new cultural equipment for cities that were tied to industry. These 'flagship projects' are often a symbol for the requalification of the region and are also very important for the deconstruction of stereotypes from which many cities like Charleroi suffered. In regions that have been marked by heavy industry, great cultural projects are meant to assure an economic conversion of the area and to create a urban 'renaissance'. They also reveal the metropolitan ambitions of the local population that wants to move forward without losing what has made the history of the region (Pfirsch & Reitel, 2014).

### **Left Side Business Park**

The Charleroi Central station district master plan (the station was still called South station until the 12 December 2022) is also one of the most noticeable regeneration projects in the city. Along with the dynamization of the riverside and the Left Side Business Park, this new project is the result of an agreement between the regional development organization Igretec and the SNCB (the national company of Belgian railroads), the Belgian railway operator. The aim is to create a real estate project that extends to some 50,000 square meters of office, housing and co-living area on the site alongside the station and the Sambre.



Charleroi Central station district master plan (Source: Igretec)

Located in the former SNCB postal sorting office, the A6K-E6K hub (business centre, incubator and training activities) could therefore expand their activities in the future buildings that are going to be constructed on the current car park lot. This represents not less than 17,500 square meters. The A6K-E6K hub wants to grow up to a European scale thanks to this project, which could attract many other enterprises to develop on the site. The ULB (University of Brussels) and Proximus have already shown their interest in developing there a data centre and a 5G laboratory along with the project of the Walloon calculator. The project will also give a new life to the “Hotel des chemins de fer” (the first building in brown on the picture above). This former railway hotel was originally built in 1933 and has once hosted the SNCB employees that were based in Charleroi. Abandoned for 20 years now, the building could be transformed into one of the largest co-living complexes in Belgium. The building should be reorganized into 75 large private rooms from 24m<sup>2</sup> to 52m<sup>2</sup> for an investment of 4 to 5 million euros (Coulee, 2023).

### 5.1.3. The revitalization of a city through great cultural projects: a bet

Amid the contemplation of revitalizing former mining and steel cities, policymakers are directing increasing attention towards significant cultural investments. These projects aim to reconnect the population with their historical roots and kindle a renewed affinity for the industrial legacy of the region. Yet, assessing the immediate success of such investments, especially in cities like Charleroi, can prove challenging. Limited hindsight and evolving cultural trends can cloud initial profitability, sometimes revealing newfound popularity over time or with the emergence of new generations.

This narrative finds echoes in various UK cities, namely Manchester, Sheffield, and Newcastle, where similar projects have faced hurdles in gaining traction. What was initially intended to captivate the local population with ambitious cultural initiatives has, in some cases, encountered unexpected socio-spatial shifts, attracting a different demographic. The subsequent disconnect has, at times, led to misunderstandings and a sense of discord within the local community.

The success of such projects mainly depends on the way in which public players and authorities cooperate. In Charleroi, these projects have just emerged for most of them, but they are already receiving good media coverage and the thrust of the local population. The projects undertaken seem to be popular, and for the first time in decades, Charleroi is no longer cited in the media to talk about a social crisis, but to talk about the city's evolution and renaissance. (Pfirsch & Reitel, 2014)

## 6. The role of former industrial sites in the socio-cultural identity of a region

### 6.1. The survey

The objective of my study was to gather public sentiments regarding the preservation and revitalization of former industrial sites, with a primary focus on those situated in Wallonia. The survey specifically delved into the potential cultural identity associated with these sites and the emotional attachment they might evoke. Commencing on July 1, 2023, the survey remained open for participation until August 12, 2023.

A total of 139 respondents shared their insights, comprising a diverse demographic. Among them, 23.7% fell within the age bracket of 21 to 40, while 51.8% were aged between 41 and 60. Respondents aged 61 and above accounted for 23.1% of the total, while a minority – less than 2% – were aged 20 or below.

### 6.2. The results of the survey

Charleroi and its vicinity constitute a focal point of the survey, as a notable 56% of the participants who engaged in the online questionnaire are residents of Charleroi or its neighbouring suburbs. Particularly noteworthy is the observation that within this group, an impressive 97% express an attachment to their region and its industrial heritage.

One of the survey questions sought to gauge respondents' familiarity with the Bois du Cazier in Marcinelle. The findings reveal that over 70% of the participants are more or less acquainted with the site, although 41 out of the total 139 respondents were found to be unaware of it. Continuing the exploration of Bois du Cazier, one of the questions addressed the 98 individuals who seemed to possess knowledge of the site: specifically, they were asked about their awareness of the tragic incident that occurred on August 8, 1956, claiming the lives of 262 miners. As it might be expected, a very small number of the respondents haven't heard of the tragedy, as only 6 out of the 98 respondents indicated a lack of awareness regarding the historical event.

The survey also delved into educational aspects related to such sites and their transformation. Respondents were prompted to share their opinions on the inclusion of local history, including the industrial heritage of a given region, within the curriculum, a practice already implemented in the FBW (Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles). The results unequivocally reflect the sentiment, with an overwhelming 98.6% of participants expressing support for the idea. This resounding endorsement leaves only a minuscule minority of 2 individuals (1.4%) in disagreement.

Subsequently, the questionnaire delved into the pivotal issue of preserving and potentially repurposing the Haut-Fourneau B in Ougrée, near Liège, which was previously discussed. Respondents were presented with the dilemma: whether the imposing steel structure should be integrated into a cultural or recreational project, or if it should be removed from the landscape altogether. The responses provided a clear perspective: a resounding 67% of participants expressed a strong inclination to safeguard the steel giant, while a mere 15.8% favoured the concept of introducing an entirely new and unrelated element in the former industrial area the site. Meanwhile, 17.2% of respondents remained undecided. This insight underscores the enduring significance of these steel structures within the population, suggesting that individuals in Belgium who have been immersed in their region's industrial legacy derive a sense of identity from the very landscape.

Continuing through the survey, attention shifted to another project: the reconversion of the Tour du Roton (the vestige of the last active Walloon mining site, to be discussed later) into a green energy powerhouse designed to serve the neighbourhood and potentially beyond. While specific project details have yet to be disclosed, the core concept is met with remarkable enthusiasm among respondents. Notably, 112 out of the total 139 participants voiced their support for this endeavour.

Furthermore, after presenting these concrete projects and gauging public sentiment, a synthesis phase ensued where respondents were queried about the

most promising and accessible avenues for repurposing former industrial sites. The responses displayed considerable diversity:

- 46% of participants endorsed educational initiatives, emphasizing innovation and collaboration with institutions and schools, similar to the model seen in Frameries, Belgium, with SPARKOH!
- The notion of establishing museums secured second place, garnering support from 16.5%.
- 14.4% of respondents leaned towards projects with a public utility focus, exemplified by the transformation of a site into a green energy facility.
- The concept of creating an amusement park, previously proposed for the Haut-Fourneau B site in Ougrée, caught the attention of 7.9% or 11 respondents out of 139.
- An additional 15.2% of participants suggested alternative transformations, ranging from the development of green spaces to the establishment of new residential areas.

Detailed statistics (in French) are included in the appendix.

## 7. The economic potential of former coal mining sites

### 7.1. CO<sub>2</sub> sequestration in coal mines: a study by Geologica Belgica

It is becoming clear that the transition to a less energy-dependent society will take more time than envisaged at the last conferences on climate change. According to this point, the sequestration of CO<sub>2</sub> in abandoned coal mines in Belgium could be a solution to reduce the industrial emission of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. When CO<sub>2</sub> is injected into a coal mine, it is either stored in solution in the formation water or absorbed in coal.

The technique is already proven technology and, in a study published in 2004 by Geologica Belgica, a case study for the Beringen-Zolder-Houthalen collieries shows that sequestration is a viable option and that at an injection of 300 000 tons/y into a mine, sequestration can be operational for about 25 years. This could be a great opportunity for petrochemical plants that produce nearly pure CO<sub>2</sub> streams to increase their storage capacity and reduce their impact on the atmosphere. The study shows also that the risks and uncertainties for this kind of sequestration in coal mines are very limited. The main issues concerning the feasibility of CO<sub>2</sub> sequestration in coal mines is the technical possibility of sequestration, since not all coal mines are suitable for this kind of techniques.

Unlike natural gas-storage,  $CO_2$  sequestration requires a minimum pressure inside the mine to ensure the free-space storage capacity, which refers to all voids in the mine that are accessible to inject carbon dioxide, on long-term. A lot of structural aspect must be considered for each mine, but the risks of an accident during the sequestration are still very low, and carbon dioxide released in the air is not toxic in low concentrations. Unlike nuclear wastes, an uncontrolled release of  $CO_2$  from an underground storage facility will not have a long-term effect, as the gas will be diluted in air or ground water. Nevertheless, carbon dioxide can be dangerous in high concentration, when its storage is hazardous. In extreme cases, an uncontrolled release at high pressure could freeze the immediate surrounding, but leakage may only occur along infrastructure such as injection well. The risks are therefore only site-specific, according to the study. The author of the study makes also an interesting point in studying the feasibility of  $CO_2$  sequestration in the Hainaut coalfield. The study states that, unlike the coalfields of Campine and Hainaut, the Basse-Sambre, Namur, Liège, Herve, Theux, and Dinant basin coalfields of South Belgium are of no interest for the underground storage of carbon dioxide. Their galleries are not suitable for this technique or not deep enough (750m to 150m), unlike coal mines in the basins of Charleroi, Centre and the Borinage, which reaches up to 1495 m in depth. In fact, coal mines located in those basins were already used to gas drainage, which occasionally continued up to 25 years after the closure of the coal mines (it has been the case in Bois du Cazier). The colliery that has been chosen for evaluation is the Anderlues coal mine, near Charleroi. The mine was used for natural gas storage until 2000, and this is an advantage because the mine has had no time to be flooded. In other cases, mines that were not used are not monitored and may be largely flooded (Piessens & Dusar, 2004).

## 7.2. New tourism and urban exploration trails

### 7.2.1. The growing success of urbex and urban exploration

Today, regions scarred by 20th-century industrial decline are giving rise to innovative tourism trends. Among these, urban exploration and its unauthorized counterpart, urbex, stand out. Urban exploration, led by authorized guides, offers a legitimate journey into former industrial sites. In contrast, urbex ventures into abandoned domains without authorization, navigating a realm outside the law. While urbex flouts legality, a cadre of enthusiasts remains undeterred. This dynamic interplay reflects our ceaseless quest for heritage and adventure, revealing a tapestry woven with contrasting threads of exploration.

### 7.2.2. Urban exploration: from neglect to recognition

In the canvas of the 19th century, Belgium strode with distinction as the world's second-largest industrial powerhouse, its prowess fueled by three dynamic sectors: coal, metallurgy, and textiles. Yet, as time wove its intricate tapestry, the threads of industrialization began to unravel, casting into shadows sites, edifices, and frameworks that once bore architectural and social allure. Today, a resounding echo reverberates across various European cities, echoing their storied connections with the industrial titans of the 19th and 20th centuries. In this symphony, Charleroi takes a prominent bow, orchestrating innovative projects that not only rekindle memories of the coal and steel juggernauts but also reforge the bonds of belonging and attachment between its local population and the city's very essence.

Amid this backdrop, enterprising local committees have kindled a new brand of tourism: urban exploration. This novel approach radiates with virtues – economical investment, preservation of infrastructures and landscapes in their raw authenticity, and a resounding authenticity. Urban exploration, though reliant on protective gear and the city's blessings for site exploration, remains surprisingly budget-friendly, making it an accessible "safari" for the intrepid. As explorers venture forth, they are gifted a window into a bygone era, traversing former industrial epicentres whose spirit has endured since their last operational days. Often, only modest safety enhancements are instituted, a testament to the integrity of these spaces.

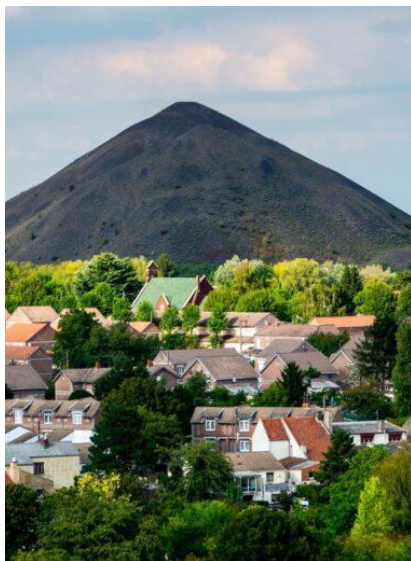
Yet, beyond the surface, this nascent form of tourism unfurls profound transformations. Visitors, as they wander through the corridors of yesteryears, embark on a voyage of self-discovery, re-evaluating their connections to these storied structures. These sites, evocative of an era, resurface as not just bricks and mortar but as embodiments of regional, cultural, and social identity – a sentiment that resonates far beyond their physical presence (Johnston, n.d.). In this narrative of rediscovery, urban exploration stands as a conduit for the past, present, and future to harmoniously converge, and for the pulse of heritage to revive.

### 7.2.3. The heaps shaping the landscape

#### 7.2.3.1. Heaps and the local population

Since the closure of the coal mines in the 1980s, the heaps, or *Terrils* in French, are often their only remaining element. In the days when coal was still extracted from underground, tailings that were not good quality coal, together with dirt and earth that were separated from the coal, formed a heap at the end of the production chain. These heaps would grow as mine production increased, transforming the landscape of the region. Over time, some of the heaps have

suffered from inactivity and weather conditions and have collapsed, transforming once again the landscapes. Here is an example of the *Terril des Aulniats* in Farciennes (extraction site *Roton*) before and after its collapse:



(1980s)



(2023)

Fortunately, no casualties were reported in Farciennes. But the proliferation of nature that followed the collapse is striking in the second picture. Moreover, in the contemporary landscape, a profound transformation has swept over the remnants of these once-formidable slagheaps, yielding to the reassertion of ecosystems. As we safeguard these enclaves, we generously yield territory to nature instead of succumbing to the allure of residential development. In this deliberate preservation, we etch out spaces for verdant havens, an environmental stride that assumes critical significance in our era of pressing climate concerns.

The heaps, now enveloped in lush greenery, bear witness to a monumental triumph – the triumph of nature reclaiming its dominion. This burgeoning symbiosis doesn't merely bestow a natural sanctuary within city confines; it metamorphoses these spaces into tranquil retreats cherished by locals. Far beyond their role as picturesque oases, these mounds are indelibly woven into the very fabric of Wallonia's coal basins, stand as eloquent sentinels chronicling the region's illustrious industrial saga.

For photographers – whether seasoned professionals or passionate amateurs – these heaps unfurl a captivating tableau. A distinct vantage point unveils itself, one that offers an alternative perspective of the cityscape while endowing nature enthusiasts with a captivating melange of species and lush landscapes. This juxtaposition, wherein the coal-darkened past intersects with nature's vibrant hues, kindles a profound fascination. The allure intensifies when these heaps nestle remarkably close to urban centres, at times even seemingly within the very heart of the city – as exemplified by the Terril des Piges in Charleroi (*Un safari urbain à Charleroi, la ville industrielle la plus incroyable d'Europe!*, 2023). This

dynamic interplay manifests as a living testament to the power of harmony between human heritage and the resurgent force of nature.



View from the top of the *Terril des Piges* offering a panorama of the city centre of Charleroi.

Heaps play also the role of remembrance for the local population. It enfolds the lives of those who have moved around it and played their part in its creation. The single act of perceiving the heaps is sort of an act of remembrance, and it helps the local population to never forget that their predecessors have worked hard to make the region a central hub for global steel and coal industry.

#### 7.2.3.2. La Boucle Noire

Emerging as a prominent gem in Charleroi's tourist crown, "La Boucle Noire" [The Black Loop] and "La Grande Dérive" [The Great Drift] have become a dynamic duo of signposted hiking trails that unveil both the allure and the stark reality of the Pays Noir (Black Country). The first to grace the scene was "La Boucle Noire," an offshoot of the GR412 circuit – an ambitious project classified as a "Grande Randonnée" (GR) trail, pioneered in 2016 by the collaborative force of the Chemin des Terrils association. Winding across a 23-kilometer tapestry, this loop navigates through Charleroi's enigmatic landscape, offering glimpses of its most captivating facets. From the majestic castles of Monceau and Marchienne to the concealed treasures of industrial relics like the Dampremy-La Docherie slagheap chain, the trail assumes an almost initiatory role. Today, it stands as a beacon of triumph, embraced by both local denizens and urban adventurers alike.

Upon ascending the slagheaps, a breath-taking juxtaposition unfurls. Enthusiasts find themselves immersed in a fusion of verdant gardens and nature that have reclaimed these once-industrial mounds. Yet, alongside this organic renewal, the skyline is punctuated by the formidable silhouettes of factories that have etched Charleroi's narrative of history and prosperity. Weather, at times, weaves a canvas that photographers covet – whether it's the onset of rain casting an evocative atmosphere or the morning mist enfolding the landscape, revealing only the defiant chimneys piercing through the ethereal veil.

Intriguingly, the genesis of this trail tracing Charleroi's heaps owes its inspiration to a pair of alternative rock musicians from the region – Micheline Dufert and Francis Pourcel. These urban explorers, whose roots intertwine with the industrial tapestry of Pays Noir since childhood, were raised amidst the resonance of tramways, the rhythmic cadence of machinery, the chimes that punctuated the laborers' respite, and the ethereal plumes ascending from chimneys. Their lives were a vivid tableau that echoed the industry's heartbeat – a cherished backdrop that now finds its embodiment within the trail's transformative allure. (Maillet, 2022).

The trail is not too difficult and is suitable for children and elderly people in good physical conditions. The icing on the cake, a playlist is proposed on smartphones during the hike. A musical asset that allows hikers to discover the slagheaps chain with SIC, the music band of Micheline Dufert and Francis Pourcel.



*Our desire was to identify the potential of the landscape and link the chains of slagheaps to the city-centre of Charleroi by creating paths. We reclaimed what had been abandoned. La Boucle Noire is the journey of a city, but also its history revealed beneath our feet.*

(Translated from French<sup>1</sup>) (Dufert, M.. & Pourcel, F. in Lefevre, 2020).

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<sup>1</sup> [Notre envie, c'était de repérer la potentialité des paysages et de relier les chaînes de terrils au centre de Charleroi en créant des chemins. On s'est réapproprié ce qui avait été laissé à l'abandon. La boucle noire, c'est le parcours d'une ville, c'est son histoire qui se découvre sous nos pieds]

### 7.2.3.3. The Martinet site

*La Boucle Noire* passes also through the *Martinet* site, a former coal mine that closed in 1979. The *Martinet* has become a main tourist attraction of the region and is located in Monceau-sur-Sambre. The ruins of the engine room of the former extraction shaft have become the perfect place for shooting and small concerts. The site is a monument to coal mining, citizen mobilization and the deployment of post-industrial landscape parks. Carried through 40 years of mobilization by a committee of local residents concerned about the environment and the preservation of the site, which is owned by the city of Charleroi, it extends over 50 hectares of natural space reclaimed from a former industrial wasteland.

Exploited from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the site underwent large-scale industrial development from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the 1930s, the site of the extraction shaft n°4 of the *Société de Monceau-Fontaine* included not only an extraction shaft, but also a gigantic sorting-washing plant and a ball mill, making the site one of the most modern in Europe. 1,200 workers were employed there. In the 1950s, *Monceau-Fontaine*, which had become the most powerful mining company in Belgium, was at its peak, with 12 mining sites, 10,000 workers and a concession covering 25 neighbouring towns. By the 1960s, competition from imported products such as natural gas and oil had taken its toll on the coal mines. The Martinet extraction shaft shut down in 1967 and the whole site finally closed in 1979.





In the 1950s, an afforestation programme was carried out on an experimental basis on the northern slope of the large slagheap in a perspective of enhancing both its ecological and historical value. This kind of experiment had already been done in the industrial basins of the Ruhr, in Germany. In addition, pioneering vegetation quickly developed once the dumping had been completed. Today, wetlands, reedbeds and toad ponds are still managed ecologically.

The committee of the Martinet has played a big role in the preservation of the site and its slagheap. In fact, in the 1980s, at the time where slagheaps were judged as “no longer useful”, private companies began prospecting for materials such as shale and residual coal and brought up the idea to exploit the heaps again, but this time from the surface. However, the mining techniques used caused numerous nuisances for locals (cartage, dust, environmental degradation) and generally led to the complete disappearance of the slag heap. In the Martinet district, the inhabitants’ committee vigorously criticized the project and rejected it. The main reason was the deep-rooted attachment to the site, marked by its social history and the beauty of the slagheaps, especially when we consider their ecological potential and the evolution of their landscape value recognized by local residents.

#### 7.2.3.4. La Grande Dérive



(Source: RTBF)

Micheline and Francis, supported by Eden, the cultural centre of Charleroi, recently created another trail that has a length of 54 km called *La Grande Dérive*. In fact, the couple didn't want to stop at *La Boucle Noire* and wanted to go further in enhancing the landscapes of the region. The official name of the trail is GRP1666, in honour to the creation of the city of Charleroi in 1666, at the time a military fortress. The route is divided into four parts, each of them is accessible by public transport from the city centre, which is a deliberate choice of the creators of the trail. It is also full of contrasts: the sections and landscapes are all very different. Over the course of a few kilometres, amateurs can pass through a 19<sup>th</sup>-century coron – a historical type of working-class housing found in Northern France and Belgium – as well as walk along an old gas pipeline and a river, and finally discover an old coal mine before arriving at the heart of a nature reserve (Hermans & Cotsoglou, 2023).



*La Grande Dérive, it's a bit of a mirror image of La Boucle Noire. While La Boucle Noire is 22 km long and plunges into the heart of the steel industry, La Grande Dérive is more likely to take in the woods, the footpaths, the rivers and neighborhoods that are very diversified. Charleroi has it all! (Translated from French<sup>2</sup>) (Dufert, M. & Pourcel, F. in Hermans & Cotsoglou, 2023)*

## 7.3. Investment in former coal mining sites in Belgium

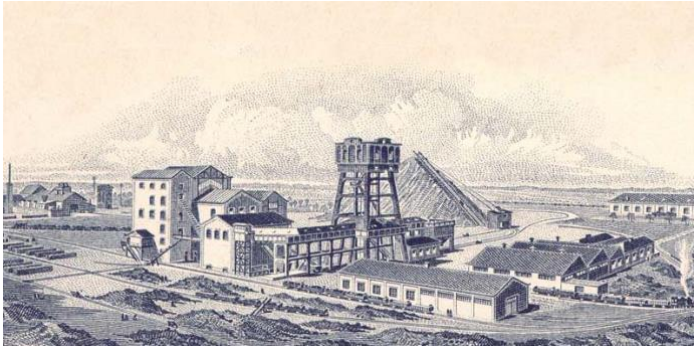
### 7.3.1. Blégny-Mine, Province of Liège

As highlighted earlier, the Blégny mine, nestled between Maastricht and Liège, stands as Belgium's solitary mining site inviting visitors to journey into the depths through its original shaft – a rarity in the country. Merely three other enclaves across Europe extend the same exceptional opportunity. At Blégny, the adventure begins with visitors donning a jacket and helmet before stepping into the cage, which descends to the subterranean galleries at depths of -30 and -60 meters. This immersive encounter pivots predominantly on education, serving as an illuminating portal for young students and their families into the realm of coal extraction and the underground labour conditions of yesteryears. The Blégny mine stands as a testament to the triumphant metamorphosis of Wallonia's industrial heritage, representing an awe-inspiring paradigm of successful preservation and transformation. While its origins trace back to the 16th century, solidifying its status as one of Belgium's oldest coal-mining sites, the first official grant – Trembleur – was sanctioned in 1799, marking the inaugural foray into extraction efforts. Over time, Trembleur merged with the Argenteau grant,

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<sup>2</sup> [ Cette Grande Dérive, c'est un peu le miroir inversé de la Boucle Noire. Si la Boucle Noire fait 22 kilomètres et plonge au cœur de la sidérurgie, la Grande Dérive, elle, va plutôt aller du côté des bois, des sentiers, longer des cours d'eau, traverser des quartiers très diversifiés. Il y a tout ça à Charleroi. ]

culminating in a sprawling site sprawling across 2,171 acres. The site experienced swift expansion in the late 19th century, culminating in a zenith of productivity with an output of 84,000 tons in 1931. This storied evolution encapsulates the dynamic history and resilience that have come to define the Blégny mine's enduring legacy.



Overall view of the coal mine in the 1930s (Source: Blégny-Mine)

After World War II, the site's production rate surged dramatically, extracting a staggering 230,000 tons and providing livelihoods for 680 dedicated mineworkers. In sync with the rhythm of many other mining sites in Wallonia, the 1980s ushered in a turning point. On March 31st, 1980, the site's activity came to an abrupt halt, prompted by the Industrial and Social Ministerial Committee of Belgium's decision to terminate state grants for coal mines.

After its closure, the site's fate seemed poised to align with the many that succumbed to demolition across the region. However, a different tune resonated with the provincial authorities, particularly Governor Gilbert Mottard. Fuelled by unwavering resolve, Mottard embarked on a mission to safeguard this poignant testament to the coal miners who toiled within the realms of Liège. A mere two months after its cessation, in 1980, the Province of Liège officially took custody of the site. Swiftly, the transformation into a public attraction started, dovetailing seamlessly with the implementation of measures to ensure safe exploration of the subterranean galleries. The results exceeded expectations. From the inaugural visits in 1980, the influx of visitors swelled steadily, culminating in an annual tally of 50,000 by 1990. The European Fund Federation propelled this evolution further, injecting vitality through the construction of new welcoming infrastructures to accommodate the burgeoning throngs. The visitor count soared to 100,000 that year, laying the foundation for continued growth, ultimately amassing a staggering total of over 3 million visitors over the past 35 years.

In harmony with three other mining sites in Wallonia – Grand-Hornu, Bois-du-Luc, and Bois du Cazier – the Blégny mine attained global recognition in 2012 as a UNESCO World Heritage site. This laurel symbolizes the profound significance etched within these grounds, celebrating the rich tapestry of industrial heritage that continues to capture the imagination of generations. (Wese, 2022)



(Source: Blégny-Mine)



Today, Blégny-Mine and the Province of Liège are thinking about the possibility of developing an educational centre where coal in a more global context, including the important energy resource it represented and the energetic challenges that we are facing today and those we will face tomorrow. The details of the project are still to be discussed.

### 7.3.2. *Be-MINE, Beringen, Limburg: turning an old coal mine into a green recreational park*

When the Beringen mine shuttered its operations in 1989, the local community found itself grappling with a slew of grievances voiced by its residents. Nature, however, slowly reclaimed its dominion over the once towering rubble heaps, ushering a poignant transformation. Although Beringen, much like its counterparts across Belgian Limburg, had long been intertwined with the tapestry of coal mining, the municipality of Beringen was resolute in its determination not to let the site languish. A momentous ambition emerged: to revitalize the sprawling expanse of 100,000 square meters of existing architectural heritage, propelling it into the echelons of Flanders' grandest industrial heritage sites.

A pivotal epiphany unfolded as the municipality and the tourism board united in purpose. Foreseeing the potential of converting the site into a centre of tourism and leisure, they aspired for more than a mere repository of memories. The aspiration transcended temporal boundaries and aimed at nurturing a project with enduring resonance. To this end, it wasn't sufficient for the project to be a wellspring of knowledge; it had to be profitable.



*Subsidising heritage is a temporary solution. To retain it for a long term, it is better to make it economically meaningful. That is the best guarantee that investments in the buildings will continue to be made (J. Huysmans cited in van de Pas, 2021)*

Catalysing this ambitious vision was the public-private partnership named Be-MINE, which has steered the site's redevelopment since 2009. With a flourish, the entire expanse was transmuted into an ecosystem – a verdant oasis where a plethora of bulbs, trees, and their associated fauna found a harmonious haven. This organic resurgence offered a counterpoint to the urban migration trend that had drawn populations away from rural settings. But the dynamism of Be-MINE extended beyond flora, with municipal authorities pledging an annual infusion of new trees.

The project's success was mirrored in its cultural and historical aspects. The playground ingeniously embraced the subterranean network of the mine, with design elements mirroring underground pits, imbuing the play space with an experiential connection to the miners' world. A prismatic play surface harked back to climbing surfaces and stepping stones, cleverly evoking the miners' journey, and the play route even tapered as it ascended, lending an authentic historical dimension. A "coal square" served as a nexus of learning, inviting visitors to delve into the annals of the former coal mine's history.

In December 2020, Be-MINE's triumphant metamorphosis clinched the esteemed Green City Award – a distinction bestowed annually upon 13 outstanding projects from each of the participating European countries, extolling the most impactful urban green initiative. This accolade bequeathed an official imprimatur to the Belgian venture, affirming its place as an embodiment of dignified, valuable, and contemporary historical reinterpretation. (van de Pas, 2021)

### 7.3.3. The role of Europe

In the latter half of the 20th century, the ECSC (European Coal and Steel Community) raised significant concerns about the working conditions within the coal mines of the Walloon basin and the Ruhr region. This questioning sparked turmoil on both social and political fronts, ultimately resulting in the closure of numerous extraction sites and affected regions with a severe economic crisis, leaving some without viable alternative economic pathways.

However, the landscape has shifted in the present era, with the European Union seamlessly stepping into the ECSC's shoes. This transition has seen the institution ardently committed to the revitalization of coal mining sites and industrial frameworks; a trend exemplified by the earlier instances we explored. The advent of ERDF investment funds heralds a fresh lease on life for regions that weathered the industrial downturn of the late 20th century in Western Europe.

In the upcoming segment, we'll delve into an ongoing narrative – one where the work is far from complete and the discourse concerning the future of industrial sites and their historical significance remains a pressing topic.

## 8. The fight to preserve old industrial structures

### 8.1. Debating with the people and the authorities

A crucial foundation for safeguarding structures on former industrial grounds undoubtedly lies in the synergy and discourse between the local community and the political stakeholders. When citizens are actively engaged in the dialogue and survey process, a sense of ownership can burgeon, fostering a profound connection to these industrial remnants that serve as conduits to history and memory. The focal point pivots not merely on preservation, but on the transformative journey of harnessing these spaces into vibrant, inclusive realms of creativity, accessible to a broad spectrum of individuals.



A great example is the Haut-Fourneau B (depicted in the picture), an inactive blast furnace nestled in Ougrée near the city of Liège in Belgium. Originally slated for demolition, the permit's seal of approval had already been bestowed by regional authorities in April

2021. Today, fuelled by the rallying cry of concerned citizens and trade unions who advocate for the preservation of this steel giant as "a duty of remembrance," the permit's fate appears poised for revision. A potential metamorphosis beckons, entailing the preservation of the greatest and least impaired structures. The envisioned transformation encapsulates a vision of cultural and communal endeavours. This example shows that the collaboration between local associations and the local/regional authorities is paramount in the turnabout of former industrial plants in cultural and educative spaces. After prolonged deliberations surrounding the fate of the site – whether the region and local institutions should save it – a paradigm-shifting concept surfaced in 2017. The prospect of establishing an amusement park on the site, conceived in the spirit of salvaging the industrial relic owned by the behemoth of steel, ArcelorMittal, took root. For the trade unions, it was imperative to present an ambitious vision, transcending the confines of a mere museum with limited allure. The recalibrated space should ensnare a diverse demographic, standing as a long-term magnet while generating employment opportunities. The notion of an amusement park, akin to esteemed venues like Phantasialand, Efteling, or Walibi, gained traction, given the region's pre-existing collection of heritage tourism destinations such as Blégny or SPARKOH! in Frameries (formerly known as Le Pass). In essence, the conception of a novel Belgian amusement park emerges as a harmonious compromise, uniting an array of offerings inclusive of historical industrial edifices like Haut-Fourneau B.

Of course, the realization of such a project is more likely to have several cons, like the dismantling of a few steel structures that have suffered too much damage over time, the work involved in cleaning up and depolluting the site, and the overall budget. But many actors could be involved in the project and invest money for its realization, the local office for economic development (SPI), the Region and the local authorities could intervene simultaneously.

Back in 2017, an article in the Belgian newspaper *Le Soir* featured Jordan Atanasov, the regional secretary of the CSC trade union, who shared an exciting vision: turning the Haut-Fourneau B site in Ougrée into a blend of fun and education. For Atanasov, holding onto Haut-Fourneau B is a big deal since it is a

symbol of the heritage that's deeply etched in everyone's minds in the Liège region. But that doesn't mean the project should just be a history lesson. It should buzz with life and draw people from all over.

In the same article, Philippe Collinet, which has worked as an operator at the Haut-Fourneau B for 15 years, declared:

*The Haut-Fourneau B is emblematic, and something must be done to preserve it. Today, a museum attracts less people and the best would be to have a true economic activity on the site, which would also be economically profitable for the region and its people. [...] I'm in favour of a positive project. An amusement parc? It is imaginative and original. That would attract lots of people.*

(Philippe Collinet in Grosjean, 2017)

It is clear that the Haut-Fourneau B in Ougrée and its preservation is paramount for both the local authorities and the people that have been implicated into the development of the steel industry in the basin of Liège. Today, the option of an amusement park has been left out, but the debate is still on the table, and new projects, more educative this time are slowly emerging. To be continued...

## 8.2. The technical and economic challenges of such investments

Such investments represent enormous costs and most of the time, subsidies from national or supranational institutions are essential. First, the site must be depolluted and cleaned in order to erase any trace of chemicals into the soil that would endanger the future visitor's health or impede the conversion of the site and the construction/renovation of infrastructures. But the journey doesn't end here: technical and operational difficulties may occur due to various basis. It might implicate the composition of the ground, the location of the site, the state of the underground galleries or the deterioration of the steel infrastructures and workshop buildings, and many other variants.

Nowadays, many remaining infrastructures of the industrial past are being assigned projects that make them profitable for the community and the economy of the region. More than ever, these sites must be cost-effective. In the next point, we will see how a coal mining site, unless it becomes a cultural hub or tourist attraction, can be turned into a green power station in the region of Charleroi.

## 9. The future of old industrial sites and their heritage

### 9.1. Tour du Roton, Farciennes, Belgium

Nestled within the province of Hainaut, the town of Farciennes emerges as a modest gem, guarding the eastern threshold of Charleroi. This unassuming town assumes significance for travellers journeying from Namur, their path guided by the iconic Tour du Roton. This venerable tower stands as a sentinel, preserving the memory of Wallonia's last active coal mine, which ceased operations on September 30th, 1984. Harkening back to 1905, the Société Civile, the embodiment of the mine's labour force, comprised a formidable assembly of 2,200 individuals, men and women united by their toil. The workforce has even increased to a staggering 3,000 stalwarts in the year 1960. This mine held a dual advantage, reaping the bounty of diverse materials and claiming the lead over the highest quality coal in the Charleroi region.

Erected in 1959, the tower rises skyward, a towering monument standing at 56.8 meters. A purposeful creation, its genesis was tailored to foster the expansion and efficacy of the Sainte-Catherine extraction shaft, plunging an unfathomable 900 meters into the depths below. The tower's zenith hosted an engine that once could hoist burdens of up to 47 tons – a testament to human ingenuity. This edifice, a sentinel cast in iron and steel, radiates a poignant aura, encapsulating the storied industrial legacy of the region. Yet, despite the noble efforts of local authorities, including the current mayor Hugues Bayet, the tower's potential has languished in relative obscurity. An intriguing chapter unfolded in 2007, as private ownership of the tower passed into the hands of Luc Ronsmans, who, in an unusual twist, extended its embrace to a club of spelunkers, allowing their exploits to grace the tower's hollows. (Vande Velde, 2020)

In 2023, a visionary project, with the help of Europe's ERDF funds, in collaboration with local and regional authorities, embodied the tower's metamorphosis. Its timeworn facade is slated for a renaissance, poised to be reimagined into a power centre, including the installations of solar panels and façade wind turbines.

Since the details of the project have not yet been made public, I asked a few questions to the mayor Hugues Bayet himself during an interview on the 26th of April 2023 in Farciennes – a narrative poised to etch a new chapter onto the canvas of Farciennes' history.

- Why is the preservation of the tower so important for Farciennes and the region of Charleroi?

*Le Roton is obviously the symbol of our past industrial wealth in Farciennes and the region, but it's also the gateway to Charleroi Metropole, the eastern gateway. So we thought it deserved a second life.*

- Concretely, what does the project involve?

*The details of the project, the budget, and the ERDF funds allocated to the project have yet to be determined. We would like to carry out an energy-efficiency renovation of the building and re-insulate it, and then think about how to use the tower to produce sustainable energy. The project would involve, for example, the installation of wind turbines on the facades of the tower itself, as well as solar panels and a link to the Ecopôle, a "green" industrial park located one kilometre below, on both sides of the river Sambre. I talked earlier about the powerful symbol that the tower represents for the region. Therefore, we would like to install LED lighting on the tower, so that it regains its splendour in the evening, and is recognized for miles around.*

- Farciennes is used to work with European funds and many projects have been realized thanks to these subsidies. Also, you have been a MEP (Member of the European Parliament) from 2014 to 2019. In your opinion, why has this project been selected and why it is important for Europe to help preserve the heritage of coal mines?

*At the time when most of the coal mines closed in Western Europe, the institution wanted to move forward and to adopt another type of economy. Coal was to be forgotten because it had created a trauma for many working families. Fortunately, a few sites have been preserved and in the region of Charleroi, most of the heaps are still there. After the trauma, in recent years, the European Commission has focused on cultural and educational project, and we realized that the former coal mining sites could be a great opportunity to create something that would teach local history and foster innovation.*

## 9.2. The role of education: focus on local history

### 9.2.1. UK: bringing local history into the curriculum

In one article published on the web page of Historical Association, an organization of historians and scholars that puts history of all types to the fore by creating an environment that foster a lifelong learning and, for instance, the integration of local history into the curriculum across the UK. The association's patron was Queen Elizabeth II and the Historical Association was incorporated by royal charter in 2006. Their common purpose is to advise teachers in their teaching methods, keeping them in touch with university work, and to encourage the local centres for the discussion of questions relative to the different ways of teaching history at school.



Assisted by Sally Burnham, a dedicated member of the HA Secondary Committee, a distinguished history educator in Lincolnshire, and a PGCE tutor at Nottingham University, the Association unveiled an insightful article on their blog in 2020, spotlighting the pivotal significance of imparting local history within the educational realm. Delving into the practical realm, this article proffers invaluable insights for seamlessly infusing local history into pedagogical approaches across diverse Key Stages, most notably Key Stage 3 and 4<sup>3</sup>.

Drawing from her wealth of experience, Sally Burnham unearths her journey of seamlessly interweaving local history into her instructional strategies. Commencing with a foundational local history inquiry during Year 7, the methodology expands organically throughout Key Stage 3. This transformative pedagogical approach is aptly illuminated through a series of exemplary instances, wherein local artifacts sourced from nearby museums are ingeniously integrated, historical occurrences are dissected to uncover their imprint on regional landmarks, and the community is actively engaged through collaborative ventures.

A pioneering facet of this educational voyage is evident in Sally Burnham's proactive initiatives that transcend the confines of the classroom. Year 7 scholars, under her guidance, embarked on visionary projects involving the presentation of innovative concepts for reviving the legacy of Sleaford Castle—a medieval stronghold that languished into disrepair during the latter half of the 16th century. This forward-looking endeavour not only nurtured the students' intellectual

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<sup>3</sup> In the United Kingdom, the education system is divided into different stages, and "Key Stage" refers to a specific phase of a student's education. Key Stage 3 covers children aged 11 to 14 and includes Years 7 to 9, while Key Stage 4 covers students aged 14 to 16 and includes Years 10 and 11.

curiosity but also fostered civic responsibility as their ideas were shared with local authorities.

The essence of teaching local history extends beyond the confines of conventional pedagogy. It nurtures inquisitiveness, encourages profound exploration of subject matters, grapples with the art of abstraction, and engenders contemplation about one's role in perpetuating historical continuities. Moreover, it bestows the invaluable gift of cultivating an unbreakable bond with a shared local identity—a sense of belonging that emanates from the echoes of the past.

In her conclusive remarks, Sally Burnham ardently advocates for fellow educators to embrace the enriching realm of local history in curriculum design. An eloquent advocate for gradual yet steadfast integration, she underscores the paramount importance of harnessing local resources and expertise as the scaffolding for this transformative educational endeavour (Bates & Bowry, 2021). By emulating Sally Burnham's pioneering spirit, educators can illuminate the path for a generation of learners to forge a profound connection with their heritage, and in turn, draw the contours of a more enlightened future.

### 9.2.2. Introducing local heritage in schools of the FWB

Since many years, the FWB (Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles), the official institution of education in Wallonia and the region of Brussels-Capital, has included the teaching of local heritage into the curriculum of History and Geography, in the first and second years of secondary school. Among other things, the institution works with industrial sites that have been converted into educational and leisure centres for schools and families, such as SPARKOH! in the region of Borinage.

### 9.2.3. SPARKOH!, Frameries, Belgium

Although the historic site has been exploited since 1254 with the first artisanal use of coal, the idea to create a cutting-edge educational centre in Wallonia called came up in the early 1990s, when the Walloon Region and the European Union collaborated on an ambitious project to transform the former Crachet-Picquery mining site (closed in 1960) in Frameries, Borinage, into a centre focused on the mashup of scientific, technical, and industrial culture. Jean Nouvel, the architect designated to repurpose the abandoned site, has successfully integrated the 1950s industrial structures such as the Belvédère, the Pit-Head Frame, and the Machine Room, which are listed as industrial heritage sites by the Walloon Region since 1989, into a contemporary design that fosters last decades' industrial innovation. Le Pass was born (it will be renamed SPARKOH! in 2021 after 20 years of existence). With the financial help of the European Union (we have talked previously about the importance of those funds for the region), the project has been expanded with the construction of a 210-metre-long footbridge,

known as the Pass'erelle (referring to the name of the centre), which interconnected all sections of the site. In fact, the footbridge is the symbol of the link between the area's coal mining history and its present educational purpose as a hub for scientific exploration.

Today, the architect Laurent Niget is ensuring the innovative and inspiring vision of SPARKOH! (*Découvrez SPARKOH!*, n.d.)

## 10. Conclusion: The heritage and contribution of former industrial plants to forge a local identity within the local population

The concept of heritage is inherently subjective, inviting diverse interpretations from both essentialist and constructivist viewpoints across various socio-cultural contexts. This phenomenon is strikingly evident in the cases of Belgium, the UK, and the Netherlands, where the closure of former coal mines and industrial plants has stirred contrasting responses. In Belgium and the UK, the collective memory of social trauma stemming from these closures has transformed into a profound sense of belonging, serving as a valuable source of knowledge for current and future generations. Conversely, the Dutch approach saw coal mines vanish into a haze of historical detachment, leaving behind a sparse legacy accessible primarily through literature and limited museums. The intricate interplay between local committees, regional/national institutions, and European Union funding has spearheaded efforts to preserve and repurpose numerous sites, catalysing their pivotal role in the economic and touristic vitality of Wallonia, Flanders, and the English Midlands' Black Country. Beyond their economic and touristic significance, these sites bear an indispensable educational dimension. While some have been transformed into renowned museums and innovation hubs, those that have endured with undefined purposes assume an equally essential role in imparting the region's heritage to new generations. This pedagogical process is propelled by educational institutions, parents, youth organizations, and the ones who have lived this period of heavy industry collectively weaving the narrative tapestry of history.

Reflecting on my own experiences, I have been profoundly shaped by the industrial echoes of the Belgian Pays Noir, underscoring the profound influence of heritage on personal identity. Expanding the scope to encompass culture and space, particularly the landscapes, unveils an answer to the paradox of cherishing a past marred by health adversities and socio-economic challenges. Landscapes act as custodians of memories, anchoring heritage in the present and beckoning its integration into daily life. Through this process of assimilation, the mining landscapes paradoxically facilitate an element of forgetting while ingraining themselves into the evolving identity of the region.

Moreover, mining regions in Belgium and the UK exemplify an astute knack for continual reinvention, capitalizing on their industrial legacy as a wellspring of innovation. Effective communication and open discourse emerge as linchpins in

optimizing future prospects for repurposing defunct coal mines and industrial plants. Within a society poised for innovation, untapped opportunities remain ripe for exploration, extending far beyond the paradigm of converting these sites into power centres, as previously discussed. Contemporary regions, shaped by the weight of heavy industry, must undertake a comprehensive inventory of their assets, leveraging them as catalysts for pioneering advancements.

In this dynamic landscape, the preservation of these sites assumes a profound symbiosis with education. The narrative of industrial heritage is co-authored by a population that forges a symbiotic relationship with its past, evolving from destruction to dynamic rejuvenation, as it has been observed in the area of Charleroi. A society that stands on the precipice of a transformative journey is constantly marked by mindful conservation, reinvention, and a collective commitment to recycle the threads of heritage into the tapestry of the future.

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# Appendix

## Enquête portant sur la préservation et/ou reconversion des anciens sites industriels du bassin wallon

139 réponses

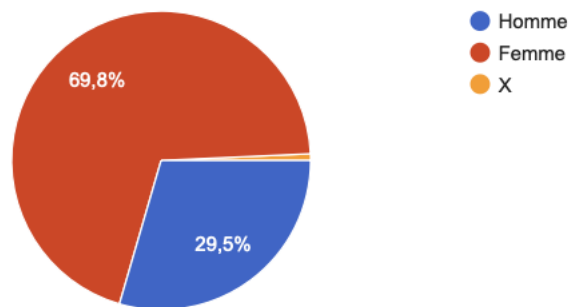
[Publier les données analytiques](#)

### L'enquête

Vous êtes...

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139 réponses



Quel âge avez-vous? (Ex: 21)

139 réponses

47

57

53

48

55

51

32

36

63

23

42

66

58

52

65

45

54

41

59

76

26

40

22

60

67

21

68

24

35

49

56

43

69

39

44

19

50

46

77

61

54 ans

70 ans

75

72

61ans

64

30 :(

37

54 ans

28

89

30

33

55ans

80

20

27

Dans quelle ville/région vivez-vous actuellement?

139 réponses

Charleroi

Farciennes

Charleroi

Farciennes

Hainaut

Neufchateau

Marcinelle

Chatelineau

Chiny

Châtelineau	Philippeville	Province de Luxembourg
Fleurus	Province Luxembourg	Montigny le Tilleul
Arsimont	Sambreville	Paliseul
charleroi	Couillet	Farciennes oui
Bruxelles	Aiseau presles	Eghezee/Namur
Liège	Chatelet	6000
Namur	Léglise	Région namuroise
Chatelet	namur	Roly
Fleurus	Suxy province de Luxembourg	Châtelet
Liège	Anhee	Marquain
Namur	Luxembourg	Aiseau-Presles
Bastogne	Carnieres	Libramont
farciennes	Marcinelle	Philippeville/Wallonie
Italie	Gembloux	Mettet
Les Bons Villers	Lambusart	Gérouville, province du Luxembourg
Herve	Philippeville	Courcelles
Province du Luxembourg	Gembloux	6230 Obaix
Doische	Châtelet	Charleroi Hainaut
Lobbes	Neufchâteau	Gerouville
Thuin	Châtelineau	Couillet
Florennes		Gosselies
		6230 Obaix
		Charleroi Hainaut
		Gerouville
		Couillet
		Gosselies

Nivelles

Jumet

Chatelineau

Sambreville

montigny le tilleul

Suxy

Province de Luxembourg

Angleur

Vivez-vous dans la même région que celle où vous avez grandi? Si non, précisez.

139 réponses

Oui

oui

Oui

Non

Non

Liège

Non, travail, déménagement

Italie

non, un peu partout en Belgique mais originaire de la Basse Sambre et revenue dans le pays carolo

Non, Beauraing.

Non, j'ai grandi a Chatelineau

non j'ai grandi en Auvergne

Non, vécu en Flandre et à Bruxelles pour le boulot.

Farciennes

Non. Déménagement pour travail puis divorce

J'y vis depuis 1977

Non, j'ai grandi à Mons

Non je viens Allemagne

Non. Anderlues

Non c'était à Wépion

Bruxelles

Couillet

Non Montigny le Tilleul

Non, j'ai grandi à Charleroi

Non je suis originaire de châtelineau

Moins de civisme , de respect , de sécurité

Enfant jumet adulte Ham-sur-Heure-Nalinnes

Non Manage

Non, Bastogne -> Paliseul

Non, j'ai grandi à Charleroi

Non Brabant Wallo'

Grandi à Charleroi

Non anciennement charleroi

Oui.

Orcq

A 3km de la ville où j'ai grandi (Farciennes)

Non, je vivais à Fleurus

Non, je suis à liège et j'ai déménagé à 10 ans

Oui

Hainaut

Oui mais avant 6181 Gouy-lez-piéton

bruxelles

Non je viens de gaume

Non avant Mons

Sambreville

Non je suis originaire de Durbuy

Non j'ai grandi dans la région de Charleroi

Non. Moustier-sur-sambre

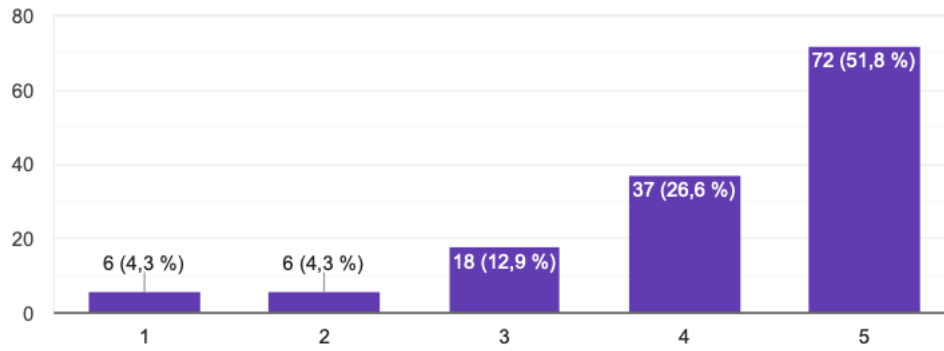
Non j'ai grandi à Charleroi

oui dans le hainaut

Vous sentez-vous attaché à la région dans laquelle vous vivez, ou celle où vous avez grandi?

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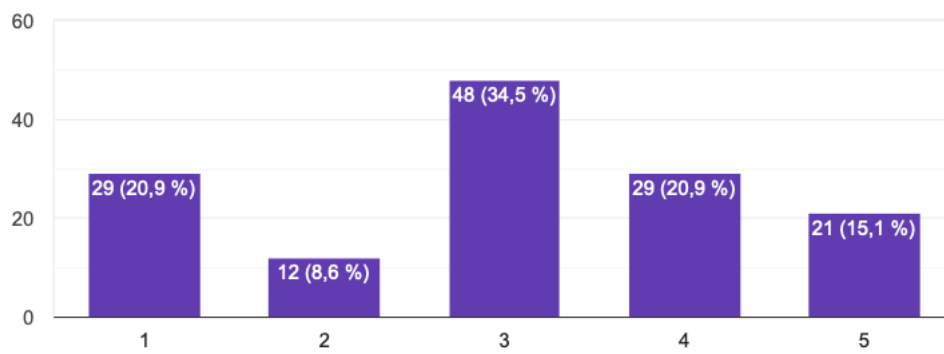
139 réponses



Etes-vous familier avec le Bois du Cazier à Marcinnelle?

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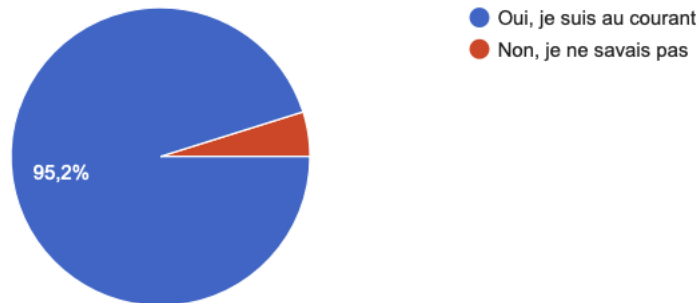
139 réponses



Si vous avez répondu 3 ou plus à la question précédente, savez-vous qu'une catastrophe y est survenue le 8 août 1956 tuant 262 mineurs?

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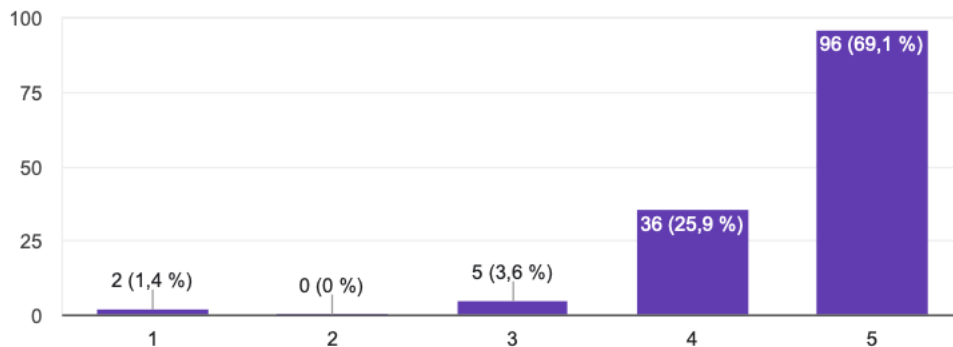
124 réponses



Selon vous, est-ce une bonne idée de continuer à enseigner l'histoire locale dans les cours d'Histoire, comme c'est le cas en secondaire en Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles actuellement? Par exemple, enseigner dans les écoles de la FWB en quoi le bassin minier wallon a considérablement contribué au développement industriel et économique du pays.

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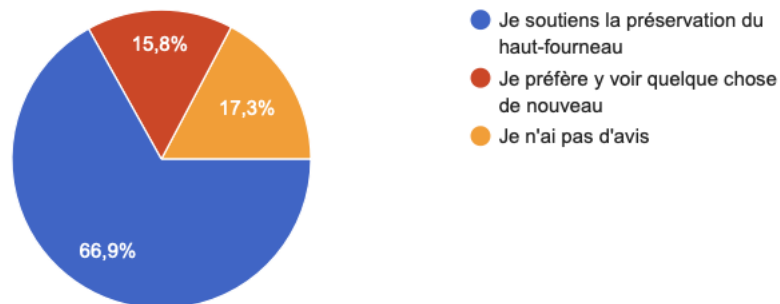
139 réponses



Il existe plusieurs moyens d'inclure d'anciennes structures industrielles dans un projet de reconversion. Prenons un exemple: **le Haut-Fourneau B d'Ougrée** (près de Liège) est visible à plusieurs kilomètres et est un témoin du riche passé industriel de la région. Aujourd'hui, le débat est toujours sur la table pour évaluer les projets de préservation ou de démolition. En concertation avec un comité de citoyens, un projet de parc d'attraction tel que Walibi avait été proposé pour sauver le haut-fourneau de la démolition. Le parc et les attractions auraient alors été construits autour de la structure d'acier, mais le projet est ensuite tombé à l'eau.

**Et vous, seriez-vous pour la préservation du haut-fourneau ou seriez-vous d'avis à le démolir et construire quelque chose de nouveau, un quartier résidentiel par exemple?**

139 réponses

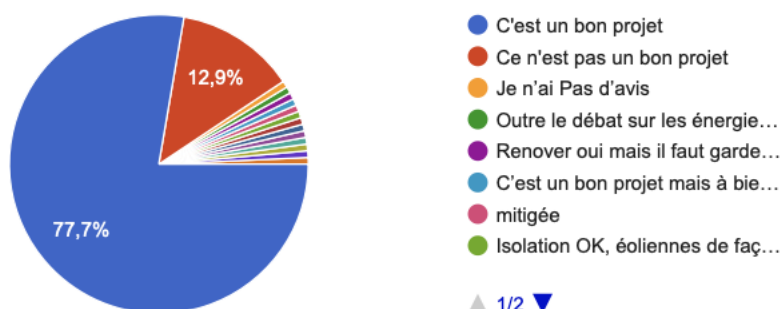


Un autre exemple de projet de reconversion est la tour du Roton à Farciennes. Visible à des kilomètres, elle est le vestige du dernier charbonnage wallon en activité. Le projet a été annoncé récemment et devrait bénéficier de subsides européens. Il prévoit la rénovation énergétique de la tour (isolation, panneaux solaires, etc) et sa transformation en un pôle énergétique, notamment grâce à l'installation d'éoliennes de façade. Le projet est donc focalisé sur la production d'énergie verte.

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### Quel est votre avis sur ce type de projet?

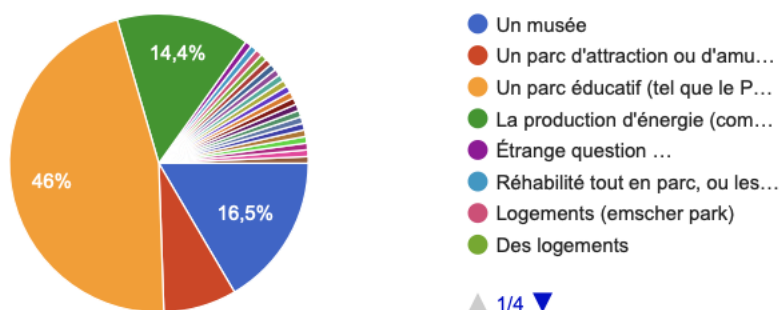
139 réponses



Selon vous, quelle option serait la plus attractive pour la reconversion d'anciens sites industriels aujourd'hui?

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139 réponses



Merci !

This study presents a nuanced exploration of the dynamic interplay between the heritage of former coal mines and industrial plants and their multifaceted reconversion into educational, cultural, and/or entertaining initiatives. Utilizing a meticulous analysis of historical records, archival materials, and contemporary literature, this research illuminates the profound influence of industrial heritage on the cultural identity and historical consciousness of communities across Belgium, Luxembourg, and the United Kingdom. With the backdrop of industrialization and subsequent deindustrialization shaping these regions, this investigation delves deep into the intricate relationship binding tangible industrial remnants, the collective memory of local communities, and the ever-evolving socio-cultural dynamics enveloping them.

An intriguing aspect of this research involves dissecting the variances in the interpretation of industrial heritage between Dutch Limburg and Belgium, providing critical insights into divergent perspectives. The pivotal role of landscape takes centre stage in this inquiry, fundamentally shaping how former industrial plants are perceived by local populations. The thesis also seeks to unravel the extent to which the landscape intertwines with the collective memory of individuals living in regions deeply impacted by heavy industry, while also assessing the myriad possibilities for repurposing these sites. A pivotal focus lies on the constructive dialogue between public entities and residents' committees, emerging as the linchpin facilitating reconversion projects and the preservation of industrial structures.

Moreover, this research delves into the contemporary purposes of former industrial plants and their transformative evolution, with particular emphasis on the Belgian Pays Noir, the English Black Country, and the Dutch Limburg. It analyses also what place these sites still have in the collective memory and what socio-cultural role they play. New perspectives are emerging, including education to younger generation about the industrial heritage of their homeland.