

## **Industrial Heritage Preservation in the Ruhr Region of Germany (Theme: Preserving and Popularising mining history)**

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Since regional industries throughout Europe have started declining, preservation initiatives referring to the industrial heritage can be observed. Today, the European Route of Industrial Heritage (ERIH) makes sites in different European countries accessible and integrates them in a complex system of thematic and regional routes. The Route of Industrial Heritage in the Ruhr Region of Germany, which opened in 1999 as a succeeding project of the International Building Exhibition Emscher Park (1989-99), serves as a role model for ERIH.

The Ruhr Region can be seen as an interesting case study, if only because it is one of the few old industrial regions, which after the withdrawal of the leading industries still exists structurally. Already at the beginning of the 20th century, there were activities on the preservation of technical monuments in Germany. But only during structural change, the history of coal and steel became a means of regional awareness – and the material relicts like winding towers, blast furnaces, machine halls came to mind as part of cultural identity.

The paper will focus on protection activities and historical culture in the Ruhr region since the 1970s and then turn to current strategies and problems. A special attention is addressed to the "Foundation for the Preservation of Industrial Monuments and Historical Culture" (Dortmund), founded in 1995. The Foundation was established as an agreement of RAG mining company and the federal state of North Rhine Westphalia and resulted from a conflict on the protection of monuments from the mining sector. At the end of the paper, a critical position on the future prospects of industrial heritage preservation in the Ruhr area will be discussed, taking into consideration the examples of other industrial regions.