

ERIH, the European Route of Industrial Heritage- The Tourism Information Network of Industrial Heritage in Europe

— Rainer Klenner, ERIH board member, webmaster

ERIH is a network of industrial heritage visitor attractions which tell the fascinating story of the places, the processes and the people that together make up Europe's common industrial heritage. On its website ERIH presents over 1,850 sites from all European countries. Over 100 of these sites are so-called Anchor Points, sites of exceptional historical importance in terms of industrial heritage which also offer a high-quality visitor experience. Regional Routes introduce in more detail the industrial history of landscapes, which were particularly influenced by industrialization. All locations are assigned to one or more of 14 European Theme Routes, which show the variety and - often together with the biographies - the interlinkages of European industrial history and their common roots. The network is run by an association (ERIH e.V.) established under German law, which has more than 300 members in 26 countries. In 2019 ERIH was certified as a "Cultural Route of the Council of Europe".

It was at the end of the last millennium that ERIH started. In 1999 the idea was born to establish "Industrial Heritage" as a brand of tourism and to use the potential of industrial heritage tourism for local or regional economic development. This would be realized by creating a pan-European network called "ERIH-The European Route of Industrial Heritage". ERIH would introduce sites that present the European dimensions of technology, social and cultural history of the industrial age as attractive tourist destinations that are worth a visit.

What's behind this idea? Industrial history is a crucial part of Europe's past since nothing has left its mark as clearly as the two centuries following the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. Production plants with their supply and disposal facilities, the extraction of mineral resources, transport routes and traffic facilities, workers' settlements, the rhythm of machines radically changed the landscape and working life. The Industrial Age's living and working conditions were more or less the same, assuming that a miner in the Ruhr district or in the valleys of Wales dug for same coal in a very similar way. They even migrated all

across Europe in search of the 'black gold'. The example illustrates that the peoples of Europe share the same memories of industrial history which are part of the common European identity.

For several decades now, structural and economic shifts have once again led to drastic changes to industries and their communities. Factories are closing or relocating their production facilities to other regions or continents. Mines are being closed down, production facilities demolished or converted for new industrial production, for trade and commerce or for residential purposes. Fortunately, however, a greater number of the remnants of Europe's industrial development have also been transformed into attractive tourist destinations as museums, cultural and natural spaces, becoming both places of remembrance and symbols of change. A gigantic network of sites spread all over Europe. It only has to be brought back to life – which is what ERIH is helping to bring about.

European Union supports the development of the ERIH network

Institutions from different countries (Belgium, Germany, Netherlands and United Kingdom) were convinced of the original idea. Together they applied for funds from an EU funding programme to develop a master plan - and were successful. The master plan, submitted in 2001, illustrated the economic potential of industrial heritage as a tourist brand and presented the possible structure of a pan-European network with Anchor Points (including their quality standards), regional routes and theme routes.

With further EU funding the development of ERIH was undertaken between 2003-2008, initially in the countries of North-West Europe (funding area), but towards the end of the funded development phase also a first extension to other countries.

Main activities

To promote the new brand, ERIH developed a corporate design, including a common logo, signage at the ERIH

sites, and information material. The network's most important communication tool is the website.¹ As the main promotional platform it presents the industrial heritage to the general public, thus encouraging people to visit the industrial monuments. Extensive information and a plethora of links to other websites dealing with industrial heritage, tourist offices and further organizations and initiatives help to attract visitors. With its comprehensive background information on Europe's industrial history the website can also be seen as a virtual library offering a forum to exchange experiences between experts and lay people with a strong interest in the topic. A more personal form of exchange can be experienced at annual conferences, workshops and national meetings. News concerning the network and industrial heritage in general are promoted via newsletters and the ERIH Facebook site.²

The structure of the ERIH network

ERIH's system of – virtual – routes is the signpost to Europe's industrial heritage.³

Anchor Points form the main route

ERIH presents a large number of locations, some are particularly highlighted as so-called "Anchor Points". They form the virtual main route and promote "ERIH" as a brand for industrial heritage tourism in a special way. As industrial heritage tourism has to compete with established travel destinations quality matters. Therefore, the sites highlighted as Anchor Points (currently over 100) must meet special selection and quality criteria: they are sites of exceptional historical importance in terms of industrial heritage which also offer a high-quality visitor experience. Acceptance as an Anchor Point (by the ERIH board) is a seal of quality and it offers visitors of all ages the promise of an enjoyable and interesting visit by fascinating guided tours, exciting multi-media presentations and outstanding special events. Last not least, Anchor Points are simultaneously starting points for a variety of regional routes.

Regional Routes open up the industrial history of a region

Many regions in Europe have an interesting industrial history and a sufficient number of sites which are attractive for visitors. That's why the development of regional routes is an important element of ERIH. Regional routes (or regional networks) are a marketing tool which bring together a range of sites, large and small, to present in a coordinated way the industrial heritage of a particular area.



Figure 1. Presentation of ERIH master plan in December 2001. Duisburg, D (Source: ERIH; DGfI)

Just as each region is different, so the routes which tell their stories will differ in content and presentation. However, there are features which all routes share. Based on the experience gained from the routes that have already been established, ERIH drafted a "Guidance for creating ERIH Regional Routes", which is available for download on the website.

A regional route must relate to an area that is recognizable and readily identifiable by visitors – it could be a city, a county or a region. A regional route will usually be focused on one or two Anchor Points, which provide the gateway(s) to the route and region. As well as telling their own stories, the Anchor Points will encourage visitors to explore the other sites and attractions that make up the route.

It is important that the area covered by the route has an interesting story to tell and that the cultural tradition and history of the region is reflected in the route. The theme of a regional route will 'tie together' the sites and attractions on the route and it will be reflected in its branding and promotion.

European Theme Routes illustrate the European connections

Currently ERIH presents over 1.850 sites of all branches of industry from all European countries. The database of sites is continuously being expanded. In addition to the

¹ <https://www.erih.net>

² <https://www.facebook.com/pg/ERIH.net>

³ <https://www.erih.net/i-want-to-go-there>

⁴ <https://www.erih.net/about-erih/route-system/regional-routes/>

attractive presentation of industrial history, a key selection criterion for inclusion to the database is the accessibility of the site for visitors: during the usual tourist season in summer the location should be open at least two days a week.

All ordinary sites and Anchor Points are grouped on the basis of 14 Theme Routes. The Theme Routes are organized by branches of industry; there is also a list of company museums and sites that offer factory tours and another list of industrial heritage properties on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

The Theme Routes take up specific questions of European industrial history and draw - often in connection with the biographies - possible connecting lines. They follow them throughout Europe and to a wide variety of industrial monuments. The result: a "circuit diagram" of the common roots of European industrial heritage.

Biographies introduce personalities who have influenced industrial history

However, industrial history is not only told through architectural evidence such as mines, production facilities or workers' settlements. The people are just as important: inventors, entrepreneurs, financiers, and especially the workers. This is why ERIH also presents 160 biographies of personalities who have influenced European industrial history.⁵

The ERIH website

ERIH's website is the most comprehensive portal of a cultural theme in Europe; its contents at a glance:

- more than 1,850 sites in all European countries
- among them more than 100 Anchor Points
- 20 Regional Routes with brief descriptions of their industrial history
- 14 European Theme Routes (with 42 subcategories)
- more than 160 Biographies
- brief descriptions of European industrial history and the industrial history of 42 countries
- 16 historical reviews of branches of industry presented on the European Theme Routes
- approx. 400 links to industrial heritage networks, industrial UNESCO World Heritage Sites, and industrial heritage/archaeology organisations
- more than 4,000 links to websites of sites, regions and branches of industry described

ERIH's management structure

After the end of public funding, the network established itself on a "legal footing". In 2008, 17 persons and institutions from 3 countries founded an association established under German law listed under the name of "ERIH - European Route of Industrial Heritage e.V.". Since then the number of members has risen to more than 300 from 26 European countries: industrial heritage sites and museums, organisations from tourism and business, public authorities, monument conservators, interested individuals and other actors involved in industrial heritage. The organs of the association are the board of management and the general assembly. The board has commissioned an external manager and nominated national representatives. The costs of running the network are financed by the membership fees.

Renewed EU funding enables numerous projects

Recognized as a pan-European network to promote Europe's industrial heritage ERIH was granted another funding period from October 2014, provided by the "Creative Europe" network funding programme. Thanks to this funding ERIH has been able to extend its information portal and to finance numerous further activities.

The funding is, amongst other things, invested to drive networking forward in favour of the exchange of experience on a regional, national and European level. This is particularly assured by the annual ERIH conferences, each of which focuses on a topical theme relating to industrial heritage and tourism.⁶



Figure 2. Handing over the Anchor Point Plaque to Big Pit, National Coal Museum, Blaenavon, GB (Source: Big Pit Nat Coal Museum)

⁵ <https://www.erih.net/how-it-started/stories-about-people-biographies>

⁶ <https://www.erih.net/what-is-new/erih-annual-conferences>

The project "Twinning of Sites" comprises the twinning of thematically similar ERIH sites to share experience and good practice and to develop skills and competences. ERIH covers the travel and accommodation costs of the exchange for between 1-3 persons.⁷

To create the "ERIH Industrial Heritage Barometer" the association carried out a survey of industrial heritage sites in Europe. Based on the questions ERIH is frequently asked, a questionnaire was compiled on the topic groups core data, target groups, perspectives and measures. This formed the basis of a Europe-wide online survey in 2018 and 2019.⁸

There are numerous "expert databases and best practice websites" on different topics dealing with industrial heritage. In order to get an overview of this websites at a central point, ERIH has researched them, created a linked database and placed it on its website.⁹

The annual dance event "Work it Out" for young people as well as the young at heart held at impressive industrial settings all around Europe is very successful and effective in terms of publicity.¹⁰



Figure 3. WORK it OUT 2019 at Ignacy Historic Mine. Rybnik.PL
(Source: Ignacy Historic Mine)

Challenges for the future

Since its establishment in 1999, ERIH has become established as a major player in industrial heritage tourism in Europe. It is recognised as such by the Council of Europe and the European Commission and also national heritage and tourism organisations across Europe. The network continues to expand and its profile become more widely known. However, the challenge now facing ERIH and also the industrial heritage tourism sector is how they can adapt to major issues now facing the world – including climate change and the economic and social challenges in a post-Coronavirus world. Over the coming months and years, ERIH will be keen to work with its member sites and other agencies to explore how the stories of Europe's industrial past can continue to be presented.

⁷ <https://www.erih.net/projects/exchange-program-twinning-of-sites>

⁸ <https://www.erih.net/projects/erih-industrial-heritage-barometer>

⁹ <https://www.erih.net/nc/service/experts-and-best-practice-databases>

¹⁰ <https://www.erih.net/projects/erih-dance-event-work-it-out>