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Space Construction as a Mental Process: Heavy Industrial Regions in Comparative Perspective

Introduction

“Space construction as mental process” involves three components: time, space, and men. All of them are never stable – even space as we shall see –, they are changing and interacting with each other through time periods. Moreover, these changes are not simply tangible ones such as urbanisation or labour migration, but mental ones, too. People inside as well as outside the coalfields perceive and internalise changes of their “mental map”, as Marguerite Yourcenar expressed.

The main questions, still debatable, are: how do various views or perceptions of the heavy industrial region emerge? How are such perceptions modified? To what extent does mind space govern the present and the future of industrial areas? To what extent could we perceive of tensions between images of the past and visions of the future, tradition and transition? What is the status of historians in this process of mind space construction?

The last question is probably the most challenging one for historians who are not simply dealing with the “past reality” – archives, material relicts, oral documents – but above all with multiple reconstruction of past and present, with invented or dreamed pasts. As we shall see, history itself as a local history of the coalfields, or as a labour history of the working class, and initiatives in terms of industrial heritage, museums, local archives etc. also contribute to mapping and remapping the mental space. Hereby, contributors would not so much speak about “past reality” – the “familiar past” of local historical monographs – but they would explore a more immaterial history: the vision of the past *and* the space the people of industrial areas had and still have in mind. The view should not be history “wie es eigentlich gewesen ist”, as Ranke put it, but how history has been interpreted and mediated to produce a space in mind.

Consequently, we are struggling with a dialectical process. On the one side, space construction – tangible and visible space – through industrialisation and de-industrialisation produces pressure and modifies the mental process of identity formation and alteration. On the other side, mind space influences the ways in which landscape is reorganised (in French: “aménagement du territoire”). Therefore historians are facing tensions, debates, and conflicts between the past and its representation, between reconstructed pasts and projects for the future, between mind space produced by people living in the coalfields, and perception of the coalfields from outside. As we shall see, these tensions would also appear in historiography too.

Space construction as a mental process inevitably raises controversial questions about “identity”. All the contributions of this volume highlight the complexity of workers’ identities. For long, class identity prevailed regional identity, but this apparently went the other way round when heavy industries had vanished. Identity construction works like a reflecting

angle that refracts both the material component and the mental perception of particular place and phase in time. Identity should not be reduced to a repository of mental perception, an accumulation of stratum. Above all it is a mental process through which the vision of a reconstructed past and of an imagined future interact with each other. Moreover, identity construction is usually a process of reaction against something or someone that threatens. Remarkably, regional identities of heavy industrial regions strengthened when the economic bases of such regions had become endangered since the 1960s. The contributors to this volume agree to the point that identity construction of the coalfields works in reaction to inside as well as outside challenges.

Space construction as mental map and identity seem to render an impression of continuity and tradition. Take the example of the Ruhr as a black and smoky region since the late 19th century till now, an impression that never met reality. Actually, the contributors to this volume throw new light on tensions between continuity and discontinuity throughout time and space. Continuity or discontinuity was not only perceived by people of industrial areas in the past – for instance, native people expressed their feeling and fear of discontinuity at the time of fast industrialisation as a consequence of immigration – but also in more recent times when exhaustion, decrease, and disappearance of the formerly dominant heavy industry raised questions about regional identity.

The four industrial regions under consideration of course differ in terms of geographical size, time of industrialisation, urbanisation, and population growth. However, they share a similar pattern of industrialisation. They were formed and transformed by heavy industry, and became confronted with industrial redeployment after the decline of coal and steel industries. Beyond discrepancies, they offer an astonishing similarity in the process of space construction as mental process. This means that we are dealing with a common phenomenon involving millions of people rather than a peculiarity of the Ruhr or the Nord/Pas-de-Calais. Comparative history incites historians to look at space construction as mental process in its transnational dimension.

In what follows, I shall consider continuity and discontinuity in time, space, and people. Secondly, I shall analyse the process of mental space itself.

Continuity and discontinuity in time and space

The contributors to this volume agree that time is not just chronology but a succession of steps and phases, of breaking between “before” and “after”, succession of discontinuity, and even crisis. At least five chronological phases can be identified. The first phase was the time of early industrialisation that took place around 1830–1850 (earlier however in South Wales). New collieries and ironworks mushroomed very quickly meanwhile immigrant workers invaded industrial regions. This obviously produced a deep rupture from past rural lifestyles. Such a discontinuity was perceived as an aggression on part of both, indigenous people – farmers and petty bourgeoisie of small market towns submerged by migrants – and the newcomers who struggled with animosity, disorientation, and unfamiliar space.

The next phase was marked by industrialisation, urbanisation, mass migration, and by the material construction of the coalfields from mid-19th century until the First World War. During more than half a century, class identity rather than regional identity was forged. This long-lasting phase became interrupted by the two World Wars and the Spanish Civil War in the Asturian coalfield. However, such ceasures did not interrupt both industrialisation and urbanisation, rather on the contrary. Therefore the period of time between the 1880s and 1960s retrospectively appears as a phase of continuity, as a time of “classical” black country and “classical working class”. This perception became crucial for the creation of a tradition and myth of working class identity. As we shall see, this sense of continuity constituted mind space and became brutally questioned when heavy industries came to an end since the 1960s. However, it is important to realise that this perception of continuity is, to a large extent, but a retrospective vision of the past. Thus, Jean-François Eck insists on events that paved the long-lasting phase of industrialisation, such as strikes, and serious industrial incidents and disasters like the catastrophe of Courrières in 1906. Moreover, such ruptures occurred not just in “industrial time” but in “political time” as well. The rising influence of socialist and communist unions and political parties introduced a “new era” that reflected discontinuity vis-a-vis the past and created both then and now a new impression of continuity. Two World Wars, the Spanish Civil War and the intrusion of National Socialism in the Ruhr disturbed the sense of continuity to the point that they strengthened the mind space of a fighting working class ready to defend class identity and their territory, their industry.

The third phase began in the Ruhr and Nord/Pas-de-Calais as well as in South Wales after the Second World War and ended around the late 1960s. In the Asturian coalfield Franco’s regime constituted a peculiar phase between 1939 and 1957–1960. Strong industrial expansion occurred alongside with reconstruction and modernisation. This was a time of mass immigration as well as sustained economic growth. The mind space successfully coped with the invention of tradition and the assimilation of modern life style. Perhaps, the period could be coined as a “golden age” of working class culture and identity.

The following decades of the 1970s and 1980s were totally disruptive. Decrease and disappearance of heavy industries affected all regions under consideration. Pit closures and increasing difficulties in steel industry – not to mention the crisis of textile industries in Nord/Pas-de-Calais – instrumented the end of a century of industrialisation, and went alongside with a new formation of mind space and tradition. Old industry had passed whereby new and totally different industrial plants were eventually erected, new steel units, and new car factories for instance. The industrial regions as well as their communities moved from labour intensive recruitment to increasing redundancy and closure of collieries and obsolete steel units first, and then to post-industrial, high tech regional economy (at least in the Ruhr and Nord/Pas-de-Calais). It is worth to note how quick changes took place in the 1970s generating a feeling of “the world we have lost”. However, this also became a time of impressive initiatives to create or improve higher education, exemplified by the development of Glamorgan University, the birth of the universities in the Ruhr and in the Nord/Pas-de-Calais.

The last phase that probably started in the 1980s and early 1990s was a time of both industrial heritage campaigns and conscious, obstinate initiatives to rejuvenate and transform the

industrial landscape into a dynamic economic and cultural region. 1980–1990 was a watershed, a clear break from the past, a discontinuity which challenged the identity of the region and asked for a new identity.

Therefore, space dramatically changed during the last two centuries. Indeed, the borders of the industrial regions have been moving geographically and mentally according to the respective phases. The process modified not only the landscape from inside, but also the outside space, permeating the borders of the industrial basin. Industrial space (inside) is enshrined in a wider one (outside) both interacting with each other usually by conflict and mediation.

Thus, space of industrial regions was never definitively fixed. During the phase of early industrialisation, the industrial regions usually emerged from scratch, from rural space. They grew very quickly – during less than half a century – and turned into a “hybrid landscape”, a mixture of rural and urban plots. Such transformation inevitably modified the mind space, the visual and mental perception of the region. The following description of the Durham coalfield, recorded by an officer of the Royal Commission on the Employment of Children in 1841, would apply to South Wales, the Ruhr, the French coalfield of Pas-de-Calais as well as the Asturian coalfield: “Within the last ten or twelve years an entirely new population has been produced. Where formerly was not a single hut of a shepherd, the lofty steam-engine chimneys of a colliery now send their volumes of smoke into the sky, and in the vicinity a town is called, as if by enchantment, into immediate existence”.¹ According to the French geographer Demangeon, the coalfield of the Pas-de-Calais was just a piling up of villages overcrowded by proletarian workers in the early 20th century. Demangeon’s compatriot, Vidal de la Blache, considered that this accumulation of mine shafts, factories and houses was not enough however to produce a townscape; it was just “primary materials of town waiting for life force”.²

Tensions occurred both within the regions themselves between pre-industrial identity and the newcomers in search of recognition and identity; and between the industrial regions and the rest of the country. From outside, coalfields were perceived as a new world of violence, poverty, and threat. This negative perception for long remained attached to industrial areas as black countries. Therefore, identity construction is a process against something and someone. Working class identity was forged against the “others”, mainly the elite and also the local population. Communities were constructed in demarcation of “we-they” and “now-then”. At the same time, identity construction was also a reaction against the negative perception from inside. Industrial regions seemed to expand without any control, any plan. This perception was strengthened by the fact that expansion rarely went hand in hand with

1 Norman McCord/D. J. Rowe: Industrialisation and urban growth in North-East England, in: *International Review of Social History* 22 (1977), pp. 30–64, 33.

2 Quoted by Joël Michel: *Le mouvement ouvrier chez les mineurs d’Europe occidentale* (Grande-Bretagne, Belgique, France, Allemagne). *Etude comparative des années 1880 à 1914*, Thèse présentée pour le doctorat d’Etat, Lyon II (1987), tome I, p. 96. Bernard Dezert/Christian Verlaque: *L’espace industriel*, Paris 1978, p. 19–27; Gideon Sjöberg: *The preindustrial city. Past and present*, Glencoe III. 1960, p. 8. See also René Leboutte: *Vie et mort des bassins industriels en Europe. 1750–2000*, Paris 1997.

changes of administrative borders and with sufficient administration, services, markets, and infrastructures. That was especially the case for the Ruhr where urbanisation appeared unplanned, anarchical at least until the inter-war period.

For long, space was not clearly defined and borders moved according to industrial expansion or recession. Space in the industrial region is *flexible*. The Ruhrgebiet is probably the best example of an industrial region without any natural borders. Therefore the notion of “border” zone (Grenzraum) is more appropriate than frontiers (Grenzlinie). Industrial areas grew and expanded by infiltrating into the old network of villages and market towns; they created sub-regions. The Ruhr valley was the cradle of industrialisation, but heavy industries moved to the North, and occupied the “Hellweg zone” that emerged as a centre of heavy industries, but the northbound expansion soon occupied the “Emscher” and the “Lippe zones”, and spread to the respective surroundings, creating a completely new landscape of “industrial villages”. In the Nord/Pas-de-Calais, the region was composed (and still is composed) by different sub-regions: Lille was dominated by the textile industry; the sub-region of Douai-Valenciennes specialised in steel production and heavy industry, and the Bassin minier itself. In South Wales industrialisation progressively expanded from the coalfield valleys to the coastal towns of the South. The Asturian coalfield also grew from a nucleus of villages distinctive from Gijón and Avilés.

The geographical flexibility in itself is one of the main reasons for the implementation of a changing “mental space”. Mind space and collective identity were not alike throughout the whole of the industrial region. Jean-François Eck indicates different reactions to de-industrialisation according to space within the Nord/Pas-de-Calais, such as strong Communist opposition to industrial redeployment within the coalfield, but a more flexible attitude to modernisation and change within the textile area of this region. Analysing the Ruhrstadtdebates, Stefan Goch also shows the absence of uniformity: the old Ruhr versus a new one is clearly part of the debate.

Expanding industrial region also means tensions with outside space, and other regions. Viewed from outside – and in particular from old towns and cities like Lille or Düsseldorf – the coalfields were both unknown and threatening zones. It is worth mentioning that the urban bourgeoisie of old historical cities turned their back on new coal towns. During the phase of industrialisation (1850–1914) the Ruhrgebiet was perceived both from inside and outside as socially homogeneous and as a region with “innerer Regionsbildung”. In Asturias the phase of heavy industrialisation was considered as an aggression that came from. But at the same time, a proletarian society emerged and grew and imposed itself creating its own identity against outside space.

As far as space is concerned, urbanisation is a key component. First, there is a discrepancy between industrial regions scarcely urbanised at the beginning of industrialisation, such as Asturias or the coalfield of Pas-de-Calais, and others that already had a network of small towns like the Ruhr and in the sub-region Lille-Valenciennes. As industrialisation spread, new towns emerged from almost nothing but a coal pit or a railway station, the “coal towns”

or villes minières, like Lens in Pas-de-Calais.³ For most of the 19th century urbanisation progressed without any urban planning. Mid-19th century Merthyr Tydfil may serve a good example of urban chaos. Merthyr was not a place to live in: it was a place to quit for a healthier spot once you had achieved some competence (1850). Three years later a health officer reported: “Merthyr Tydfil presents one of the most strongly marked cases of the evil of [...] allowing a village to grow into a town without providing the means of civic organisation”.⁴

The contributors to this volume underline this absence of urban planning and urban consciousness that probably is a necessity for people to organise their mental space as well as their physical environment. The case of the Ruhr is probably the most remarkable one: Regional planning came into existence not earlier than the 1920s (Siedlungsverband Ruhrkohlenbezirk). The development of regional political initiative played a major role in this attempt to physically and mentally reorganise the space that had suffered for a long time from the negative image of a Black Country and urban chaos.

A similar absence of urban planning characterised other industrial areas: Nord/Pas-de-Calais, South Wales, Upper Silesia, and so on. “Coal towns” grew by a street framework in the valleys of South Wales, meanwhile, in other coalfields they were based on squaring map. But there was hardly any planning project for the whole industrial area as such before the inter-war period. Another feature of the process of coalfield urbanisation is formed by prestigious buildings – usually offices of main collieries and steel companies – and urban components like monuments, little street shops, churches, town halls. The new townscape was usually a decoration “en trompe-l’œil”, a window dressing masking another less prestigious reality: overcrowded coronas in Nord/Pas-de-Calais, blind alleys, death ends.

Probably more vital as elsewhere, market places were the centre of everyday life and identity in coal towns. Market places contrasted with overcrowded dwellings and jumbles of industrial infrastructures. Open space, fresh air, light opposed to elusive space of coal mines, air pollution, and darkness: a feeling that contributed to mental space in black countries.

Viewed from outside, industrial areas were usually perceived as ugly, covered by coal dust, oppressed by smoked black countries. This image is a key element of mental space to such an extent that it has become a literary cliché (Emile Zola’s “Germinal”). But smoking chimneys of steam engines’ boilers, of steel units, of coke furnaces also meant jobs and earnings for workers. Paradoxically, in the 1970s–1980s fresh air signified the end of heavy industry and the death of the region. Derelict buildings, abandoned gallows, frames of mine shafts and waste grounds strengthened the negative image of black countries turning into depressed areas. And it is precisely by fighting against this reality and image that mind space and collective identity strengthened. Stefan Goch notices the formation of a “Ruhr identity” in the 1960s–1970s as well as Jean-François Eck who underlines the efforts of the people of Nord/Pas-de-Calais to eradicate the negative image of an ugly depressed area. If the Ruhr, Nord/

3 Jean-Pierre Poussou/Alain Lottin (eds.): *Naissance et développement des villes minières en Europe*. Arras, 2004.

4 G. Humphrys: *South Wales*, Newton Abbat 1972, pp. 24–25.

Pas-de-Calais, and South Wales now appear more and more attractive even for tourists, it is the result of “image campaigns” in favour of industrial heritage and architectural peculiarities, but it is also the positive effect of a redirection of industrial areas on the road of high education through university development and fine art and high quality cultural initiative.

It is now when the process of de-industrialisation process is coming to an end, that industrial regions are finally delimited. No new industrial extension is taking place, and therefore people from inside and from outside have a better idea of borders. This phenomenon is remarkable in the case of the Ruhr to such an extent that people from the Ruhr identify themselves with a now delimited space (“Der Pott kocht” is today not only a marketing slogan but a popular expression of self identity of a rejuvenated region).

Space construction as a mental process in comparative perspective

During the first phase of industrialisation, we observe a clash between tradition and transition. History, tradition and identity were rural (South Wales, Asturias), and, in the cases of Nord/Pas-de-Calais and the Ruhr, both rural lifestyle and small market places identity were suddenly challenged by waves of people from different origins and backgrounds who had only one point in common: they came there to work. Work and workplaces formed the backbone of their construction of identity. The identity of the workers had to be forged in reaction to the identity of peasants and tiny local bourgeoisie. From such early experiences some relics have remained, such as the vision of a remote beautiful green landscape that had been damaged by industrialisation and unplanned urbanisation. Moreover, according to Jean-François Eck, the case of Nord/Pas-de-Calais is even more complex due to the powerful presence of very old cities close to the Bassin minier: Lille-Roubaix, Valenciennes, and many others.

All contributors to this volume highlight the fact that the new industrial regions had no history, no tradition of their own: “Ruhrgebiet ohne Geschichte und Tradition”. A new social group emerged, the miners: “Jene Figur war kein Mensch mehr, sondern ein Stück Kohle mit Armen und Beinen”. Industrialisation, it is supposed, would mean violence, criminality and destruction of the local society of villages. Viewed from outside, industrial areas were seen as a homogenous, strong, violent society, a perception which is a mental construction very different from the inside mind space that clearly distinguishes between different valleys in South Wales, the heart of the Bassin minier (Lens) and the townscape of Lille or Valenciennes, the Ruhr valley and the more recent coalfields in the northern part of the Ruhr. Thus, each portion of the coalfield has its own identity usually based on phases of industrial growth, ethnicity, religious affiliation and political commitment.

In fact, this is a good example of space construction as mental process: by complaining the absence of tradition and history workers did not endorse the long history and tradition of the pre-industrial “mental space” and intended to create their own tradition and to write their own history. And they did. Stefan Berger insists upon literary production: poems, novels, narrative history produced by workers of the coalfield. This inner literary production greatly contributed to construct a new identity. In the same time, narrative works and his-

tory that created an image of the coalfields also came from external observers like Emile Zola. *Germinal* gave to the Nord/Pas-de-Calais coalfield an identity that expresses a universal type and cliché.

The question of the role of the bourgeoisie and the state is debatable. The case of Asturias is probably a special one. Holm-Detlef Köhler insists upon the key role of the state and foreign entrepreneurs, both creating the industrial area. Also, Jean-François Eck emphasises the role of the dynasties of textile entrepreneurs as a crucial element in the development of the whole region, including the Bassin minier. We know about the impulse of foreign entrepreneurs to the industrialisation of the Ruhr from about 1830 to 1880, whereas English entrepreneurs were active in South Wales.⁵ However, it is worth noting that the bourgeoisie did not share the day to day life of the coal fields but rather turned their back to them. French bourgeois lived in Lille, not in Lens or Courrières. Similarly there was hardly any bourgeois living in the heart of the Ruhr, in the valleys of South Wales or in the Asturian coalfield.

The absence of bourgeoisie in the heart of industrial areas also went with reduced administrative structures. Indeed, industrialisation did not contribute to develop administrative structures that remained throughout the time. The absence or even disappearance (county structures became absorbed by growing cities) of modern regional administration is one of the main characteristics of urbanisation in the coalfields. Stefan Goch and Klaus Tenfelde rightly insist on this absence in the case of the Ruhr, but the same situation is also true for South Wales and the French Bassin minier. In the Asturias the State and regional authorities played a leading role in industrial implementation but administrative structures remained underdeveloped in the coalfield itself. For the Ruhr, Stefan Goch notices that it is only in the early 1920s that the creation of the Siedlungsverband Ruhrkohlenbezirk really initiated a certain but weak development of a regional administrative structure. Jean-François Eck insists upon the persistence of dynasties of patronage which were unwilling to modify the administrative framework (moreover embedded in the tradition of French centralism).

As a hypothesis Klaus Tenfelde takes the case of the Ruhr. "It is rather with the middle classes that a need to acquire a sort of regional identity evolved. Within the migrants' generation, workers' identity of the region was rather weak, understandably, whereas they and especially their children tended to favour professional and class identities that may have been constructed elsewhere; also, neighbourhood and network identities within a worker's culture understood broadly, played an important role. Within the working class, and the lower classes in general, a need even of national identification is rarely felt, though it may arise sharply in times of national crises."⁶ All the papers confirm this hypothesis. A tiny but dependent middle class – not a bourgeoisie – existed within the industrial regions: engineers,

5 Margareta Anna Victor Devos: *Kapitalverflechtungen in der Montanindustrie zwischen dem westlichen Deutschland und Belgien von etwa 1830 bis 1914*, (Diss.) Universität Bonn (1986).

6 This is a quotation from the outline of ideas submitted to the contributors in preparation of the session in Kiel. See the introduction to this volume.

directors of collieries and workshops, shopkeepers. These may have participated in the construction of national rather than local identity.

In the case of Nord/Pas-de-Calais Jean-François Eck notices that the elite – especially the elite of the textile industry – was not involved in the mental process of regional identity. The elite was constituted by dynasties that expressed their own tradition and culture, obviously in contrast to workers, petty bourgeoisie and shopkeepers in the Bassin minier. The dynasties of textile were powerful and shaped a network of relationships. They shared Weberian values. They invested in coal mining, but were hardly concerned with regional development or even with industrial diversification. The traditional authorities – clergy, aristocrats, civil servants – had no place in the French Bassin minier. However, engineers, directors and administrators of mining companies were part of the coalfield “mental space” as rulers. They symbolized an expression of power, discipline, and bourgeoisie lifestyle. The main building of the colliery company of Lens – the “grands bureaux” – was the symbol, the visual expression of their mind space.

Klaus Tenfelde’s hypothesis also refers to the children of migrants’ generations who tended to create their own identity. According to Stefan Berger, training and education as well as trade unionism and affiliation to the churches paved the road followed by the local working class to move up on the regional social scale. The Glamorgan School of mines became the cradle of generations of engineers as highly skilled technicians. A truly local elite emerged and played a key role in forging a regional identity, in particular through narrative masterpieces. In this respect, South Wales seems quite in advance compared to the French Bassin minier, the Ruhr and above all the Asturian coalfield. Political activism reinforced this identity of a Welsh miner. However it is rather a class identity than a truly local identity.

The industrial regional identity was also based on activism, on fighting against social exploitation and hardship of everyday life in the coalfields. According to Jean-François Eck, regional identity constituted a coherent set of representations and perception that is composed of two distinctive elements: the importance of the collective actors represented by the patronage and the trade union and the violent antagonism between the two. Violent actions and strikes were part of the identity of the coalfield. Facing the patronage, trade unions constituted a powerful collective actor that influenced the regional identity of all the three basins.

Workers’ identity in the Ruhr, the “Kohlenpott”, means a shared identification with hard work, family, and to a degree, local space. Therefore on the one hand, space construction as mental process is adaptation to and appropriation of the internal space. But on the other hand, it is affirmation vis-à-vis the outside environment, the country, the state. This is obvious in the Ruhr where workers’ identity to a degree was constituted by willingness and readiness to violently fight for a proletarian vision of freedom (“Ruhrkampf” 1920) and to a degree, against political violence as exerted by National Socialism. This element – worker’s identity based on vision and resistance – is common to all the papers presented here. In the Asturias, the working class was isolated but created its own identity through the myth of fighting against the dictatorship; see the October revolution of 1934 and the miners’ strike of 1962. In the case of South Wales, Stefan Berger underlines the political activism of the work-

ing class. As far as Nord/Pas-de-Calais is concerned, Jean-François Eck identifies two circumstances that solidify workers identity: the Courrières disaster (1906) and the German occupation during the two World Wars.

So far, Stefan Berger and Jean-François Eck speak about the “making of the hero”: collective identity epitomised by an individual. In South Wales William Abraham and, more recently, Arthur Scargill personified a population that struggled for their region. Jean-François Eck demonstrates the importance of Maurice Thorez as a man who sacrificed himself for the cause of coal miners and coal basins. The perception of heroism also helped immigrants’ integration into the coalfield. The making of the hero is not limited to individuals but encompassed the whole community through “Identitätsnarrativ”, an unchallenged literary genre in South Wales. Stefan Berger’s contribution gives a detailed analysis of the way in which a proletarian avant-garde successfully created a collective identity and even a myth of Welsh miners, of Welsh people (*gwerin*). Interestingly, this process had a gender dimension by making heroes from women and mothers: “Welsh Mam” as a hero just like miners. The “Identitätsnarrativ” also produced the first “inside” historical works like William Galloway’s history of coal mining, or Charles Wilkins’ History of the Coal Trade of South Wales. There is apparently no equivalent in the other coalfields. However, this point would need further investigation in a comparative perspective.

Space construction as a mental process probably reached a climax in the 1950s and 1960s. Wilhelm Brepohl invented the people of the Ruhr, meanwhile the same image of united, well-defined people of the coalfield also appeared in the French Bassin minier, in South Wales and in Asturias. Historians and local historical societies played a key role in this process of tradition making. Stefan Berger rightly insists on the importance of a movement from “inside” the coalfield. In the 1970s and 1980s the topic of local historians was the culture of coal miners; they created the Miners’ Library and Archive and were active as oral historians. In the 1970s the Welsh Labour History Society focused on the relationship between labour movement and labour culture. This reconstruction of identity opposed proletarian avant-garde to the bourgeois culture.

The formation of self-consciousness of the Ruhr as a unity started in the early 1920s when, as mentioned before, the first regional planning authority was introduced. Meanwhile industrialisation continued to progress, and the process of urbanisation and landscape remapping then became supported by regional marketing which strived to sell a positive image of Ruhr’s cities both within the industrial region and above all outside the industrial region. However, this rupture from the past became a matter of conflict, and opened the door to a vivid debate about the future of the Ruhr. Consequently, this contributed to the implementation of space construction as a mental process. Even if the process was different from South Wales, the result was similar: the construction of a tradition, a history, and eventually a notion of regional citizenship. Moreover, in the case of the Ruhr, the liberation from National Socialism and the will to rebuild the region and its industrial power gave a new impulse, a new motivation to the Ruhr’s self-consciousness. The image of “old Ruhr’s coal miners” was challenged by “Neubergleute”, new immigrants, who were looking for identity. According to Stefan Goch, the post-war decades marked the real beginning of “Ruhrgebiets-Identität”

with its new political culture (“Kultur des kleinen Mannes”). In the 1950s increasing real wages opened the door to consumerism and the new welfare state.

De-industrialisation, “Strukturwandel”, and regional identity: debates and tensions

In the late 1980s the debate about the “Ruhrgebiets-Identität” and the reorganisation of a space now sometimes called “Weltstadt Ruhrgebiet” or “Metropole Ruhr” started again.⁷ It is not by chance that in those times, this debate started when the fate of coal became precarious. The comparison of the four industrial areas under consideration in this volume underlines the importance of the debate on identity, culture, industrial heritage and new image after the phase of de-industrialisation, that is to say, since the 1970s and 1980s.

At least three different opinions were expressed about the future of the French Bassin minier. First, there were those who had connected their life fate with such industries, and felt the need to preserve, maintain, and secure self-respect. Secondly, and more importantly, especially via higher learning a new educated middle class stepped on the stage of construction of regional identity, to investigate and realise about its origins. Thirdly, the maintenance of the industrial heritage was discovered to provide jobs, form attraction, and improve the regional image. From all this, the thesis may evolve that ironically, in formerly heavy industrial regions, a consciousness of regional identity did evolve only after the material bases of such consciousness had disappeared.

In terms of collective reaction to de-industrialisation, the regional identity reacted to this disruptive discontinuity by defending the identity forged at the time of industrialisation. Köhler insists upon continuity in the collective identity of Asturian coal miners even after the beginning of the process of de-industrialisation. However, he notes that this continuity now is challenged by a feeling of “no future”. As far as collective identity is concerned, the Asturias survive through its social fighting capacity (“soziale Kampfkraft”) and solidarity. This mentality remained unchanged until the 1990s.

Facing the defensive reaction of the people of the coalfields to fight for and save their space, there is a tendency coming from outside to clean the ground from the industrial past and from the many industrial relicts. The Welsh Tourist Board and the Welsh Development Agency tried to eradicate the landscape of coal mining. Collieries were transformed into green land for tourism: Bryn Bach Country Park is only one example. Stefan Berger notices that monuments tended to be set outside the industrial heritage: Museum makers in the 1960s and 1970s became concerned by “Objektfetischismus”. In the Asturias, the negation of the industrial past lead to an effort to recreate a “pastoral paradise”. The collective identity of the workers was looking back to the glorious past of a blossoming class consciousness (1880–1970), meanwhile other actors – regional authorities etc. – went back to pre-industrial times, to the green landscape and rural tradition.

7 See Christoph Zöpel: *Weltstadt Ruhr*, Essen 2005.

In the Nord/Pas-de-Calais, the collective identity has been shocked by the process of de-industrialisation from the 1960s onwards. Confronted with this structural change, three attitudes may be observed. The local industrial companies tried to minimize the seriousness of the situation and to avoid conflict. Consequently within the population, there was a feeling that entrepreneurs tried to keep their secret and to reorganise the coalfield behind the workers' backs. The other attitude aimed at taking short-time measures without any consideration of a long-time perspective, equally disappointing for the workers. The last attitude was an individualistic reaction of the workers themselves who did not trust in collective solutions anymore. Another important element of this period 1970–1980 is the role of the strikes to defend and reinforce regional identity. The discontinuity appears with strikes against the early manifestations of de-industrialisation. In a sense, the strikes meant continuity with the past: Jean-François Eck notes that the process of de-industrialisation has been used to re-activate the tradition of struggle and conflict. But the strikes were also perceptions of discontinuity. The strike at Valenciennes in 1978–1979 expressed a complete confusion in regard of the collapse of a world in which heavy industry had dominated collective identity. In the Nord/Pas-de-Calais, trade unions and the Communist party were totally opposed to any kind of “reconversion” (industrial redeployment). Strike became the ultimate attempt to defend not only jobs but also mind space. In these strikes, we observe the two sides of the coin: the past and the future. Strikers based their protest on past experiences, that is, a time when the region had been prosperous and. Through their reaction, they expressed their own vision, their mental landscape of the region. Above all they became concerned with the future and, once again, formulated their vision of the future, a mixture of loss of hope and of struggling for a renovated region. The case of Asturias seems different in the sense that government for a time tried to maintain coal mining to avoid social troubles.

Stefan Goch gives a detailed account of the changes in the Ruhr in the 1970s and 1980s. With the industrial “reconversion” (*Strukturwandel*) the regional self-perception had to struggle for its survival creating a new solidarity. Then the region was clearly delimited by a “mental map”. What was threatened was the popular culture of the post-war industrial region, the “*Kultur des kleinen Mannes*”. Jean-François Eck and Stefan Berger address the question of the consequences of a weak middle class in the difficult struggle for maintaining a regional identity at the time of de-industrialisation. Jean-François Eck notices the ambiguity of attitudes of local authorities and companies, whereas Stefan Berger clearly indicates that the regional authorities, entrepreneurs, and bourgeoisie tried to clean the ground from the “ugly” industrial past, weakening therefore the regional identity.

Secondly, via higher learning, a new educated middle class stepped on the stage of construction of regional identity, to realise about their origins. All the contributors underline not only the role of higher education – above all the universities – in constructing regional identity, but also the huge development of cultural initiatives as theatres, sports, and so on. In the Ruhr and in South Wales the creation of universities as a key component of regional identity and regional economics generates new occupational opportunity. In the Nord/Pas-de-Calais, the creation of multi-polar universities was more recent but equally important. Collective actors such as the new universities, local and regional political authorities, have

contributed to this new identity. It is worth mentioning the role of regional territorial reorganisation (“aménagement du territoire”) in these efforts, and also the TGV.

This last and very important point opens the question about “marketing” of present industrial regions. Stefan Goch and Jean-François Eck point at this process of “selling” a good image of a regenerated industrial region (Lille and, in 2010, Essen and the Ruhr as European Cultural Capitals). The challenge is now to make the region, the coal mining area in particular, a geographically open-space rather than a region looking back to its traditions.

Thirdly, the maintenance of the industrial heritage provides new job opportunities. Ironically, a consciousness of regional identity only appeared after de-industrialisation had altered the heavy industrial regions.

Thus in the four regions we are dealing with, we observe a complex process of constructing new identities that simultaneously refer to the past and to a regenerated region. According to Berger, the regeneration of the mining past is problematic. This was as much a political as an industrial act, he says, for it was meant to extinguish the memories of these communities rather than to maintain them. Berger gives an obvious example of this mechanism of conflict between past reconstruction and new initiatives: In the 1950s and 1960s, the people of South Wales continued to adhere to male working class culture. In the 1990s this stratum remained there but altered under the influence of a new stratum. The people (historians among others) not tended to reinterpret the previous strata in a different way. The old traditional labour history became reconsidered as both, as a relict of the past and as something to be reinvented as history of the people (men and women) of South Wales. However, important changes of historiography have taken place more recently. Berger notices that the history of the proletarian community has passed there is a chance for a “genuine Historisierung der Geschichte des Reviers”, a new history of the miners’ community. Interestingly enough, the Welsh labour history society became Welsh people’s history society. The making and breaking away of the valleys form the central concerns of today’s Welsh history.

As far as museum, industrial heritage and mind construction are concerned, what kind of the “past” are we dealing with? The foundation of museums provoked a vivid debate everywhere. For the people, the “actors of the past”, the ex-workers, museum often mean the last step of de-industrialisation, the very end of their occupational life. For them, factories and collieries are definitively closed and transformed into museums and leisure parks, something totally different from their past. Even worse, as Bill Jones quoted by Berger said, the green sites and parks are the negation of the past, of the former mines. This attitude has to be taken into account as part of today’s process of space construction as a mental process. On the contrary, there exists the other attitude that expresses an urgent necessity to save and protect the relicts of the past and to make them understandable for present and future generations.

In this debate, historians play an important role. Jean-François Eck and Stefan Goch insist upon the positive and important role of archives, museums, and historical centres as places where identities are preserved and continue to develop themselves. Stefan Goch circumscribes the new approach of historians as an effort to write “Regional-, Stadt-, Stadtteil-,”

Lokal-, Siedlungs- und Betriebsgeschichte". The regional history is now part of the defense of territory, identity and mental map through new regional institutions such as the "Haus der Geschichte des Ruhrgebiets" in Bochum and, above all, through city archives, museums, and exhibitions (for instance "Feuer und Flamme"). Interestingly enough, there is a strong inclination to put regional history in an international context.

Space Construction as a Mental Process – a Kaleidoscope

At the end of de-industrialisation we are dealing with an industrial heritage and history which really looks like a kaleidoscope. Through this kaleidoscope we see many pictures, nuances, from the most remote past of the regions (old rural landscapes, green countries) to the most up-to-date and modern one (the "new" Nord/Pas de Calais, the Metropole Ruhr, and so on). The kaleidoscope also offers a mixture of identities: some people struggling for the preservation of the "real past" (a myth) and struggling against the "musealisation" of the relicts of the past; others on the contrary fighting for a rebirth of the regions through higher education, culture, and industrial heritage.

Jean-François Eck gives a detailed account of this kaleidoscope. In the Nord/Pas de Calais there are no coal mines, no big textile factory, and no steelworkers anymore, but a strong movement for preserving and giving additional value to the industrial past through archives, museums, or historical centres. In the kaleidoscope of Nord/Pas de Calais we see not only the identity of the region with its industrial past, but also with modernity through new technology and hi-tech-industries. Stefan Berger insists upon a new approach to the history of South Wales to confirm consideration of the history of the whole people in the entire valleys, and not only a mythical working class. The same is true for the Ruhr (let us mention "Ruhrstadt-Debatten" and their cultural, historical dimension) and the Nord/Pas-deCalais. Once again, the Asturias seem to make up for a different case. Consequently, it seems that it is now, at the end of the industrial story, that these regions are forging a consciousness of regional identity. But this consciousness is not rejecting the past, but incorporating it.