



First international conference by the Miners of the World

**The coal mines, government, market and society**  
**Land of resilience**  
**(18<sup>th</sup> - 21<sup>st</sup> centuries)**

Many studies have shed light on developments in the coal industry in Europe, its contribution to industrialisation and issues raised by redevelopment.

However research has rarely explored the remarkable capacity to adapt demonstrated by coal-mining communities in the face of the various shocks endured in the past three centuries.

The first *Miners of the World* conference scheduled for Spring 2013<sup>1</sup> organised by the Nord-Pas de Calais Regional Council and the University of Lille-3 at the Arena Stade Couvert (in Liévin, Pas-de-Calais, France), aims to mobilise the research community in the humanities and social science on the topic of resilience in coal-mining communities since the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

It was the coal mines which drove industrialisation in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, as strategic pivots for both world wars, forging ahead with reconstruction, a major issue during the Cold War and in economic competition in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Facing off competition from other sources of energy, the coal mines took a forward-looking approach, innovated and reacted through to their closure and the latest redevelopments. What was the springboard for this dynamic? Did all communities react similarly? How did this adaptability shine through and what impact did it have? What roles do/did the government and companies play in this adaptation? From a broader perspective, what is or was the role of politicians, economic and social players at national, regional and even local level? To what extent are reactions to shocks from the outside world peculiar to the coal industry? All these questions prompt an interest in the resilience resorted to in these areas, inviting multi-disciplinary and comparative approaches, open to different geographical entities (regional and national, European and global) and over various periods. The questions addressed have been sorted into four themes.

**People in coal-mining communities in industrial and technical societies.**

This first theme examines migratory movements and the circulation of people, knowledge and ideas to and from coal-mining communities. It explores individual adventures - the initial spark behind the discovery and exploitation of seams - and the development of techniques to exploit coal and the history of miners and their families since the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

This theme revolves around the forms of work in the mine, worker organisation, the influence of trade unions and the impact of strikes, their effects on neighbouring society and

---

<sup>1</sup>. Exact date to be communicated shortly.

national - even European - debates, not forgetting the demographic and social transformations resulting from the redevelopment.

It is a matter of determining the extent to which the characteristics of people in mining communities inform their capacity to adapt to outside upheavals. More broadly, it is about exploring the resources of the mining community and managers of coal mines to address change.

### **The coal mines faced with risks and uncertainty and the strategy of governments and mining groups.**

The second theme focusses both on the history of mining societies and governments, proactively involved in the coal adventure, addressing various eras and against various geo-political backdrops.

It first aims to shed light on the strategies deployed by public and private players, faced with special circumstances such as catastrophes, war, reconstruction, then redevelopment.

This theme then looks at ongoing forms of supervision of the mining industry (developments in legislation and regulations, presence or not of regulatory bodies such as the "corps des Mines" in France) encouraging - or slowing down - their adaptation to economic and structural transformation of its markets.

Organisation of the coal mines during the two world wars in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, then in the aftermath of war, the changes in coal policies during the *"twenty glorious years"* (1952-1972) and the comparative effectiveness of the *Charbonnages de France* - resulting from nationalisation - with that of the *National Coal Board* in Great Britain over the same period, inform public and private practices of coal mining leaders to be explored throughout Europe, nationally, regionally and even locally, to seek out the foundation of resilience in these communities.

### **Resilience in vulnerable mining communities.**

The third theme pertains to how the area adapted to sanitary and environmental changes wrought by coal-mining followed by the shock of the pit closures.

Prompting the identification of the type of shocks and definition of the strategies to adapt to them, two types of reaction are distinguished:

- Firstly, considering that coal mining greatly impacts health and the environment, modifying ecosystems in an often irreversible manner, and engendering equally irreversible sickness, one might question how mining communities can (or could) adapt to these changes. What technical, legal, economic and organisational solutions were put forward in response to this impact and what lessons can be drawn for future reference? To what extent have societies confronted with mining risks developed specific adaptation strategies?
- The redevelopment of the areas also raises economic, political, social, environmental and psychological issues, prompting questions as to the effects of pit closures on mining societies, on relations between players and how a community revolving entirely around the mine can be redeveloped. It would be useful to analyse strategies introduced in the various mining communities having experienced a similar or comparable situation. Oral researcher communication may be rounded off with accounts by players having experienced these transformations and/or having introduced measures as society's response to resilient communities.

### **Remembrance of coal mines.**

How do you shape remembrance after pit closures? This last theme involves archivists, historians, sociologists, stakeholders and witnesses, former miners and members of associations examining the coal-mining past in a search for the means to embrace the future.

Historians need to explore the writing of coal mine history now that the pits have closed, asking about the material available and how to put together and preserve shared memory after redevelopment, alongside archivists and other specialists in the humanities and social science.

A round table bringing together people with first-hand accounts of redevelopment (former miners, representatives of coal mine managers and political authorities) and observers (historians, archivists, statisticians, journalists and researchers) to prompt debate on this issue.

Communication proposals are to be sent to [irhis.recherche@univ-lille3.fr](mailto:irhis.recherche@univ-lille3.fr) (Put "Miners of the World conference" in the subject line) by 15 September 2012, in the form of a summary of up to 3,000 characters (spaces included), preceded with a title and enclosed with a short, 1-page CV for the author/s, specifying which institution they work with and their status. The scientific committee will give its answer in late October 2012 and the communication texts (up to 30,000 characters) must be sent in by 1 March 2013.

**Coordination and scientific organisation:**

Sylvie Aprile, *University Professor in contemporary history*, University of Lille 3.

Matthieu de Oliveira, *Lecturer in contemporary history*, University of Lille 3.

Béatrice Touchelay, *University Professor in contemporary history*, University of Lille 3 - IRHiS UMR CNRS 8529.

**For further details please contact:**

✉ [beatrice.touchelay@free.fr](mailto:beatrice.touchelay@free.fr)