

Press Release

The inclusion of Wallonia's major mining sites on the World Heritage List

Carlo Di Antonio, the Minister for Walloon Heritage, is pleased to announce that the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, which is currently holding its 36th session in Saint Petersburg, has **recognised Wallonia's major mining sites as World Heritage**.

Grand-Hornu, Bois-du-Luc, the Bois du Cazier and Blegny-Mine now feature, as a collective whole, on the prestigious List alongside other previously-recognised Walloon treasures (the lifts on the Canal du Centre, the Walloon Belfries, the Notre-Dame Cathedral in Tournai and the Neolithic Flint Mines at Spiennes).

Furthermore, the four sites form a coherent ensemble that justifies their serial nomination. This inclusion, which has met with Minister Di Antonio's delight, represents a genuine recognition of the history, diversity and richness of the major mining sites in Wallonia and Wallonia's mining heritage in general.

This recognition is the culmination of collaborative constructive efforts carried out throughout the candidacy by the parties involved in the four mining sites with the cooperation of Wallonia. However it is only a step, in the form of a challenge, in the mission to conserve and enhance the sites, a mission to which managers of the sites and all the operators and institutions concerned by the zones in the inclusion are committed.

For Minister Di Antonio, this inclusion constitutes a real opportunity for the development of heritage and tourism in Wallonia.

WHAT THE INCLUSION SIGNIFIES

According to the definition established by the World Heritage Committee, *outstanding universal value means cultural and/or natural significance which is so exceptional as to transcend national boundaries and to be of common importance for present and future generations of all humanity*. This means that sites recognised as world heritage belong to all peoples of the world and embody exceptional testimonies of the diversity of culture and the richness of nature.

To be included on the World Heritage List, the sites must have outstanding universal value and satisfy at least one of the ten selection criteria set out by UNESCO. The criteria met by the collection of the four sites are **criteria II** (to exhibit an important interchange of human values) and **IV** (to be an outstanding example of (a) significant stage(s) in human history).

The four sites offer a condensed insight into all aspects of mining heritage: expertise, landscape, remembrance, social or architectural and they also complement one another. As a whole they represent a place of cultural confluence which has absorbed contributions (exchanges in technology, migration of workers, transfer of ideas and knowledge distribution) from highly diverse origins and which exercised considerable influence in Europe and the rest of the world.

The four sites in and of themselves illustrate the intense migration flows that the Walloon collieries experienced, involving Flemish, Polish, Italian, Spanish, Greek, Moroccan and Turkish workers (and

many other nationalities besides). Among the 262 victims of the Bois du Cazier disaster, a dozen nationalities were identified.

Exploiting the “coal seam” located between Nord-Pas de Calais and the Aix-la-Chapelle Basin, the four sites span the same chronological period (from the beginning of the 19th century to the end of 20th century). The collection also forms a microcosm of the Industrial Revolution representing all the different stages of technological and social development. While the Blegny and Bois du Cazier sites represent the “work” element, the Grand-Hornu and Bois-du-Luc sites represent the “social” element illustrating through their architecture the relationships of power and social organisation with the creation of “workers’ villages” under the auspices of paternalism.

All aspects of coal mining are represented at the four sites, demonstrating the course of expertise that earned Wallonia its international renown. The particularly harsh and dangerous working conditions also became blatantly apparent across the four sites, nowhere more so than at Bois du Cazier, the site of the terrible disaster on 8 August 1956.

The sites, by their quality, diversity, uniqueness and the richness of their components also meet the standards of integrity and authenticity required by the World Heritage Committee.

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

This serial nomination will lead to the development and enhancement of the links that already existed between the four sites.

In the short term they could also build relationships with other industrial heritage sites already included on the List. The four Walloon mining sites are part of the continuity of industrial complexes of the first half of the 19th century, including the landscape of Blaenavon (Wales), included on the World Heritage List since 2000. Other sites such as Zollverein (Ruhr), included since 2001, belong to a later period.

The four Walloon mining sites offer an exemplary illustration of the Industrial Revolution in continental Europe as well as its consequences that shaped our societies of today. This inclusion represents a superb opportunity for the four mining sites to launch a completely new dynamic around the conservation and cultural and tourist value of these treasures recognised for their universal value.