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*Kortrijk station building in 2015
(Photo: Adriaan Linters).*

Industrial heritage on a European scaffold

Adriaan Linters

From the industrial heritage sector, more attention should be paid to a number of European initiatives that can help raise awareness of its value. This article highlights the initiatives of Europa Nostra, which was founded in 1963 on the initiative of Italia Nostra, an Italian organisation dedicated to saving Venice.

Especially during and after the 1975 Year of Monuments, Europa Nostra broadened its operation and expanded to all European countries. The European Year of Architectural Heritage 1975 brought a break with what 'heritage' had been before. Besides the better and intellectual classes, ordinary citizens and their organisations now had a say. The traditional heritage field of

churches, monasteries and castles was broadened and forts, commercial buildings and workers' housing were also covered. Through a number of publications, attention was drawn to repurposing,¹ in contrast to traditional restoration views that mostly dated back to the time of Viollet-le-Duc.

Today Europa Nostra, with its seat in The Hague and a second seat in Brussels, is the main European heritage platform, with a network in 50 countries, more than 250 member organisations (heritage associations and foundations with more than 5 million members), 150 associated organisations (government agencies, local authorities and companies) and 1,500 individual members.² For many years, Europa Nostra has been joined by the Flemish Association for Industrial Archaeology asbl (VVIA) and the European Federation of Associations of Industrial and Technical Heritage (EFAITH).

An annual award for exceptional projects

Since 2002, Europa Nostra has organised the 'Euro- pean Heritage Awards / Europa Nostra Awards' with the support of the European Union's Creative Europe programme.³ These reward excellence in cultural heritage conservation. By spreading the 'power of example', the award also aims to encourage further heritage efforts and projects across Europe and to provide examples and ideas.

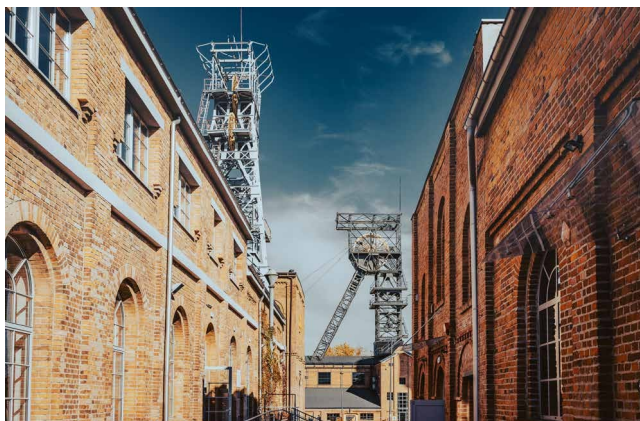
Whereas in the past the awards mainly went to traditional heritage projects, recently industrial heritage is increasingly coming into the spotlight. In 2019, the Flemish Society for Industrial Archaeology received an award in the 'dedicated service' category, because of its purely volunteer efforts, without struc- tural subsidies for 40 years.⁴ The jury appreciated the VVIA's relentless efforts to preserve a part of the heritage whose survival and sustainable restoration cannot taken for granted. She stressed, "Indus- trial heritage has long been a particularly endangered part of the family of cultural heritage, precious to preserve and in need of constant maintenance. Moreover, the sheer scale of the concept, which includes mills, mines, ships and factories, poses a great challenge to the individuals and organisations that want to preserve it for

future generations. Despite these and other complications, the Flemish Society for Industrial Archaeology has time and again been on the front line to protect those sites and monuments threatened with destruction, often without the much-needed financial support."



VVIA presentation at the European Heritage ceremony in Paris, October 2019 (VVIA photo library).

Europa Nostra also awarded several restoration prizes to industrial heritage projects in recent years. In 2024, there was an award for the restoration and repurposing of the Ignacy coal mine in Rybnik (Poland). The mine was opened in 1792 and had been in operation for more than 200 years. In 1999, faced with the threat of neglect and decay, miners mobilised to save the site. They formed an association with a clear mission: to convince mine management and local authorities of the importance of preserving this iconic facility. Their efforts paid off when, in 2005, the most valuable part of the mine was officially recognised in the Register of Cultural Property. The site came into the hands of the town of Rybnik and, although extensive renovation had been planned since 2014, renovation work only began in 2018. Thanks to the joint efforts of former miners, the city of Rybnik, the Polish state and EU funds, the complex was saved and given a new function as a cultural and recreational centre.



The Ignacy coal mine in Rybnik, Poland© Europa Nostra.

Also recognised in 2024 were the Flaxmill Maltings in Shrewsbury (UK), formerly the flax mill 'Ditherington Flax Mill'. When it was built in 1797, it was the world's first iron-framed building. It is now an adaptable work and coworking space, a hub for social enterprises and a place for leisure destinations. Historic England's flagship heritage regeneration project was funded from several sources, including the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Historic England, Local Enterprise Partnership, and Shropshire Council. Funding for training and special projects was raised through crowdfunding, charitable contributions and individual philanthropy. Volunteers put in more than 17,000 hours of their time in bringing the story of this special place to life.



Flaxmill Maltings in Shrewsbury (UK)© Europa Nostra.

2023 featured the steam brewery in Lobeč, Czech Republic, with a history dating back to 1586 in a village of 140 inhabitants. The long-term project to restore the brewery has brought the small village back to life and ensured it will be enjoyed for generations to come.

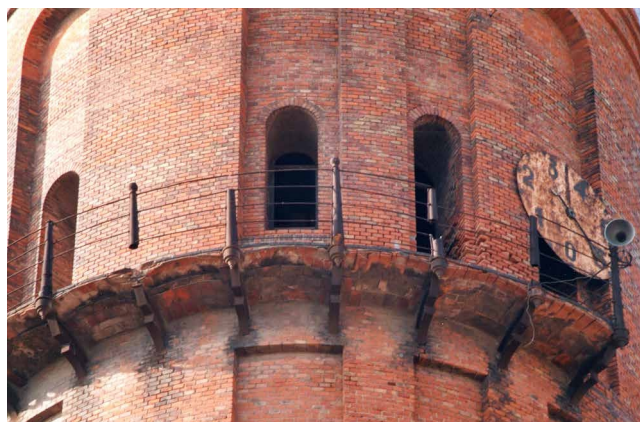
In addition, in 2023, a restoration award went to the stone bridge over the river Deba along the famous Camino de Santiago in Spain. Designed by Antonio Cortazar, construction of the bridge was completed in 1866. On 5 July 2018, the central pillar of the bridge suffered a sudden collapse, severely damaging the two adjacent vaults and the structure on the verge of collapse. This required engineers-restorers to investigate numerous traditional construction techniques.

In 2023, two awards also went to water-related projects: a first to the safeguarding of the traditional 'Arte- Xávega' fishing technique in Cantanhede, Portugal; a second to the restoration centres for traditional vessels established by the Norwegian Society for the Preservation of Ships ('Norsk Forening for Fartøyvern'), an NGO of owners of traditional vessels, together with the Norwegian Directorate for Cultural Heritage ('Riksantikvaren').

In 2022, the Atlungstad distillery, founded in 1855, won awards. It is the oldest Norwegian distillery still in operation and one of the few in Europe producing potato-based spirits.

An exciting international research project (France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Slovenia and Spain) that won awards at the time was SILKNOW, which developed an intelligent computer system under the then European R&D programme Horizon 2020 project to improve our understanding of Europe's silk heritage. This used new information and communication technologies to unlock heritage for museums, education, tourism, cultural and creative industries.

At the 2019 awards ceremony, the mining project, the Sztol- nia Królowa Luiza (the Queen Luisa mine corridor) received an together with the VVIA.⁵ It is under the management of the mining museum in Zabrze. It is nice to be able to exchange information and experiences with colleagues on such occasions.



Besòs water tower, Poble Nou (Barcelona) © Europa Nostra.

And here we would also like to mention the Besòs water tower in Barcelona's Poble Nou district. We were able to visit it several times with the VVIA together with our friend architect Toni Vilanova, who was in charge of its restoration, and for whom we supported the application. The water tower was once part of a large industrial estate, and now stands amid new housing developments. It was preserved under pressure from the neighbourhood, and is now at the disposal of the history association 'Arxiu Historic del Poble Nou', which houses its archives and organises visits there.

Industrial heritage from Belgium and the Netherlands also used to win awards. In Flanders, the wooden 'Hertboom' windmill in Onze-Lieve-Vrouw-Lombeek first won that honour in 2003. And then there were the re-use of the 'Gare Maritime' of Thurn & Taxis in Brussels in 2021, the re-use of the De Hoorn brewery in Leuven in 2016, the restoration of the Wielemans-Ceuppens brewery's machine hall and machinery in Brussels in 2013, Antwerp's Central Station in 2011 (which was still planned for demolition in the early 1970s) and the 's Hertogenmolens in Aarschot.

In the Netherlands in 2020, the honour went to the magnificent re-use of the LocHal in Tilburg. 2020 also honoured the personal efforts of Don Duco, who since 1969 collected the world's most extensive and varied collection of smoking pipes and tobacciana, housed in the 'Amsterdam Pipe Museum'. In 2015, it was the turn of De Hallen in Amsterdam. This tram depot, built between 1900-1928 to store and maintain the first electric trams with its Polonceau trusses, was transformed into a Centre for Media, Fashion Culture and Crafts. In 2011, it was the Langstraat bridges between 's-Hertogenbosch and Lage Zwaluwe,⁶ in 2010 the Westergasfabriek in Amsterdam, and in 2008 the Van Nelle factory in Rotterdam.

Action for endangered heritage

The 'The 7 Most Endangered' programme is a campaign to save endangered heritage sites in Europe.⁷ It raises awareness, makes independent technical assessments, makes recommendations for action and seeks to raise support to save the selected endangered sites. Listing is often a catalyst for action and an incentive to mobilise public or private support.

The programme was launched in January 2013 by Europa Nostra with the European Investment Bank as a founding partner and the Council of Europe Development Bank as an associated partner. It was inspired by a similarly successful project of the US National Trust for Historic Preservation. The 7 Most Endangered is supported by the European Union's Creative Europe programme.

In 2013, the VVIA unsuccessfully submitted the candidacy of the 'Charlesville', the last Congo boat that provided the link between Antwerp and the Belgian colony. The ship ended up as the 'Georg Büchner' in Rostock and was threatened with scrapping there. Despite protests, the Charlesville was towed from Rostock to Klaipėda in Lithuania on 28 May 2013 to be scrapped, but en route the ship sank off the Polish coast in the Baltic Sea.



The action group around the Beringen coal laundry in 2018© archive VVIA.

In 2018, we made it to the shortlist with the Beringen coal laundry.⁸ Although it did not make the final selection, it marked a turning point and fuelled the argument for preservation. Whereas in early 2018 everything was ready for demolition, the complex was saved and meaningful repurposing projects are now on the table.

At the end of 2022, the VVIA submitted a dossier for the Kortrijk reconstruction station (1951-1956). It was announced in January that the station had been shortlisted, and on 13 April that it made the selection of The 7 Most Endangered 2023.⁹ This triggered a huge discussion about the value of recent heritage and railway heritage, not only in Kortrijk but also across the border. Supported by the European recognition, the VVIA applied for legal protection as a monument in mid-February. However, on 25 April Flemish minister Diependaele, responsible for Immovable Heritage, announced that he did not want to protect the station, despite the favourable opinion of the Agency for Immovable Heritage. A day later, the Belgian railway company SNCB announced plans for demolition and new construction of a megalomaniacal project. Meanwhile, negotiations for preservation and the search for alternatives continue, supported by experts from the European Investment Bank Institute and Europa Nostra.

Despite all opposition, a demolition and building permit was granted, which is now the subject of legal proceedings. The outcome is still uncertain.



Action to preserve Kortrijk station during the Open Monument Day, September 2023 (photo: 'Save our ' working group).

In 2024, the 'courées', the typical working-class alleys of Roubaix and Tourcoing in northern France, were recognised. These towns attracted tens of thousands of textile workers, not only from France but also from neighbouring Belgium (so-called 'Frenchmen'). They were housed in small houses in narrow dead-end streets squeezed behind existing terraced houses, creating a distinct morphology that reflected working-class life. The courées embody the history of the former textile workers and the heritage of their living conditions, which were an integral part of the region's larger industrial ecosystem. They serve as "lieux de mémoire" for the region and invite us to interpret nineteenth-century European history. The main mission of the 'Roubaix-Tourcoing courées' movement is to stop the municipality's demolition project. An application for protection has been officially submitted to the French Ministry of Culture.



VVIA visit to the Roubaix courées, August 2024 (photo Adriaan Linters).

In addition, in recent years, interesting industrial sites in several countries have been included in the lists of The 7 Most Endangered. They offer not only a cross-section of the threats to this heritage, but also of the changes in mentality that make conservation possible.

The first recognised endangered industrial site, in 2013, was the landscape of Roşia Montană, in the western part of the Carpathians (Romania). It is characterised by the mining of gold and silver, from prehistoric above-ground exploits to deep underground galleries, continued through the middle centuries and modern times, until the 1970s. The underground heritage consists of a vast corridor network of about 150 kilometres, including 7 kilometres from Dacian and Roman times, as well as in situ preserved equipment and artefacts, cemeteries, structures and roads from ancient to modern times. In the mountain valleys are small towns and villages linked to the mining industry. In 2021, Roşia Montană was included in UNESCO's World Heritage List, as well as UNESCO's Heritage at Risk.¹⁰

Afterwards, five other threatened industrial sites took their turn. In 2016: the Colbert Bridge in Normandy's Dieppe,

which is known as the last large hydraulically powered swing bridge still in operation in Europe. The bridge, designed by engineer Paul Alexandre was opened in 1889. It is the only link between the historic centre of Dieppe and the port district of Le Pollet, 12,000 vehicles and 1,800 pedestrians daily. It was threatened by the construction of a new bridge, but The 7 Most Endangered managed to turn the tide. The tourist board included the bridge among the city's landmarks, and in March 2024 the tender for its restoration took place.



Grimsby Ice Factory in Grimsby (England) © Europa Nostra.

In 2018: The 1900 Grimsby Ice Factory, designed by engineer W.F. Cott is a Grade II* listed industrial building in Grimsby Docks (England), the world's leading fishing port at the beginning of the 20th century. The factory supplied ice for packing and fish within the UK and to numerous other countries, at a time before artificial refrigeration existed. The recognition generated attention. In 2021,

conservation works are being carried out on the roofs and new proposals were recently submitted to secure the structure and future use of the buildings.¹¹

In 2020: The Szombierki power plant in Bytom, Poland, designed in 1920 by brothers Georg and Emil Zil Imann, was one of the last coal-fired electricity

power plants in Europe. For the past 20 years, the building has stood empty. Although the site was locally registered as a monument and possessed enormous potential for redevelopment, the power plant was threatened with demolition and its condition had deteriorated significantly. An innovative and multi-layered educational, museum, cultural and entertainment project, which was planned for 2025 but has since been delayed, is currently underway.



Szombierki power plant in Bytom, Poland© Europa Nostra.

In 2021: The Achensee Steam Railway is a rack railway that has connected Jenbach to Lake Achensee in Tyrol, Austria, for more than 130 years. The expert committee pointed out the threat and stressed the importance of preserving and appreciating this railway line as part of the European Year of Rail 2021. The line has been saved and the locomotives are still steaming there.

In 2022: The Zogu Bridge over the River Mat in northern Albania, built in 1927. It is considered a major achievement in metal structures and concrete structures over rivers in southern Europe. Technical and other feasibility studies are now underway to restore the bridge.¹²

In 2023, in addition to Kortrijk station, the water mills in the village of Bistrica, along the Bistrica river in eastern Serbia, were selected. They form a unique complex of historical mills for grinding grain and calendering fabric. Constructed between the 19th and mid-20th centuries, they represent small-scale and wooden vernacular rural constructions in the Balkans.

Keeping an eye on

Both programmes present the most important industrial and other sites, threatened or otherwise, in Council of Europe member states. Browsing through them is fascinating, but they are also two initiatives to keep an eye on, as a call for applications is launched every year. Of course, the impact of recognition cannot be underestimated. Applications for The 7 Most Endangered traditionally have to be submitted by mid-September, those for the European Heritage Awards by mid-October. The prerequisites and procedures can be found on the websites listed.

Endnotes

- 1 See, for example, Sherban Cantacuzino, *New Uses for Old Buildings* (London 1975).
- 2 <https://www.europanostra.org/>
- 3 <https://www.europeanheritageawards.eu/>. Through this website, can find all projects that have ever received an award. Therefore, we do not include a link with individual winners.
- 4 <http://industrieelerfgoed.be/content/vvia-europees-geerd-parijs>
- 5 <https://www.europeanheritageawards.eu/winners/queen-louise-adit-complex-poland/>. The restoration and opening up of the mine project were largely co-funded by the European Commission and carried out over more than 15 years. The total cost was €39,629,100, of which ,551,175 was financed by European Union grants.
- 6 See also Anton van Tuijl, 'Reuse of railway bridges in the Netherlands', in: *Erfgoed van Industrie en Techniek*, 2022/4, 2-11.
- 7 <https://7mostendangered.eu/>. Through this website, one can find all heritage sites recognised as endangered, not just the industrial sites we mention in this article.
- 8 <http://industrieelerfgoed.be/content/kolenwasserij-beringen-most-endangered>
- 9 <http://industrieelerfgoed.be/wederopbouwstation-Kortrijk>
- 10 The 'List of World Heritage in Danger', <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1552/>
- 11 See BBC website: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-humber-65708125>
- 12 <https://amfora.al/en/zogu-bridge-solutions-to-rescue-this-engineer-ring-masterpiece-of-the-20s/>

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Foto achterzijde

Interieur van de LocHal in Tilburg, in 1932 gebouwd als werkplaats voor onderhoud en reparatie van spoorlocomotieven van de Nederlandse Spoorwegen. Sinds 2019 herbestemd als kunst- en cultuurcentrum en bibliotheek in de Spoorzone van Tilburg. In 2020 bekroond met een European Heritage Award for Europa Nostra (foto: Europa Nostra).

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