

Declaration of Katowice on the future of Working Industrial and Mobile Heritage

Issued to reflect the presentations and discussions at the Conference on the European Heritage of Coal and Steel, held in Katowice, Poland, on 10 and 11 April 2025

Modern Europe as we know it today has its origins in the development of science and technology. Technological achievements have fuelled industrialisation, transforming societies and driving political and socio-economic change. Evolving industries have, ultimately, improved living conditions and led to a doubling of average life expectancy, enhancing the material world around us. This has, however, occurred at a cost, the most obvious manifestation of which is intensifying Climate Change.

Mindful of our changing climate, it is no surprise that Europeans are taking action to mitigate the negative impacts of industrialisation. As a result, older technologies are being replaced by more environmentally friendly, sustainable and efficient alternatives, and the intention is that in the coming years, fossil fuels – notably coal – will cease to be used as a source of energy. This is, of course, to be welcomed, but there is a strong argument for possible exceptions to be made to accommodate the preservation of Europe's hugely important working and mobile industrial heritage.

The commitment of the signatories to safeguarding working and mobile industrial heritage is fully aligned with, and supportive of, the objectives of the European Green Deal. As a community of industrial heritage institutions, museums and civil society organisations, we recognise our particular responsibility to contribute actively to decarbonisation, climate awareness and sustainable transformation. Cultural heritage institutions are trusted voices in society, whose actions are visible, evaluated and capable of engaging citizens in this transition.

In this sense, the declaration follows the principles set out in the European Cultural Heritage Green Paper (2021), initiated by ICOMOS and Europa Nostra, which underlines that: *“creativity rooted in culture, together with an extractive attitude to nature, helped introduce carbon-based industrialisation; creativity, rooted both in past and contemporary culture, combined with a holistic approach to nature, can power the transition to a perpetually regenerative economy.”*

We, the participants of the Conference on the European Heritage of Coal and Steel, therefore wish to take action that will help preserve the working and mobile industrial heritage of Europe. Although work is underway to evaluate and convert to alternative energy sources for some of our working heritage, in many cases of mobile industrial heritage these alternative fuels have so far proved incapable of offering effective and immersive visitors experiences.

Therefore, one major option to be considered is to maintain a modest supply of fossil fuels to power this heritage and maintain it in an operational condition. Especially for the case of mobile heritage this is vital to its successful conservation as a “living heritage”, greatly enhancing its value as uniquely powerful educational and tourism assets. In particular, it is also essential if this heritage is to be kept alive for the benefit of future generations.

It is important to recognise that the quantity of fossil fuels that is required is very small. This is partly because, on a European scale, actions have already been taken to enhance the efficiency of many of the movable monuments that consume fossil fuels, such as steam locomotives, steam engines,

steam-powered ships, and vehicles powered by combustion engines; for stationary fossil machinery also alternative fuels or drive options often can provide suitable solutions.

A significant consideration is how these supplies of fuel might be secured in the future. As a first step a robust assessment of the actual demand for “heritage coal” is required, also a balanced analysis of costs and benefits of different options, taking into account technical, economic, regulatory aspects as well as aspects of conservation and “authenticity”.

The next step should be to identify a currently operating hard coal mine which might be preserved to provide a small amount of fossil fuel to power historic industrial and mobile heritage. In recent decades, a substantial number of coal mines across Europe have closed. Most of the remaining mines do not produce coal suitable for steam locomotives in particular. Still Poland produces the best locomotive coal with, for example, two mines near Katowice providing by far the best quality in terms of sizing, lower caloric value, ash, sulphur, and moisture.

Were this to be achieved, the vision is that the mine would remain in production as a separate enterprise with the specific purpose of supplying coal for the needs of working and mobile industrial heritage, and for other specialist heritage sector activities (such as historic metallurgy and ceramics). The intention would be that, in addition to securing heritage fuel supplies for the future, the mine could also play a leading role as a technical education and training centre for the local mining community and the region which would carry on its specific knowledge as intangible heritage.

Any use of the coal would then constitute an exceptional exemption, strictly limited to very small quantities and justified solely in the context of heritage conservation and interpretation. Nevertheless, given the multiple environmental, regulatory and financial challenges related to the operation of a mine, alternative supply options must remain under consideration.

The third step then is to verify the feasibility of keeping one of the Upper Silesian coal mines in operation, which could supply the required fossil fuel and at the same time meet the educational objectives mentioned above.

In order to achieve this goal, the signatories of this agreement plan to support the following actions:

1. At a European Scale: Political Support

To support activities aimed at obtaining the consent of the European Parliament for the continued but very limited use of fossil fuels specifically to fuel historic technical engines, machines and vehicles across Europe, exclusively for the purpose of safeguarding the cultural and educational value of industrial heritage in line with the commitments of the European Cultural Heritage Green Paper. This includes working and moving heritage owned by European museums as well as public and private collectors and organisations who have collections of vehicles and devices that consume fossil fuels.

2. At a Regional Scale: Nurturing the Mining Heritage of Silesia

To support initiatives examining the concrete feasibility of retaining a modest capacity for coal extraction, with special consideration given to one of the historic Upper Silesian coal mines that are currently in operation and with the specific purpose of supplying Europe’s technical monuments with the coal that they need to stay alive. The signatories of the agreement support further work to assess the demands, costs and benefits of such a solution aiming at a possible continued limited production at a suitable selected mine. This involves ensuring the basis of its future operation on a safe and sustainable basis.

3. Traditional Skills and Knowledge: Intangible Technical Heritage

This declaration is being made in the knowledge that our working and mobile industrial heritage is of enormous cultural and educational value, and that this will be significantly questioned if a substantial part of it won't be operative any more in its initial form once the fuel it requires to operate becomes unavailable. We know that communities across Europe will be seriously exposed to challenging conditions if the technical knowledge, expertise and skills associated with this living heritage are not passed on to future generations and are lost.

Thus, a heritage coal mine – should it prove feasible – could serve not only as a limited source of heritage fuel, but would allow to continue the local mining community of the region, even to a small extent, and keep alive the intangible technical heritage involved, supporting this knowledge to be passed to museum professionals and ensuring the authentic operation and interpretation of mining-related machinery.

The signatories of this agreement hereby declare their intention to conduct further work aimed at achieving these goals within the established international platform of 'WIMH' – Working Industrial and Mobile Heritage.

The Katowice Declaration is published under the supervision of the WIMH platform committed to the preservation and promotion of working industrial and mobile heritage in Europe.

The following organisations are partners in WIMH (in alphabetical order):

ERIH - European Route of Industrial Heritage

Europa Nostra - Industrial and Engineering Heritage Committee

Fedecrail - Federation of European Museum and Tourist Railways

FIVA - Fédération Internationale des Véhicules Anciens

TICCIH - the Committee for the Conservation of the Industrial Heritage

