

ERIH STRATEGY FOR INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE TOURISM

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Summary

The most important concept for the ERIH strategy, learned from its model route in the Ruhr, is Network Marketing. Classical methods of marketing have much less success than direct customer contact on site. To tell local visitors that there is more to see in the Regional or European Routes, by media on site and by the assistance of the counter personal, is the best way of marketing. But in the tourist market a 'brand' must be a common 'seal of quality'. This means the visitors or customers expect something to be satisfied with their visit.

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1 ERIH Strategy for Industrial Heritage Tourism

ERIH started with the creation of a master plan starting with a model region in north-west Europe. The first step was the definition of quality criteria for the selection of the Anchor Points. Then we developed a system very similar to the one at the Ruhr. Anchor Points and other sites are in the main route, but also form part of 'Transnational Theme Routes' and 'Regional Routes'. Promoting the network is most effective with the existence of a Regional Route and/or an Anchor Point. Both should be aware that their activities should always make their membership of the whole network as visible as possible. Only this guarantees the overall success of the entire system.

ERIH opened in 2004 and since then it has developed quickly and now stretches through twenty-four countries in Europe. Fortunately, it was accepted very much by the European institutions – and no wonder, it is by far the biggest of the continents' cultural networks.

ERIH is more than a marketing network. The ERIH network encourages the transnational transfer of knowledge and the development of joint marketing strategies and cross-border initiatives. It is about exchanging experiences: there is no need to invent every new wheel. There are many solutions for good interpretation, preservation methods, effective marketing and so on which can be shared. This will save money and will raise quality. And you never walk alone: this is more important than you might believe. To feel not alone with the daily boring problems you are confronted with is of a great psychological value.

Therefore ERIH is a success for the members. Based on common experience and the reputation of the network local sites and networks very often benefit, receive more support (and sometimes money) from their politicians, can upgrade their site interpretation and more. One of the best examples is the Regional Route of Upper Silesia in Poland which is very impressive and attracts a lot of visitors.

And: Industrial Heritage is a growing business - in principle, but for ERIH especially. We know about 150 million of visitors to Industrial Heritage Sites in Europe, ERIH site have about 24 million at the moment. For many of these sites numbers of visitors had been upgraded for a third since they had become a member. The best economical impact on the sites and the region had obviously the marketing of a 'Regional Route'.

Finally, 'Industrial Heritage Tourism' should not only be understood as a commercial branch of the local activities of a heritage site. Its big importance for me is to serve as a tool to tell the story of the history of industry – and of the people who served it. Especially the transnational aspects and the story of the 'industrial landscapes' can be told ideally when we are able to make people travel through them:

- ERIH makes connections between sites, visitors, local communities and colleagues and tourism organizations
- ERIH is a tool of network marketing: one for all, all for one
- ERIH seeks to develop sustainable tourism
- ERIH seeks to lobby for the preservation of industrial heritage
- ERIH tells the story of the industrial landscape
- ERIH seeks to tell the human stories associated with a common European Heritage.