

## Causes and Impacts of Industrial Decline in the Sambre Meuse Valley - 2015 Q4B

I have studied the causes and impact of industrial decline in the Sambre Meuse Valley. The Sambre Meuse Valley is located in the Wallonia region of Belgium. Industrial decline occurs when a region that was once industrially prosperous is no longer able to sustain its level of economic development.

One major cause of industrial decline is the depletion of resources. This greatly affected the Sambre Meuse Valley. During the Industrial Revolution, the Sambre Meuse Valley was the economic core of Belgium. The region prospered due to its large reserves of coal and iron ore. Steelworks, engineering and chemical industries all located in the area because the deposit of coal made it suitable for heavy industry. At its peak, the Sambre Meuse Valley had over 120 mines and employed 122,000 people. Over 30 million tonnes of coal were mined each year. Wallonia became the core region of Belgium. Industrial growth lasted for 150 years in the valley until 1960, when rapid industrial decline began.

By the 1960s, the region's main coal deposits were used up. This caused many factories to move from Wallonia into Poland which had large, cheap deposits of coal. Oil and gas deposits were discovered off the northern coast of Belgium, in the Flanders region. Oil is a more efficient and cleaner power source than coal. Many factories in the Sambre Meuse Valley relocated to the Flanders region.

One major impact of industrial decline is the creation of industrial wasteland and unemployment. Between 1960 and 1973, over 50,000 people lost their jobs in Wallonia. The region's unemployment rate soared and outward migration occurred as workers from Wallonia searched for employment in Brussels or Flanders. Unemployment rates peaked at 20%. The Sambre Meuse Valley struggled to attract new industries as the outdated factories and industrial waste made the region unattractive.

Flanders became the economic core of Belgium so the government and the European Union invested in redeveloping the Sambre Meuse Valley and the whole of Wallonia. Unemployed workers were provided with training in order to give them the necessary skills to work in modern industries. Industrial wastes (such as slag heaps) were cleaned to make the region more attractive. Communication links were proved to make the region more accessible from other major cities. Charleroi Airport was upgraded to offer more international routes. Modern, turnkey industrial estates were built to attract MNCs (Multinational Corporations) to the region. Although these efforts brought some economic recovery to the region, the standard of living in Wallonia is still far below that of the Flanders region.