

Industrial Decline in Wallonia|sample answer

Q: 'Explain the growth of any one developed economy that you have studied under one or more of the following headings: Financial services, Tourism and Industrial decline.' (2010 Q8 B.)

Wallonia, Belgium has declined in importance over the last century. It was a region which contained coalfields which were used during the industrial revolution,

Coal has many uses and is an important material eg Steel industry, dyes and paint. During the industrial revolution textile and steel industries were built near coal fields to reduce cost of transporting raw materials. Belgium began its industrial revolution in the 12th century when coal mining began in the Sambre- Meuse valley Wallonia. Wallonia was considered an important, economic region.

When coal eventually ran out industries using coal faced increased cost for imported coal. As a result many industries left or closed down. Thousands lost their jobs across the region.

At its peak more than 120 mines employed over 120,000 people and produced 30 million tonnes a year. The last mine closed in 1992.

The availability of cheaper coal imported from the US and Australia encouraged many coal based industries to re-located to ports like Antwerp in the North of Belgium.

Coalfield towns lost their main employment. Unemployment skyrocketed and coal field towns became regions of industrial decline and server urban decay.

By the 1990s Wallonia was classified by the EU as both a convergence region and a competitiveness and employment region under the regional policy.

As they dug deep it was nearly impossible to be productive in the mines. The cost of maintaining the extraction of coal became too high and local industries couldn't compete with the modern industries in Antwerp.

In the mid 1980's the government decided mines should be closed. They provided a €2.5 billion redundancy package to the miners.

The EU had a policy offering financial support to the most efficient mines across Europe and the Belgians did not qualify. The mines were not economical like the German and British mines at the time.

Between 1960-1973, 50,000 jobs were lost in the region. Industries associated with mining eg chemicals and engineering jobs also declined. This led to unemployment levels reaching 10%

Emigration to more prosperous port areas around Antwerp were common.

The landscape in the Sambre Meuse Valley was heavily polluted. It was a depressing landscape to live in as it had few recreational activities. It was nicknamed the Black Country.

Today the EU is helping Wallonia as it qualifies for funding under the cohesion fund. Between 2006 and 2013 it received over €1.2 billion in European structural funds.

The Belgian government is encouraging investment in the region by offering low interest loans, grants and tax incentives. It is encouraging transport lines and cleaning up run down towns such as Charleroi.

Attempting to attract light footloose industries.

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