



Preface to the special issue

Mapping the culture of the last coalfield in Europe.

Marta Tomczok¹, Jan Malura², Robert Krzysztofik³

¹University of Silesia in Katowice, Faculty of Humanities, Katowice, Poland

²University of Ostrava, Faculty of Arts, Department of Czech Literature and Literary Criticism, Ostrava, Czech Republic

³University of Silesia in Katowice, Faculty of Natural Sciences, Institute of Social and Economic Geography and Spatial Management, Sosnowiec, Poland

Mapping the culture of Europe's last coalfield is the subject of both the current issue of "Environmental & Socio-economic Studies" and the Polish-Czech Opus Lap project, within which most of the articles published here were written. Their thematic scope is very broad, but it fits both within the aforementioned research project and within the intertwining disciplines to which it is linked: geography, literary studies, cultural studies, and art history. The interdisciplinarity of research on the legacy of the hard coal industry is currently one of the most important trends in energy transformation, as well as in teaching about it. The process of decarbonization cannot be thought of solely as an engineering exercise consisting of replacing the coal industry with renewable energy. The process of adapting to change also requires "soft" measures, aimed at commemorating what is passing and creating a foundation for transformation from post-industrial heritage. However, all of these activities require a thorough mapping of the area – both its historical, past, and present dimensions.

The map's goal is to visualize the network of cultural connections with coal, understood literally, geologically, and metaphorically. The coal mining is part of the mineral-based industry that developed on a large scale in Upper Silesia and western part of Lesser Poland from the 18th century onward. Much contemporary research on the culture associated with energy transition is developed both in isolation from direct contact between researchers and maps (cartographers, GIS systems, field observations) and without any connection to industrial history. The goal of this issue of "Environmental & Socio-economic Studies", as mentioned, is quite the opposite – to demonstrate that the connections between geography and the humanities are crucial in the process of energy transition, one that respects both tangible and intangible heritage.

The texts published here were prepared by researchers from the University of Ostrava and the University of Silesia, working as part of the joint Opus Lap project to create a digitized, open cultural map of the Upper Silesian Coal Basin. The map's goal is to visualize the network of cultural connections with coal, understood literally, geologically, and metaphorically, as part of the mineral-based industry that developed on a large scale in Silesia from the 18th century onward. This international collaboration stems from a concern to emphasize the need for cross-border research in the Upper Silesian Coal Basin. For the first time in the history of collaboration between Polish-Czech humanities scholars and geographers, this research is being undertaken on such a large scale. Its most important outcome, besides the map itself, is the development of a mapping methodology. This methodology begins with a thorough cartographic reconnaissance of the studied area and focuses on spatially distributed objects such as poorhouses, monuments, sculptures, and murals.

By mapping them, the authors not only analyze real and potential tourist routes of the mining and metallurgical industries, but also the explicit and implicit connections between cultural texts and industry. Such analyses are rare in the humanities, as they propose, instead of a universalizing perspective, a topographical specificity, which, when combined with an artifact, can serve as more than just an insignificant detail. Such a spatialization and spatialization of humanities research is crucial in the era of energy transformation, as it has additional cognitive and educational value, drawing attention to local industrial history, which, were it not for activities such as mapping, would have faded into oblivion.

The texts collected in this issue cover topics such as a literary map of Ostrava, post-mining sculptures in the Czech Republic, industrial-themed murals in Katowice, industrial photography, shallow coal mining, historical places of mining, and last but not least – cultural aspects of postindustrial illnesses. The research data, collected in the form of maps, tables, and summaries, are intended to help readers recognize post-industrial culture and its entanglements with space and the environment; they also frequently reference the environmental history of coal, which today constitutes a crucial background to the Anthropocene.

Marta Tomczok, Jan Malura, Robert Krzysztofik

The articles contained in this issue (written by Iva Malkova, Marta Tomczok, Lucyna Sadzikowska, Jakub Ivánek, Ondřej Durczak and Robert Krzysztofik) were created as outcomes of the project Mapping the culture of the last coalfield in Europe project, supported by the Czech Science Foundation, no. 25-14527L and NCN Poland, UMO-2023/51/1/HS2/01809.