

## Leaving Certificate **Regional Geography**

**2013 Q 4 (C)**

**Q: Examine how socio-economic factors can be used to define regions with reference to any examples you have studied. (30marks)**

There are socio-economic factors that can define a region, such as industry. The example I have studied is the Sambre-Meuse Coalfields in Belgium and Cork in Ireland.

The coalfields stretch about 150km from the french border to Liège along the Sambre-Meuse valley in Belgium. At the start of the nineteenth century it was one of the first regions of continental Europe to have large-scale industrialization. However, in order for the region to develop they depended on the major urban-industrial European markets, good canal and railway networks.

The coalfields are in Wallonia. As more jobs become available in coal mining and heavy industry, many immigrants moved to Belgium, especially from Flanders. With so many nationalities it made Wallonia the cultural and economic region in Belgium.

However, after the 1950's, the Sambre-Meuse began to decline. This was due to various regions. They discovered new alternative sources of energy instead of coal. The costs of production increased and so they couldn't afford to compete with world trade. New technology replaced human power needed for work and so many jobs were lost to new machinery.

The decline of this industry brought consequences. Due to job losses, unemployment levels rose and people moved away again through out-migration. As the heavy industries declined, so did the local regions that depended on them. By the year 1984, the final colliery of the Sambre-Meuse had closed and it left a scarred landscape which looked ugly. Flemish-speaking flanders replaced french-speaking Wallonia as the economic core of Belgium, which has caused tension between them ever since.

As a more local study, I have studied the Greater Cork region also. When Ireland joined the European Union in 1973, Cork was Ireland's dominant centre for large-scale, port-related industries. These industries included steelworks, shipyard, oil refinery and ford car assembly plant.

Up to the 1980's, Cork's industries provided the entire Greater Cork region with good employment. However, when the recession hit in the early 1980's, decisions were made to close down most of these industries in Cork. By 1985, the shipyards, ford and Dunlop plants had been closed with a huge loss of 3,000 jobs. Cork had experienced deindustrialization and became a region of industrial decline and a black spot for national unemployment.

However, in the 1990's, Cork's economy was revived as many new industries moved into the city. These are mainly chemical and pharmaceutical companies.

In conclusion, these are socio-economic factors that define a region from Belgium and Ireland that I have studied.