

HERITAGE, MINING PARKS AND TOURISM IN SPAIN

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1. INTRODUCTION: MINING TERRITORIES, ECONOMIC CRISIS AND RATIONALISATION

In Spain, mining activities have generated gains and prosperity, in addition to contributing towards the country's industrialisation. However, from the mid 1970s, the great mining areas had to take on the repercussions of the so-called «oil crisis» and subsequent industrial rationalisation process in the face of competition from a much more profitable type of mining in lesser developed countries, and so many of them closed down. These areas contain a natural and cultural heritage whose conservation, rehabilitation and subsequent enhancement can be a valid strategy to give them a socio-economic boost with a view to tourism.

2. CONSERVATION OF MINING HERITAGE AND TOURISM

Understanding heritage from a territorial perspective (Cañizares, 2009a: 93 and ff.) and even considering territory itself as heritage (territorial heritage) enables us to discover different forms of heritage resources. Within this analytical framework, an increasingly specific assessment is carried out of the material and immaterial heritage of these agonising mining areas, through what we have denominated *mining heritage* or *mining-industrial heritage*. This is to say «the mining and industrial heritage consisting of material and immaterial remains resulting from the industrial activities that were conducted in the past or that are being conducted at present, which are an integral part of the cultural identity of the social groups at specific times in their history» (Cañizares, 2005: 29).

In the 1990s, Spain begun to perceive the potential of mining and industrial heritage, although any actions had to overcome certain obstacles, such as large investments of questionable profitability due to an inability to compete with traditional tourism, reluctance due to lack of aesthetic value or environmental deficiencies (Cueto, 2010: 163). Overcoming some of these obstacles was without a doubt possible due to a series of events, such as recognition by UNESCO including some elements linked to industrialisation and mining within the assets classed as World Heritage; the progressive protection of elements of heritage value through the declaration as Heritage of Cultural Interest under Spanish

laws; the creation of a UNESCO-ICOMOS Faculty (in Spain) of Mining, Industrial and Historic Heritage within the Technical University of Madrid; activities carried out by organisations such as the International Committee for the Conservation of Industrial Heritage (TICCIH-Spain) and the Society for the Defence of Geological and Mining Heritage (SEDPEGYM in Spanish); or the progress made with regards to planning instruments such as the *Industrial Heritage Plan*, currently under the Spanish Cultural Heritage Institute, which is, at present, being reviewed in order to tackle the need for protection, conservation and social exposure of such heritage that is considered to be living proof of, and an essential element to help understand and document, a period that was key in our history, thus setting the foundations for their conservation, in view of their rapid transformation and deterioration.

3. DOES MINING TOURISM EXIST IN SPAIN?

The rich heritage legacy of the mining areas has become the basis for various actions aimed at revamping these territories through the creation of museums, which, in some cases, are the mines themselves or re-converted/rehabilitated material elements (workshops, control rooms, etc.) for other uses such as cultural (exhibition centres), educational (university campuses) or entrepreneurial (hotels).

Spain has been witness to the «tourist revamping of the once obsolete mining territories» (Cañizares, 2008a: 12) in mining areas that had been gradually closed down and that have managed to recover part of their heritage elements to integrate them into a tourist development strategy. In this respect, the average sum of investments made in large mining recovery projects has, in the last few years, reached a figure of more than 7.5 million euros per year and the number of tourists that have been to see them is now close to 2 million per year (Puche and Mazadiego, 2007: 165). It is thus possible that here as well as in other European countries, one can speak of progressive consolidation, still ongoing, of the so-called *Mining Tourism* or *Industrial and Mining Heritage Tourism* (Llurdes, 1997: 198), also known as *Mining Tourism* or *Industrial Tourism* (here integrating the mining side), more recently referred to as *Technotourism* (Alvarez, 2009b) and even *Geotourism* for instances where the geological and mining heritage gain prominence together. In any case, a type of tertiary activity linked to tourism in which mining areas that were closed down, restored and appropriately rehabilitated display their heritage assets with regards to the territory they are in, thus turning it into a museum itself. The educational duty is common to all of them in teaching about the region's mining past to those who visit it, thus becoming one of those activities that are most favourable in promoting a series of activities that harness, in line with the French ecomuseums, the range of heritage elements in the region (Cueto, 2009: 72). This is tourism based on heritage, closer to the German or French models where industrial tourism becomes interlinked with industrial heritage tourism, rather than with the Anglo-Saxon countries where the two modes appear clearly differentiated (Otgaar et al., 2010: 2).

4. MINING PARKS IN SPAIN

Mining parks are currently the main example of what we have called mining tourism in Spain, since they relate to sites found in mining areas or districts where their geological and mining heritage is protected and adapted so that it can be visited by keen members of the public, mainly for recreational, educational, research, training or healing purposes (Orche, 2004: 56). Frequently, these sites have visitor centres, museums, themed centres, access to the mines, mineral processing facilities, mine trains and other interesting activities (Perez and Sanchez, 2010: 55) and provide an overall view, which given their large scale make it a necessity to create more or less organised tours (Pardo, 2010: 250), thus turning the territory into a museum.

4.1. Riotinto Mining Park in Huelva (Andalusia)

Created in 1992, the park has some of the most outstanding mining landscapes of the Iberian Peninsula as a result of the copper mining operations that took place between pre-Roman times and the 1980s, specifically highlighting the English presence in the 1873-1954 period. Underground, and subsequently open-pit, mining work (the former in mine-shafts) have left plenty of physical evidence that is contained within the natural environment with spectacular views rendered unique by the Rio Tinto river. It pioneered the revamping of mining heritage in Spain in the early 1990s and is currently protected through its status as Heritage of Cultural Interest under the Historical Site category. Some of the visit activities worth doing are the train journey through the mining area; the visit to two open-pit mines: *Corta Atalaya* and *Peña del Hierro*; visiting the old Mining Hospital turned into the «*Ernest Lluch*» *Mining Museum* and the *Victorian village of Barriada de Bella Vista* created in 1883, where a house has been rehabilitated, known as *Casa 21*.

4.2. Almaden Mining Park in Ciudad Real (Castile-La Mancha)

It is located in the cinnabar/mercury mines found south-west of the Ciudad Real province, in the Almaden and Almadenejos districts, first created in pre-Roman times and closed down in 2003. Officially opened in 2008, its purpose has been to create «a space to promote high quality cultural, educational and tourist exchange» (<http://www.mayasa.es>), when the mine ceased operate. Its main appeals are the descent into an *underground mine*, while touring through several facilities turned into the *Mercury Museum*, *Mining Museum* and the *Furnaces of Aludeles* dating from the 17th century, which were necessary to turn cinnabar into mercury. In the town of Almaden a visit can also be paid to the *San Rafael Royal Miners' Hospital* (18th century), which was the first specialist hospital in Spain to treat mining-related illnesses, as well as the first Spanish Mining School (1777), currently being rehabilitated.

4.3. Andorra-Sierra de Arcos MWINAS Mining Park in Teruel (Aragon)

In the north of the province of Teruel, the region of Andorra-Sierra de Arcos has hosted the *MWINAS Technology & Mining Park* since May 2005, located in a territory devoted to coal mining from the early twentieth century until the late 1940s. A visit to the Park begins with the *San Juan mine shaft*, where there still is an iron derrick with its control room, the *Themed Centre* that displays photographs, maps, implements, tools, etc., provided, in many cases, by the local miners, and it ends with a tour around the *Sculpture Park* outside the facilities where more than 30 machines have been placed, which were linked with the mining work carried out helping us to understand the different methods for coal extraction. Also available for a visit is the restoration site containing the open-pit mines in Val de Ariño, involving a bus tour that stops at different lookout platforms called «*Ecologic Restoration of the Mining Zones*» *Themed Centre*.

4.4. La Union Mining Park in Murcia (Region of Murcia)

It was launched recently, in July 2010, as the *Mining Park*, located in the Sierra Minera mountains of Cartagena-La Union (Murcia) where historically several lead and zinc mines were operated from Carthaginian and Romanisation times, the 19th century being the most active period, when numerous underground sites were opened, followed by other open-pit sites in the 20th century. At present, Sierra Minera is protected as Heritage of Cultural Interest under the Historical Site status and it is undergoing a revamp phase with 12 mining clusters which make up a true territory-museum, and others could soon follow. The Park, with a total area of 50,000 m², offers visits to the *underground tunnels* inside the *Agrupación Vicenta Mine*; a journey on the *mining train* visiting parts of the Sierra and viewing elements such as the *Remunerada Mine Washery*, the *Pablo and Virginia Mine Hoppers* and the old *Gunpowder Keg*. In addition, you can visit the *Themed Centre for the Las Matildes Mine*, an archaeological-mining site made up of a derrick, mine shaft and two control rooms. It is worth noting, as intangible heritage, the *Festival Internacional del Cante de las Minas de la Union* held since 1961.

4. A FEW SHORT CONCLUSIONS

The Spanish Mining Parks that we have briefly analysed are clear examples of how mining and industrial heritage has represented a pivotal force in the socio-economic recovery of certain territories, going from being a (cultural, social, economic) resource to becoming a (socio-economic) product yet maintaining its nature as a legacy that previous generations have passed on to us, relaying the responsibility to maintain it and pass it on to future generations in the best possible condition, thus constituting part of the collective memories of a social group and especially their memories of work.