

THE TOURISME IN THE REGION OF RIOTINTO MINE

Francisco Javier García Delgado

Universidad de Huelva
fcogarci@uhu.es,

Aquilino Delgado Domínguez

Museo Minero de Riotinto. Fundación Río Tinto
museomineroriotinto@telefonica.net

Jesús Felicidades García

Universidad de Huelva
jesusfe@uhu.es

During the past half century there has been a productive change in most of the European mining areas. Thus, important and millennialmining landscapes lost their extractive and transformative function and the deindustrialization became a pressing issue. After many years, this degraded and abandoned landscape recovers interest again, and it is believedthatits recovery will support productive activities. It is in this way that the productive function of the landscape mutates into a new one, such as educational and recreational, in which tourism is capable of energizing the territory. It has gone fromdismantling and putting on sale as scrap mining infrastructure to being assessed as heritage and even searching the intangible heritage.

However, the success does not depend only on the heritage itself but also on the set of elements and factors affecting the tourism (the attractiveness of the whole, the distribution, marketing, etc.). In general, in spite of the importance assigned to the activity, it is difficult to make therestored heritageprofitable.

The Rio Tinto mining bowl is located in the southwest of the Iberian Peninsula, in the central-eastern province of Huelva (Andalusia). It is composed of seven municipalities: El Berrocal, El Campillo, Campofrío, La Granada de Rio Tinto, Minas de Riotinto and Zalamea la Real, covering an area of 626.2 km².

The richness of the subsoil is what has determined the future of the region, a mining history dating back 5,000 years. In search of silver, copper and sulfur, their operators have left deep traces in a mining landscape, deforestation, open cast mines, tunnels and slag heaps, which are accompanied by mining-industrial residues (railway, industrial machinery and other constructions). This continuous operation since Prehistory and Protohistory, will have in the Roman times the first great period of exploitation. The second will come with the purchase of the mines in 1873 by a consortium of foreign capital, mainly British, who constituted Rio Tinto Company Limited, which will establish a quasi-political and economic colonialism until 1954 (the year of nationalization of the mines).

The mining specialization led to a deep crisis from the 50s of 20th century. This mining crisis gave negative demographic trends in the region since the sixties and seventies of the 20th century causing the displacement of economic activities towards the coast of the province. Today there is a small population, this reaches just over 3% of the provincial population, with 16,976 inhabitants. The demographics of the region are not encouraging either: low birth rate, aging, negative migration balance, high dependency ratios ... very similar to those of other deindustrialized and rural areas.

The average income falls, while retirees and early retirees from the mine are gradually passing away and the unemployment benefits are strong in the region. In this context and since the arrival of democracy, and very especially since the incorporation to the EEC, with the help of the ESF or Community initiatives (LEADER I and II) and national (PRODER II), new alternatives to the region have been searched, aimed at the provision of services, the creation of a network of development, the formation of the population and promoting other activities (agriculture, industry ...). However, the medium-term problem has been the installation of exogenous activities seeking subsidies rather than energizing the territory having had little impact on employment, and it continues being weak: unemployment is structural and little incorporation of women into the labor market and difficulties of incorporation of young and qualified manpower.

Thus, the dependence on public sector investments and the lack of corporate culture lead to the region to a lack of dynamism in the creation and diversification of economic activities. In this context, the emergence of autonomous entrepreneurial initiatives intended to manage the heritage and the ultimate achievement of local development is a notable exception. In 1987, during the crisis of copper prices, the company Rio Tinto Minera SA created the «Rio Tinto Foundation for the Study of Mining and Metallurgy» Teaching Charitable non Profit Private Cultural Foundation. The ultimate goal of Rio Tinto Foundation (FRT) is the conservation and restoration of historical heritage generated by five thousand years of mining activities and subsequent promotion for tourist use. To do this, it was endowed from the beginning of an important heritage (archaeological, industrial, documentary and bibliographic), which has been recovering, restoring and rehabilitating.

Rio Tinto Foundation has become since its creation in a boost for the region, able to give voice to the rural development policies of the EU and materialize them in the use of heritage, due to the limited capacity of devastated territories by mining-industrial reconversion and lack of dynamism.

As realization of its aims, in 1992, Rio Tinto Foundation puts in motion the project Rio Tinto Mining Park to preserve, highlight and disseminate the restored mining and railway heritage, by promoting tourism and creating jobs in the region.

Different tourist initiatives have been launched: Mining Museum (1992), Tourist Railway (1994), the House 21 of Bella Vista English Quarter (2005), Housing Group San Carlos (2009) Peña de Hierro open cast mine (2004). It also created a Historical Mining Archive which hosts the documentation generated by the mines; it has become indispensable as a research center, which covers part of the scientific vocation of the Foundation which develops in conjunction with the Mining Museum.

The status and importance of the assets managed by Rio Tinto Foundation and the touristic promotion carried out by Rio Tinto Mining Park has been endorsed with the

statement of cultural interest, within the category of Historic Site. This should strengthen their position, however, this statement, together with the designation of Rio Tinto as Protected Landscape and Natural Monument of Andalusia, are insufficient for a set of mining heritage of this importance, which should aim at the Heritage statement of Site by UNESCO.

The Riotinto Mining Park is now a museum and interpretive set of the first magnitude, whose importance is demonstrated for being the most visited museum complex in the province of Huelva, with 69,387 visitors in 2010, and the second most visited place in the province of Huelva.

The most usual tourists are the individual visitors (over 60'0%), this points out the self- organization of the journey, this type of visitors are predominant on weekends, they are people who enjoy rural tourism who do not stay in our region, but close to it (Sierra de Aracena). The second largest group is represented by educational institutions, and it explains the important educational work done by the Foundation. The third largest group is the one that comes in organized tours, in which the Mining Park of Riotinto is sometimes included. On the whole, the domestic tourists are predominant (80%), but foreigners are not negligible (20%), coinciding many of these tourists who organized the trip through intermediaries. The most numerous national tourists are from the Autonomous Community of Andalusia (40%); some of them being individuals and some others organized tours. In a second-level we have to highlight people from Madrid and Cataluña, organized groups or self-organized visitors. Among the foreigners dominate German and British tourists, who are also major in hotels on the coast.

Having analyzed the whole Mining Park, it is necessary to address tourist offer in the region. The Rio Tinto Foundation initiative has not been supported by private initiative, by the weakness and lack of entrepreneurship.

The development of services, infrastructure and equipment should be equal to the creation and consolidation of the destination, the lack of them makes difficult the consideration of real destination, and it makes difficult to enter the market.

The first basic elements, is the lack of tourist information. Only there is a tourist information point in the mining area (Mining Museum). There are other infrastructures (tourist offices) that have never worked as such or they opened once and closed soon after. Not unlike the case of other initiatives for heritage interpretation, as the Interpretation Centre of dolmen Culture which has suffered several interventions for a decade without having proceeded to its final opening. As for the supply of accommodation there are 19 tourist establishments, with a total of 180 rooms and 331 beds, in addition to the 255 seats in a tourist camp, divided between: cottages (10), B (4), rural apartments (1) Inns (1) Hotels (2) Camping (1). The offer is concentrated in the two most populated municipalities and economically dynamic: Minas de Rio Tinto and Nerva. Even worse is the situation of catering establishments, 24 in total, adding up less than 1,000 seats, limiting tourist services, without forgetting that most of the business comes from the consideration of Rio Tinto Mines as headquarters of the district hospital.

In this context, it begins to develop some more interesting tourist private initiatives, such as the recovery of the old railway station of Zalamea la Real, with the opening of a hostel and restaurant. Also of interest is the recovery of some Victorian houses as rural lodgings in Bella Vista English District.

The other tourist initiatives (receptive agencies, active tourism, etc.), Are virtually absent from the region, which also recorded large commercial tissue weakness. The existence of tourist initiatives and dispersed isolated services clearly determines the low competitiveness of the destination, with clear marketing problems (market access, lack of homogeneous offer), sometimes as basic as the inability to stay in a single hotel a complete tour bus.

In conclusion, the Rio Tinto Mining Region, saddled with its dual nature as Rural and de-industrialized is living a substantial change based on the exploitation of the heritage and mining resources, from a recreational-tourist point of view, the recovery and promotion of mining heritage not without notable difficulties (financial, managerial ...). In this context, the role of the government should be limited, avoiding the paternalistic culture, and enhancing internal resources through non-profit entities (Rio Tinto Foundation and others), as a successful model tested elsewhere together with the empowering of local entrepreneurship. Moreover, the experiences in areas with similar characteristics and conditions must not lead to the import and / or export of models, but the creation of networks or strengthening the existing ones for mutual learning.

The next step must be to get a real tourist product that allows us to convert excursionist into tourists, who consume, eat and sleep in the region.

This process of change of mind, productive orientation and job creation, should not be the only process, but it must be accompanied by other activities, to avoid the problems that have occurred and are now occurring in other areas with similar characteristics, with little capacity for generating employment and establishing business initiatives. It is necessary to promote services, infrastructures and equipment, but also from other kind of activities because we should not abandon a monoculture productive model to develop a similar one, to get this goal, regional planning must be realistic.