

# THE HERITAGE OF THE INDUSTRY: A TOURIST REFERENT TO EXPLORE IN THE REGION OF MURCIA

*María Dolores Palazón Botella*

University of Murcia  
mdolorespb@um.es

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Region of Murcia bears witness of the industrial history of our country, of its problems and progression, adding chapters of advance and setback (Martínez, 2002). Despite of this, until recently, the qualifier 'unimportant' has come first when valuing its participation in the national industrialization scene, not taking into account that this process did not meet homogenous criteria, but it adapted to the reality of the places where it beamed within common standards (Nadal, Catalán, 1994). In fact, its industrial development dates back to the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, under Royal patronage industries. Mining, textile and food-processing industries emerged powerfully in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and remained in place during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century; time when an industrial projection that would be evident in several sectors that would diversify its industrial projection hatched.

In the eighties of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the adjustments brought by a new way of understanding political, economical, commercial and industrial relations would force the regional industrial activity to restructure and adapt itself to the changing times. This situation resulted in the end of mining activities, the readjustment of business sectors such as the food-processing industry, causing the closure of many workplaces, or the seeking of new production models that implied its settlement in industrial estates, which started to take the industry out of the city. This would end generating an industrial heritage that, seen from an industrial heritage perspective, stimulated the need of measures to retrieve and give it value, which backed by tourism, allows to expand its contemplation (Pardo, 2004).

Tourism is an economic asset that is constantly broadening its horizons with new referents and aspects that diversify and determine it as a heterogeneous entity that addresses the different needs of a public that is changing tastes and leisure criteria. Thus, what was previously considered to be a touristic anecdotal issue, as with industrial tourism, has become an emerging typology where actions are taken both regarding industrial heritage and the industry itself, as it is sustained and set in both matters (Caamaño, 2011: 162-163).

The Region of Murcia started to opt for this strand in order to stimulate the recovery and enhancement of its industrial heritage. After years of operations, it is appropriate to undertake a review of it to delimit its real situation and highlight new pathways that bind with the implemented measures in other areas.

## **2. AIMS AND HYPOTHESIS**

The aims of this work are summarized in the following points:

- To contextualize the touristic consideration of industrial heritage.
- To analyze the measures taken by various groups and entities in the Region of Murcia, in order to implement tourism under their industrial referents.
- To indicate a future line of work that is able to effectively revert the diversification of the regional touristic offer, thereby strengthening the safeguarding and diffusion on its industry.

Our aim is to test if the hypothesis that sets our starting point consists of proving that industrial tourism in the region of Murcia is based on similar patterns based on the recovery of industrial spaces that ceased their activity, through museographic proposals or paths focused on specific sectors (food-processing, mining and transport sectors). The repetition of this pattern results in leaving out representative activities and references of the regional industry that may help to diversify the proposals undertaken. Thus, the progression that tourism has undergone in recent years is still a residual issue in this community. All of this has an impact in the lack of initiatives that may consolidate it as a touristic option to bear in mind.

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

This work is based on the analysis of all the touristic proposals (public and private), activated concerning industrial heritage. For this reason, an extensive research was done in order to pinpoint them, as well as these being visited while data samples were taken during the process, that have had an impact on the analysis that compiles its current situation, highlighting strengths and weaknesses.

This was completed with two new quests. The first one was centered in the search of other models that could adopt, through referents located in other areas. The second one was focused on locating new patrimonial referents that could promote touristic actions.

At the same time, a study of the touristic implications in industrial heritage was conducted, to define both its origin and the existing provisions in this area. In this way, a state of play that helps to justify this issue has been achieved.

## **4. BROAD SUMMARY**

This work is divided in four sections:

1. The Region of Murcia within its industry: It addresses the contextualization of the industrial progression of the studied area with the aim of underlining its values and contributions. In this way, its industrial legacy is endorsed and its sectorial progression is classified.

2. Tourism as an ally of industrial heritage: Throughout it, the main definitions and issues to be considered are gathered when addressing industrial heritage touristic reconversion. For this, the different texts that official bodies have written about it have been selected and analyzed, as well as bibliographical contributions that have classified its courses of action.

3. Industrial tourism in the Region of Murcia. A work in progress: this heading is focused on, following the previous sections, analyzing which is the current touristic situation in the Region of Murcia. In order to make this easier, it will be distributed in sub-sections that allow to see what has been developed in different areas.

The first one is focused on museums and the next one in routes. It is here where mining, the food-processing and transport industries take center stage. In the majority of cases this is about local initiatives. To spread these means often the encounter of obstacles given that they do not participate in the channels that have been set, nor have they the capacity of assuming it given its entity. Despite of this, their advocates, local authorities and associations make a great effort in order to maintain their presence in regional media. The access to these routes is more complicated given that they are articulated from the municipalities that settle them and advertise them in their own channels, which in some cases do not go beyond their territory. To this aspects, variable visiting hours which are sometimes incompatible with the preferences of its visitors, as well as untrained staff who do not have the necessary knowledge regarding the industrial area and that lack direct information about the routes, without the adequate signals and information boards. This is counteracted by the encouragement of activities, adjusted to its conditions, whose aim is to attract an audience even though they do not always have a beneficial impact as they go unnoticed.

This work goes on to focus on the measures that have been implemented to activate tourism in operational businesses. The active side of industrial tourism is implemented in the regional industry through visits to different workplaces than can be regularly paid. The problem is that there are no mechanisms to properly expose this option, this being, to show the workplaces that can be visited and to generate measures to manage them. A business has been created in order to specifically cover this area: "Turinde. Visita a Industrias y Empresas". This body is specialized in industrial tourism, preferably on its active side, though it works on the heritage side too. It operates as an intermediary to draw together businesses and visitors. But it is not limited to this aspect only, as it covers the specialized consultancy office in this area in accordance with the industrial tourism UNE 302001 standard.

In the meanwhile, from a public side, Murcia participates in the RETI (the Spanish Network of Industrial Tourism), through which the industries that participate in this process are exposed and connected to those who are interested in this proposal, as well as in the diffusion of this initiative beyond local and regional borders which, until this time, limited the promotion of this measure.

4. New options to activate industrial tourism in the Region of Murcia: This is the last section of the piece of work and in it, after detecting sectors and activities that could be linked to diversify the regional touristic offer, new proposals that could strengthen this matter are compiled. Despite everything that has been done, if these touristic options want

to be boosted, it is needed to visualize what has been done, offsetting the negative aspects relating to a lack of diffusion and projection, as well as to encourage new proposals that have amongst its priority aims the spread, respect and consolidation of past and present industrial substrata of the Region of Murcia. The first thing to do this is to address the knowledge of its industrial legacy in a comprehensive manner. If done like this, the sensitive aspects of starting to lead new touristic initiatives would be pointed out, where the participation not only of tourism experts but of the rest of disciplines that participate in this studio about industrial heritage (history, economics, sociology, architecture, landscape... etc.) would be needed, as it is difficult to know about it in detail as it is a domain where several areas converge, whose connection would allow to highlight and implement new proposals that will diversify and amplify what has been achieved, aiming to give a more prominent role to the fusion between industrial heritage and operational industries, as well as generating connections with other geographical areas.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Industrial tourism is a good opportunity for industrial assets. To design new touristic actions about industrial heritage is a model that emerged from the beginning of its acknowledgement and that takes as a referent what has been done about cultural heritage. This may mean a new path towards their conservation. And to see in the same light the operational business that allows both to spread it and to generate a new option, allowing the transmission in first person of the experiences and processes that start with the production stage and end with the consumption of the product.

This model has been applied in the Region of Murcia with an unequal consideration, as while industrial heritage has been considered an ally to diversify the regional touristic offer, the operational industry has needed more time to be acknowledged as a possible option. Like this it is possible to indicate that the reality of the touristic proposals about industrial substrata offer in the Region of Murcia follows the traditional trends: the simple gathering and exposition of elements, the creation of consolidated touristic products or the generation of routes.

In parallel, measures have been promoted in order to activate its consideration in the operational industry. But we could go further and continue advancing in its consolidation with the activation of new initiatives that reactivated what has been done and put in place new formulae. In order to do this, it is important to redevelop what has been done.

The current interest to stimulate it is not enough if it is compares to the rest of touristic and cultural proposals. There is a lack of skill and training to address it. Furthermore, there is no support of the industrial sectors that could back it up, nor the full commitment of the administrations that should ensure it.

The actions that are normally taken do not end up configuring a touristic product, but help to highlight a resource that does not meet visit expectations and the projected economic benefits. Furthermore, similar models are repeated, with slight variations that end up not creating in the visitor a feeling of novelty. Besides, one is not aware of the damages that the touristic side can cause both in the heritage, not interpreting it correctly or employing it without a consolidation and maintenance action, as with industry that does not take the adequate corrective measures, which cannot be beneficial for both the worker and the visitant.

Last but not least, it is important to highlight that it does not have enough dissemination channels. This issue resided in that, despite of what is being done and what has been done, there is a general feeling that this is something secondary.

For this reason, to be able to deal with these issues and boost it in an adequate manner, to address new measures to strengthen it would be required. Like this, industrial tourism could become a sustainable action that allowed both the maintenance of industrial heritage, as of the existing industrial activity, as this does not make sense when it goes against them. It is its maintenance and acknowledgement that really allows us to appreciate not only the development and industrial evolution of the Murcian society, but also of the cultural substrata surrounding it.