

# **MINING TOURISM IN GEOGRAPHICALLY DISADVANTAGED TERRITORIES IN CASTILE AND LEON (SPAIN): RECOVERY OF INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE AND OPTIONS FOR LOCAL DEVELOPMENT**

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At present, social sensitivity and concern for the patrimony which forms the cultural heritage has created a broader concept which also includes elements considered to be of minor importance. Conceptual and methodological change responds to a renewal of the terms of heritage, territory and landscape as well as the emergence of new terminology along with the concept of «territorial heritage». For this reason, the modern definition of cultural heritage implies a comprehensive overview of patrimony, with two dimensions (tangible and intangible) and a strategic assessment as a resource of local development. These considerations have led to the rescue from anonymity of territories, installations and ways of life pigeonholed within «ethnographic heritage» and «industrial heritage». For example, «industrial heritage» includes all the elements of industrial exploitation, generated by the economic activities of each society that respond to a particular production process and a specific technological system characterized by mechanisation within a socioeconomic system, according to the definition given by the National Plan for Industrial Heritage. The regulations on cultural heritage of Castile and Leon consider «industrial heritage» to be the personal property and real estate related to the economy and processes of industrial production of the past, under the heading of «ethnological heritage». However, the identification of what can be considered «industrial heritage» is not so simple due to the wide range of possible definitions derived from; the raw materials used, the various sources of energy, the degree of mechanisation, the characteristics of construction, the production processes, the goods produced, the marketing system, the social sectors involved, and so on. According to the classification of the Industrial Heritage Inventory of Castile and Leon, coordinated and designed by the Directorate General of Cultural Heritage of the regional Ministry of Culture and Tourism, a large part of the items are linked to isolated elements such as mining installations and landscapes or linked to the industrial production processes of mining operations; for example, property related

to sectors of the metallurgical industry (forges, smithies, hammers, etc.), products for the construction sector (lime kilns and gypsum pits) and transport and communications (mining railways with tracks, tunnels, bridges, stations and stops, loading bays for minerals, etc.).

The value of the territorial heritage of the tangible and intangible remains associated with mining is unquestionable and therefore in need of effective devices for its conservation, protection and storage to ensure its integrity and prevent loss, destruction or deterioration. Because of the origin and complexity of the mining assets to be protected, initially the most appropriate category within the national legislation would be that of a «historic grouping», «historic site» or «archaeological area». With the coming into effect of the regional legislation for Castile and Leon, industrial heritage is included in the inventory with the figure of «ethnological grouping». However, because in many cases these sites occupy a vast territory, with historical roots built by human action, they would require a classification closer to the concept of «cultural landscape» including all the installations and a preventive perimeter for protection. Existing cases of protection of sites of cultural interest in the territory of Castile and Leon stem from the declarations of «*La Plaza Cerrada y los restos del Alto Horno*» in Sabero, in Leon, «*Las Salinas*» in Poza de la Sal, Burgos, and «*Las Cavenes*» in El Cabaco, Salamanca. More recently, the Directorate General of Cultural Heritage of the Regional Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Regional Government of Castile and Leon, has initiated proceedings to declare as Property of Cultural Interest (BIC, in Spanish), with the category of «ethnological group», the «*Castillete del Pozo Ibarra*» in Ciñera - municipality of La Pola de Gordon, Leon, and the «*Complejo Minero de Puras-Villafranca*», in Belorado, Burgos.

Funding for the promotion and dissemination of mining heritage has come from very diverse sources and forms of intervention, however, the reform of structural funding in the late eighties, in order to unify criteria for the application of regional policy and for providing a common framework for other variants of intervention (operational programmes, EU initiatives, pilot projects, etc.) has been a major stimulus for investment in this field. Moreover, the crisis of local coal production at European level has led to the implementation of a package of State aid to the mining industry and to deal with alternative development projects in the mining regions.

The regional administration has sought to regulate investment in mining with the adoption of successive integrated tools in the Programmes of Action in the mining regions of Castile and Leon. These programmes have covered the following types of subsidies: the incentives for the energy and non-energy mining sector, the improvement and restoration of the Mining Habitat for those municipalities in the Region with mining, either in operation or abandoned, and reactivation of Coal Mining Districts. These interventions in the industrial mining heritage of Castile and Leon, through the investment by various financial instruments of the regional administration and the local authorities, has generated a host of pilot projects, which are innovative and transferable to other territories. Throughout the length and breadth of the region, but especially in the outlying areas, there have been numerous *ad hoc* interventions on abandoned mine workings with a view to boosting the local economy. This generous effort by local authorities, intended to strengthen tourism as an alternative source of employment, is

noteworthy because it corresponds entirely to one motive, a bottom-up approach to participation and management of the entire process and, at the same time, it has made safe many abandoned mine shafts and quarries and prevented the destruction of unique examples of the industrial past by turning mining infrastructure to touristic use. From the negative standpoint, this type of action has some shortcomings because many have taken too long to complete, being executed in too many stages and because they were begun without a design for the future sustainability of the project. The ranking of the best experiences of specific actions is established based on the following criteria: the customisation of visits to the mining areas and facilities («*Las Médulas*» in Leon, «*Las Cavenes*» and «*Mina Salamanca*» in Salamanca and «*Las Salinas de Poza de la Sal*» and the «*Complejo Minero de Puras de Villafranca*» in Burgos), the interpretation of heritage landmarks in museums, classrooms and interpretive centres and being open to visitors («*Parque Temático del Granito*» in Salamanca, the «*Parque Geominero*» in Burgos, the «*Parque Arqueológico de los Hornos de Cal del Zancao*» in Segovia and the «*Parque Cultural*» in Zamora) and the signposting of pathways, routes, trails and viewpoints of mining landscapes (the «*Sendero Minero de Juarros*» in Burgos).

The work carried out in coal mining areas of Leon and Palencia is, for many reasons, an exceptional case as regards the alternative use of tangible and intangible industrial heritage, inherited from centuries of activity. The main reason has been the adoption of two individual plans, each with their own budget, to undertake projects to promote touristic infrastructure from previous mining resources or to develop new touristic products: the Plan for Coal Mining and the Alternative Development of Mining Regions (*Plan «MINER»*, 1998-2005) and the «National Strategic Plan for Coal Reserves» 2006-2012 and the «New Model for Integrated and Sustainable Development of Mining Regions». Moreover, a series of measures of the Operational Programme of the EU initiative for the economic transformation of the coal mining areas (RECHAR II, 1994-1999) were carried out in these regions, including a specific section for touristic infrastructure.

From the Plan for Coal Mining and the Alternative Development of Mining Regions (*Plan «MINER»*, 1998-2005), implemented in the mining regions of Castile and Leon by means of the Collaboration Protocol signed on January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1998 between the Regional Ministry of Industry and Energy and the Regional Government of Castile and Leon, arises the possibility of undertaking a series of local projects for leisure and tourism covered by a «Plan for Touristic Development in the coalfields of Castile and Leon». According to the draft plan, the geographic distribution of the 22 projects listed, with an initial investment of 38,108,748 Euros, was as follows: Montaña Palentina (7), Montaña Oriental y Occidental de León (6), Valles de Babia, Luna y Omaña (4), Villablino/Laciana (1), Fabero Area (2), Sil / Alto Boeza (1) and Alto Bierzo (2). The draft plan was controversial because of the type of proposed projects (golf courses), the unequal distribution of resources by municipalities and the rejection of some ideas proposed by local councils, As a result of these differences, the regional administration decided to abandon the integrated action plan and to undertake some of these projects individually.

Delays on the part of the bureaucratic and administrative management (drafting of legal and technical feasibility studies and development of environmental impact studies, procedures for tenders, etc.) caused the projects to be transferred individually to the

section of touristic infrastructure of the «National Strategic Plan for Coal Reserves, 2006-2012 and the New Model for Integrated and Sustainable Development of Mining Regions», adopted by the Council of Ministers on March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2006. The administration of the Regional Government of Castile and Leon signed a Collaboration Agreement for the promotion of alternative economic development of coal mining areas with the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Tourism, June 29<sup>th</sup>, 2006. Once again, a number of administrative shortcomings and technical delays in the countersigning of documentation are affecting the works on touristic infrastructure after more than a decade of the implementation of the «funds for mining». Today, according to published references on the project for «Promotion of touristic infrastructure» in the coal mining areas some projects have disappeared forever, others have been replaced by new local proposals and very few have reached completion.

The most ambitious and symbolic action, under the plans for coal-mining areas, has been the transformation and upgrading of the «*Ferrería de San Blas*» ironworks in the «Museum of Mining Metallurgy of Castile and Leon» in the municipality of Sabero, Leon. Initially, the plan only provided for the transformation in a museum of the forge or «*plaza cerrada*» and the coke-burning blast furnace to display to visitors the industrial past of the Sabero Valley.

By way of an epilogue, the future for the massive industrial mining heritage of Castile and Leon has an upside and a downside. Since the turn of the century, progress in research, documentation and protection of representative elements and prominent mining heritage has been made, though slowly, due to the growing awareness of society of the worth of this patrimony and the economic value it can represent. On the other hand, the management of this kind of heritage requires creativity, stemming from the experience accumulated over the years, to undertake restoration and upgrading projects with a view to their touristic value.