
Research Article

Identity and community—Reflections on the development of mining heritage tourism in Southern Spain

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to highlight the effect of social identities and the role of the symbolic community in the development of heritage tourism. This perspective expands on the classic relationship between identity and tourism, going beyond the accepted influence of tourism on identities. Here, special emphasis is placed on the effect of community identities on heritage tourism. Research was carried out in four mining areas in Southern Spain where there has been little or no development of the heritage tourism industry. The results obtained are of interest for two reasons: on the one hand, they provide in-depth insight into the nature of industrial heritage tourism; and on the other, they have a clearly practical dimension that recommends the inclusion of indicators relating to community identity in the assessment, planning and management of this type of tourism.

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1. Heritage, identity and community

In one of its many interpretations, tourism is understood as a communicational setting, a space in which to relate, become closer or more distant, hence its inherent identity-related dimension (Abrah, Waldren, & Macleod, 1997; Urry, 1990, 1994). When tourist activity focuses on heritage and culture, the link between tourism and identity is accentuated even further (Stebbins, 1997). In heritage tourism, the convergence of the host community, tourist activity and visitors is chiefly mediated by local heritage, which has a dual role to play: it is the central focus of the tourist activity whilst at the same time being a fundamental element in the construction of community identity. Therefore, when looking at heritage tourism, identity and community must undoubtedly be two of the reference points.

Social identities have an eminently symbolic nature owing to their discursive character and their function of representing reality; they always remain open, subject to negotiation and conflict, immersed in power relations (Bauman, 2004; Laclau 1994, 1996a, 1996b). Furthermore, as discourse, identities have a clear performative dimension (Austin, 1996; Lisón, 1997; Pearce, 1986; Touraine, 1992); they do not only describe social subjects, they create them and help them come into being, making it possible for them to act, relate and communicate. Identity is discursive in nature; there are no neutral, monological or private thoughts, words or acts; everything is loaded with intention and inflection (Bajtin, 1982). Identities are symbolic, open, political and dynamic. They go beyond mere descriptions and representations of society; they guide and stimulate it as catalysts of social action.

Above all, community is a symbolic reality and as such is a construction (Cohen, 1985). Community is perhaps, together with the individual, the main reference point for the recreation of identities: it is, therefore, a level of identity. Strong collective identities linked to life spaces (Augé, 1992) or imagined spaces (Anderson, 1991) give rise to a solid sense of community. This is how the link between identity, place and community is shaped, a link which is as ambiguous as it is crucial to social and political functioning. Community, as a key social reference point, needs to be constantly defined and stabilised (Jensen, 2004). A community can only emerge through common experience...
and the shared use of contexts of meaning. These contexts of meaning shape situations in which the participants create values. Shared common discourse, which defines social action, gives meaning to acts, creating guidelines of thought and differentiated action that shape a community. As a privileged context in which identity creates society, the meaning of community becomes a decisive factor for local development (Bassetière, 1998; Palmer, 1999, 2005; Pretes 2003; Stebbins, 1997), as has the transformation of the identities of the hosts (Boissevain 1996; Brown, 1999; Chambers, 1997; Howell, 1994; Prats 1997; Rogers, 2002; Smith, 1989; Valcuende del Río, 2003) and even as a way of generating and consolidating new identities and images (Ashworth & Larkham, 1994; Bassetière, 1998; Doorne, Ateljevic, & Bai, 2003; Kroskus, 2003; Le Chêne & Monjaret, 1992; Light, 2001; Pritchard & Morgan, 2001; Thierry, 2003). Heritage tourism favours identity polyphony (Bajtin, 1982): the same heritage stimulates different identities both for its depositaries and for tourists. However, all these approaches consider almost exclusively the influence of tourism on identities, but not that of identities on tourism. An open and processual view of notions relating to identity and community, together with a more recursive consideration of cause/effect relationships (Morin, 1990), invite a different analytical approach. To what degree is tourism affected by identities and representations of community? Do the identification models of the hosts have an effect on the development of tourism? Does this approach favour a more complete understanding about the development of heritage tourism?

In this respect, Xie (forthcoming) warns that “successful tourism development needs a common community perception”; as discussed above, this “common perception” can only be based on shared models of identity and community. Hence, when focusing on heritage tourism—a field in which the convergence of heritage, tourism, identity and community is even greater—the role of identities must be explored as a conditioning factor in the planning, management and sustainability of heritage tourism. Similarly, it will be crucial to examine in depth the meaning of symbolic community in the social context of the planned heritage tourism. Yet until now very little attention has been paid to these factors. In what way do models of identification affect the development of tourism? Pritchard and Morgan (2001, p. 177), in their study of tourism promotion campaigns in Wales, confirmed that these campaigns are not only shaped according to the market, but they are also “constructed expressions of destinations’ cultural and political identities”. Balcar and Pearce (1996, p. 211) surmised the “identity effect” at the end of their study on mining heritage tourism in New Zealand, concluding that “…closer examination has shown that on the West Coast the tourism element of heritage tourism may be less important than it first appears and what has driven the establishment of historic sites in the region derives more from a strong sense of local and regional identity and a wish to preserve the community’s heritage”. Along these same lines, we maintain that identity factors contain a clear explanatory potential when it comes to analysing the development of heritage tourism.

Our aim is at once practical and theoretical. Even though we are moved by the desire to understand the nature of heritage tourism development, we are chiefly concerned by the need to take symbolic and identity-related factors into account when planning, designing and managing tourist products and destinations. The context of advanced modernity in which we live and from which we interpret tourism involves a number of different agents that activate identities. This leads to both the proliferation of different heritages and the growing need to negotiate selection and evaluation criteria (Airiño, 2003). This approach is not only valid for the special characteristics of the mining heritage settings that have been studied, but could also be applied to other (potential) contexts of heritage tourism development.

3. Study context

Mining heritage tourism is particularly suited to an initial consideration using the approach proposed above. The crisis situation felt in mining regions, once the mines are closed down, makes it all the more important to find economic alternatives. The development of tourism offers a real opportunity that has been demonstrated in diverse locations (Chon & Evans, 1989; Dicks 2000; Edwards & Llurde´s, 1996; Escalera, Ruiz, & Valcuende, 1995; Harris, 1989; Hewison, 1987; Wanhill, 2000). At the same time, the threat of the dissolution of local society (employment crises, emigration and economic deactivation), increases interest in heritage, in identities, and the search for a symbolic redefinition of the community that could sustain the continuity of local mining societies (Cohen, 1985; Dicks, 2000; Etiembrde, Micoude, Peroni, Peyrache, & Roux, 1999; Escalera et al., 1995; Ruiz, 1999, 2002). In this context, the development of heritage tourism is understood not only as one of the pillars of alternative economic and social development to replace the deactivated mining industry, but also as an active agent in the process of defining the diverse collective identities.
The research presented here was carried out in Andalusia, Spain (Fig. 1). Two socio-economic characteristics of this region must be highlighted, particularly for the purposes of our study: on the one hand, the importance of the mining industry during the 19th and 20th centuries, and its abandonment at the end of the 20th century; and on the other hand, the significant development of its tourist industry from the 1970s onwards (Marchena, 1987). For this study, four towns were selected (Linares, Alquife, Serón and Villanueva del Río y Minas) in which mining activity was the crux of social and economic life during the 20th century, and where this industry was later abandoned, giving rise to the subsequent cultural, social and economic effects that are common in mining areas experiencing a slump all over the world.

The specific selection of these towns for our research was governed by three fundamental factors:

1. In all of them, there are many remains and landscapes that are characteristic of mining activity (underground and surface mines, mining facilities, towns, workshops, offices, transport infrastructure), as well as intangible elements (ways of working, rituals, expressions of sociability, memory, etc.). It is a compendium that reflects the most important aspects of mining culture in Andalusia (Ruiz, 1999). It is important to remember that all these cultural elements could become heritage if the relevant social process of “heritagisation” (Hernández & Ruiz, 2005) took place.

2. Comparably, there is significant variation in the type of mining carried out in these areas, their evolution, the socio-economic situation of the town, and the status of any conservation work carried out or intervention in relation to mining heritage (see Table 1).

3. In all these areas, heritage tourism is practically inexistent despite initiatives and actions to develop it.

These three factors ensure a reasonable balance between homogeneity and heterogeneity when comparing cases and for the eventual extrapolation of conclusions with other types of industrial heritage tourism.

4. Culture, symbols and mining identity

The unique characteristics of the mining industry mean that it has its own cultural universe based on a set of features that can be found in many mining areas around the world (Ballard & Banks, 2003). In the case of Southern Spain (Ruiz, 1999), perhaps the most significant features are: the geographical, social and economic isolation and remoteness of mining areas (enclaves); specific ways of working; environmental alteration; expressions of sociability in mining towns; the presence of large facilities and infrastructure that have a great impact on the landscape; management structures and business organisation (from paternalism to colonialism); and a significant development of organisation and the workers’ movement. Furthermore, in the context of this article, there are certain cultural features to be taken into account, including the processes of deactivation, crisis and abandonment that are recurrent in the mining industry; periods of social resistance and the search for socio-economic alternatives, which culminate in most cases in the abandonment of the mines. The mining and industrial facilities fall into ruin and there is widespread dilapidation in former mining districts.

As with any area, identities and communities in mining areas are created through the usual political-discursive processes. Models of social representation (identities) emerge and develop, giving rise to the construction of cohesion and collective meaning through symbols and practices, which usually take their main content from the mining culture. Communities that represent themselves as mining communities express an kind of “epic poetry” based on the permanent reminder of the harsh working conditions in mines; important locations have mining monuments; they celebrate festivals to honour Saint Barbara, the Patron Saint of miners; they place an emotional value on mining landscapes. Points of reference for work and life in the mines provide a vehicle of symbolic communication that they use to recognise, vindicate, identify and differentiate themselves... in short, to create themselves as a community.
Table 1
Features of the areas studied

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Proximity to other tourist destinations and access to the town</th>
<th>Type of mining</th>
<th>Mine closure</th>
<th>Mining heritage and location</th>
<th>Declared a public heritage site</th>
<th>Heritage property</th>
<th>Availability of tourist infrastructure and products</th>
<th>Tours or tourist activities organised and control of visits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Serón</td>
<td>2414 The coast of Almería (60 kms). Roads recently improved</td>
<td>Iron, underground mining</td>
<td>1968 Mining facilities, town and pit. 15 kms from the town</td>
<td>Partial collective declaration, 2004</td>
<td>Public/private Apart hotel and campsite in the mining town. Poorly signposted pathway</td>
<td>There are no tourist activities organised and visits are not controlled. Guided tour services are offered at the hotel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villanueva</td>
<td>5185 Seville (42 km), near the Sierra Norte Natural Park. Good road and rail access</td>
<td>Coal, underground and surface mining</td>
<td>1973 Unique buildings, mining facilities. Round the outskirts of the town</td>
<td>Declaration of Historic Area, 2002</td>
<td>Municipal Non-existent</td>
<td>There are no tourist activities organised and visits are not controlled. Guided tour services are offered at the hotel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linares</td>
<td>59096 Close to Úbeda and Baeza (30 kms.), cities that have been declared “Heritage of Humanity” sites. Good road access</td>
<td>Lead, underground mining</td>
<td>1991 Remains of mining sites dotted around the township, railway stations</td>
<td>Partial collective declaration, 2004</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>There are no tourist activities organised and visits are not controlled. Guided tour services are offered by individuals and institutions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alquife</td>
<td>896 Granada (80 km), near the Sierra Nevada Natural Park and ski resort. Good road access</td>
<td>Iron, surface mining</td>
<td>1998 Mining facilities, town and pit on the outskirts of the town</td>
<td>No declaration has been made and there are no protection measures</td>
<td>Private Non-existent</td>
<td>The company that owns the facilities does not allow visits. It selectively manages tours for visitors it deems appropriate (visits by schools and specialists)</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

But when these regions begin to endure times of crisis, many of these mining cultural features start to fade as the mines are closed down and mining identity is called into question. The continuity, recreation, development and “consumption” of symbols and identities are crucial to understanding these societies in crisis. Then questions begin to emerge, such as: is there a mining identity? Is there symbolic cohesion? Is there really a community? In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to trace the presence of all kinds of symbols, which communicate a sense of group, of belonging, of community. These symbols could be objects, acts, events, concepts and expressions that are highly varied in their essence (rituals, spaces, monuments, constructions, landscapes, social practices, etc.) and which arouse feelings and emotions that stimulate action (Cohen, 1985). There are many cultural features that characterise these societies and which could become symbols. The question is: which of them are symbolically activated? In other words, which of them have developed as vehicles of communication? Which have become objects that symbolise relationships and therefore represent culture, acting as a basis for identity and community? This begs the question: what role do mining symbols play in the construction of community? Are they major elements in the community’s representation and discourse? Are they relegated to the background, far from discursive hegemony? Are they literally left out of identification discourse?

The construction of community in declining mining areas can respond to diverse identity models which are grounded in different symbol systems, where mining is one possible source of content.

When mines close down, the area must look for socio-economic alternatives and it is crucial to develop models of identification that provide symbolic coverage for the implementation of alternative activities. This situation can lead to a conscious rejection of mining in the symbolic sense (as well as the material sense), as the area looks for other sources of economic and identity production: other symbols and activities. When local society debates about its economic and productive future, it is also debating about the consistency of its symbolic elements, identity and community. At this point a paradoxical situation is reached. Tourism is brandished as a potential economic alternative in declining mining areas; however, these areas have few resources that are attractive to the development of tourism. Interestingly, the elements that could most appropriately be converted into a tourist resource through cultural tourism are the mining remains and the traces of the mining culture. However, in some of these areas it is also possible to activate other tourism resources: the landscape around the mines, certain traditional activities that were also carried out in addition to mining and which could now be revitalised or local historical references that predate mining. Support for different models of tourism...
development coincides with support for different symbols, heritage and models of local identification, which form a whole, provided the aim is to construct models of community.

The symbols that a symbolic community chooses to activate are linked to a differential, intentional and performative reading of the past, present and future of local society. The phenomenon of heritagisation represents the crystallisation of this process, in which the coordination between identity, community and tourism takes form. Community is constructed around symbols that are converted into heritage: open cast, derricks, pitheads, mining landscape, industrial facilities, tools, rituals, machinery, festivals and buildings. All of these elements could be turned into a vehicle to convey meaning related to heritage, identity, community, the symbolic and also tourism.

If there is no community or mining identity, if features and cultural elements related to mining are not activated symbolically, it is highly unlikely that they will be developed successfully as a tourist resource: in other words, it will be difficult to create consistent mining heritage tourism. Therefore, careful attention must be paid to the effect that identity and community have on heritage tourism.

5. Methodology

Identity and community are intangible rather than material concepts. This is not to say that they do not involve a certain materialisation or that the construction of these concepts does not have material effects, but rather that their configuration is chiefly symbolic/discursive. Here, discourse does not have a purely verbal dimension; it is rooted in social practice as an all-encompassing whole, illuminating both thought and action (Austin, 1996; Foucault, 1977). Discursive representations give meaning to the collective as such, and therefore guide its action, predisposition and desires. The interest of this study lies in revealing how discursive constructions based around identity and community condition the development of mining heritage tourism. Therefore this paper focuses on how tourist activity fits discursively into models of local community and identity. It is important to bear in mind that the development of heritage tourism not only involves making it possible for tourists to flock to a certain space and procuring the necessary infrastructure to support it, but there must also be heritage around which this tourist activity revolves. The symbolic and collective nature of heritage is what finally bestows analytical significance on identity and community.

Qualitative research provides the most appropriate means of approaching the object of our study. We aim to connect identities and models of symbolic community with conditions that govern the development of heritage tourism. Therefore, our work is exploratory/qualitative and aims to shed light on the mediation of identity in the tourist industry. Ethnography is the most suitable tool for this type of study (Chronis, 2005; Palmer, 2001).

Our fieldwork was carried out throughout 2004 and was completed by February 2005. In each of the areas, the process of mining “heritagisation” and the development of heritage tourism were studied. By consulting the documentation available and through in-depth interviews with the key participants of these processes, we have been able to reconstruct, analyse and compare the different heritage tourism development initiatives. At the same time, models of community identification were studied along with the mining’s role within them. It was crucial to establish the content of local identity discourses, via: (1) the detailed examination of extremely diverse materials using content analysis: advertising, official documents, local bibliography, guides, local iconography, etc.; (2) in-depth interviews (recorded and later transcribed) with key informants (between 15 and 20 in each area studied); and (3) participatory observation of festive rituals, public spaces, events, celebrations etc., a key strategy to infiltrate local life and corroborate the presence of identification discourses in the practices of social subjects (rather than merely relying on information provided by questionnaires and surveys).

6. Spheres of analysis

Once the ethnographies of each of the mining towns were analysed, and the corresponding analytical correlations and comparisons were established, five appropriate spheres clearly emerged to reveal the link between the development of heritage tourism and community identity: quality of the heritage; public and private intervention; heritage associations; configuration of the tourism market; and local government. Therefore, we will focus our reflections on these areas.

6.1. Quality of the heritage

In each of the towns studied, the ups and downs of the mining industry, the type of mining carried out and the historical period all bestow authenticity and individuality on the area, giving it the potential to become mining heritage. From a local point of view, heritage is unique and therefore valuable. Furthermore, from this perspective, we must also bear in mind that the potential mining heritage studied co-exists alongside other possible local heritages (such as the meat industry in Serón and the natural or Roman archaeological heritage in Villanueva), which also have tourist potential and in some cases, greater significance in relation to local identity. Therefore, the most important factor for the development of heritage tourism is not exclusively the intrinsic value of the heritage (its quality), but rather the initiative to exploit it for the purposes of tourism, which in turn is based on the value placed on the heritage by the local society: heritage is more of a social construction than a discovery made by specialists (Desvallées, 1995; Prats, 1997). In the cases
studied, the mining heritage does not lack importance either as heritage or a potential object of tourism. The most important aspect of these cases is to what extent the local community recognises itself in the activity of mining and identifies with the industry, converting its material remains and cultural elements into its own heritage. This must precede any eventual consideration of this heritage as a tourist resource, and the possibility that tourism could be part of a local development strategy (vital for regions in crisis).

You talk to anyone here, people just don’t think about mining. Local identity is based around Jaen [capital of the province] and that’s the fundamental element, not mining. The city has always been in crisis …(...) I just can’t see tourism based on local mining heritage working here. Heritage can’t be an economic alternative for anything here. Perhaps if they set up a good education centre so that local schools could visit, then that might create a fairly good employment structure, but I don’t think it would be very profitable. (Informant, Linares)

Our results show that the mining heritage in itself is not enough to explain the development of tourist activity or not. In Andalusian mining towns, it is not the “quality of the heritage” that explains the underdevelopment of mining tourism and therefore it is worth pausing to think about the identity aspect of this heritage. Hence, there are towns such as Villanueva where, even though its heritage has been officially recognised (see table 1), praised by specialists and defended by preservation associations, this heritage is not recognised from the point of view of local identity, and consequently it is not considered as a tourist resource from the local context. Quite the reverse is true here with the Munigua archaeological ruins, or the banks of the river Hueznar, areas that are frequented by the inhabitants of Villanueva in their leisure time and which are presented popularly as tourist resources and local heritage.

6.2. Public and private intervention

The intervention of regional and central governments, along with funding from the European Community, are strategic elements to understand the development of heritage tourism in Europe’s mining areas (Dicks, 2000; Etiembre et al., 1999; Ruiz and Iglesias, 1999). Specifically, in Andalusia, both heritage and the development of tourism are priority areas for the regional government. In fact, in all the contexts studied (except in Alquife), the role of the State has been decisive. There have been varying degrees of state support, both in the form of official declarations of heritage and government involvement (Villanueva, Linares and Serón), and in direct investment in tourism development (particularly in Serón and to a lesser extent in Linares). Yet, the intended development of heritage tourism has still been largely unsuccessful.

It is acknowledged that public investment should be the catalyst for endogenous tourism development, in which investors and local companies play a key role, but the growth of tourist services (hostelry and leisure companies) in the areas studied has been limited. Our research reveals that the explanation for this lies not only in the scant demand, but also in the fact that local mining heritage is undervalued as a tourist resource and locals scarcely identify with this heritage: “What’s there to see here for tourists?” asked one of the informants. The devaluation of heritage from within partly limits its potential as a tourist attraction, particularly in the case of small-scale tourism (Hampton, 2005). Exogenous private initiative in these rural areas has always been weak. In fact, in the cases studied, private initiative only appears in the sale/purchase of plots of land and disused facilities (Alquife), but there is no direct investment for tourism development. This situation is common in the development of heritage tourism in Andalusia.

6.3. Heritage associations

In Spain and Europe as a whole, the existence of associations and groups that work for the defence of heritage is vital so that heritage is valued and intervention takes place to restore and subsequently develop it for tourism (Ariño, 2003). In Villanueva, the work of two heritage defence associations has managed to do little to change the indifference felt by the local society towards mining. In Linares, such associations have had more of an impact on local government than on society as a whole. In Alquife, the constitution of a platform of technicians and academics—mostly from outside the town—has had little influence on the town or mining heritage. Hence, the conclusion reached is that these associations are more elite in nature rather and have little real social influence; they have more of an impact on the local power structure than on the community as a whole. We have verified that they do not have a direct influence on the models of identification and symbolic community without the help of local government. In Linares, although it might seem like a contradiction in terms, members of heritage associations can often be heard to say that “the association has no weight in society, we’re more like the anti-establishment”, whilst also maintaining that they “advise the current local government in the area of heritage policy”. In general, these associations are more like lobby groups than the voice of civil society: their membership numbers are very low in each town, their events scarcely attract the local elite and their representation speeches are limited to minority sectors. In general, their initiatives only transcend association circles when they are appropriated by local political institutions, which amplify them and convey them to the whole of local society.

However, in Serón, an association, which is not specifically heritage-oriented, has united the ex-miners (now emigrants) of the mine at Seron, called Las Menas,
and is gaining a significant role in heritage restoration and tourism development.

Years ago the Santa Barbara association was created, I’m the secretary, and all of us were born here in Las Menas [the mining area of Serón] or our families were. Our concern with mining has developed since the creation of this association. A few people in Serón are interested in our association, but mainly it’s people who emigrated to Catalonia. We aim to recover the historical memory of Las Menas. (...) Nothing is organised with the town’s associations. (...) The aim is to breathe life back into Las Menas. We hope to recover the historic heritage of Las Menas; that’s why we have helped with the repairs and maintenance of the chapel. (Secretary of the association, Serón)

This association brings together precisely those people for whom the mine represents a strong identity reference point for biographical and affective reasons, as opposed to the immense majority of the town that feels a connection with other symbolic elements, casting mining aside and openly rejecting the heritage and tourism-oriented actions that are taking place in the mining area of the town.

[about the Santa Barbara association] The townspeople don’t like this association, they don’t think it’s right. (...) Most of the members of this association are from other places, there are very few from the town itself ....I’m in a cultural association but we’ve never had anything to do with [the mines at] Las Menas, we focus on dances, customs, typical dress etc. Perhaps we should turn our attention to [the mines at] Las Menas, but we haven’t so far. (Informant, Serón)

Furthermore, the position of many pro-heritage associations with regards tourism must be defined. In Villanueva and Linares, the associations have an ambiguous attitude to the use of heritage for tourism purposes. In the link between heritage and identity, they consider tourism as a contaminating factor or one that reduces authenticity: their objective is the restoration of local identity rather than commercialisation. According to these associations, a conceptual incompatibility can be determined between heritage and tourism, which is justified by the assumption that the weakness of the mining identity will be even greater if mining heritage focuses on tourist trade rather than local “consumption” (García, 1995; Hannabus, 1999; Miller, 1999; Ortiz, 1998). Hence, and also in relation to identity and the symbolic configuration of the community, pro-heritage associations can become obstacles rather than activators of heritage tourism development.

6.4. Configuration of the tourist market

It is worth examining whether the lack of tourism development in the areas studied could be linked with the characteristics of the region’s tourist market. The limitations and specificities of industrial heritage tourism make it more of a complement to other tourist destinations than a product in its own right and with its own sustainability. In Southern Spain, this situation is intensified by the great importance of sun and sea tourism in the region and the existence of cultural destinations with a long tradition of tourist activity (Seville, Cordoba, Granada). However, all of this, rather than a weakness for the development of industrial heritage tourism, could be considered a strength, if it is understood as a complement and a generator of synergy. Specifically, in three of the cases studied, we found a significant link with consolidated natural and cultural tourist destinations, located just a short distance away and with good communication links (Alquife, Villanueva and Linares), and only Serón is in more of an unconventional location, although this is compensated by a substantial improvement in its communication and other links with an area that is undergoing significant expansion in sun and sea tourism (the coast of Almería). Therefore, the mining regions studied should be sufficiently linked to other consolidated natural and cultural tourist destinations, as well as relatively well connected to popular sun and sea destinations where there is a growing demand for complementary cultural tourism (Consejería de Turismo, Comercio y Deporte, 2004).

6.5. Local governments

In Andalusia, local governments, regardless of their political orientation, view tourism as a way to reactivate the economy. From this assumption, they strive to look for elements and come up with images that could be used for the purposes of tourism to contribute both to local regeneration and economic growth and also subsequently benefit them politically/electorally. Hence, tourism and politics would seem to be inextricably linked (Hall, 1994) and tourism development occupies a significant place on local political agendas. Among the local councils we studied, some of them have only recently begun to act and plan in this area (Villanueva in 2003, Alquife in 2004) following periods in which they have maintained an ambiguous position or have kept away from these strategies. The town council of Serón, despite having played an active role in “heritagisation” and tourism development, has had little room to manoeuvre, as we shall see later on. In connection with tourism and mining heritage in Linares, the council has considered strategic lines of action both in relation to local development and political advantage.

Linares is a modern city where our residents enjoy life and benefit from a booming economy based on industrial diversification and urban adaptation to commerce and services. The inhabitants of Linares have made this miracle possible, turning our city into the capital of a large district and an example of how to face the challenges of the future. Far from forgetting our history, more than ever we are trying to conserve and
restore it. The hoist is a monument that pays tribute to all the miners who gave their health and even their lives in our mines, and who helped to make the dream of our city come true. (Institutional advert, Linares Council)

Bearing in mind the structure and role of government in these issues in Southern Europe (Hospers, 2002), council backing is crucial for the development of heritage tourism. All our areas of study, although to varying degrees, have benefited from councils that are committed, sooner or later, to heritage tourism, but even so, the success rates have been minimal. The explanation for this is not only in the scant exogenous support—which has been provided, although modestly, by the public sector—or the lack of integration of the tourist product, but rather it has much more to do with the involvement of mining in the symbolic models of local community. Local councils, despite their pre-eminent positions in the systems of local power in Andalusia (Ruiz, 2000, 2001; Talego, 1996, 2001), cannot bend social identities to suit their purposes, and these identities can pose a serious obstacle to strategies aimed at developing industrial tourism.

7. The role of the mining identity in community models: effects on tourism

In Serón, the physical and symbolic distance between local society and the mining population is long standing: there is no local symbolic manifestation in which any reference to mining appears. Therefore it is not surprising that when the mines closed and the miners emigrated, local society tried to forget the mine and construct its identity around other symbolic reference points: the natural surroundings and, above all, ham and pork products. Local identity is constructed in opposition to symbolic mining reference points that are even used to reinforce the “us” (the townspeople) versus “them” (the miners) opposition. Town council actions in relation to mining heritage and its exploitation for the purposes of tourism go against the meaning of local community, which imposes obvious limits in terms of political logic. However, even though the last two mayors (1983–2005) have shown strategic interest in tourism development in the mining town (Las Menas),

When I was elected Mayor in 1983, I had a personal ambition to develop them [the mines at Las Menas] for tourism. I wanted to do something as a tourist town with the townspeople, but the council didn’t have the money. (…) I was the driving force behind this process and I had to convince the various different departments of the Andalusian Regional Government: public works, culture… (…) [The Mayor of Serón 1]

[about the mines in Las Menas] We now hope that the projects that have been defined will be completed. (…) The Council must lead on this process so that people don’t forget what this was and so that whatever is done is a combined effort. (…) We must understand that the town is more than just its buildings; it has a social significance and heritage, which must be valued across the board, and which could generate wealth. I hope to get funding for this, but it’s difficult, there’s a lack of awareness. All of this could really influence the local economy. Tourism planning should be geared towards… [Mayor of Serón 2]

They are equally aware that this initiative contradicts the identity-related perceptions and models of their neighbours. Furthermore, significant State investment for the development of tourism in the mining area has not changed this tendency in the slightest, and was met with strong criticism from local society. The local population displays a certain degree of contempt towards the mining world; they do not acknowledge that the tourist initiative in this area of the town has any relevance or interest.

Traditionally there has been friction, a certain degree of jealousy between Serón and Las Menas (…) In the town there isn’t really any unemployment, there are lots of older people and the young people work in construction or the marble companies in Macael. The village is doing well in terms of work and money. There’s no way that people here will work in Las Menas tourism. People really don’t like what’s going on in Las Menas. No one in Serón or Bacares wants to have anything to do with it. (Hotel owner in Serón)

In Alquife, the recent mine closure and surrounding controversy have turned mining into an issue of acute local conflict, which has meant that the town council has almost completely steered clear of any issues related with mining heritage until quite recently (2004). Faced with this traumatic situation, forgetting the mining past appears to be a clear survival strategy, since it calms tension in local society. At the same time, other identity-related reference points have been rescued that block out the frustration of mining and light the way to the future. Local society is diluted not only for socio-economic reasons, but also for ideological ones: symbolic mining reference points are not used to construct community. As an alternative, they are increasingly looking towards the agricultural identity of Alquife’s surrounding region. Mining and farming have co-existed in an asymmetric relationship that has favoured the former industry (Checa, 1995, 1999), but current farming activity could be flourished as an identity-related alternative, which projects a different heritage other than mining and encourages tourism development based fundamentally on “ruralness” and “nature”. It would involve references to the land, the mountains, ways of life related to cattle farming, both in the main festivals, which do not honour the Patron Saint of miners, and in the definition and commercialisation of typical products (pork, honey, soaps, ceramics, woven handicrafts, etc.), which are made to be sold to tourists on their way to the Sierra Nevada National Park.
In the region of Villanueva, it is extremely surprising that industrial tourism has not been activated. All the factors analyzed indicate highly positive conditions for its development. However, since the pit closed in 1973, mining has been disappearing from discourse and the community is diluting both qualitatively and quantitatively. As some of the informants commented, “the people of the town don’t feel proud of the mining past”. The identity dimension of mining is limited to minority groups of the town and emigrants. Owing to the lack of other reference points, we find mining references in images and rituals (statue of the miner, the Santa Barbara pilgrimage), but these uses of mining are not really sustaining a model of identification in the town. Nor can we glimpse the development of alternative identity reference points other than mining, not because the local community is lacking in them, but because they are not activated in their symbolic sense. In Villanueva, not only is the mining identity weak, but also the actual community configuration; from this starting point it is very difficult to develop initiatives based around mining heritage, despite its importance.

The weakness of the mining identity in Linares is similar to the cases described above, although for very different reasons. Mining slowly vanished from imaginary and local models of identity at the same time as a double phenomenon was taking place: the progressive deactivation of mining from the first third of the 20th century onwards, and the subsequent peak of industrial activity. During this period, mining lost economic and symbolic significance and in particular prestige as an activity. The community significance of mining in the town was diluted and gradually substituted by industrial significance. But in the last quarter of the 20th century, industry also slumped, so its role as a symbolic reference point also came into question. The local symbolic community lacks strong reference points and only recently have highly specific groups, and in particular the town council itself, tried to restore not only the material remains of mining (which have remained in an abject state of neglect for decades), but also their potential to construct an identity for the damaged local symbolic community.

Bringing a hoist to the city centre is like bringing historical memory. For me, the mining monument is not where it should be, it should be in more of a mining environment, in a mining neighbourhood, on the way out towards the mining areas… These two actions in the city centre aim to recover historical memory. In the nice parts of the city there should be things that identify us; it’s a question of self-identification, with our symbols, mining, a hoist, a flag … It’s the reunion of our own symbols; we are that past, that history… (Informant, Linares)

Within the framework of this strategy, actions have been carried out such as the illumination of mining remains on access roads to the city, as well as the urban relocation of hoist and mining monuments; however, in our study, we did not find evidence of any other actions that would attest to a consistent process of local identification with mining: the social use of mining spaces, rituals grounded in the mining culture, the recovery of mining traditions, etc.

This transversal approach from the perspective of identity and community allows a more complete explanation of the scarce development of mining heritage tourism in Southern Spain. Although on an initial level of analysis it might seem strange, the towns studied—in which mining has had a great social, economic and cultural importance—do not have a significant model of mining identification that articulates the symbolic construction of community hegemonically. In general, we have verified that there is little local “consumption” of and demand for mining heritage. This makes it difficult to value and restore heritage, which would be the first step for development as a tourism resource. Thus, the existence of public support and capital, the quality of the tourism resource, heritage associations, the interest of local government and the synergy of the regional tourism offer are not enough by themselves to activate tourism development.

8. Conclusions

There is a tendency to think that the main explanatory factors in order to understand the development of heritage tourism (as for any type of tourism) are the market, its generation of demand, and the intervention of the State. Without denying their irrefutable influence, our research shows that endogenous factors of the host societies must also be taken into account in order to explain more thoroughly why heritage tourism has developed in some areas and not in others. However, we go beyond a simple consideration of the generation of tourism offer within the market. Certain models of local identity and the development of specific community discourses undoubtedly condition the possibility and success of the tourism offer. Tourism affects and constructs identities, but identities can also construct or obstruct tourism. This circumstance can clearly be discerned in the cases analysed here.

For the development of heritage tourism, the existing heritage must be able to be converted into a tourism resource. Tourism, on the other hand, as an economic industry, is subject to the convergence of the market with the relevant public legislation. However, heritage is deeply rooted in the sense of community, on the one hand, and the content of identity on the other. Without a sense of community, there is no collective heritage; without an identity based around mining, there will be no mining heritage, only remains and ruins that are not valued or used. Thus (and no matter how much unquestionable external value they have) it will be very difficult to convert them into a tourism resource from endogenous initiative and they will not be offered on the tourism market. Identity and community are decisive factors to understand the development of heritage tourism, especially that which has been termed new tourism and small-scale tourism.
It is not difficult to imagine that these same circumstances could be found in other contexts and with other heritages. For the type of heritage tourism analysed here, one must take into account that the initiative for tourism development must come from within the local society itself but it also depends on exogenous support, normally from the public sector. However, the members of a community must value the potential of their heritage as a tourist product, in order to widen their offer; in order to do this, it is fundamental for the local population itself to establish a “relationship of consumption” with its heritage (García, 1995; Hannabus, 1999; Miller, 1999; Ortiz, 1998); in other words, said heritage must be positioned strategically in the symbolic construction of community.

This does not mean ignoring the influences of tourism on identities, excluding other explanatory factors of the development of heritage tourism, or establishing a hierarchy of importance between them. The aim of this paper is to highlight the complex nature of the heritage tourism system, underlying how identities and the construction of community have a significant influence on this type of tourist activity. This approach is used to highlight the role of local societies in the development and sustainability of this type of tourism. Furthermore, this expands on and clarifies the role of tourism in models of local development, providing a more specific content for the conceptualisations of social capital and resilience (cf. Barret et al., 2005; Chenoweth & Stehlik, 2001; Grant 2001; Wiesenfeld & Giuliani, 2002) in the development of tourism.

On the other hand, research into tourism enriches the understanding of identities and community, going deeper into the practical meaning and operational capability of these notions. Analysis of heritage tourism development reveals the defining aspects of identity and community as reflected in the literature: its complex, conflictive, political and contingent nature. But at the same time, it illustrates how this complexity is resolved in practice. All of this sheds light on the role of identity and community in the way society functions, which, far from being a minor role, is in fact crucial to understanding processes of crisis and socioeconomic change.

Yet the conclusions of this study are not only theoretical. From the relevance of processes of identification and the configuration of the symbolic community, at least two recommendations can be drawn regarding the planning and management of tourism projects based around heritage. On the one hand, the opportunity to use participatory methodologies for the planning and management of heritage tourism (Aas, Ladkin, & Fletcher, 2005; Hampton, 2005), since this would be the most suitable model to guarantee appropriate knowledge of the tourism settings. And on the other hand, the need to know—before supporting any heritage tourism initiative—the “identity status” of the collectives whose heritage is to be converted into a tourism resource. In order to do this, one must include indicators relating to community identity in the assessment, planning and management of heritage tourism projects.

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