

STRATEGIES OF REGENERATION OF FORMER MINING SITES IN ROMANIA

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Summary

The article debates the reuse possibilities of industrial sites in general and particularly the mining industrial sites. In Romania the mining exploitations have led to the birth of communities and for some they have been a growth source. Therefore abandoned mining sites have a huge impact in economic, social, ecological and urban terms.

The paper presents three possibilities of tourism regeneration and their impacts in the country. The three strategies are: recovery by construction – conservation; recovery through building reuse for the benefit of the community; and the last one transformation in alternative industrial production parks. Their implementation in Romania would have an enormous positive impact both nationally and internationally.

Keywords: Romania, industrial heritage, tourism, mining

1 Introduction

1.1 Industrial heritage – focusing on Romania

Industrial heritage is a very poor or not exploited part of cultural heritage in Romania. Significant remains of buildings and machinery exist, such as: workshops, factories, mines and sites for processing and refining, places where energy is generated, transmitted and used, transport and its entire infrastructure, as well as places used for other activities related to industry. In Romania there is not yet a national approach to what former mining sites represent. Before 1989 the mines were supposed to support the national economy, with the export of minerals. The aim of this action was to minimize the imports and international debt. The result consisted in oversizing of the mining sector. Starting with 1990 the country has made great efforts to support the sector. At the end of 2005, because of lack of strategy, almost everything had to be shut down. Mine closure had serious consequences in Romania “the most serious social effects have been associated with the reduction of the number of employees” [3]. What it was even more problematic had been the concentration of a massive loss of employment in a limited time: more than 71000, “employees were fired in just three months, August – October 1997” [3]. This caused major economic, social and psychological crises. All over the country there are major sites

that need to be redesigned. An interesting area is in the west, where a combination of all major Romanian types of exploitations persists: coal (Jiu Valley); gold (Brad, Roșia Montana) and ferrous minerals (Hunedoara).

1.2 Site description – west side of the country

For this reason the article will focus on the west part of the country. The chosen sites are: Zarand–Brad and Jiu Valley depressions. These are developments from the same county – Hunedoara, with an important history of mining. Viewing the different mining sectors; the sites are different in terms of technology, urban typology, surface and environmental problems. But they have in common the fact that between 1998–2004, both have been declared disadvantaged mining areas, for a period of ten years [3].

At Brad, the first mining exploitation was documented in the year 21 BC. The extraction intensified between 1918–1948 and was closed in 2006 [2]. Since then the processing areas are in a continuous state of destruction. The principal features of this region are: the rarity (in Europe); the present openness of the municipality (project The Golden Way); the living memory of industry due to the recent closure.

The region of Jiu Valley, being the biggest coal exploitation region in Romania has a different status. The history of coal fields started in 1869 and parts of it are still open and will be until 2018. In total there are five open cores: Petrița, Petroșani, Vulcan, Lupeni, Uricani and two closed: Aninoasa and Câmpu lui Neag. The most important feature of this region is the living industry. Because of this complete mining sites can still be seen and therefore possible to analyze the relation between people and mine.

For both sites characteristics such as accessibility, accommodation options, presence of activities that can sustain industrial tourism are of major importance, not forgetting the need for cleaning and greening of the sites.

2 Sustainable development strategies

Based on the above description of the two sites, a conclusion can be deduced: there are reasons that qualify them for applying of tourism regeneration strategies. These are three: recovery by construction conservation – focus on heritage tourism; recovery through building reuse – focus on cultural regeneration, with a touristic secondary effect; recovery by transformation in alternative industrial production parks – focus is on keeping the industry alive, but as practice proves tourists are attracted by this.

The three kinds of strategies complement each other and well managed can lead to remarkable results. There are some steps that have to be followed: consultation of national and international laws; obtaining of EU funds and generating participative workshops for the communities. Community contribution and political support are non – negotiable elements in these situations. Community as an important key, needs to be constantly defined and stabilized [4].

2.1 Recovery by construction conservation – image regeneration

The major focus is on heritage tourism; this is the only one of the three strategies completely based on tourism. It is suitable for sites that concentrate impressive industrial heritage, have examples of indisputable architecture, construction models or technology. The positive aspects are: the strengthening of the community through a common goal;

improving the image; reintegration of waste lands in the urban agglomeration; attracting of new employees; improve working morale. For tourism to be sustainable it is necessary to balance the relation between public and private good. It is important to be realistic about market potential and not over estimate. Good examples for this kind of approach are: Ironbridge or Beamish – the living museum, from United Kingdom.

In the Brad region examples are concentrated from the period of the Roman Empire (Musariu galleries), up to modern times (Brad, Crişcior, Gurabarza, Căinelu, Băiţa). It is important to mention also the “12 Apostles Church”, the Brad railway Station and railway Brad–Gurabarza that have been declared historical monuments. All these possible tourism anchorage points are completed by: authentic mining colonies, a gold museum unique in Europe and diverse technological constructions. A break for a future project could be the relatively small community and the small budget. Because of this a mandatory step would be the attraction of private or european funds.

Concerning the Jiu Valley, because of the big surface “affected” by mining and the separation in seven mining points, a strong strategy should be found for the whole. What should be kept? In what form? What is the major attraction? These are just few questions that need an answer. In this case the industrial heritage tourism is sustained and could work due to a mixture of open – closed sites. The tourist would have the possibility to see the real process of extraction and to understand the evanescent characteristic of a process in industrial history. This strategy should be implemented as soon as possible, because the good results could be an argument for keeping the state of open-closed parts even after 2018.

2.2 Building reuse for the benefit of the community – cultural regeneration

This strategy is focusing on the idea of changing the function of industrial buildings according with community needs. Usually the new architectural programs are cultural, which at a secondary level do attract tourists. A good example is “Cité de design” in Saint Etienne, France. Even if this strategy is the most frequently used, it usually needs subventions to work. Therefore in the actual conditions, it has to be doubled at least by the third type of strategy, proposed in this article. There are two important questions in this case: What are the needs of the community? Which is the present – future character?

Zarand depression is formed by a number of valleys from which two have great importance in this case study: Brad Valley and Crişcior Valley, both previous gold exploitation fields. Their intersection is marked by the biggest industrial site – Gurabarza. These two valleys gather a population of 20721 inhabitants. Various buildings of the industrial site could be converted, keeping the local scale. This could become the activity – articulation point and through this the industrial character of the area will be kept alive.

Jiu Valley is an urban agglomeration of 147000 inhabitants, and also a second university town. Some of the industrial buildings could be “recycled” in spaces for learning, libraries, and conference rooms. To be successful the political and community goal have to be the same and the strategy has to be based on: culture, education and industrial architecture; good examples from France are the promoting strategies of towns like: Saint Etienne or Lyon. Also it’s of big importance the municipality opening, a proof is the organization in Petrila of an international architecture workshop.

2.3 Transformation in alternative production industry parks – principal economic regenerator

The last, but not least important strategy is transformation to alternative production industry parks, keeping the industrial tradition. This kind of approach generates jobs and communities economically rebalance. As already stated, mining communities face big economic problems, due to increased unemployment and vacancy rates; which also lead to a decrease in population. New job creation is separated in two phases: firstly rehabilitation of existing facilities and construction if necessary of new ones and secondly working in the new facilities. A good example for this could be: Tech'Hom Belfort, France.

Jiu and Zarand depressions were both declared disadvantaged areas a few years ago because of mining closure. Even if until now the results aren't as expected, due to: "bureaucratic obstacles, inefficient consultancy services, difficulties of communication between authorities and investors, corruption, frequent legislative changes" [3] and mental laziness; at least a platform to facilitate investments has been created. Due to the law number 20, from 1999 these areas benefit from a series of tax exemptions and discounts; encouraging small and average investments; the creation of temporary jobs and requalification projects. Furthermore, unused industrial buildings and infrastructure are suitable for accommodation of new industrial functions; take for example the halls from Gurabarza site or various buildings, chimneys, towers from Jiu Valley.

3 Conclusions

In the context of the European Union, where Romania is a peripheral partner, the big question is what are the policies that the country should apply to the regeneration of mining sites and communities? As debated in the article, a major thematic strategy is industrial tourism, that comes in three different forms. Together they could have the desired effects: image, cultural regeneration and new working places. All these methods maintain the industrial memory alive. In conclusion the country could be the new "playground" for all kind of tourists searching for industry past, present and future.

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