

From an orphan mine site to a touristic asset, La Florida mines, Cueva del Soplao

2005 Countries covered: Spain

Summary:

The El Soplao project is one of the most ambitious underground works for tourism , undertaken in Spain. The coexistence of three fundamental elements: touristic offer, research and dissemination to the general public of scientific findings is considered a successful component of innovative approach for mine closure.



Description:

La Florida lead-zinc mines were intensively exploited from 1857 to 1978. The mines had the most advanced technology of their era, including the construction of shafts, locomotives and the innovative equipment for drilling and hauling. In 1908, during the excavation of a gallery, a huge natural cavity full of outstanding speleothems was discovered by the miners, attracting worldwide popularity. The cave of El Soplao has approximately 15 km of routes, located in an underground mine complex of more than 30 km which was developed for the mining of zinc and lead ores. Cantabria, the region where La Florida lead-zinc mines are located, was the most significant zinc district in the world between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. During the exploitation period of the mine, until the 1970's, the region was very prosperous: In addition to the mining activity, agriculture and cattle raising were highly developed. The area experienced a great boom and modernisation. In 1978, the mine was abandoned due to the lack of regulations concerning the closure of mines and the environmental restoration. Abandoning the region without the realization of any restoration actions had consequence, such as the gradual weakening of economic activity and the emigration of the population.

The regional economic situation changed after the tourist exploitation of the mine in 2005. After negotiations that were carried out between 1996 and 2003, it was in the summer of 2003 that political and administrative decisions were taken to convert this cave into a public attraction. Between December 2003 and March 2007, all the tourist rehabilitation works had been completed. The official opening took place in July 2005, except the visitor center and the mining train. There was an important public investment in its restoration and access infrastructure and the area was re-developed. Currently, about 200,000 visitors are annually visiting the mining museum and it is one of the most important tourist attractions in the region. There are around 40 direct jobs and additionally many indirect ones in the valley. The hostelry sector in the area has been developed with the new project. The migration trend in the region has been interrupted and the population increases. In the year 2008, a transcendental event took place in the surroundings and it was the discovery of the Cretaceous amber deposit. Currently, some additional research work is performed in the so-called "El Soplao territory", mainly in the Plaza del Monte and the mouth of Cereceo, in

the La Florida mine complex. The education was always a basic pillar, as well as sharing the discoveries with the general public: for that reason the cave - mine has a private managed "tourist" structure together with a department with public funds that manages the research and communication of findings.

Good practice areas:

Economic sustainability

Re-integration of disturbed areas into landscape-land reclamation and profit

Environmental sustainability

Re-integration of disturbed areas into landscape-land reclamation and profit

Social responsibility

The bad examples of waste disposal and mine closure (or better mine abandonment) of the past times were turn into modern projects that give to the area and its population another source of income: eco-friendly tourism.

Organisations involved:

<http://www.elsoplao.es>

IGME

<http://www.igme.es>

Innovation category:

System

Impact on the mining value chain

- MINE CLOSURE / WASTE management (incl. Permitting)

Mine closure / Waste

- mine site reclamation/rehabilitation for subsequent uses

Linked policies

Mining policies & legislation

Transferability:

The "La Florida" mine can be considered a very good example for the touristic exploitation of similar mining districts in Europe.

Innovation drivers and barriers

Drivers:

Other

The IGME project "Apadrina una roca" - "Sponsor a Stone" is a way to approach the geological heritage preservation to society. All the Spanish LIGs can be sponsored free by any citizen without any geological background but with strong interest in the preservation. This give a strong workforce to many sites that otherwise will be impossible to be supervised by authorities.

Other

El Soplao cave - mines is an outstanding research laboratory catalogued as LIG - Site of Geological Interest and GEOSITE UR004

Barriers:

Other

The special protection framework helps the preservation of the site, but sometimes the procedure for research permits and technical visits is difficult and slow.

Impact Area

Area:

Environment, Ecosystem services and quality of natural resources

Impact on listed area:

+: Land reclamation

+: Protected area as Geosite

Area:

Human/Social, Education and skills

Impact on listed area:

+: Promotion of geoconservation, international symposiums and congresses are organized regularly

Area:

Economic, Financial flows and profitability

Impact on listed area:

+: The increasement of tourism supports the local economy

Area:

Economic, Employment

Impact on listed area:

+: New jobs