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Processes of Reinterpretation of Mining Heritage: the Case of Bergslagen, Sweden

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ABSTRACT

Mining heritage is often used as a powerful tool in maintaining a sense of place and national identity, and Sweden is not different in this respect. Another important motive for the revival of the mining past is the opportunity for the economic revitalisation of the space marked by the deindustrialisation process. The aim of this paper is to investigate how mining heritage is interpreted and used for the goals of tourism destination development based on the five provinces in the middle part of Sweden that are called Bergslagen. The first decade of the 2000s was characterised by the prevailing top-down approach to the regeneration process of the mining landscape of Bergslagen; the process was led by public institutions that were mainly concerned with preserving the cultural heritage left over from the mining era. This resulted in the absence of a diverse and innovative thinking in terms of the touristic development of these destinations. Municipalities in the region ended up with multiple mining sites trying to attract visitors with similar types of experiences based on the limited representations of the regional mining heritage. Enhancing communication between the managers of the mining sites and closer collaboration with other tourism sites in the same region would improve visitation. Additionally, alternative interpretations of the heritage might allow for a wider representation of local people, as well as an awareness of the local or regional heritage of Bergslagen.

Keywords: Mining Heritage; Tourism Development; Sweden; Bergslagen; Destination Development

Культурное наследие горной промышленности часто используется как мощный инструмент для воспитания чувства гордости за страну, Швеция в этом отношении не отличается от других стран. Одной из причин, пристального внимания к этим

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вопросам, являются экономические выгоды столь необходимые для реабилитации, так же и местного хозяйства. Цель данной работы рассмотреть как культурное наследие горного дела, используется для развития туризма на примере пяти провинций в центральной части Швеции – района именуемого Бергслagen. В этой статье приводятся конкретные примеры, использования закрытых рудников для этих целей. Туризм на этих рудниках носит разноплановый характер, позволяющий местным агентам развивать и сопутствующие виды туризма. На первом этапе развития, в начале 2000-х годах, инициаторами возрождения выступила культурная элита региона, но эти люди не были заинтересованы в использования памятником горного дела в качестве туристических объектов. Этот период развития с начала 2000х годов, характеризуется, отсутствием инновативных подходов к развитию объектов, связанных с горнодобывающей промышленностью. Муниципалитеты региона в конечном итоге, оказались с набором направлений, представляющих ограниченный интерес со стороны широкой аудитории, так как в основу развития туристического продукта было заложено ограниченное понимание того что в действительности привлекает туристов. Результатом данной работы стали рекомендации, использование которых призвано положительно повлиять на создавшуюся ситуацию в регионе. Менеджеры объектов использования наследия горной промышленности нуждаются в более тесном взаимодействии и обмене опытом между собой. Для более широкого использования культурного наследия горного дела, необходимо вовлечение в этот процесс представителей местного населения, что будет способствовать осознанию значения этого наследия для региона и всей страны.

Keywords: Культурное наследие горной промышленности; туристическое развитие; Швеция; Бергслagen; развитие туристических направлений

Introduction

Throughout Europe the notion of “heritagisation”, meaning the redevelopment of old industrial spaces into consumption places in Europe’s older industrial areas (Edwards & Llordés i Coit, 1996, p. 345), dates back to the early 1980s. As such, the potential of tourism landscapes in relation to natural resource extraction (underground or the open type of mineral exploitation) was realised. This process is perceived as having two aspects: it is a practical solution for bringing industrial heritage “back to life” and commodifying it for the purpose of tourism. And, industrial regions can be used as a platform for innovation and new thinking, which creates benefits for the local economy (Hospers, 2002, p. 402).

In Sweden, local revitalisation campaigns based on the use of cultural or industrial heritage took place during the 1980s and 1990s and were supported by regional and local governments facilitating the process of utilising cultural heritage for commercial purposes (Grundberg, 2000, 2002; Heldt-Cassel & Pashkevich, 2011, 2014; Molin et al., 2007; Westin, 2005). Some studies (e.g., Ballesteros & Ramírez, 2007; Hospers, 2002) suggest that the increased focus on heritage areas of declining industrial regions in Europe has been a consequence of the search for alternative methods of socio-economic development and for ways to strengthen national and regional identities.

It is more challenging to value abandoned industrial sites and mining landscapes than other types of cultural heritage that, according to Swedish law, should be protected and preserved. Debates concerning the correct evaluation of the actual value to society of these landscapes were new to the Swedish representatives of the cultural institutions that were working to preserve the cultural heritage (Dahlström Rittsel, 2005). The Swedish state became involved in the process by initiating an inventory of the industrial landscapes and developing a platform of financial support specifically aiming at the preservation industrial heritage. However, this direct involvement of the state only lasted until the early 2000s (Dahlström Rittsel, 2005; Isakson, 2007).

The aim of this paper is to analyse the process of reimagining a mining heritage as a means of tourism destination development, from the perspective of both former and active mining areas in Sweden. The study examines the various interpretations of mining heritage and the processes behind the way these sites are re-developed to attract and strengthen touristic value. Bergslagen in the middle of Sweden was chosen as the study area. The study answers the following questions: How was a transformation of mining heritage for modern use in the tourism industry facilitated in Bergslagen? What were the major challenges identified during this transformation process? How did this transformation affect the actual development of mining tourism destinations that were in the initial stage of development?

This paper is structured in the following way: First, the term “mining heritage” is defined, and the issues of mining heritage preservation and redevelopment in Bergslagen are identified. Mining heritage is part of Sweden’s industrial heritage, and it is important to place it in relation to the overarching themes and questions of industrial heritage use in the country, and in the region of Bergslagen in particular. This study analyses attempts to reinterpret the mining areas of Bergslagen for use in tourism. Finally, the outcomes of the developmental projects specifically targeting the

process of destination development based on mining heritage are evaluated, and conclusions are made.

1. Reassessing Swedish mining heritage

1.1 Issues of the past and present

Industrial heritage in general consists of every social and cultural form of life connected to 1900s society (Silven & Isacson, 1999, p. 8). Mining heritage, in this paper, is considered on two spatial levels: the local level and the regional level. The local level refers to mining heritage in connection to an open pit area, which could be closed down or still operational, and is based on the joint history of the exploitation, transport networks (natural or human-made), and history of settlement. Furthermore, even the mentality of the people still residing in these areas is considered part of the mining heritage. The regional mining heritage of the middle of Sweden (that is, the region of Bergslagen) is a vital part of the overall industrial heritage of the country that has been developed by several generations of workers from all over the country.

The process of deindustrialisation in Sweden began almost at the same time as in the rest of Europe, in the beginning of the 1970s (Storm, 2008). Extraction industries based on natural resources (coal, iron or copper ore, and other minerals) were hit by low profitability and in some areas were forced to shut down. However, in Sweden this process was somewhat delayed and came into full effect only by the late 1970s and early 1980s. Most of the depressed municipalities were located in the old industrial mining area of Bergslagen. Regional and local governments were assigned the task of evaluating the possibilities of reemploying the labour force available after closures, as well as of creating conditions for entrepreneurship and new businesses. The area holds a combination of more than a thousand years of mining history that was recently terminated (Falun Mine, for example, operated from around the 12th century until it was closed in 1992), as well as on-going mining operations. After Sweden joined the European Union in 1995, these areas became a subject of European Commission funds within the initiative Goal 2, aimed at reinforcing the regional identity and image of Bergslagen (Heldt Cassel & Pashkevich, 2011, 2014; Jakobsson, 2009).

The use of cultural industrial heritage in Sweden was discussed by numerous research efforts (Alzén, 2006; Aronsson, 2005; Braunerhielm, 2006; Grundberg, 2000, 2002; Ronström, 2008; Silven & Isacson, 1999). Most of them reported increased attention towards reassessment of past histories and practices in order to find new uses of cultural heritage for the means of socio-economic development. The definition of heritage and its quite often “non-democratic” character was also closely scrutinised by scholars (Alzén, 2006; Aronsson, 2005; Ronström, 2008); working with heritage and its uses became a privilege for a certain group of individuals. In this situation, questions concerning the end-users were not investigated fully, which led to a mismatch in the interpretations of what should be put on display, as discussed in detail in Heldt Cassel and Pashkevich (2011, 2014). Quite often, only a certain “polished” picture of the past

was presented to visitors, making it difficult to add any alternative interpretations, to show a multi-layered interpretation of the past.

Several research efforts went further and began to question the authenticity of the modern “heritisation” process, meaning that for the sake of end-users, only a certain part of historical environments and traditions are emphasized (Grundberg, 2000, 2002; Ronström, 2008; Silven & Isacsson, 1999). Furthermore, researchers realised that the notion of heritage is often used to describe something that could both include and exclude certain interest groups (Braunerhielm, 2005). Heldt Cassel and Pashkevich (2011) also described cases of limited community involvement in the planning process. The authors suggested that using the general public opinion in the commodification of heritage could give the alternative results observed in some study cases (Heldt Cassel & Pashkevich, 2011).

The process of redevelopment of old industrial landscapes in Sweden for the means of tourism development has taken various forms. Certain locations chose to focus on the development of experiences that combine interpretations of the area’s actual history with imaginary events. Thus, a tourism product based only partly on reality is able to evoke people’s interest and engagement in their own past (Mossberg & Johansen, 2006). In addition, according to Molin et al. (2007), the process of developing heritage destinations can potentially lead to a situation in which the developers are interested in creating a product that will entertain and generate profit, at the expense of the original story of the heritage, which could be modified to suit tourists’ interests, thereby challenging the authenticity of the product. These discussions correspond to the well-documented notion of the “disneyfication” of heritage (Mortensen, 2008; Souther, 2007).

Therefore, it is possible to conclude that marketing issues related to the multiple uses of cultural or industrial heritage are somewhat marginalised, as most of the discussions in the literature concentrate on the issues of authority and owning the “right” to tell a story to visitors. Some discussions in the literature try to come to terms with the question of the commercialisation of cultural objects and the principles of finding ways to revitalise peripheral areas. However, there remains anxiety over the potential conflicts between different stakeholder groups, who may not be fully prepared to meet the challenges of private capital running these sites (Heldt Cassel & Pashkevich, 2011).

In general, the nature of the heritage product is discussed in the existing literature, as is the role of the principle stakeholders in forming the product according to their own understanding of what should be put on display for visitors. If there is a conflict between interest groups, the touristic use of the site as well as the management becomes very problematic. There is also conflict among the possibilities of preserving mining heritage and developing it into something other than an open-air museum. The examples given later in the text illustrate that there are forces able to commit themselves not only to preservation, but also to the creation of experiences that make visitors want to go back and see places again.

1.2 Regeneration of depressed industrial areas

The appreciation of the industrial landscape left after mining operations is not necessarily explicit, and open pits and cracks in the landscape often were used as dumping sites by local farmers (Barnatt & Penny, 2004, p. 46). Public attitudes towards mining heritage in Europe changed significantly in recent decades. Mining sites that were once considered wastelands became an integral part of modern society. Examples can be found in the experiences of the development of the Peak District (the upland area in the central part of England), once Europe's main supplier of lead (Barnatt & Penny, 2004).

In Sweden, this notion of the reinterpretation of the value of mining heritage is even more deeply rooted in the consciousness of local community members. In the 1970s and 1980s, interest in local history and initiatives such as "dig where you stand" activities increased dramatically (Isaksson et al., 2009; Storm, 2008, p. 39). Regional culture and history connected to the "good old days" received much attention in the political agenda of Bergslagen. Governmental programs aimed to develop tourism, strengthen self-reliance, and increase cohesion and regional awareness in these areas (Jakobsson, 2009). It was proclaimed that a new era had begun in Bergslagen with the creation of the landscape of experiences available for use in tourism (Braunerheim, 2006; Jakobsson, 2009; Storm, 2008).

Investments from the central government were brought to the region through the creation of the Bergslagen's delegation in 1983, which operated until 1990 and had a considerable budget to distribute (Isaksson, 2007, p. 263). Overall the Swedish state invested some 475.5 million kronor, which were used for various purposes (transport infrastructure, firm development and starting up of small businesses, educational programs, cultural projects (ibid., p. 263).

Surprisingly, despite the considerable economic support, the development of entrepreneurship and the number of small enterprises started by 2008 in Bergslagen were still quite limited (Hedfelt, 2008). Isaksson (2007) and Jakobsson (2009) agree that the investments in the region focused more on the redevelopment of traditional heavy industries, thus leaving little room for development in the service sector. However, despite this, the attention given to the reinvention of the mining landscape still resulted in the development of adventure tourism (climbing, diving, parachute jumping, and personal watercraft and snowmobile riding) and well as the direct utilisation of the mining heritage (the creation of trails and routes connecting several closed-down mining areas, accessible mainly during the summer season).

3. Methodology

This study utilises a qualitative approach to analyse the processes behind the redevelopment of mining heritage in the area of Bergslagen for the purpose of tourism destination development. The methodological approach was partly influenced by several research efforts dealing with similar issues (Alipour & Kilic,

2005; Cannas, 2016; Draper, Oh, & Harrill, 2012; Henderson, 2014). Background information connected to various public and private stakeholders taking part in this process was collected from the daily newspapers articles, policy documents, and project reports in the areas connected to the case study. The newspapers were searched via media archives using the following key terms: “mining heritage”, “industrial heritage”, and “tourism development”. The materials published and available electronically, such as tourist information websites, impressions on the tourist experiences, as well as electronic tourist brochures and policy documents provided by the local municipalities, the County Administrative Boards of the corresponding provinces, local history societies, and tourism firms in the area provided most of the information connected to the official use of mining heritage. The information analysed for this study was from the period 2000–2013.

Another set of data, which helped us identify the major challenges in the process of tourism development of mining heritage, was collected through semi-structured interviews with 25 people: representatives from local tourism organisations; destination developers; representatives from the Country Administrative Boards, the National Antique Board, and local municipalities, including politicians and municipal officers; curators at the local and regional museums; representatives of some of the sites (Falun Copper Mine, Sala Silver Mine, Tuna Hästberg); and representatives of non-profit organisations, such as historical society groups. The informant’s views analysed for this study were able to highlight the major challenges experienced by the main stakeholders in this process, as the participants were connected both to public and private organisations. The interviews were carried out in the period 2010–2013, during the summer and autumn months. The semi-structured interviews were used with a set of predetermined open questions, giving the opportunity for the respondents to reflect more on the particular themes. Some of the themes discussed included questions concerning the meaning of mining heritage and the potential ways of using it for future generations, the efficiency of the support provided for them in their efforts in the process of reimagining of mining heritage of Bergslagen. Most interviews were done in person, but when an informant was not able to be present at the meeting, a phone interview was conducted instead. All interviews were tape-recorded, and written notes reflecting main points were made during the interview process. All of the interviews were transcribed and then translated from Swedish into English by the corresponding author.

Thematic content analysis has been used to interpret the results and to examine the ways used to interpret the meaning of mining heritage for use in the tourism industry (Finn, Elliot-White, & Walton, 2000). An analysis of interview transcripts helped to identify the general themes within the data and to gather examples illustrating the more general notions found during the analysis of the published data. Several categories have been compiled in order to illustrate the efforts towards use of mining heritage for the means of tourism development; these were connected to the perceived value of the mining heritage connected to education, entertainment, and the importance of this region for the rest of the country. The most prominent themes found in the thematic content analysis were focused on attempts to identify the actual product as a ground for further development, with certain sites becoming leaders in this process, as well as on the notions among the participants describing

the character of the development with regard to the involvement of different stakeholder groups.

4. Findings

4.1 Swedish mining heritage: mines of Bergslagen – what is there today?

The analysis of policy documents, local media sources, and tourism information indicates that mining heritage has a special place in the hearts of at least several generations, as several parts of the country have long mining histories. Sweden has three traditional mining areas: Bergslagen, Northern Norrbotten, and the mining field of the Skellefteå region. Bergslagen is the oldest mining area in the country: its northern opening stretches over the coast of Uppsala to the southern part of the Gävleborg province; in the west, Bergslagen stretches over the territory of southern Dalarna and the southeastern part of the Värmland, Västmanland, and Örebro provinces (Figure 1). According to the Swedish Geological Survey there are more than 5,000 mines in total in the area including some operational mining areas. The northernmost part of the province of Dalarna possesses by far the oldest mineral province in the country – Falun Great Copper Mine and Garpenberg (which is Sweden's oldest operating mine, and which had already started operations in the 12th century; Örnberg, n.a.). The oldest record coming from the Falun copper mine is dated 1288, but it was exploited even prior to that date.

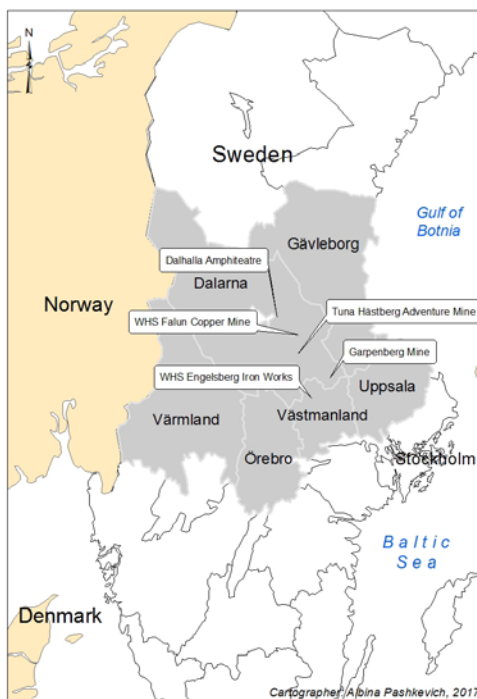


Figure 1: Swedish mining provinces including the oldest mining province of Bergslagen.
Source: Albina Pashkevich

In general, since the 1990s, tourism development based on mining heritage has focused on establishing open-air museums and has mostly attracted middle aged, highly educated visitors from Sweden, Germany, and the Netherlands, a rather limited segment of the potential visitors to the area (Interviews with the representatives from Dalarnas Museum and tourism management organisation “Visit Southen Dalarna”, 2013). However, the results of this revitalisation of old industrial areas are still considered rather modest. According to Jakobsson (2009, p. 81) despite the fact that during the 1990s and 2000s employment in the service sector of Bergslagen showed its highest growth (almost 30 percent), still at the end of 2010s the share of those employed in service and leisure sector in the most tourism-oriented province of Dalarna was 7.1 percent, in comparison to the national value of 8.5 percent (Jakobsson, 2009).

During this period, 2006 is considered the beginning of a new epoch in the tourism profile of Bergslagen, including its five provinces and 25 municipalities. The financial support from the European Union was utilised in order to support actions towards active commercialisation and packaging of the area’s mining heritage. Fourteen industrial and mining heritage sites were chosen to become the core of this process. The reimagining and creation of new tourism products and services based on the rich industrial past became a long-term development goal in the period 2007–2016. Cooperation among the chosen sites was promoted and in 2009 resulted in the creation of the tourist route called the “Iron Road”, bridging several provinces together. The twelve mines included in the Iron Road, as part of the Ecomuseum in Bergslagen, were meant to illustrate the story of the past connected to mining. Tourist activities were confined to the summer months, with guided tours, café visits, and souvenir shopping. The development of this initiative also contributed to the awakening of the inhabitant’s engagement in organising events connected to the history of mining activities (interview with the representative from Dalarna Country Administration, 2012).

Apart from the sites included on the Iron Road, there were at least five more mining heritage sites that did not qualify to be in this network but nonetheless have great potential for destination development for the municipalities possessing them. Some of these were the Falun Copper Mine, the Sala Silver Mine, the Tuna Hästberg Adventure Mine, and a limestone quarry lying outside Rättvik in Dalarna called the Dalhalla Amphitheatre (see Figure 1). These sites are examples of the variety of touristic experiences created based on the visions of the major stakeholders and developers. One site that has been subject to the influence of the external factors influencing its development (the UNESCO World Heritage convention) is the Falun Copper Mine. Due to its World Heritage status, which it obtained in 2001, there are limitations on the type of development possible, meaning that any alterations of the historical landscapes are not allowed in order not to risk the values that permitted the mine to appear on the World Heritage list. The mine and the history of its importance for the country and Europe should be preserved as close to the original as possible, with no alterations of historical values. In contrast, tourism destination development at the Sala Silver Mine, the Tuna Hästberg Adventure Mine, and even the Dalhalla Amphitheatre have through the years relied on the creation of products connected to tourist experiences, not necessarily using the mining history of these sites.

4.2 Elitist and exclusive – the process of inventing tourist attractions in Bergslagen

Evaluating what should be preserved for future generations became part of the overall socio-economic development process in Bergslagen during the 2000s. It involved employees of regional museums, local interest groups, and representatives from local municipalities. The process was closely monitored and executed by central authorities such as the National Antique Board, the State Cultural (Art) Council, and County Administration Boards. Several informants for this study, especially those with direct involvement in the tourism industry, raised concerns about the character of the development, claiming that it was centralised and led by cultural institutions (county antiquarians) with limited involvement by representatives from the wider public. Numerous research efforts also questioned and openly criticised the dominant role of cultural institutions in this process (Alzen, 1996; Alzen & Burell, 2005, p.15; Silven & Isacson, 1999).

One example often mentioned by those interviewed in this study illustrates the possibility of wider involvement from different stakeholder groups. This example was the development of two particular industrial heritage sites: Engelsberg Iron Works (in the province of Västmanland) and Falun Copper Mine (in the province of Dalarna), mentioned above, which both became World Heritage Sites (WHSs) on UNESCO's World Heritage List, in 1993 and 2001, respectively. These two sites illustrate differences in the approach chosen to use mining heritage in the creation of tourist experiences.

The Engelsberg Iron Works is owned by the Ax:son Johnson family's "Northern Star Investment Company". One of the informants for this study describes the character of the management process of the Engelsberg Iron Works as follows:

They were completely uninterested in commercialising the site for touristic purposes. It is a very private group, not unpleasantly of course, it is a big industrial family with their hearts beating for Bergslagen, they are holding on to it (the site), they take care of it, but they want themselves to decide whether they want to have visitors or not (Personal communication, 2012).

As a result, the site becomes available to tourists only during the summer months, despite the fact that it is the only ironworks in Sweden where the buildings and most of the technical equipment from the 1700s and 1800s are preserved. The private owner has chosen to focus on the use of the buildings and property for hosting events, such as scientific conferences or seminars for journalists, politicians, and industry representatives (Nordstjernan, 2016).

On the other hand, at the Great Copper Mine in Falun, the historical values of the WHS are on display for visitors year-round. The territory is accessible by foot and there are several car, bus and caravan parking opportunities. There are plans to set up facilities to accommodate tourists at the site by opening a budget hotel. Several shops and a building, including a ticket office and large souvenir shop, combined with the area for

the multimedia presentations about the life of miners during the heyday of the mining operations, are available within the premises of the Falun Mine. According to one interviewed for this study tourist destination developers, the site has become a showcase of the process of reimagining the past for the use of contemporary society (interview with the Visit Dalarna DMO representative, 2011). However, this process has not been unproblematic.

In Falun, the most appealing aspects of the past have been chosen and put on display (Figure 2). The WHS in Falun consists of three parts: the mining landscape, parts of Falun's city centre (Elsborg, Östanfors, and Gamla Herrgård), and an area west within 20 kilometres of the mine that includes the homesteads of the miners (Heldt Cassel & Pashkevich, 2011). The fact that Falun's heritage is spread throughout the city is a great challenge for the managers of the mine. Developers of the site need to give visitors an overall understanding of the parts included in the WHS. According to most informants, this remains challenging; most guests only associate the mine with the WHS status.



Figure 2: Part of the World Heritage Site in Falun – the Great Copper Mountain.

Source: Albina Pashkevich

The nominations by UNESCO have altered the development strategies for the site, as well as the views on preservation of the tangible objects at both of the sites (Heldt Cassel & Pashkevich, 2011). The development at Falun has been more oriented towards attracting visitors due to its status as a WHS. The character of the historical site has to be kept unchanged to maintain WHS status, and therefore new developments and alterations of older buildings are not allowed without special permission from the municipalities concerned and the County Administration Board. Cedergren (2009) demonstrates how the ambitions of the controlling bodies arose after the nomination of the mine area for WHS status. Conservation issues are considered in parallel with development issues. Thus, old buildings should not be

considered museums and therefore should not be altered, but they also need to correspond to the changing needs of a modern society (Cedergren, 2009).

The guided tours at the mine in Falun overemphasise the past, as the life of the workers in the 17th century seems to appeal to the modern visitor. According to one the representative of the site, tours to the modern part of the mine are not possible for safety reasons and because parts of the modern operations are underwater (interview with the Falun Mine representative, 2010). Therefore, visitors are given the interpretation of the mining past that is visible to them; there is nothing left for the imagination to interpret, and none of the experience-based activities used by other sites are utilised. The only experience that matters is the “great period” in Swedish history, the “heydays” of the Great Copper Mountain; the only legitimate story of the mine is the one that gained it WHS status (Heldt Cassel & Pashkevich, 2011).

4.3 Towards a dialogue: connecting culture and tourism

Evaluating the potential of mining sites in Bergslagen for tourism development resulted in a number of potential cases being chosen to represent the whole region. The sites were chosen based on the qualified judgement of the staff of the National Antique Board and of county antiquarians, which according to one of the informants describing this process meant the following: “They (representatives from governmental cultural institutions) chose places of interest that according to them had the highest potential to become sustainable tourist destinations (2012)”. The initiative meant to help these sites prepare for an increase in the number of visitors during the period 2007–2011.

It also became clear that two stakeholder groups – representatives from the public institutions dealing with preservation of cultural heritage and tourism developers – were not able to understand each other. Another informant, in charge of project management, experienced the following:

During our meetings, the representatives from the cultural institutions often said that the tourism developers are engaging themselves in telling fairy tales and selling them to visitors. It was not considered as appropriate. Sometimes it felt almost like “swearing in the church” when somebody mentioned the word “customer” (2010).

The same person also mentioned that in several cases there was no direct link between the sites and the regional destination management organisations: “It was strange, as sometimes you would imagine there should be some sort of natural contact established between these stakeholders, but it was not at all the case, people just did not want to work together (2010)”. Another informant stated the following:

Some municipalities connected to the project had very ambitious plans and suggested the inclusion of several additional destinations that had nothing to do with Bergslagen’s mining history. We could not make it happen, we could not develop these complete destinations containing whole municipalities! (2010)

One informant pointed out that one of the major outcomes of this initiative for the mining area of Bergslagen was a possibility for destination developers and local museums to meet each other and exchange their ideas, sometimes even more. One of the managers of the project commented on this by saying the following:

We had three mining sites dealing with the history of the exploitation of three different minerals (copper, silver, and iron) coming from three mines, do you think they ever met with each other to discuss collaboration opportunities? There should be no illusions concerning the fact that these people have never cooperated with each other (2013).

A primary goal of the project was to use creative ideas and best practices to form a core for a tourism product. The local destination management organisations (DMOs) were supposed to help sites create other products and services based on the mining heritage of the region. Stakeholders involved in the project noticed an interesting trend in the activities of the local DMOs. Most of them had a very similar touristic profile and touristic offering due to the limited area of the region. Still, the DMOs chose different strategies to position themselves away from the mining history of Bergslagen in their official marketing campaigns. According to one informant, *“the DMOs from different provinces across Bergslagen did not want to cooperate with each other. They did not want to realise that in fact they did not have a unique product on their own (interview with the EU-funded project coordinator, 2011)”*. Furthermore, one of the informants mentioned the following:

Sometimes it even felt as if the tourism developers wanted to distance themselves from all that had to do with the industrial past. I do not know why, as this is the world’s most fascinating environment, and it is easy to develop this as a place to visit (ibid, 2011).

Final remarks

This paper aimed to evaluate the process of redevelopment of one of the oldest mining areas in Sweden – Bergslagen. In the beginning of the 2000s, this process meant to strengthen the regional identity of the area based on the traditions connected to its great mining history. Therefore, the focus of the interpretation of the mining heritage was to identify traditional representations of the past to highlight during guided tours and in other activities for tourists, showing the heroic and monumental meaning of the past. This process was initiated and carried out with funds from the Swedish state and with the help of EU initiatives.

The cultural elite connected to the institutions, such as the National Antique Board, County Administrations, municipal politicians, regional museums, and historians belonging to local historical societies, became the main facilitators of the reinterpretation of the mining heritage. One of the major challenges to the success of this process has become the lack of involvement by a wider audience, which corresponds to the situation in similar cases studied previously (Braunerheim, 2006; Heldt Cassel & Pashkevich, 2014; Ronström, 2008). A limited group has decided that specific sites should be developed based on their historical and cultural value, and not

by attracting tourists with an alternative story or another type of experience that has no relation to mining (Molin et al., 2007).

The development of the sites in the area of Bergslagen has illustrated a mosaic of the outcomes of the process of reinterpreting the mining past. In one case, a historical mining site became a private project based only on the aspirations of one owner (for example, Engelsberg Iron Works). In another case, despite broad stakeholder involvement in the management of the Falun Great Copper Mountain, external forces dictated the interpretation of the mining heritage with a strong emphasis on the historical past of the site not including the alternative interpretations of the modern mining heritage. Moreover, our results illustrate that the process of reinterpretation has evolved into an attempt to establish a dialog with practitioners from the tourism industry. Tourism stakeholders, especially DMOs in their marketing practices, have been distancing themselves from the historical part of the region. The interviews gave further insight into the conflicting nature of the destination development process, which in practice did not correspond to the ideas suggested by the cultural elite in Bergslagen.

The findings reveal the difficulties connected to the process of reworking and reimagining the industrial heritage of the mining area of Bergslagen. The cultural elite leading the process were not necessarily prepared to commercialise the sites in order to attract a wider audience of visitors. The lack of end-user perspective also became obvious during this period of tourism development. Furthermore, the case of tourism development in Bergslagen showed the limitations of the interpretation of Swedish mining heritage, this particular case showed the obvious limitations to the interpretation of the Swedish mining heritage of Bergslagen. There is little room for interpretation, and the interpretation is exclusively due to the cultural values as understood by a narrow group of experts. The interpretations provided by these specialists are certainly helping to strengthen a traditional national identity, but are not able to ignite the interest of non-native Swedish citizens.

This lack of interest provides an opportunity for further research. It would be interesting to investigate how the Swedish industrial mining sites incorporate the cultural norms and heritage of immigrant groups. Alternative representations of the heritage might allow for a wider representation of the local people, as well as an awareness of local or regional heritage (Nyaupane & Dallen, 2010). Another opportunity for investigation is in regard to the pressures to compete in the market and be innovative while also conceding to the rules prescribed by the UNESCO WHS status. Heritage sites are competing in the same market with other sites; those sites with the possibility to reinvent themselves may have a competitive advantage.

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