

CASE STUDY

The Lewarde Mining History Centre

The Lewarde Mining History Centre in France is an important example of how cultural heritage has been preserved while opening up new economic opportunities for the region.

DESCRIPTION

Location: Lewarde, France

Type of action: heritage

Actors: regional councils, coal mining company

Financing conditions: private sector, government.

Since opening: public contributions and own financial revenues

Type of coal: hard coal

Region: peri-urban

GDP: below national average

Unemployment rate: above national average

Population: growing population, ageing society



KEY POINTS



APPROACH

- Heritage preservation combined with further cultural activities
- Foundation of the cultural centre co-financed by the former mining company



ENABLING CONDITIONS

- Region is part of several tourist attractions in the region (which is a UNESCO World Heritage site)
- Publicity through a famous novel and film



CHALLENGES

- Persuading stakeholders about the potential of the heritage preservation (before the opening of the centre)



ACHIEVEMENTS

- 150,000 visitors annually
- 50% financial self-sufficiency
- Former miners employed as tour guides



PRESERVING THE HERITAGE OF LEWARDE

A major milestone in the effort to preserve this heritage was the establishment of the Mining History Centre on the old Delloye colliery yard, which opened its doors in 1984. The mission of the centre is to preserve mining culture and to make this heritage accessible to the public.

Introduction

In coal mining regions, coal is more than an economic factor – it generally forms an important part of the region’s identity as well. Thus, the prospect of phasing out coal is not only perceived as a threat to the economic prosperity of the region, but also as a challenge to cultural heritage and regional identity.

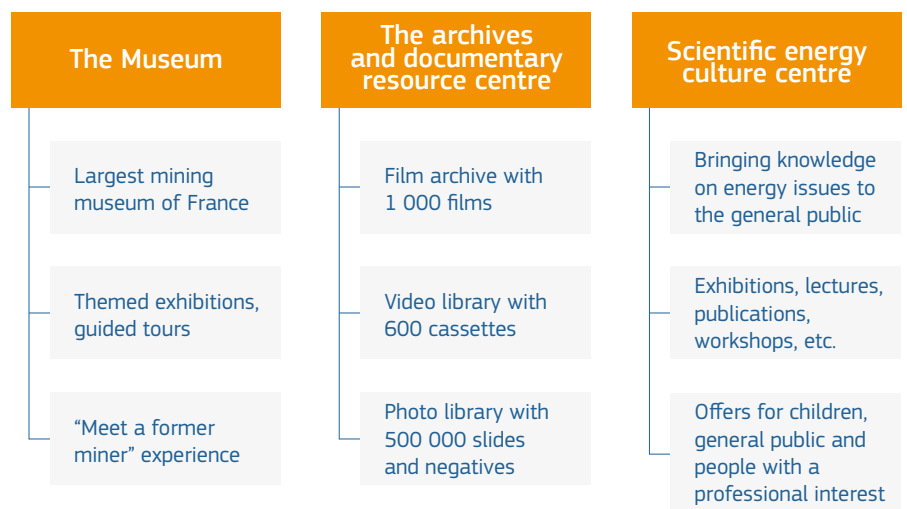
The Lewarde Mining History Centre in France is an important example of how cultural heritage has been preserved and at the same time how new economic opportunities for the region have been opened up. It symbolises the transition from a highly industrialised region into a tourist hot spot with a national significance. Many other coal mining regions in Europe have established museums and heritage sites (for further examples see below), but Lewarde, as one of the oldest, has long-term experience that can serve as a source of inspiration.

Lewarde is a small town in the former Mining Basin of northern France, where coal had been extracted between the 18th and 20th century. Over those three hundred years coal mining shaped the face of the region, its landscape, and geographical and urban conditions. The importance of this heritage has been acknowledged through the region Nord-Pas de Calais Mining Basin becoming a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2012.

A major milestone in the effort to preserve this heritage was the establishment of the Mining History Centre on the old Delloye colliery yard, which opened its

doors in 1984. The mission of the centre is to preserve mining culture and to make this heritage accessible to the public. To fulfil this aim, the centre consists of three departments: i) the museum, ii) an archive, and iii) a science and cultural centre (see graph below). The centre is run by the Mining History Centre Association which was created with the involvement of the French government (Ministry of Culture), the Nord-Pas de Calais Regional Council, the Nord Departmental Council and the Nord-Pas de Calais coalfield nationalised mining company. Since 2016, the centre is a cultural cooperation institution (EPCC in French). Its board of directors consists of the French state, the region, the Douai Communauté d’Agglomération and the Communauté de Communes Cœur d’Ostrevent.

Besides keeping mining heritage alive, the centre offers further cultural, scientific and educational activities. It explicitly aims to develop and promote the attractiveness of the region towards its inhabitants as well as national and international visitors.



Challenges

Before the foundation of the centre, not all stakeholders were convinced about the adequacy of the touristic and cultural potential of the region's mining heritage. There were concerns about how to implement the transition from a highly industrialised past to a future in which tourism could play an important role. The concept was also criticised for not providing a significant replacement of jobs, which were lost following the mine closures.

Interestingly, a novel and a film play an important - but ambiguous - role for the Mining Centre: "Germinal" is a world-famous novel by Emile Zola from the late 19th century, describing the harsh living conditions and the protests of the French miners at the time. The book and movies based on the novel did create publicity for the topic and the region, however some visitors linked the negative events described in the story directly to the Delloye colliery and its History Centre.

Enabling conditions

A good starting point for the foundation of the centre had been that the company that owned the former coal mines in the region (Nord-Pas de Calais Coalfield Nationalised Mining Company - HBNPC) agreed to finance the infrastructure of the museum. Costs were reduced by the renovation of the old mine sites instead of building new facilities for the centre. This also allowed a more authentic display of working conditions and the cultural heritage. Today, 50% of the museum's costs are funded by the revenue generated by the centre (tickets, restaurant, gift shop, etc.). The other 50% come from public contributions (the main contributor is the Region Hauts-de-France).

In order to establish an authentic exhibition for the Mining History Centre the founders of the centre called upon former mining workers and other concerned groups to provide their existing objects (tools and so on) characteristic of the mining industry. This had the side-effect of fostering a sense of ownership in the region towards the museum. This grassroots process was complemented by measures to ensure a high quality exhibition. For example, a scientific council was established to provide a high level of professionalism to the exhibition.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the museum is not a singular site. The Nord-Pas de Calais Mining Basin UNESCO heritage area offers several other tourist attractions. Thus, there is a synergy within the heritage area that makes the whole region a more attractive tourist destination.

In 1993, the above-mentioned movie *Germinal* created great publicity for the mine. As a result, the centre has been struggling to accommodate the crowd of visitors coming in. In 1999, efforts were started to enlarge the visitor centre and to revise the museographic project.

Achievements

The establishment of the history centre has been a collaborative effort from various regional stakeholders, ranging from government to industry to individual workers in the region – an achievement set against a backdrop of initial scepticism from some stakeholders. The infrastructure, initially financed by the former coal-mining company, exemplifies a positive example of responsibility taken up in reclamation activities following the termination of coal mining. As for the operational financing scheme, the centre has managed to create a sustainable business model, which requires public support of only 50% of running costs. The centre has a wider economic impact, attracting tourists to the region who consume in hotels, restaurants and shops nearby.

150,000

ANNUAL VISITORS

The Lewarde Mining History Centre hosts 150,000 visitors annually – approximately 4 million during its existence, which makes it the most visited site of its region, Hauts-de-France.

The success of the Lewarde Mining History Centre is mirrored in figures:

- In operation for 30 years, hosting 150,000 visitors annually – approximately 4 million during its existence, which makes it the most visited site of its region, Hauts-de-France.
- Around 100 employees work today in the centre (guides, curators, archivists, administrative workers, cooks, waiters, security agents, technical agents, etc.)
- Following its foundation, the centre employed 40 former miners as tour guides, four of whom still work for the institute.



IMPORTANT LEARNING POINTS

- Partnership between different regional (and national) stakeholders contributed to the successful delivery of the project, local ownership and long-term success.
- Financial sustainability was achieved through a long-term business model in which 50% of running costs are covered through generated revenue and the remains through public funding.
- Although the number of jobs directly created by the centre itself is fairly small, in synergy with other tourist attractions in the region, the centre has become an economic factor.
- The employment of former coal miners as tour guides and asking miners to provide mining gear to the exhibition did not only result in a positive economic effect, but increased local ownership of the museum as an institution preserving local heritage.
- Obviously, not every museum can hope to become a film location like the Lewarde Centre. But the story of the *Germinal* novel and movie underpins the necessity of some sort of PR strategy if a mining museum is to aim at a greater reach-out with subsequent positive economic effects.

References

- http://www.europeancoalminingmuseums.com/en/the_european_coal_mining_museum_network/france
- <http://www.aroundlouvrelens.com/explore/coal-black>
- <https://www.chm-lewarde.com/en/>
- <https://www.chm-lewarde.com/en/the-mining-history-centre/presentation-and-missions/>
- <https://www.erih.net/i-want-to-go-there/site/show/Sites/mining-history-centre-of-lewarde/>
- <https://www.entreprises.gouv.fr/node/172896>
- <https://www.memhisto.com/site/en/centre-historique-minier-gb/>

Other examples of mining heritage sites in Europe

Silesian Museum, Katowice, Poland

• <https://muzeumslaskie.pl/pl/>

Zeche Zollverein, Essen, Germany

• <https://www.zollverein.de/>

Muzeum Górnictwa Węglowego, Poland

• <https://muzeumgornictwa.pl>

Centrum Nauki i Sztuki Stara Kopalnia, Poland

• <https://starakopalnia.pl/en/about-us/>

Italian Centre for Coal Mining Culture

• <https://www.museodelcarbone.it/it/>

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