

Looking for Union elements

The case study of Murcia

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Esteban Bernal became the proud mayor of La Unión in 1960. The young man wanted the best for the town. Therefore that year, he hired Juanito Valderrama, a famous music idol at the moment, for the local festival. Juanito Valderrama wanted to offer the audience of La Unión something more authentic than his great hits - melodic songs that bring him fame-, and at his repertoire, he started a sad flamenco song. The public began to shout at him, asking for those songs that bring him fame. The singer stopped his performances and explained with anger to the audience that he felt ashamed for their rudeness, but even more for the fact that they had forgotten their traditional: the songs of the mine. As it was said before Esteban was a proud man, and he took the singer's words as a personal challenge. With the help of some good friends, they created from scratch a festival of flamenco. So why flamenco? La Unión was a small and new town settled in 1860 for a group of localities that decided to stop to pay taxes to the big city of Cartagena. Their own identity was based on the secular tradition of mining exploitations and since the 19th C the flow of migrants from Andalucía to work inside the mines. Flamenco roots and mining works gave birth to a style of music characterised by the sadness. The "cante of the mine" does not necessarily speak about mining tragedies - even though a lot of times it did it - but it has a blue feeling. The festival is a story of success: the oldest festival of Spain, active since 1961, and with international repercussion. The festival recovered a forgotten heritage; the "cante de las minas" was an untangible heritage of those migrants and sons of the migrants who combined their popular folklore from Andalucía with the personal living experience in their new home, the mine. But the impact of the festival in the town is limited at different levels. Even though the organizer develops a constant activity during the year, there is a punctual economic contribution to the local economy. Could it be possible to develop a non-statitonal strategy for a model of sustainable tourism? The enclave of La Unión is also linked to another unique fact: the greatest ecological disaster of the 20th C in Spain. During the second half of the 20th C the bay of the municipality was used as a massive landfill dumping site by private mining companies. The project of regeneration and decontamination of the bay is a nest of interest in which the private owner of the old mine complex, the regional and national administration must agree with (and invest in) a common plan and strategy. In this impressionistic picture, the side of the local community has been ignored. Those mines' roots are not present in the current population, even though the ecological catastrophe is present every day. When the mine definitively closed in 1991 hundred of miners' families had

already migrated. Another activity is linked to the rich geologic heritage of the area. Once a year, collectors from around the world come to La Unión to sell, buy or exchange minerals and metals in the National Fair of Minerals and Fosils. In a certain way, this activity combines a hobby and informal source of income; the searching and exchange of minerals has become a secondary activity for a number of members of the community who collect minerals from the more than 1000 mines of the area. There are even physical shops and online businesses. Once more time the institutional effort had been focus towards the outside: promotion at the national and even international level. Positive sides could bloom from this last activity. The mines, the mountains should be identify as a element of leisure and joy. And joy has been a word absence in the collective imaginary of the miners and mine life. La Union is a young municipality of 20,000 inhabitants with five primary schools and two secondary schools. It is a key element to insufflate to the new generations this new and positive identity with the underground. La Union seems to look at the mines as part of their past, a dusty past without value nowadays. It is essential to find elements in their daily life and activities that allow show them that the mining culture is also an instrument to learn about sustainability in a complex and natural ecosystem that is alive and chance with the pulse of their people. The milestones of the Study case La Unión have been at first the interviews with most representative stakeholders (CARM- Patrimony Service of the Regional Government; CEEIM- Business Angels; Fundación del Cante de la Mina; Asociación de Vecinos de La Unión; Politechnical University of Cartagena; Europe Direct). Secondly have been carried on: First and Second Living Lab session at the University of Murcia; Field Analysis (Giuseppe Pace and Susana Martínez-Rodríguez); Deep interviews with the mayor and members of his team. The next steps are: involucrate other private agents in the living lab to learn more about people identification with the territory; identify business dynamizers of the area.



Living Lab meeting Photo: Murcia University