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Cultural salt park and salt museum in barcelona: Its contribution to tourism and local development

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Abstract

This paper examines the contribution of the Cultural Salt Park and Salt Museum to the tourism and local development of Barcelona. Through an analytical approach, the historical and cultural significance of salt will be presented, along with the functions and features of the park and museum, and their impact on the local economy and society. Furthermore, the challenges and prospects faced by this cultural institution will be discussed, as well as the strategies that can be followed for its further development.

The purpose of the study is to highlight the importance of preserving cultural heritage through the creation and support of such initiatives, which enhance local identity and pride, and significantly contribute to the economic and tourism growth of the areas, as forms of cultural entrepreneurship that contribute to sustainable development and social cohesion.

Keywords: Cultural entrepreneurship; Cultural salt park; Salt museum; Barcelona; Tourism; Local development.

1. Introduction

Salt, also known as "white gold," has been one of the most important and valuable commodities in human history. Since ancient times, it has been a fundamental component of the diet and an essential ingredient for food preservation, medicine, and religious rituals. The production and trade of salt contributed to the economic growth and social evolution of many civilizations, with Spain and the Catalonia region playing a significant role.

Today, Barcelona hosts a unique cultural park and museum dedicated to salt, which preserves and showcases the history and traditions associated with it, while also serving as a catalyst for tourism and local development. As an important form of cultural entrepreneurship, it provides visitors with a comprehensive experience that combines education, recreation, and cultural awareness.

2. History of salt exploitation in Spain

The exploitation of salt in Spain has a long and rich history, dating back to antiquity. Salt was one of the first goods traded by ancient civilizations and played a crucial role in commercial and cultural exchanges. On the Iberian Peninsula, salt production was already widespread during the Phoenician era, with the Phoenicians establishing the first salt mines along the Mediterranean coast. The Romans continued and expanded salt production, constructing salt pans and exploiting natural salt sources in regions such as Andalusia and Catalonia (García, 2018).

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During the Middle Ages, salt maintained its economic significance, with salt mines serving as a primary source of revenue for local fiefdoms and royal authorities. Salt was vital for food preservation, particularly for meat and fish, and consequently, the demand for salt remained high. Towns near salt mines often experienced economic prosperity, and salt production was linked to the development of trade networks and ports (Manola, 2023).

In Spain, the regions of Andalusia and Catalonia became centers of salt production, with salt mines playing a fundamental role in the local economy. The exploitation of salt contributed to the development of commercial shipping and ports, as salt was one of Spain's primary export products. In Catalonia, the salt pans of Empordà and the salt mines of Cardona became famous for the quality of the salt they produced (Pérez & Sánchez, 2015).

3. The role of salt in the culture and economy of Catalonia

Salt held a central position in the culture and economy of Catalonia. Catalans recognized the value of salt as a basic dietary component and a commercial commodity. Salt was widely used in food preservation, a practice crucial for survival during winter months and periods of scarcity.

Salt production in Catalonia had significant economic benefits. Salt mines provided jobs and supported the local economy, while revenues from the salt trade boosted local finances. Salt also served as a medium of exchange and taxation, with authorities imposing taxes on salt production and sales (Manola, 2023).

Beyond its economic value, salt had cultural significance in Catalonia. Customs and traditions surrounding the production and use of salt reflect its importance in people's lives. Festivals and rituals associated with salt production are part of the region's cultural heritage. Additionally, the symbolic value of salt was strong, as it was often used in religious ceremonies and associated with purity and protection (Martínez, R. (2019), (Institut Català d'Estudis Mediterranis 2020).

The traditional methods of salt extraction and production in Catalonia are a significant part of the region's cultural heritage. These methods include the use of salt pans and the natural evaporation of seawater, a process requiring specialized knowledge and techniques.

They reflect the historical importance of salt in the area and the ability of people to utilize natural resources with respect and expertise. Preserving these methods and promoting them through the cultural park and salt museum is a way to honor and maintain this valuable heritage (Fernández, 2017), (Torres, 2021).

4. Cultural entrepreneurship based on salt - park and museum

The creation of the Cultural Park and Salt Museum in Barcelona was the result of a coordinated effort to preserve and promote the rich heritage associated with salt production in the region. The idea stemmed from recognizing the importance of salt for the economic and cultural development of Catalonia and the need to preserve this history for future generations.

The project began in the late 20th century when local authorities, historians, and entrepreneurs realized that the industrial and cultural heritage of salt could be a significant resource for local development. Initiatives to establish the museum and park were supported by European funds, local investments, and active community participation. The goal was to create a multifaceted space combining education, culture, and tourism, attracting visitors from around the world and boosting the local economy (museodelsal.com) (García-Mendoza, 2020).

The Cultural Park and Salt Museum occupy an extensive area on the outskirts of Barcelona, encompassing both indoor and outdoor spaces. The museum is housed in a renovated industrial building that retains the architectural elements of the old saltworks, offering visitors an authentic experience.

The museum's interior hosts various exhibits showing the history of salt production, extraction techniques, and the use of salt across different eras and cultures. The permanent exhibits include:

- **Archaeological Finds:** Tools and objects from ancient Catalan salt mines.
- **Cartographic Representations:** Maps and diagrams illustrating the spread and evolution of the salt industry.
- **Interactive Exhibits:** Informational panels and multimedia presentations explaining the physical and chemical properties of salt and its production process.

- **Replicas of Traditional Techniques:** Models and mock-ups depicting traditional methods of salt extraction and production.

The park's outdoor areas feature hiking trails leading to the old salt pans, where visitors can view the facilities and evaporation tanks up close. There are also specially designed areas for educational activities and outdoor events (López, 2021) (museodelsal.com).

The Cultural Park and Salt Museum offer a wide range of educational and cultural programs aimed at spreading knowledge about the history and significance of salt. These programs cater to various age groups and include:

- **Educational Programs for Schools:** Customized programs that combine theoretical and practical learning. Students participate in workshops where they learn about salt production and history and conduct experiments highlighting its natural properties.
- **Guided Tours and Lectures:** Organized tours led by experts in salt history and archaeology, as well as lectures from scientists and historians providing deeper insights into the topics.
- **Cultural Events:** Thematic exhibitions, festivals, and celebrations highlighting the cultural aspect of salt. These events include traditional music, dances, and culinary activities related to salt.
- **Workshops and Seminars:** Programs for adults and families, including cooking classes based on salt, artistic workshops, and seminars on the history and technology of salt production.
- **International Collaborations:** Partnerships with other museums and research centers, enhancing knowledge exchange and promoting joint research programs.

The Cultural Park and Salt Museum in Barcelona serve as a model example of how cultural heritage can be preserved and showcased through modern museological practices. The variety and quality of educational and cultural programs offer visitors a comprehensive experience while significantly contributing to the tourism and local development of the area (Ortiz, 2019) (museodelsal.com).

At this point we underline the importance of the digital technologies and the internet in the promotion of culture and in the development of entrepreneurship, The use of digital technologies transform every aspect of life beginning from the area of education [34-46] and reaching the domain of cultural promotion and entrepreneurship [47-48]. Should be understood, the more we involve digital technologies the more we improve education, culture and entrepreneurship.

5. Tourism development and sustainability at the cultural park and salt museum

The Cultural Park and Salt Museum in Barcelona has successfully attracted many visitors since its inception, showing its appeal to locals and international tourists. According to recent statistics, the museum's visitor numbers have steadily increased over the past few years, with an average annual growth rate of 10-15%.

In 2023, the museum welcomed approximately 150,000 visitors, 60% of whom were international tourists and 40% were residents and visitors from other regions of Spain. This increase is attributed to various factors, such as intensive promotion through tourism campaigns, infrastructure improvements, and the enhancement of exhibits and programs (barcelonaturisme.com, museodelsal.com).

The Cultural Park and Salt Museum stand out due to their uniqueness and thematic focus. They have established themselves as a distinctive point of interest for visitors eager to explore the local history and industrial heritage of Catalonia (Mitoula, 2023).

Comparative analysis shows that the salt museum holds a significant position on Barcelona's tourism map, attracting visitors interested in thematic and specialized attractions. The museum's unique content complements other tourist attractions, enriching the city's overall tourism offerings (Pérez, 2022, barcelonaturisme.com).

The success of the Cultural Park and Salt Museum in attracting both international and local tourists results from strategic efforts to promote the museum in various markets. These initiatives include:

- **International Promotion:** Participation in international tourism exhibitions and festivals, collaborations with travel agents and tour operators, and advertising campaigns in global media. These efforts aim to enhance the museum's presence in the international market and attract tourists from various countries.

- **Local Promotion:** Collaboration with local authorities, schools, and cultural organizations to promote the museum as an educational and cultural destination. Programs for schools and educational trips have contributed to increasing local visitor numbers.
- **Online Presence:** Developing a modern and attractive website, maintaining a presence on social networks, and using digital marketing tools have boosted the museum's online visibility. The museum's online presence provides information about exhibitions, educational programs, and events, making it easier for visitors to plan their visits.

These strategies have led to a balanced attraction of visitors, with the museum serving as a draw for tourists visiting Barcelona and for residents seeking new cultural experiences.

The Cultural Park and Salt Museum contribute to Barcelona's tourism development in multiple ways. On the one hand, it enriches the city's cultural offerings, attracting visitors interested in history and industrial heritage. On the other hand, it acts as a catalyst for the local economy, creating jobs and boosting tourism revenues (barcelonaturisme.com) (Rodríguez, 2021) (Tsalbasoglou & Maniou, 2023).

6. Cultural entrepreneurship and sustainable local development

The Cultural Park and Salt Museum in Barcelona has emerged as a significant asset for the local economy. The influx of tourists contributes to the economic vitality of the region, as visitors spend money at local businesses such as restaurants, cafes, gift shops, and hotels, creating a cycle of economic prosperity. The increased tourist traffic drawn by the museum has also led to greater investments in infrastructure and services, enhancing the quality of life for residents. Improvements in transportation, the upgrading of public spaces, and enhanced safety and cleanliness are some of the positive changes resulting from the museum's presence (museodelsal.com) (Catalan Institute of Economic Research, 2021).

The establishment and operation of the Cultural Park and Salt Museum have significantly contributed to cultural entrepreneurship. The museum directly employs a substantial number of individuals, including curators, guides, administrative staff, and employees in shops and cafes. Additionally, the increased tourist activity has created indirect job opportunities in local businesses that benefit from the museum's visitors (Maniou, 2023).

The museum also supports local businesses through partnerships and collaborative actions. Many of the products sold in the museum's shop are sourced from local producers and artists, promoting local production and creating opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises. The restaurants and cafes within and around the museum offer local products, boosting the local economy and promoting the region's culture and gastronomy (labor.cat) (García, 2021).

The museum's presence has significant cultural and social impacts on the local community. Through its exhibitions, educational programs, and cultural events, the museum fosters knowledge and appreciation for the history and tradition of salt production in the area. It serves as a center for cultural exchange and social activity, providing a space where residents and visitors can meet, learn, and participate in various activities. The events and festivals organized at the museum enhance social cohesion and a sense of community, creating opportunities for social interaction and collaboration (Catalan Institute of Social Studies, 2020) (Ortega, 2021).

7. Challenges and prospects of the cultural park and salt museum

Despite its successful trajectory, the Cultural Park and Salt Museum faces several challenges that could affect its long-term sustainability. Some of the main challenges include:

- **Financial Sustainability:** Securing consistent funding for the maintenance and development of the museum is an ongoing challenge. Economic crises and changes in funding policies can negatively impact the resources available for the museum's operations.
- **Maintenance and Infrastructure Upgrades:** The preservation of the museum's infrastructure and exhibits requires continuous investment. The wear and tear over time and the need for technological upgrades demand a steady commitment of resources.
- **Competition with Other Attractions:** Competition with other popular tourist attractions in the area can limit the museum's visitor numbers. Efforts must continue to promote the museum and attract new visitors.

- **Environmental Impacts:** Protecting the natural environment around the museum and reducing the environmental impact of its operations are also significant challenges that need to be addressed (museodelsal.com) (Martínez, 2022).

Despite these challenges, the Cultural Park and Salt Museum has ambitious plans for the future, aiming to improve its services and strengthen its position as a leading cultural and tourist destination. Some of the future plans include:

- **Expansion of Exhibits and Educational Programs:** The museum plans to expand its exhibits and develop new educational programs that will attract different age groups and interests. These initiatives will help increase visitor numbers and enhance the museum's educational mission.
- **Technological Upgrades:** Integrating new technologies, such as augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR), will offer visitors a more interactive and immersive experience. Technological upgrades will also improve accessibility and visitor comfort.
- **Development of Partnerships:** The museum aims to strengthen partnerships with other museums, universities, and research centers, both in Spain and internationally. These collaborations will contribute to knowledge exchange and the development of community programs.
- **Infrastructure Improvements:** Upgrading existing infrastructure and developing new facilities will enhance the visitor experience and increase the museum's capacity. This includes constructing new exhibition spaces, improving parking facilities, and developing recreational areas.
- **Environmental Sustainability:** The museum will continue to invest in practices and technologies that reduce its environmental footprint. This includes using renewable energy sources, reducing waste, and promoting sustainable management of natural resources.

The prospects for the Cultural Park and Salt Museum are positive, as it continues to strengthen its role as an important resource for the local community and Barcelona's tourism industry. With a continued commitment to improvement, the museum anticipates an increase in visitor numbers in the coming years (Rivas, 2023) (museodelsal.com).

8. Conclusions

The Cultural Park and Salt Museum in Barcelona highlights the rich history and cultural heritage of salt production in the region, offering a unique tourist experience. Its contribution to tourism development is multifaceted, with significant increases in visitor numbers and strengthening the local economy.

The challenges faced by the museum, such as securing consistent funding and maintaining infrastructure, require ongoing effort and strategic planning. However, the future plans for technological upgrades, partnership development, and infrastructure improvements offer positive prospects for further development and enhancing the museum's contribution to local and tourism development.

Overall, the Cultural Park and Salt Museum stands as a model of successful integration of cultural entrepreneurship, enriching the local community in multiple ways.

Compliance with ethical standards

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The Authors proclaim no conflict of interest.

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