

Mining

Keywords

- > Quarries
- > overexploitation
- > stone
- > ecosystem

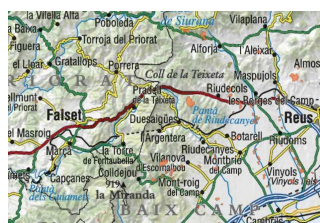


Figure2: Map of Baix Camp with current mining activities highlighted in orange
(Source: Departament de Territori i Sostenibilitat -



Figure 3: Proposed quarry site in Baix Camp where residents are strongly opposed
(Source: Joan Pons Solé)



Figure 4: Banner of opposition to a new quarry Argentera (Source: Joan Pons Solé)

Introduction

The extraction of aggregates and other subsurface minerals as an economic activity generates significant environmental impacts – on the local environment and biodiversity, on the landscape, on traditional economic activities linked to the land, and on the welfare of people living near these activities.

The Baix Camp region of Catalonia is characterised by a high concentration of quarries (Figure 1). In the municipality of Riudecols for example, currently around 3.5% of the municipality is occupied by quarries, with plans to expand activity to cover 11% of the municipality.

The lack of regulation of these activities at the municipal level has meant that very often work is carried out without any license and with the absolute complicity of government departments responsible for environmental control. Moreover, in recent years there has been a clash of interests between these extractive activities and other economic initiatives such as rural tourism, the re-launch of certain agricultural areas, the enhancement of the landscape and the protection of the environment.

Other municipalities that are affected by these activities in Baix Camp are, for example, Duesaigues, l'Argentera, Alforja, Riudecanyes, Vilanova d'Escornalbou, Pratdip Colldejou, Montroig del Camp, Montbrió del Camp, Riudoms, Vinyols, Maspujols, l'Aleixar, Botarell, les Borges del Camp (Figure 2).

In summary, a large majority of municipalities in the region have quarries, quarries that provide income for taxes, but that generate environmental externalities.



Figure 1: Quarries in Vilanova d'Escornalbou
(Source: Joan Pons Solé)

Background

Catalonia in general, and Baix Camp in particular, contain some geologically important areas, where tectonic activity has created numerous rocky outcrops, strong reliefs, folds, faults and other formations.

Mining in the villages of Baix Camp has been ongoing for several decades. Some of these quarries have been closed, as landscape restoration commenced in a few rare cases.

Environmental conflict

The exploitation of resource mining in Lower Camp has generated and still generates very significant environmental impacts. These can be summarized as:

- Alteration of the landscape and its values
- Impact noise around the quarries
- Increased movement of heavy vehicles on the rural roads in the area
- Emissions of dust
- Alteration of habitats of natural areas that act as ecological corridors

These environmental effects have often been minimized in environmental impact

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studies submitted by the operating companies, with the approval of environmental agency in Catalonia.

Different organizations and platforms, environmental associations and neighbourhood groups have expressed their opposition to the proliferation of more quarries in the area because of its environmental impacts (Figures 3 and 4). In fact, opposition to these projects is increasing, but political pressure has been mobilised to delegitimize these opposition movements.

Social conflict

In addition to the environmental impacts of the projects, social conflict is increasing. The opposition movements in quarries in Baix Camp are growing to the extent that now almost every new project, or attempt to expand an existing one, faces some sort of opposition.

These reactions have been a surprise to the region around the quarries, as residents had always accepted the quarries with tolerance and resignation. Municipal politicians and political processes that had until recently enjoyed much stability, have now been overwhelmed by situation frequently characterised by violence.

Past 'normal' procedures of quarry installation and conditions of complete operational freedom by mining companies are now a thing of the past. One of the most prominent social reactions occurred in the municipality of l'Argentera. In this municipality a company plans to install a quarry in an area of special natural interest, close to the Castle of Escornalbou (the main historic place in the region), significantly affecting the landscape and historic roads in the area. Critical of the project, a strong movement has temporarily halted it, generating debate not only in the town, but in the entire region.

Although local politicians have consistently tried to discredit the movement and hide information from the public, the people understand that such a project would generate many more negative impacts than benefits. The

promise of jobs and investment by the municipality are no longer enough to ensure the acceptance of another proposed quarry.

Certainly something has changed in the political and social perception of quarries in Baix Camp, especially in the case of the town of Riudecols where municipal planners have agreed to stop the proliferation of new quarries or extensions to existing quarries. Here it is clearly understood that the acceptable number of quarries has been exceeded, and that the people cannot withstand the negative impacts associated with these economic activities.



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DEFENTERRA website (Spanish)
<http://defenterra.galeon.com/>

No quarry at Escornalbou
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/187886098950/>

Alveolus website (Spanish)
<http://alveolus.cat/>

Gepec website (Spanish)
http://gepec.cat/show_new.php?id=6