

Historic mines in Peru - a new tourist attraction Cerro de Pasco Case

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ABSTRACT

Peru is a well known mining country where this activity has been going for centuries, and whose economy depends fundamentally on this industry. The tremendous geological potential of Peru has made it the last decade the target of the main mining multinational countries for exploration in search of new orebodies, and presently it has over 53 billion US dollars in new mining projects. However the industry faces strong opposition from the communities that is putting at stake these projects, as in the past it has not represented an activity that has promoted sustainable development among its stakeholders and on the contrary, it has left considerable environmental liabilities. Among the efforts of the industry to change its image, the alternative of converting old historic mines from liabilities into assets like happens in other countries is becoming an strong option. In this paper we introduce the case of the historic Cerro de Pasco mine, the oldest in Peru and still producing, as a mean of improving the image of mining by promoting tourism to it.

INTRODUCTION

Cerro de Pasco is the capital city of the Pasco region in central Peru, it is also the site of the country's oldest mine which gives the city the title of the "Mining Capital of Peru". Located at 4300 m altitude, it is one of the highest cities in the world and has a population of 70000 being connected to Peru's capital, Lima by road (300 km) and rail.

Mining in the region started in the late XVI century when an indian shepherd named Huaricapcha discovered silver veins in the high plains near the Huallay Rock Forrest, famous for the strange shapes the wind and water have given to the rock formations. When the news spread, hundreds of Spanish conquerors arrived and built their houses on top of the shafts excavated to reach the veins where

thousands of Indians introduced into them to work, where to die without seeing the sunlight again. This gives the city streets a peculiar shape quite different from the traditional Spanish chessboard shape of its cities. Such was the wealth produced that the Spanish viceroy established a mint house in the XVIII century from where silver coins were to be delivered to Spain and gave the city the royal title of "Ciudad Real de Minas" (Royal Mining City). At the end of the XIX century, 12 European and American countries had consular representation in the city.

At the beginning of the XX century, the newly New York formed American mining company, Cerro de Pasco Corporation bought most of the mining concessions in the region, expanded the production of the underground mines and initiated an open pit operation. By that

time, besides silver, also copper, lead and zinc were being produced. In 1974, the Peruvian military regime led by General Juan Velasco, nationalized the mines and created Centromin Peru, a state owned mining company to run the operations. In 1999, the liberal government led by president Fujimori, privatized the mine. It was acquired by Volcan Cia. Minera, a Peruvian based company of mainly local capitals. Presently, the mine has almost exhausted its reserves and mine production has stopped, only the treatment of oxides continues.

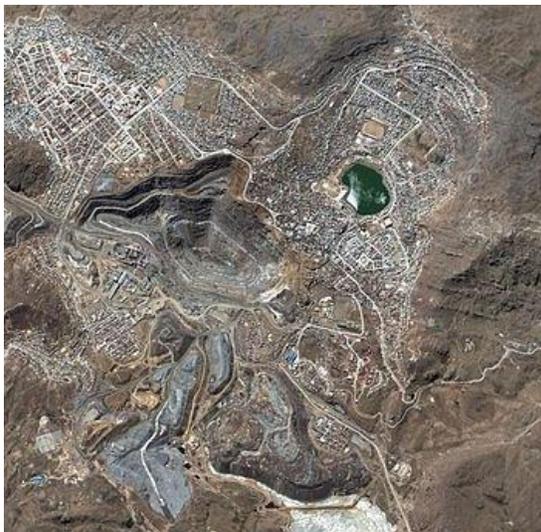


Fig. 1 Aerial view of Cerro de Pasco

MINING TOURISM THE ALTERNATIVE

Due to the high altitude and inhospitableness of the region, there are almost no alternatives of economic activities to mining in the city. It is true that there are other mining operations in the surroundings like Milpo, Atacocha, Huaron, Chungar and Brocal that can keep most of the commercial activity, but the old mine is located in the heart of the city and constitutes a liability and of course, one day the other mines will have to close

too, and there is concern about the future of the population whose idiosyncrasy is tied to mining.

In the last century, we have seen many traditional mining sites suffered economic and social crisis due to the progressive abandonment of mining towns, disturbances of the traditional mining style of life, the impossibility of getting new economic alternatives, high rates of unemployment, etc.

Today, tourism is an important aspect of the human societies, and its concept has developed from purely “leisure time” into a cultural expression as well, which includes all possible manifestations of human activities. In this sense, the preservation of the mining heritage of a country or region becomes an interesting alternative by giving the opportunity to restore areas affected by the mining activity at the same time that it puts them into value again, giving opportunities to the local population to continue exploiting and getting benefits from the former mine through a new and sustainable activity, tourism.

In the case of Cerro de Pasco, it is an historic activity which flows back from four centuries, it is the testimony of a prosperous and glorious past that can help to strengthen the image of mining and the self-esteem of the population. Of course it has to be taken into consideration, that tourism in mining sites require specialized services and offers different from the conventional parameters of mining.

The main problematic points that have to be overcome are: (1) the low attractiveness for people more accustomed to archeological tourism in Peru and good tourist infrastructure, (2) the high cost of restoration and maintenance of the mine site, and (3) the far location from traditional tourist circuits.

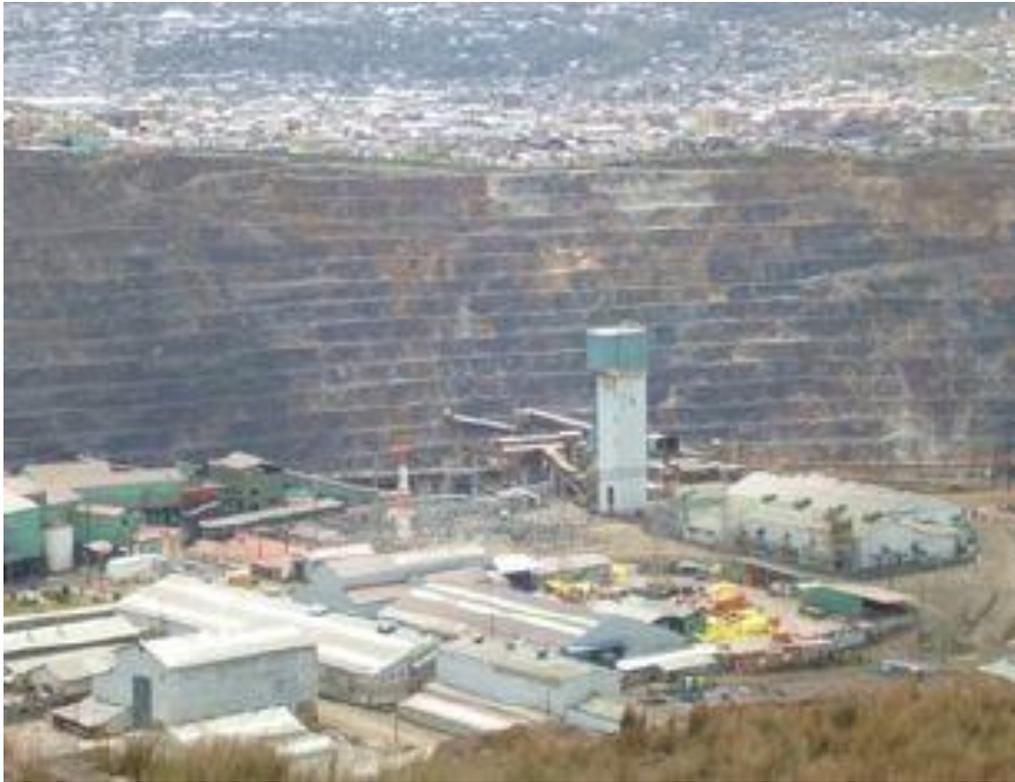


Fig. 2 Lourdes shaft and Raul Rojas open pit



Fig. 3 Projected cable railway for tourist at Cerro de Pasco open pit

LOW ATTRACTIVENESS AND POOR TOURIST INFRASTRUCTURE

Although being a medium size city, Cerro de Pasco has very poor infrastructure regarding hotels and restaurants, however the mine camp facilities if properly modified are a good alternative for those tourists wishing to stay in the city. However it is more likely that they will prefer to travel within 50 or 60 km and stay at lower altitude places like Tarma or Huanuco. The Huallay Rock Forest offers a good complement regarding attractiveness as does the nearby Junin battlefield where one of the last battles for Peru's independence from Spain was fought. Both Tarma and Huanuco are known touristic destinies for Peruvians during long holidays or vacations that could allow Cerro de Pasco become part of a wider tourism experience.

HIGH COST OF RESTORATION AND MAINTENANCE

Not only does mining environmental liabilities have to be rehabilitated, old mining buildings, plants, machinery, pit head

frames, etc have to be maintained and these requires capital investment that might not be recovered like has happens in other mine tourist attractions around the world. Therefore it is more likely that an enterprise like this needs the support of the local government. Fortunately this is the case of Cerro de Pasco, where the local council has decided to invest in developing a tourist attraction at the historic mine. The other task is to make the local population feel recognized in the process. Therefore former mine workers need to be implicated, not only for maintenance tasks but also by transmitting their work experiences, the mining legends of the place and generating feelings in the visitors.

FAR LOCATION

Driving time from the capital city of Lima at sea level to Cerro de Pasco is 5 hours. The road running west to east, totally paved runs parallel to the railway, one climbs very fast to Ticlio above 4800 m altitude, the highest railway point in the world passing several mine sites still in production at only two hours from Lima.



Fig. 4 Cerro de Pasco City Council



Fig. 5 La Oroya Smelter

From Ticlio one goes one hour down to “La Oroya” (180 km from Lima) at 3750 m altitude where the famous metallurgical complex of the same name is located. This offers an additional attraction to this mining tourist circuit. A small open air museum exists and restaurants offer local dishes as “cuy” (guinea pig), “pachamanca” (different meats and potatoes cooked over heated stones inside a hole in the ground, or “caldo de cabeza” (lamb head soup).

From “La Oroya” one turns north and within 2 hours (120 km) crossing the Junin plains, one reaches Cerro de Pasco, several small towns in the route offer alternatives for adventure sports. Passing Cerro de Pasco one goes down to Huanuco, the entrance to the Peruvian central Amazon jungle with many other tourist attractions. Therefore Cerro de Pasco is mainly a “one journey” attraction, a stop in the way to other tourist destinations, but that at the present moment is overseen.

CONCLUSIONS

Once mines close, there is the need to decide on the use of the space the mine once occupied. Historic mine sites find the cultural aspects of mining as a good source to attract tourists. Industrial heritage, landscape, environment, cultural and ethnic aspects, history offer alternatives to preserve the identity of the town and to generate some economic flow. However experience shows that to reach this purpose, much efforts are needed and the participation and compromise of the population and authorities is needed.

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