

ICOMOS

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON MONUMENTS AND SITES
CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DES MONUMENTS ET DES SITES
CONSEJO INTERNACIONAL DE MONUMENTOS Y SITIOS
МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЙ СОВЕТ ПО ВОПРОСАМ ПАМЯТНИКОВ И ДОСТОПРИМЕЧАТЕЛЬНЫХ МЕСТ
WORLD HERITAGE LIST N° 420

A) IDENTIFICATION

Nomination : The City of Potosi

Location : Potosi

State Party : Bolivia

Date : December 19, 1986

B) ICOMOS RECOMMENDATION

That the proposed cultural property be included on the World Heritage List on the basis of criteria II, IV and VI.

C) JUSTIFICATION

The Government of Bolivia has submitted a nomination for the World Heritage List which concerns an ensemble centred around the city of Potosi. In the pre-Hispanic period, Potosi was only a small hamlet perched at an altitude of 4000 m in the icy solitude of the Andes. It owes its prosperity to the discovery, between 1542 and 1545, of the New World's biggest silver lodes in the Cerro de Potosi, the mountain south of the city which overlooks it.

Growth was extremely rapid. The new town, built under the terms of the "Law of the Indies", was begun in 1572. By the 17th century, there were 160,000 colonists and 13,500 Indians, who were forced to labor in the mines. The Indians were from the 17 provinces of the vice-royalty of Peru bound under the "mita" system.

Following a period of disorganized exploitation of the native silver lodes, the Cerro de Potosi reached full production capacity after approximately 1580, when a Peruvian-developed mining technique, known as the "patio", was implemented. This technique, which was already being used in Mexico, consisted of grinding the mineral ore in hydraulic mills and mixing it with mercury. Potosi's enormous output is difficult to evaluate despite the three controls it was subjected to - locally, in Lima - and in Seville. This is because contraband and a parallel market must have nearly doubled the official figures, which were already quite high.

The city and the region conserve spectacular traces of this activity, which lasted up to the 18th century, slowing down only after the country's independence in 1825. First of all, in the heights of Potosi, known as Kari-Kari, are the numerous dams that controlled the water that activated the ore-grinding mills. There is also the royal mine complex, the biggest and best conserved of the

some 5000 operations that riddled the high plateau and its valleys. Other traces are the superb monuments of the colonial city where no expense was spared: 22 parish or monastic churches, among which are San Bernardo, San Lorenzo, San Agustin, San Martin, Santa Teresa, and the imposing "Compania" and the Cathedral. The Casa de la Moneda (the Royal Mint) and a large number of patrician homes whose luxury contrasted with the bareness of the rancherias of the native quarter also remain.

The envisaged protected area would include a representative sample of the industrial heritage surrounding the historic centre of Potosi. It does not include all the reservoirs (some, like the Laguna Chalviri, are located quite far from the metropolitan area), but only the five which are the closest to the urban centre. Furthermore, it excludes the modern sections northwest of the city.

ICOMOS is very aware of the realistic basis of this nomination, but would prefer that a larger buffer zone be defined that would include all the reservoirs east and southeast of the city. Aside from that one reservation, ICOMOS is favorable to the nomination of Potosi to the World Heritage List on the basis of criteria II, IV and VI.

- Criterion II. The "imperial city" of Potosi, such as it became following the visit of Francisco de Toledo in 1572, exerted lasting influence on the development of architecture and monumental arts in the central region of the Andes by spreading the forms of a baroque style incorporating Indian influences.

- Criterion IV. Potosi is the one example par excellence of a major silver mine in modern times. The industrial infrastructure comprised 22 lagunas or reservoirs, from which a forced flow of water produced the hydraulic power to activate the 140 ingenios or mills to grind silver ore. The ground ore was then amalgamated with mercury in refractory earthen kilns called huayras or guayras. It was then molded into bars and stamped with the mark of the Royal Mint. From the mine to the Royal Mint (reconstructed in 1759), the whole production chain is conserved, along with the dams, aqueducts, milling centres and kilns. The social context is equally well represented: the Spanish zone, with its monuments, and the very poor native zone are separated by an artificial river.

- Criterion VI. Potosi is directly and tangibly associated with an event of outstanding universal significance: the economic change brought about in the 16th century by the flood of Spanish currency resulting from the massive import of precious metals in Seville.

The decline of the silver mines of Erzgebirge and the monetary crisis and inflation whose causes were analyzed by Jean Bodin in 1568, were, insofar as Europe is concerned, the most obvious effects of the mining operation of the Cerro de Potosi. However, the appearance of a new network of trade relations with Lima, and later with Buenos Aires, was of immense consequence for the Andean zone and the whole South American continent. For an inexhaustible market where goods were bought on a cash basis, Potosi, in the 17th and 18th centuries, became one of the invisible pivots of world trade.

ICOMOS, April 1987