

Mining, Environment and Community

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Part I

Throughout the decades, different north American companies carried up an intensive exploration that resulted in the identification of seventeen valuable deposits in between the municipalities of Adjuntas, Utuado, Lares y Jayuya. These cities are localized in the central area of the island of Puerto Rico, which are the principal hydrographic valleys that supply the water to the north, west and south part of the island. Quantifying the minerals, they found copper, gold and silver whose exploitation would be economically viable. The illiteracy and unemployment rates are high in these areas. Nevertheless, the nearby neighbors and communities noticed that the exploration made practically impossible any other kind of use they could have proposed for this forest land. There were still some farms dispersed with plantain and coffee plantations. Such farms, like the forests, would be eliminated.

During the exploration, the communities knew that the mining companies were negotiating with the central government in the city of San Juan, the capitol of Puerto Rico, some fifty miles from the area of the deposits. Nevertheless, the government of Puerto Rico never informed such communities their intentions of letting the intense exploration in the area, and of negotiating with such companies the eventual exploitation of the area. With the findings of the exploration, the companies proposed to the government the exploitation of some 37,000 “cuerdas” of land. Because of the porfiric nature of the minerals, in other words, that these are dispersed throughout the area, the only technology available for the extraction is the one known as open sky mining. In this method a crater is opened in every deposit that could be approximately two thousand feet deep and a mile in diameter. In the end, when all the copper, gold and silver was extracted, the deposits could be used, as the companies said, as baseball parks, garbage

deposits, recreational lakes and even as runway for airplanes.

Even though the mining companies didn't reach a final deal with the government, the exploration of the deposits was extensive, and the use of the land was frozen and zoned for possible mining use. In this manner, other proposals and activities that could interfere with an eventual possible mining exploitation were made impossible.

Questions:

1. How important is the consent of the nearby communities and neighborhoods in the exploration phase? Why?
2. How important is the consent of such communities and neighborhoods in the consent for the exploitation phase? Why?
3. What should the communities and neighborhoods do in cases like this one? Why?
4. Number, justify and explore various alternatives.