
Innovating regarding culture, leadership, and consumption in Peru - An autoethnographic journey on historical entrepreneurship

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Abstract

We recently went on a trip to Peru. Lima, the capital, and Cusco, the former capital of the Inca empire. We loved Peru and the Peruvian people albeit have mixed feelings about the country and those who live there. Do they really see the [Entrepreneurial] Spanish Conquistador Francisco Pizarro as their saviour and founder of the capital of Lima? Of course, not their saviour... but undeniably an entrepreneur who took considerable risks and followed a specific strategy to reach a specific objective: to take over an empire with all of its wealth. However, the tour guides we had (total of whom = 7) were very polite and politically correct about this historic character. "He is part of our history and I see him as a part of our past" one tour guide said. Yet another said he did what he did because he had to... So, forgiveness, again. To understand is to forgive, I once read. The extent of the power of the Catholic Church is immense... a legacy of the Spanish. What did Francisco Pizarro do? He conquered an empire with around 200 men. How did he do that? By gathering support from different sectors who were discontent with their leadership and empire. I am referring to the Inca empire, which was spread across an immense territory, was rich and had solved the problem of food (or the lack of it). There was food for everyone under their rule. A rule which had learned from numerous other cultures. Why were the Incas hated? Perhaps as they were very elitist and violent, when they needed to be, our tour guide in Cusco shared with us. They had a lot of deeply held enemies. Who united with the Spanish "conquistadors". And yes, the rest is history. Albeit as one digs a little deeper, we see that perhaps the resentment is still there. One tour guide stated that on the commemoration of the 500 years of the colonization that, due to popular protests, the commemoration was seen as inappropriate, should not go ahead and that the monument of Francisco Pizarro should be taken down. It was. The wound still hurts as if it was opened yesterday. In some cases. This is our story, from the Inca trail right up to Machu Picchu and beyond. An autoethnographic account.

Keywords: Spanish conquistadors, culture, observation, Cusco, entrepreneurship

1. INTRODUCTION

The objective of this research effort was to try and understand Peru and its people, its culture and its history. We intended to go beyond superficial knowledge and talk and research about these topics – and were inevitably led to the Spanish Conquistador Francisco Pizarro.

Autoethnography, our research method, is still in its infancy and is a form of qualitative research. By speaking in the first person, events experienced may be communicated. One may get a notion of time and culture through the written word.

This particular autoethnographic journey is a story about a family of six who went on a holiday trip to Peru, where the Incas once had their empire. To what did the Incas owe their success? To what did they owe their demise?

In organizational terms, the leader is the most influential element in achieving organizational goals. Their function is to act as a facilitator, developing the necessary trust, a clear vision, and specific goals, so that their subordinates can overcome the different obstacles toward organizational success (Pino et al., 2020).

While in Lima, Peru, we learned of the violent death of Spanish Conquistador Francisco Pizarro. By the hand of Spanish soldiers. A man who had conquered an empire was killed by his own people. What leadership errors were committed to earn such a tragic fate?

We argue that autocratic leadership is a dangerous path - for those who lead and for those who are led. Making unilateral decisions may be appropriate only in special circumstances such as in a crisis or when there is a lack of time due to urgency. What happened to warrant such behaviour? Did the business mindset, environmental conditions and making a fortune really require seeking such violence and to trick people in a far from honest way? Such actions leave marks on people - who do not forget.

“Entrepreneurship has always existed” (Chaves-Maza e Fedriani, 2022, p.1). It is impossible to judge Francisco Pizarro according to today’s norms and values. The times have changed many times since that epoque. By a number of measures the entrepreneurial endeavour, the conquering of the Incas, was a success, in Peru and beyond, namely regarding “positioning, expectations and evolution” (Chaves-Maza e Fedriani, 2022, p.1).

The article continues with a discussion on the methodology followed (ethnography), and a look at the literature. The autoethnographic account precedes the conclusion to the article.

2. METHODOLOGY

Ethnography has gained a prominent place for qualitative research (Anderson, 2006), as such it can be characterized as a qualitative method, marked by the exploration and potentiation of personal experience to extend the sociological understanding of a particular phenomenon or experienced situation (Wall, 2008)

In other words, it starts from a sociological introspection in which an individual analyzes his or her physical feelings, thoughts, and emotions arising from a lived experience to subsequently translate that experience into a story format (Ellis, 1999). More specifically, it can be conceptualized as an approach to research and writing that aims to systematically describe and analyze a personal experience to better understand a cultural experience (Ellis et al., 2011).

Accordingly, the present research is about a trip to Lima (the capital of Peru) and to Cusco, whereby locals (mainly 7 tour guides, including a Peruvian cultural author and expert) were inquired about their thoughts and perspectives on the Spanish conquest or occupation and its effect, to this day, on Peru (though certainly not a premeditated effect in the sense that they probably did not expect to still have a profound effect 500 years later on certain former colonies, rather having acted with a more short-term extraction mentality at the time...).

As a prologue, one may state that there are still open wounds in Peru, regarding what the Spanish achieved in Peru, though on the other hand a lot of maturity also in seeing that the times were different and, to an extent, Pizarro had no choice but to act as he did. In the end, he paid dearly for his acts, and experienced a violent

death at the hands of his own men (in fact, the men of a competing faction within his forces and who sought to avenge their leader slain at the hands of Pizarro). To this day some Peruvian governments are seen as corrupt and as not acting in the best interest of the people, which is perhaps [as stated above, an unforeseen] legacy of the Spaniards, who followed an extraction philosophy and mentality, not caring about development and the well-being of the Peruvian people (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2013; North, 2005).

One has often found that only through travel may one get to know the world. Local knowledge is not available in tour guides and manuals and only by talking to locals may one really get to know what has happened, in many cases. This is our such story.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Was Francisco Pizarro a creative entrepreneur? “Creative entrepreneurs indeed have their own sets of business motives and success goals, different from those of entrepreneurs in conventional industries” (Baláz et al., 2022, p.1).

“Individual entrepreneurs, of course, may express specific attitudes and follow their own subjective norms... [opportunity-driven entrepreneurship] refers to positive motives such as achievement, challenge and learning, independence and autonomy, income security and financial success, and recognition and status.” (Baláz et al., 2022, p.1).

Did Francisco Pizarro see the opportunity he sought for himself and choose to seize it?

In organizational terms, the leader is the most influential element in achieving organizational goals. His function is to act as a facilitator, developing the necessary trust, a clear vision, and specific goals, so that his subordinates can overcome the different obstacles toward organizational success (Pino et al., 2020).

Given this perspective, leaders have a key role in establishing an environment that enables the emergence and application of innovative ideas. Put another way, leadership has a direct relationship with innovative behaviour (Norena-Chavez, Guevara, et al., 2021), as well as with the well-being and health of their followers (Chughtai et al., 2015) and the development of attitudes that contribute to knowledge sharing (Saeed et al., 2022).

In this sense, leadership should be understood as a broad concept, a consequential phenomenon for the success of organizations and the well-being of people; as something focused on building and maintaining teams and something related to the personality of its leaders so that personality functions as a predictor of the performance of the led (Hogan & Kaiser, 2005).

In general, and considering modernity, some studies have been dedicated to analyzing the influence of leadership styles on Peruvian students (Norena-Chavez, Céliz-Kuong, et al., 2021; Norena-Chavez, Guevara, et al., 2021; Pino et al., 2020), the relationship between adaptive leadership and immigration (Said & Jara, 2022), the role of leadership and engagement on the performance of call center employees (León, Burga-León, et al., 2017; León, Morales, et al., 2017; Shemueli et al., 2021), the influence of leadership styles and attitude for organizational change regarding healthcare professionals (Alegre et al., 2021), leadership and job satisfaction (Pino et al., 2020), as well as notions of hierarchy and leadership among Ashaninka peoples (Killick, 2007). However, there is a theoretical gap about the perception of the influence or legacy left by early Spanish leaders, particularly the conquistador Francisco Pizarro, to the current residents of Cusco, the capital of the Inca Empire when conquered by the Spanish.

The Inca empire was complex, vast, and organized, with an immense and sophisticated network of roads maintained by the Incas (Bauer, 2006). In the face of such complexity and organization, Pizarro shrewdly led about 168 men to the conquest of Cajamarca and, later, of the entire Inca Empire, defeating an army of more than 80,000 soldiers. Despite his leadership and military tactics, Pizarro benefited from a series of factors that ranged from military advantages (or innovations), such as steel weapons, horses, and the help of part of the natives, who, given their division due to an epidemic, were co-opted by the Spaniards. However, it is fair to say that Pizarro built his battle strategy, capable of defeating an army 500 times larger than his own, by faithfully following the footsteps of Hernán Cortés (Diamond, 2007).

About 10 years before Pizarro, Hernán Cortés conquered the Aztec empire in Mexico. His strategy was to declare himself an emissary of the Spanish King to arrange a meeting with Emperor Montezuma II. Upon obtaining the meeting, he kidnapped him, paralyzing the entire empire, and then regimented the disgruntled natives against the ruling elite, enslaving them soon after conquering the Aztec empire (Harari, 2011). In this sense, if we could summarize Pizarro's strategy in modern terms, it could be said that he systematically adopted Benchmarking.

In economic terms, the administrative policies of the Spanish colonizers were effective in transforming the means of production in the rural area of Cusco, the capital of the Inca Empire. However, such policies were more important in creating peasants than Christianized Indians (Alan Covey & Quave, 2017). In that same sense, one might think that the Spanish conquistadors left a unique legacy in terms of leadership. However, when investigating the Awajún peoples of the Alto Marañón (Peru), considered to be the most violent indigenous group in the northwest Amazon, it is possible to see that interactions between indigenous people and state forces (i.e. missionaries and the military) created multiple learning spaces, in which indigenous leadership developed as an expression of the subjects' personal and intimate trajectory (Romio, 2021).

4. THE AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC ACCOUNT

4.1. A GENERAL OVERVIEW OF OUR TRIP

We have arrived back in Portugal for almost two months now. Our trip to Peru, in late 2021 (over the Christmas period), already seems like a distant memory and dream. Between reality and fantasy, we wonder just how difficult the trip was? We did the 12 km Inca trail (with a 700m positive gain in altitude), half of it in the semi-tropical rain, for around seven hours on the way up to Machu Picchu, the lost Incan city located in the Andes mountains. The following day we climbed Wayna Picchu, to benefit from the view of Machu Picchu, from way up... It was well worth it. Then, to round off three days of intense trekking, we climbed Rainbow Mountain, up to 5,036 metres.

Though no less intense, if not for the emotional journey back in history and time, we also visited Lima, the capital of Peru, for two days. Indeed, we packed in a lot of travelling over ten days, doing what is normally done in a much longer period (we had no "rest" days and more than once arose in the middle of the night to travel around Peru). And all the while free of crowds and queues - due to the COVID-19 pandemic which we were in the middle of... Fear is a good predictor of behaviour, and we had guessed that we would have had a privileged view of Peru, a country which had lost many lives to the COVID-19 pandemic. A true tragedy. One tour guide of ours admitted to having lost twelve (12) family members to the disease. Aged 9 through to 80 years of age. Though admittedly more due to the strong medication given to them rather than due to the virus itself, at a time when not knowing what to do proved to be a dangerous companion in a nation short on the necessary health care facilities. Peru lost, in 2020 and 2021, a total of close to 203 thousand people - the highest death rate in the world. The rich diet based on potatoes and other fattening foods (and subsequently the high incidence of diabetes) was also to blame for the high death rate, in Peru, a local tour guide confided to us.

"The coronavirus pandemic has killed at least one parent or primary caregiver for nearly 100,000 children in Peru, the country with the world's highest COVID-19 death rate, its government reported Thursday... Peru leads the world in overall COVID-19 deaths per capita, with more than 6,000 Peruvians per million having died from the disease, according to an AFP analysis of official figures... More than 202,900 people in Peru have died since the beginning of the global pandemic in early 2020." (Alarabiya News, 2022).

What interests me especially after the trip are the leadership roots in Peru - and the effect that the Spanish Conquistadors had on their culture.

More than one tour guide communicated how Francisco Pizarro had promised to release a prominent Inca leader if he received gold and silver in abundance, namely, to fill a large room. The Incas did this, to try and save their leader. And Francisco Pizarro still executed the Inca leader anyway. That was wrong, the local tour guides said.

Spanish rule has brought some benefits according to one tour guide. His family is in Spain. People from Peru may enter Europe without a Visa. Spanish (Castilian) is a language that united the people who before lacked a common way of communicating. Additionally, the Incas had no written records, as other civilizations already had. So, progress did come. As did the introduction of horses and oxen (further innovations) to local communities. Not everything was bad... Yes, Francisco Pizarro was very violent (an unwanted baby who made it up from basic soldier to conquistador) and died a violent death. At the hands of Spanish soldiers. Who should have been loyal to him. But Francisco Pizarro had a bad relationship with his soldiers, stated a tour guide with whom we developed a good relationship. Very educated and polite. A superior being. In a country where perhaps there is 75% illiteracy amongst the rural population. A figure which the Peruvian government may devalue or not communicate at all. For obvious reasons.

We saw oxen ploughing in the fields with their masters. In late 2021. We also saw the odd tractor. Albeit oxen are the preferred technology, also due to the steep terrain. A technology which we have not seen in Portugal, for example, for some time. Peru is a poor country but the local citizens we came into contact with were hard working, honest and sincere.

The Inca trail from km 104 - what a great hike. 12kms in the mountains and with a positive gain of 700m. It was very difficult. The initial kms were done in the rain. Albeit we were all well equipped for that. I did start thinking that maybe it was a bit dangerous. So many cliffs and sheer drops of hundreds of metres just half a metre from where we were stepping. Hence I asked our tour guide whether anyone had ever died doing this hike. "I would be lying if I said no. A number of people have died on this trail. A notable young couple did it running to try and get to Machu Picchu first, right early in the morning. The gentleman wanted to propose to his girlfriend. Unfortunately, the lady slipped and fell off the mountain. It must have been very hard for him because the police had to get involved and ask him necessary questions to see if there had been no foul play... It is also very difficult to recuperate the bodies that fall off the mountain", our tour guide stated. This sort of information is not given to you by tour operators. It is mainly just local knowledge. If you perform the right query on Google you might get the answer you are looking for albeit no one really knows what questions to ask before visiting a foreign region. And therefore many are unaware of the dangers.

Climbing Wayna Picchu is a very steep hike with a positive gain of 300m - going from 2400m to 2700m, approximately. It is well worth the view at the top. In some places the steps are so steep you actually have to crawl on all four... Be warned you might have a heart attack on the way up or fall off the mountain if taking a selfie in the wrong place. Pay close attention to what you are doing. It normally takes around an hour to get to the top. I did it in around 40 minutes, spurred on by my youngest daughter Leonor who was right behind me. "Do not fall on me!" she said half joking, half serious, on the way up. That would have been a tragedy!

Rainbow Mountain (figure 1) was the most difficult hike of my life. Due to the altitude. Donato and his horse Gato Negro took me most of the way, but we still had to hike the steepest part of Rainbow Mountain. We all made it to the plaque stating we were 5,036 metres high. I needed oxygen twice (figure 2). What a boost that gave me! Nothing like sitting down and breathing oxygen from a bottle. I felt very light-footed after that. It took me to the top. Our tour guide must have guessed I needed the boost. Always travel with a professional when doing adventure tourism.

The view was well worth it and to be with my family was great. Very motivating. I did feel very tired later in the day.

What was our motivation? According to the leader and organizer of our group: "It gives me pleasure to climb mountains." She is 54 years old and has climbed a number of mountains such as Mont Blanc and the Pyrenees. Another group member said it is all about the intense experience. It is about the view at the top. Human effort. Difficulty in breathing. It is all a part of it. "I like intense activities. I dislike running and walking. But climbing mountains appeals to me" one of our group added. João is 24 years old. João has climbed Mount Everest, Mont Blanc, and the Pyrenees.



Figure 1 - At the top of Rainbow Mountain, Peru, with a local (photo by João Barreiros)

At Lake Titicaca the leader of the group stated that it was a shame to see such a big hotel empty. Due to the COVID-19 situation. In Lima our hotel was also empty. What a shame.

We talk and write a lot about happiness in Europe and in more developed countries such as the USA. However, here in Peru I saw no such concern with happiness. I saw no sadness. I saw people content with their lot. Accepting. According to our guide people here want less to have less worries. The more you have the more problems you have. To have little, a roof over your head, some food, is enough. But the newer generations are different. They want smartphones and WIFI all the time. What does that give them extra? Said our guide.



Figure 2 – At the top of Rainbow Mountain, Peru, I was given oxygen – twice (altitude 5,036 meters) (photo by João Barreiros)

4.2. ON LEADERSHIP AND CULTURE

How successful were the Spanish conquistadors? How much did they influence the local culture in Peru? Judging by the Roman Catholic Christmas celebrations and by everyone speaking their Castilian language, they had a profound influence (including, of course, on consumer behaviour, as religion, and Christmas, are important forms of consumption) (figure 3). The Spanish also left major buildings and architectural attractions in Lima (figure 4), and other cities, such as Cusco.

The Spanish also had an effect, perhaps, on existent leadership styles in Peru (even if, as stated above, not a premeditated and “purposely managed” influence). “We inherit the artefactual structure – the institutions, beliefs, tools, techniques, external symbol storage systems – from the past [...] This is our cultural heritage, and we ignore it in decision making at our peril – the peril of failing in our attempt to improve economic performance.” (North, 2005, p.156).



Figure 3 – Outside the Cathedral in Lima, Peru, built by the Spanish – A major tourist attraction (photo by João Barreiros)



Figure 4 – Architectural wonders in Lima, Peru – a legacy of the Spanish

Much as is seen in other parts of Central and South America, foreign colonizers from the Iberian Peninsula have left a mark (North, 2005). The extraction mentality (North, 2005) persists perhaps to this day – whereby

the elite group in power seeks to extract wealth based on existing relationships. With little concern for the development, evolution, and well-being beyond survival mode of the general population. This is perhaps sad that it has turned out this way, due to what was probably seen as a short-term intervention to extract existing wealth.

What is autocratic, self-serving leadership? It may be seen to be extremely successful, in some cases and as persisting in some major geographies. It signifies making decisions based on one's own gain, rather than on win-win situations (Chauvin, 2021). The following was written on Peru: "Peruvian COVID-19 vaccine scandal spreads... Several politicians have resigned... In an escalating scandal involving the misuse of COVID-19 vaccines, Peruvian President Francisco Sagasti has publicly expressed a sense of betrayal at Cabinet ministers who were secretly vaccinated against the virus." (Chauvin, 2021, p.7783).

Peru has been known to have political parties that, in particular cases, "lacked core values uniting their leaders" (Ponce de Leon, 2021, p.493), which led to problems related to "funding and implementation" (Ponce de Leon, 2021, p.493). The importance of values could not be more relevant to leadership (George et al., 2017).

Hence, to get involved is not necessarily to seek self-gain – but may be to seek the gain of the many. For this to occur, to have leaders who love their people, is the true blessing a nation may have. I know of no secret formula to make it happen. Albeit I have seen the lack of development spurned by somewhat self-interested rulers who have adopted foreign leadership policies designed to create survival-oriented citizens rather than to empower them for more than that.

One has access to much which is published:

- Peru, "a country still plagued by galloping corruption, inequality and injustice..." (Tegel, 2021).
- "Peru... the country has a large black market – 70 per cent of the Peruvian labour force work informally, compared with an average of 54 per cent across Latin America" (Long, 2020).
- "The Corruption and Scandals Defining Peru's Leaders... Another Peruvian leader has been accused of corruption. Alberto Fujimori, known to control with an "iron fist," faces a 25-year sentence for charges of human rights abuse and ordering death squad killings during the Peruvian Civil War." (Morgan, 2021).
- "Peru deserves a fresh political start... Peru's president Pedro Castillo... is a symbol of broader institutional disarray in the country... If your country had suffered the world's deadliest coronavirus epidemic, you might expect particular care over the choice of health minister. Not so in Peru. Within two days of Hernán Condori's appointment last week, the country's medical association demanded his resignation, saying the new minister had offered unauthorised gynaecological services, promoted quack remedies and was not even minimally qualified." (Financial Times, 2022).

5. CONCLUSION

Even the Incas were a violent nation even though successful at agriculture and having been able to solve the problem of food. Pizarro took advantage of the general discontent with the Incas to overthrow an empire with around 200 Spanish soldiers only. To this day (and though certainly not having been a premeditated effect) the extraction policy of the Spanish is still seen in some governments which do not seek to develop Peru but only to extract benefits for the ruling elite. Possibly as much as 75% of the rural population is illiterate in Peru - a nation which suffered terribly due to the COVID-19 pandemic and due to the ignorance made evident. People of all ages were killed by the strong medication given rather than due to the virus itself. One of our tour guides lost 12 family members due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The rich diet very much based on potatoes and other fattening foods did not help the population either.

What is fascinating is how much cultural change may be achieved through violence and autocratic leadership. By truly defeating a nation's spirit one may redesign values and feelings apparently at will and for the very long term. This may mean the tragic loss of centuries of cultural communication, to be remembered only in museums, which we visited.

One might argue that nothing is lost, that everything is transformed, as was once said by a Sage. Albeit some transformations are so intense that we might state that great losses do occur – linked to much hardship – and the ruling elites seem to learn bad habits quicker and easier than good habits – namely to take advantage of (bad) rather than to develop (good) – from their conquerors – whose influence is seen to endure for centuries after they have left and after the initial “bad deed”.

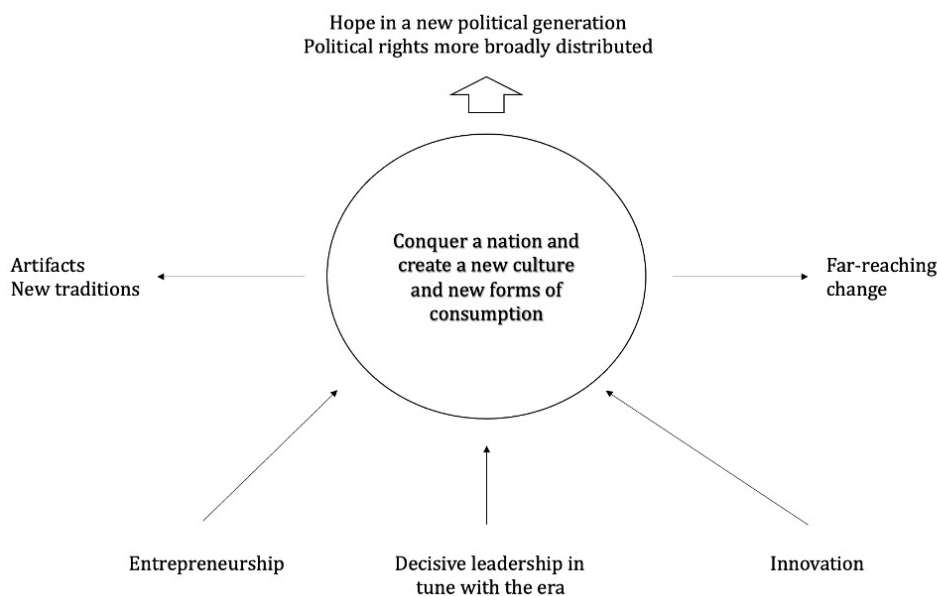


Figure 5 – Peru - Hope remains in a new generation of politicians (own elaboration)

Figure 5 summarizes what our journey has taught us – that hope in a new generation of politicians in Peru is necessary, in order to overcome what turned out to be a harsh influence under leadership perhaps better understood when adjusted to the era. A problem is that a number of good people who do not crave for power and to dominate other people refrain from entering politics. This is not to say that no good people go into politics – that is obviously not true. However, more participation in the political process is necessary at all levels and by more people. Who should not simply criticize politicians without wanting to play an active role in leading their country and people towards a better place for all and in so doing having a more active voice.

This can be achieved by the new Peruvian generation, which according to one of our guides constitutes a paradigm shift. They are modern-minded and more aware of their surroundings. “Countries such as Great Britain and the United States became rich because their citizens overthrew the elites who controlled power and created a society where political rights were much more broadly distributed, where the government was accountable and responsive to citizens, and where the great mass of people could take advantage of economic opportunities” (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2013, pp.3-4, preface).

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