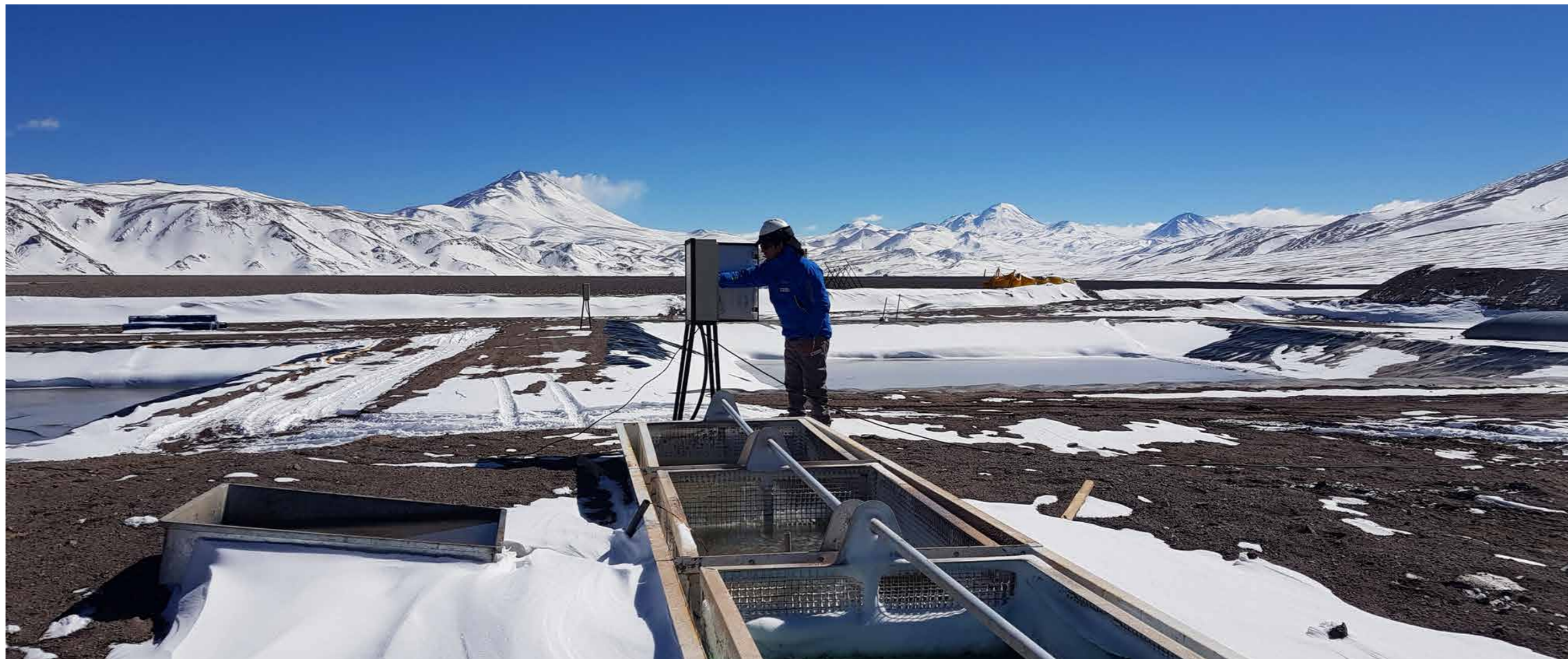


Liex S.A.

LITHIUM POWERING THE
4TH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION





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RESEARCH BY *María Bernardita Guschmer*



Lithium, the lightest of all metals, is one which almost everyone has heard of, but just a portion of people are aware of its modern day importance. To draw an analogy, lithium is to the 4th industrial revolution (the mass digitization which the world is currently undergoing) as steel was to the first industrial revolution. It is an essential component of the rechargeable batteries which keeps the fourth industrial revolution moving.

That’s why companies like Argentina’s Liex S.A. are so important. Its efforts ensure that the technology we now take for granted is accessible to the masses. Furthermore, at a time when most of the world was isolating from the effects of the Coronavirus pandemic, the importance of strong technology and telecommunications - the end destination of

reference in the lithium production industry. As Mr. De Pablos Souza tells it: “The company was founded in December 2015 by a small group of geologists, led by Dr. Waldo Perez, who were passionate about the project being proposed.”

“By July of 2016,” he continues, “the 3Q Project was already listed on the stock exchange and in November of the same year, with capital acquired, they began the drilling to establish the material resources which were achievable. This phase finished in April 2017, marking the first step of the project. By May 2018, the company had already increased its lithium assets by 220%, becoming the 5th biggest company of its kind in the world.”

If this wasn’t enough progress - and it’s worth reiterating that it occurred in less than

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Liex’s output - was underlined more than ever.

Business Excellence recently had the pleasure of speaking with Tomas de Pablos Souza, the President of Liex, about the company. Mr. De Pablos Souza enthusiastically took us through the company’s origins, the progress of its operations in Argentina, the massive importance that it attaches to ensuring everything it does is sustainable, and his plans and aspirations for the future of this fascinating company.

Backstory

Few companies could hope to achieve the meteoric rise that Liex has. In a remarkably short period of time, the company has gone from its foundation in 2015 to a public listing a little over a year later and on to become a

2 years - Mr. De Pablos Souza stresses that it was also the second highest grade of lithium ever discovered. He also says: “Between 2016 and 2019, the engineering team managed to develop evaporation ponds with brine, which was 4% concentrated. This provided the feasibility to begin basic engineering on site.”

By 2019, Liex had moved from the conceptual into the practical, producing its first batch of lithium at a pilot plant in the town of Fiambalá, a small town in northwest Argentina. This was the first batch of high quality lithium carbonate, produced entirely from concentrated brine. Business Excellence has been fortunate to gain insider insight into hundreds of projects. It is truly difficult to recall any that moved at such a groundbreaking pace as Liex.



The journey we've just described is a remarkable one, but what does it mean in practical terms? Mr. DePablos Souza reels off a list of statistics, as if they've been at the top of his tongue since the beginning of the interview. Among them: 3Q is the fifth largest project in the world measured by brine deposits, 3rd in the world in terms of brine concentration, and the world's purest in terms of combined sulfate and magnesium impurities.

Covid 19

Covid 19 has had a particularly devastating effect on Argentina. At some points over the past year, the country exhibited the worst cases-per-population of any country in the world, so it was only natural to ask Mr. De Pablos Souza about how it affected Liex. He is unequivocal in his response: "Work never stopped for us, during the pandemic. And that's not to say we didn't take every care of our employees - that's fundamental."

He continues: "We significantly strengthened the biosafety protocols, providing everything necessary to ensure the safety of our employees and their families. We also distributed tasks in such a way as to ensure that everybody could keep working with minimum disruption, while upholding the protocols. And the purchase of a fumigator - to combat the onset of dengue, which also took hold in Argentina at the same time as Covid-19 - was a reassurance."

Sustainability Initiatives

When asked about the company's purchasing policy, Mr. Tomás De Pablos Souza is keen to



emphasize that the company always buys and hires locally where possible. But that's just the beginning of its sustainability practices. He says: "We're currently preparing the feasibility study, which will give us an overview of the economic impact that the project is set to have on local communities, from an economic perspective."

He continues: "Liex is also putting together a social responsibility program, which it will roll out over time. This includes sustainable mining in the production phase. Inside the company, we're looking to pioneer a sociological model developed by Professor Jan Boon, which looks to analyze and enhance the relationships that exist between people in the workplace, ultimately leading to a better quality of life for everybody inside the company."

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Partners and Suppliers

The fact that Liex has been able to grow so quickly is in part a testament to the effectiveness of its partners and suppliers. Almost all of the specialized products and services that Liex requires are available on its doorstep in Argentina. It avails of specialized gases from Air Liquide Argentina and consulting services from Alex Stewart Argentina S.A. Scientific inspection products are provided by Micoclar Argentina and Brenntag Argentina S.A. The supplier portfolio is rounded out by Del Parque S.A., Hose Power S.A., Sigsas S.A. and Ficamen S.A.

The Future

Every day seems to bring news of advances in different forms of energy, but Mr. Tomás De Pablos Souza is bullish when asked about the

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future of his company. “Without a doubt, there are emerging alternatives, but I think lithium batteries will dominate for the foreseeable future. I’m not betting against there being alternatives - not at all - but I do see there being a huge demand for lithium batteries in the years ahead.”

And for his own company? He says: “The short-term goals for us are to improve social inclusion in those towns near the project, to continue generating employment and services in those areas, and finally, to strengthen the relationship with our strategic partners in order to achieve the construction of the plant on an industrial scale.” **BE**

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