

Why do mining projects meet resistance – and what to do to it?

03.11.2023 I got in my incoming email an invitation to a mining conference in Frankfurt. The letter started like this:

Dear Speaker/Delegate:

Greetings! from Critical Minerals Europe.

Please find the attached Sponsorship package if you wish to speak for a single presentation or join the panel discussion.

As I have been engaged in mining questions for many years and attended some similar arrangements, I am not surprised to get a letter from organizers. Anyhow it is the first time that I am asked if I want to speak or join a panel discussion. Yes, you can bet that I wish to!

I read further, gradually getting more skeptical. I see that to take part in the panel discussion I would have to pay a minimum of \$8.800, to speak from \$12.800 for 15 minutes up to \$28.800 for 30 min. Suddenly an old song sings in my ears: *Money, money, it's a rich mans world.*

Sorry, in my budget as an author of books about mining there is no place for such expenses. So I wrote a polite letter to the organizers, telling that I am very willing to speak, on the condition that I do not have to pay more than the travel to Frankfurt and two nights in the nearest airbnb.

When writing this, I have not yet got any answer, but I have got the inspiration to write the speech which I would like to give to the audience of mining companies and investors.

Dear delegates and representatives of companies which have found it possibly profitable to send you to this conference.

I am going to tell you another story than what you are used to hear, may be another story than you want to hear, but a story which has to be told. I will start to tell you about my meeting with the mining industry. I will do it without using names of companies and places, not to keep it secret, as I may give you all of them if you want, but to stress that what I tell is a typical situation and not very special for the places I have experienced.

Many years ago I was a student of mechanics in a vocational school in a small town in Norway. One day our teachers took us on an excursion to the copper mine, which was the biggest working place in the municipality. We were very much welcomed and asked to apply for work in the mine, as they needed more mechanics. I was one of those who applied, and I was promised to start with a summer job as soon as school ended. A few days before I should start came the sad message: The mine had to preliminary stop production because of very low copper prices.

So no job for me, and I went to a city to continue my studies. From there my class visited another copper mine, and again we were welcomed as future workers. When I finished after two years there was still production, but the mine had already started reducing the staff and a year after that mine also closed.

My dream of working in the mining industry had to be put away for some time, and I got ten years in fishing industry until one of the big crises in fisheries made me search for something else. Then for a short time I worked as machinery worker in an iron mine. I did not continue there until the mine was closed some years later, as I got a work as a teacher in mechanics in the town where I

started my education. Meanwhile the mine had started again, but it lasted only around 5 years, and then the buildings were demolished and the open pits filled with tailings and water. So far I had in general been positive to mines and I had wished that the three mentioned closed mines in our county would be started again soon. None of them were closed because of lack of resources, there were still copper, gold and iron ore for many years of work.

So something started to change.

First I visited the old mining site in our municipality. 15 years after closing there was still a lot of scrap around, there were a lot of strange colors in the swamps and streams and the open pits were lakes with unnatural color and no life. Didn't they tell that it was cleaned up?

A few years after that came a company from abroad and told they had bought the rights and wanted to start mining again. The mayor was positive and welcomed the mining company to an open meeting, where a lot of local people came to hear about the plans. The company expected to be welcomed as heroes and the local authorities to make all infrastructure ready for them. To the meeting came people who had experienced the former mining period, both its good and bad sides. There came reindeer herders who could tell about the problems they had during the mining and afterwards. There came a former mineworker who asked the public to apologize that he had taken part in this terrible destroying of nature, and appealed not to accept a new mine. The mining company was not able to answer critical questions and many of us who came to the meeting as open and critical left it as opponents.

After 3 years of long and hard discussions, which divided the local society, the municipality council decided that they did not want the mine. It is ten years ago, and it has so far stopped there.

The other copper mine I mentioned, was closed in 1978. The same year there were made new discoveries and as the copper price rised, it was worked to start the mine again. A new company declared in 2007 that the mine would be in production in 2011. There has been an active resistance since at least 2009, and it has grown from a local to a national and international case, mainly connected to two questions:

- 1) Disposal of tailings in sea.
- 2) Rights of reindeer herders to their grazing land.

The top of the resistance was a protest camp lasting for 100 days in 2021, stopping the construction work by civil disobedience and withdrawal of the building permission from municipality. The start has been postponed and postponed and now the company says it will be next year.

This last story is closely connected to this conference and the public here. There is in the financing sector a growing understanding of sustainability. The Norwegian Oil Fund has its ethical rules and had withdrawn from several mining companies based on evaluation of their practice. Several big companies, the World Bank and IRMA have declared that they don't engage in mining using sea tailing disposals. Several shareholders have withdrawn from the most disputed mining projects because of this. The company which should melt the copper from the last mentioned mine withdraw two years ago after concluding that the plan was not sustainable.

I have only mentioned two examples, and I am not going to mention more. I am only to say that I have searched around to find out if they are exceptions or typical. In Norway I have so far found protests or resistance to around 15 mines or mining projects, but I am sure it is not all. In Sweden I am sure the number could be doubled. When I started writing about international mining I searched in internet for countries with protests. Even if I am not able to read more than 7 of the thousands of languages in the world I could find protests in more than 70 countries.

So what is my message to you? That this is a reality. The opponents can't be rejected as extremists, NIMBY, people without knowledge and understanding of the role of minerals in our modern society. The opponents vary from tribe people in jungles and deserts to farmers, fishermen, reindeer herders, craftswomen, to teachers, students, lawyers, professors and researchers within maintenance of nature in land and sea. Most of them don't have much technical knowledge about geology, mining and separation processes, but they have seen the results of actual mining and they know they have to defend their nature and their livelihoods. This is a conference about critical minerals. But don't forget that mining also can be critical to life in nature and to many people who depend on this nature. So my appeal to you as miners and investors, and to the local, national and international politicians is: Take these peoples and their objections seriously!

The answer is not to stop mining. There will always be a need of metals, industrial minerals, energy minerals, nature stone and aggregates. But the resources are restricted and it can't be our aim to take out as much as possible in our or the next generation. One answer is recycling, but it is not enough. Quantity must be replaced by quality. Quality making a car last for 40 years, not for 10, a cellphone last for 15 years, not for 2, making constructions of concrete stand for centuries. ICMM has launched "Mining with principles", but the principles must be updated and strengthened. I will mention two:

1. **Mining is loaning from nature.** It lasts for a certain time, and then the area should be given back as good as possible. I have seen it in lignite mines in Poland. They are planned for a 30-40 years period, where it is planned before digging starts how it should look afterwards. Such mine planning is not the rule in the world, its an exception.
2. **What is taken out should be used.** All minerals are valuable, it is just a question of planning, technology and economy if they are used or end up as pollution. There is a great need of investments of money and competence in this field, and it is a responsibility of the states and a challenge to the mining organisations to make it possible.

An old proverb says "haste makes waste". It is highly actual for mining. Minerals can be taken out only once. Let us do it in a proper way. When mines are planned to give the fastest possible income the result is often very bad for the nature and for the people living on the area. To make a variant of a slogan used by the international social movement I would like to end this speech: "Another mining is possible!"