

Mining – too difficult for journalists – or too dangerous?

The front side of the medal

In 1991 one of the greatest norwegian industrial companies had its 100 years jubilee. It then wanted to have a novel written about the company, and asked one of Norway's most famous writers to write it. He did, even if he was quite sceptical, as the sources would mainly be from the side of the company leadership. But in the title of the book he made a reservation: he named the book *Medaljens forside*¹ – The front side of the medal. So let us start with the front side of the medal of mining:

Mining is a fundamental part of human civilization. For at least 40.000 years people have made mines to get minerals, for around 5000 years they have mined metallic ores to melt into metals for tools and other utensils. The minerals have been so important part of our life that historical epochs are named after them: Stone Age – Bronze Age – Iron Age. Later somebody has suggested we live in Atomic or Nuclear Age, making Uranium the fundamental metal. Or Computer Age, based on Silicon and Quartz, and a lot of different metals.

Mining has given work to millions of people – and built a lot of rich companies – some of them among the wealthiest in the world.

The back side of the medal

Mining has been and is necessary, and has given a lot of wealth. But it has also its dark sides:

- The conquering and wars to get control of mineral resources. The search for minerals, silver, gold, copper and others has been an important motive for colonialism and imperialism. Among the most famous are the robbery of the gold, silver and other metals of what is now called Latin America, the gold and diamond mines of South Africa and the cobalt of Congo. The examples could fill a book. I will come back to some of the nearer examples from Sápmi.
- The work in mines has been among the most dangerous known in history of man. Nobody knows how many thousands have been killed, crippled or poisoned in mines, and thousands still do every year.
- Mines, and the further treatment of the ores, leave enormous amounts of pollution, to soil, to air and first and foremost to water, to lakes, rivers and sea.
- Mines take up a lot of land, which could have been pristine nature or agricultural land. This is land where nothing can grow and nobody can live.
- Mines give work, but usually not where people need it. They force people to move, live in barracks far away from family and homeplace, and often to wander further when mines are closed.
- Mining is extremely vulnerable to price variations, making speculators to invest enormously and run away same fast. If a mine is profitable today, you never know if it will be in three years.
- The mining capital is extremely international. There is almost no completely national mining companies, except in a few countries like China. The two biggest mining countries are Canada and Australia, but often companies are only registered there because it pays, the owners may be everywhere – or nowhere to be found. The owners normally have no connection and feel no responsibility towards the country where they mine, to the nature or the people there.

Do we want a Klondike?

You have probably all heard about Klondike Gold Rush. From 1893 to 1896 came about 100000 prospectors to the Klondike area in western Canada. A few of them got rich, for the majority the result was complete misery, if they survived. Later Klondike has been used as a word for sudden economical boom. Usually with a same sudden breakdown, but the last part is often forgotten or overseen. Even if we should know today what a misery Klondike was to most people involved, many still speak about Klondike as something positive they are longing for. A few years ago, when there was found gold in southern part of Northern Norway, a local mayor said to the newspaper: «I

¹ Dag Solstad: Medaljens forside. Oktober forlag 1991.

really hope this can be a Klondike to our municipality». And the journalist referred without any critical question. Closer to here there is a nepheline mine on Stjernøya in Altafjord. It was started around 1960, and the director then had a more realistic attitude, when he stated: *«Somebody say there will be a Klondike at Stjernøya. I don't want any Klondike. I want a stable mine which can produce regularly for many years».* The most fantastic is that he got it, and after soon 60 years it is still producing.

Mines and marketing

The first we think of when hearing the word marketing, is marketing of goods on a market. Our cars, our mobile phones or washing powder is better, cheaper or fills better exactly the needs or wishes of the customer. With mining products it may be similar if we talk about nature stones for decoration, but not for metals like iron and copper or industrial minerals like lime and rutile. They are sold at international prices at quite standardized qualities. The art of marketing comes here in on another level, when starting up the mine.

What do a mining project need to start up? First of all it needs state permission to start digging. To get this it is usually necessary with a good marketing of the project. The resource must be marketed as big, as rich and easy available, giving workplaces and income to local society and the hosting state. An important part of this marketing is to present the coming mine as environmentally friendly, that it will destroy almost no nature, and that it will be possible for all other industries to co-exist with it.

The next is that it needs capital. Nowadays the big mining companies seldom do the prospecting themselves. There are a lot of prospecting companies, which have specialized on searching for minerals and developing projects until they have got the necessary permits. Then they start searching for investors who can join them or buy it all. Again the projects must be marketed as rich, big and extremely profitable.

When planning mining in an authoritarian state this might be enough. But in a more or less democratic society with more or less free press, there is necessary with a third marketing process: The marketing to get acceptance by the civil society, the so called «social license to drill». When mining companies, their organisations and promoters have their annual conferences, one of the main topics is often: How to get this social license.

Some marketing examples from Norway

In Norway we have seen some eminent examples of such marketing, some more successful than others.

One of the best examples is case of Nussir, a planned copper mine in Kvalsund, Finnmark. The mine will make severe difficulties for two reindeer herding districts, and the dumping of the tailings into the fjord is called the biggest planned pollution in norwegian history. The application process has so far lasted for 7 years, and the final permission is still not ready. To get state and public acceptance for such a plan needs really advanced marketing. And the mining director has really done a marketing which few others have done. He settled for some time in the village close to the mine, where he talked with almost everybody, not only with people in positions. The aim was to create a positive attitude in the village, making people trusting him and his plans. It was said that there was nobody among the one thousand people there with whom he had not been drinking coffee. A part of the marketing was arranging formal meetings, both open and in a so called resource group with people from different parts of the society. Also people who were critical were invited, and one of his main tactics was to build a good personal relation also to people who were against his project. (I have personally experienced how this works.)

The next step is to win media. Always be ready to talk with any journalist or writer, show them prospects, take them to the drilling area, give them pictures. (Some of their pictures are in my books, and I am among those writers who have got a lot of information, by telephone, mail and personal meetings. Anyhow I hope he has not managed to fool me too much.)

The company websites are important. The Nussir company has one of the most advanced

websites I have seen from any company, and specially from a company which has not yet earned any money. There are all public documents from the process, impact assessments, hearing resolutions and others, there are articles from newspapers, both positive and negative. And the main information is threeilingual. They know there is a big resistance among Samis, their answer is to publish information in Sami language, which hardly any other mining or industrial company in Norway has. And it has worked. One of the major steps was the intentional agreement with the Sami parliament, which was written in 2010. For 6 years the company could give the world the impression that it had support from the Samis, until the Sami parliament finally said no, but meanwhile had got several permissions and the Sami resistance was parked.

Nordic Mining – mobilizing supporters

The second of the most controversial mining plans is a rutine mine in Førdefjord, Western Norway. The company named Nordic Mining has had around 15 projects, but has given up most of them. The remaining ones are all marketed as «green». A quartz mine is green because the mineral is used in solar panels, a litium mine is green as it is used in electrical cars and so on.

Rutile mine is green because the use of rutile in paint is less dangerous than some of the alternatives, and because it contains titane, which make airplanes lighter and using less gasoline. The destroying of a mountain and a fjord does not stop them from the marketing as green and environmental friendly.

The company is using internet in all possible ways. It has of course its standard company website (<http://nordicmining.com>), with the slogan «Environment, Safety, Innovation», but in addition a forum for shareholders (<http://inonom.webnode.com>) and a propaganda website run by a shareholder, named *fjordaksjonen.no*, as a plagate of the opponents *fjordaksjonen.org*. The main page starts with «*Bærekraftig utnyttning av ressursene*» (Sustainable use of resources). They also have a forum for shareholders and other supporters, where they try to keep up the good hope even if value of stocks are falling.

Political marketing and propaganda

The mining and prospecting company have their supporters and promotors. In Norway this is first and foremost their own organisation Norsk Bergindustri (Norwegian Rock Industry), NHO (Employers organisation) and LO (Trade Union). They all usually support every project which is launched, but first of all they propagate the importance of the mining industry and their products, the importance for working places, local and state economy, and not at least how extremely environmentally friendly the mining industry in Norway is. In propagating the extreme values hidden in norwegian rocks, they have strong support from state institution NGU Norges Geologiske Undersøkelse (Norways Geological Exploration). Recently they have told that there are minerals for 2500 billion kroner, which with a little further treatment give the nice sum of 8000 billions. As far as I have seen this is brought further in all media without critical questions.

The opponents

To which degree has there been any opposition against mining in earlier years? It is difficult to say, as not much of this history is written. The history of mining is predominantly written by the defenders of the mines, often by people paid by mining companies and their organisation. Some critical voices has written the history of mineworkers, looking at the hard and dangerous work, the bad payment and the suppression of the trade unions. But very few, if any, have written about the pollution and destroying of nature. Probably there is something to find, but in local sources like #bygdebøker#.

From the very early days of mining in Norway we know at least two examples of local opposition to mining. The first from Seljord in Southern Norway, where german miners were chased by local farmers. The rebellion was severely crossed, and the leaders were assasinated. Around one hundred years later it is told that Sami people in Ballangen, Nordland, was forced to work in mines, but that they made revenge. Some sources say the mineowner was killed, other that

he was chased away, but anyhow the mining ended there.

From some places, among others Rana in Nordland, we know that the mineral searchers were not popular, as people feared the consequences of mining. Some had to hide what they were searching for, and many geologists and other mineral searchers started to go silently, informing as little as possible. But organized protests against mining I have so far not heard of in Norway between 1650 and 1980.

The first action against a mine because of pollution started in 1980 at Titania ilmenite mine in South West Norway. There had been mining for almost 100 years, and the tailings had filled up a fjord from 70 to 20 m depth. When the company applied for permission to release tailings to the fishing area outside of the fjord, both fishermen and environmental organisations protested. Activists made a blockade to stop the dumping pipe. Actions were also made in Oslo in the offices of the responsible ministries. After several years government gave in and decided that future tailings should be on land. This was a victory for the environmental movement, but if was a victory for nature may be discussed. The land deposit is now already almost filled up, and what to do with further tailings is a big challenge.

From single protests to movement

As result of the mining boom from around 2006 there were launched a lot of new mining plans. The first former mine to be started again was the ironmine Sydvaranger. After more than ten years without active mine had the amount of poison and pollution been reduced in air, lakes and fjord, and local population was not only happy to see it started again. In half a year the measured water quality of the nearest fjord was reduced from «good» to «very bad». Especially they reacted against chemicals released to the sea.

Then around 2010 came up three parallell plans which all met protests: Biedjovaggi, Nussir og Førdefjorden. The protests started locally, usually as statements to plan program, and with critical questions in local newspapers. The ways of organizing was different in these three places. In Førdefjorden there was established a new organisation, Vevring og Førdefjorden Miljøgruppe. In Kvalsund there were already established organisations who engaged against the plan, first the local hunting and fishing club, later Naturvernforbundet, Reindeer herders and several Sami organisations. Quite early there was made a Facebook-group against dumping to the fjord. In Guovdageaidnu there was neither established any organisation nor internet forum, the opposition against the mine was mainly expressed by Naturvernforbundet, Reindeer herders and some of the parties in the local government.

In March 2013 the norwegian government launched its mineral strategy. It made it clear that the different mining plans were not only local plans from the single companies, but that state authorities were fully behind them. Therefore opponents also found it necessary to join their forces. As the only one of the environmental organisations, Naturvernforbundet made up its own mining committee in June 2013. The same year met representatives of different groups in Finnmark, among them people from the municipalities mostly affected by mines, and made a common action. This arranged several demonstrations the same year, but later it did not keep up its activity. In November 2013 Naturvernforbundet arranged a mineral conference in Guovdageaidnu, where also activists from Førdefjorden took part, in addition to people from several parts of the country and activists against mining in Sweden and Finland.

The culmination of the fighting against mines so far was an action in Førdefjorden i beginning of 2016. Young activists linked themselves to the drilling machines, and many were taken away by police and later punished with high fees.

Media as a «microfone holder»

The main function of media has been to transfere what they have been told. Mostly the information has come from the mining and prospecting companies. The journalists have put a microphone in front of the mining directors or engineers and recorded or written what they have said. Very seldom one can see that there is put any critical question. Sometimes, as a kind of balance, they have also

given the word to critical voices, normally referring them shortly in the end of the article, when most readers already have stopped reading. Very seldom we have seen that journalists search for background information to what the actors themselves tell. It means that critical questions came from individuals or groups in local society, it did not come from the newspapers itself. If they wrote about it at all, it was when critics contacted newspapers and it was difficult not to do anything.

As far as I have seen, no norwegian newspaper has given so big priority to mining that they have searched for a qualified journalist for this topic or given any of their own journalists time and possibility to learn and do real digging journalism in mines. What if a newspaper had let one of their journalists follow some of the mining conferences which has been – both arranged by the mining defenders and their opponents. I have been to both kinds, but hardly seen a journalist.

Media as mediator of silence

While local media in general has played the role of boasting any possible mineral found, and any permission to mining, the role of the central media published in Oslo has been to behave like neither mines, environmental problems with mines or protests against mines exist. The reasons may be different in the different newspapers. Mines are in general not in Oslo or other big cities. They are dirty and not to be visited in clean clothes, they are not sexy and don't sell. To write about mining and conflicts around mining needs knowledge, and nobody can build this knowledge between the morning meeting and the daily deadline. All this is important, but I also want to ask if there is one more reason: Are the newspapers afraid of writing something which does not fit their owners, the companies buying advertisements or the organisations supporting the newspapers? What is important here is that in mining politics the main political parties in Norway completely agree, and the trade unions are of exactly the same opinion as the organisation of the industry owners.

The exceptions

There are a few exceptions, which are so few that they rather confirm the rule. A few local newspapers have brought critical articles about local mining plans, but usually restricted to their local case, not connection it to the general mineral politics.

There has in Norway been one freelance journalist who has specialized on writing critical articles about mining. She managed to sell a few articles to newspaper, then she was blackmailed after a mining company brought the newspaper to the press court (Pressens faglige utvalg). The mining company could not prove any mistake, but complained that the journalist had not done enough to get and bring their version. For some time she managed to sell some articles to NRK Sápmi, but then there was full stop, and she had to search for other income for living.

The Sami media has in general been better than the Norwegian. The best source for news about mining in Sami areas is NRK Sápmi, which mainly have brought these news in Norwegian. Ávvir has published some critical articles about local mining plans, and is the only newspaper to which I have been able to sell articles about mining.

Some examples of ignorance

1. Finnmark Dagblad, 2010: «*Trolig inneholder fjellet under de gamle dagbruddene et sted mellom fem og ti millioner tonn kobber, to-tre ganger mer enn først antatt.*» (Probably the rocks under the old pits contains between 5 and 10 mill. tons of copper, 2-3 times more than first presumed.)

The correct should be 5–10 mill. tons of ORE, with a copper content of around 1%. It means the newspaper has multiplied with 100.

2. Finnmark Dagblad, 2014: «*Anslagene over kobberforekomstene i Kvalsund ligger nå på rundt 400 millioner tonn*» (The amount of copper in Kvalsund is now estimated to 400 mill. ton.)

This time it was not enough to multiply with 100, the number is multiplied with 500.

3. GLR 2011: Arctic Gold was planning gold mine in Guovdageaidnu, and the local radio had heard about use of the dangerous chemical cyanide. So they ask the director: Are you going to use cyanide? And he answered: No, we will only use environmentally friendly chemicals. And the journalist was satisfied with the answer and did not ask the obvious question: «Which chemicals». A

short time after there was a public meeting, and then I asked this question. The answer was that they did not know yet, but they will definitely be environmentally friendly. If the journalist had asked this question and got that answer, the listeners would have a completely other impression.

4. Many media, 2017: NGU has stated there are minerals for 2500 billion kroner, which with a little further treatment give the nice sum of 8000 billions. Media has compared this with the norwegian oil fund, not mentioning that the oil fund is made from net profits, and the value of the minerals is brutto value, from which has to be taken all expences and taxes. If the net result will be positiv or negativ number, is not clear. But no media asked about this.

5. The different companies and their supporters give all the time new numbers of workingplaces in the different projects. For Nussir the company itself writes about «up to 90 workers», but the newspapers print uncritically all launched numbers up to 800. And nobody writes about the automatic mines coming in other countries.

Too dangerous?

In many countries it may be dangerous to be a journalist, at least if you report about the crimes of powerful people. It is registered that 2300 journalists were killed from 1990 to 2015.² No statistics tell how many of them because they wrote about mines and told the truth about terrible working conditions, pollution or corruption in mining. But a short search in internet tells about such events in India, Philipines, China, Colombia and Turkey. I am sure there are many other examples. In addition comes the journalists who are arrested, beaten or threaten because ot their writing, and the many who have sustained from writing the truth about mines because they see what has happened to others.

What to do?

The situation which I have described is very unhealthy, for the ideals of free speech and democratic society, for nature and people living from nature, among them often indigenous peoples. It is also very bad for the integrity and reputation of the different mass media. So what can we do? I have some ideas, and I hope that you have some more.

1. Build a knowledge base.

Don't let the mining companies and their organisations and politicians have monopoly on information about mining. Internationally there are some organisations and institutions which for many years have collected facts about mining, and about the consequences for nature and people. I will specially mention:

– Partizans / London Mining Network, <http://londonminingnetwork.org>, and the books by Roger Moody: *Plunder* and *Rocks and hard places*

– Mining Watch Canada, <http://miningwatch.ca/>

In addition I would like to mention the book Ugo Bardi: *Extracted*, telling about how we are emptying the mineral resources.

In Nordic countries the first critical book about mining came in Sweden a few years ago: Arne Müller: *Smutsiga miljarder* (Dirty billions), followed up by his book *Norrlandsparadoxen*. (<http://norrlandsparadoxen.se>)

The mentioned books have been my inspiration when I have written about mining in Norway. So far I have published two books under the title «Gull, gråstein og grums» (Difficult to make a good translation, something like Gold, stone and dregs) and the website <http://gruve.info>.

Last year came a historical book from the Mining museum of Norway. Within this year there will come two more books, one from me and one more about technology and work. When this is ready the mentioned 8 books will be a base of knowledge where critical journalists can find background information about mines and mineral extraction in Norway, Sweden and an overview internationally, mainly in English speaking areas. What restricts the usability is that you would have to be able to read both Norwegian, Swedish and English to have access to all of this.

² http://www.ifj.org/fileadmin/documents/25_Report_Final_sreads_web.pdf

About Nordic Countries there is published very little in English. This lecture is the first I have written in English, in my website there is one article, from the Biedjovággi i Guovdageaidnu, written by a student at the former course of indigenous journalism.

Mining of course takes place all over the world, where people use a lot of languages. What is written in all other languages I have so far very little knowledge about. I hope to be able to say more in a year, when I have started my 4th book in the series, about mining internationally. I suppose some of you know something about sources in your mother tongues or regional languages. You would give a very important contribution if you could use sources in those languages and write something in English.

2. Mining as example and training field for journalist education.

"A mine is a hole in the ground with a liar at the top." This is said by the American writer Mark Twain, more than hundred years ago. It was not far from the truth then, and it is not any better today. The whole mining industry is based on fooling investors that the sources are enormous and easily available, that the prices will increase, fooling authorities that the process will be safe and without pollution and fooling the public that there will be a lot of good workplaces and big income to local society. And I am sad to say that this fooling works, and that there are definitely too few newspapers and other media which really dig in this shit.

The best which can be said about mining is that it is an excellent topic for training journalists in critical work. In some countries there are groups of journalists, often in different media, who cooperate in revealing big affairs. Sometimes they work together in many countries, like the story of the Panama Papers which came up last year. In Norway this is unfortunately not a priority of media, maybe we have to start with the journalist students.

3. What more ??? Your ideas: