REXSAC is one of the four Nordic Centres of Excellence (NCoE) established under the Nordforsk Research Programme “Responsible Development of the Arctic: Opportunities and Challenges – Pathways to Action”. We at REXSAC focus on extractive resource industries in the Arctic as cultural, social, economic, and ecological phenomena – and we zoom into mining developments in particular. Mining is economically and socially very important for northern regions and their communities, which all are as well affected by global drivers of change, such as climate change. Mining is also almost by definition an activity that is hard to reconcile with sustainability, because it puts pressure on the environment and traditional livelihoods. Minerals are a limited resource, and every mining site has a life before mining, an active mining phase, and an afterlife. All these phases need to be considered, if we wish to enhance possibilities for resource extraction to become more sustainable. Consequently, the overall aim of REXSAC is to contribute to practices and processes that ensure the sustainability of Arctic communities in a rapidly changing social, political, cultural, and ecological environment. Our entire NCoE, with approximately 75 participating researchers from 15 research institutions in Nordic countries and in Canada and Russia, is guided by three overarching research questions:

- How and why does resource extraction commence?
- What consequences does resource extraction have for communities and environments in the Arctic and beyond?
- What opportunities exist for transitions to post-extractive futures?

Our three research questions are motivated by the ambition to take the entire process of resource extraction into account, from its earliest phases which often consist of visions and dreams or geopolitical strategizing, to its operational period through to the phase when extraction winds down or closes which is often a challenge, sometimes a crisis for their communities. To shape a sustainable future for Arctic mining communities, we believe, it is essential to link all these phases together into an integrative and coherent understanding of resource extraction as an activity taking place in time and space – typically over a long time and through its effects and links covering a vast space. Considered in this way extractive industries become part of local identities and integral to a social-ecological-technical system of some complexity.

Results, the progress made, where the work is heading: 2017-2018 reflections from the team Oulu

In addition to interdisciplinary research (humanities and natural and social sciences), one of the cornerstones of REXSAC is PhD student training, via courses, collaborative fieldwork, funding for research visits and conferences, etc. Most of the REXSAC-funded PhD students were recruited during 2017, so in 2017 senior REXSAC researchers have organized courses and other training opportunities for PhD students linked to REXSAC. These courses and activities made it possible; to visit historical and operational mining sites in order to better understand the scale, scope and long-lasting material and other legacies of mining operations; to explore the connections and contradictions between extractive industries and tourism, as well as other land-based activities and livelihoods such as reindeer herding, and; to gain comparative insights into research extraction realities in different Arctic case contexts.
The courses, research meetings and field research and outreach efforts of 2017 prepared the ground for joint publications and further stakeholder engagements. Some of the research has already been and several flagship journal articles with interdisciplinary REXSAC writing teams are currently being prepared.

Different types of workshops with stakeholder engagement have already been organized in 2018. Furthermore, research visits and collaborations between students and researchers take place with the purpose of gaining comparative, pan-arctic insights into the opportunities and challenges for sustainable mining developments.

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