

Understanding the Cultural Impact and Issues of Lapland Mining: A Long-Term Perspective on Sustainable Mining Policies in the North

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AIM

This project studies the history, material aspects and heritage of mining in Lapland/Sápmi and connects it to current issues surrounding mineral extraction in the region. Grounded in the humanities and social sciences the project addresses the complex cultural impact of mining and associated developments using a long-term perspective.



Mining plans meet with protests as well as approval



BACKGROUND

Mining in Lapland/Sápmi is controversial and entangled with broader issues such as nature preservation, economic development and indigenous rights. The frictions over mining largely reflect diverse interests and modes of engaging with northern environments and unbalanced relationships between the stakeholders. These tensions date back to the 17th century and are intertwined with the colonial past of Lapland/Sápmi.

Mining is often considered in narrow techno-economic terms, whereas this project studies it as a socio-cultural phenomenon. The research analyzes the development and implications of mining in conjunction with a series of reforms and policies imposed since the early modern period. Historical mining and its cultural heritage is studied against that broader background and in terms of interactions between people, material culture, infrastructures and environments.



Since the antiquity Lapland was portrayed in ambivalent terms as an unforgiving homeland of 'barbaric' Sami and as a land of plenty, unspoiled beauty and a backdrop of harmonious if simple life. Early modern state regarded the North as a source of untapped wealth, which in order to be exploited, needed to be measured, mapped, reformed and brought to civility.



The discovery of silver in Nasafjäll in 1634 and the establishment of silverworks in Silbojokk spurred a systematic search for ores and other resources in Lapland.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The research is structured around four interlinked questions and work packages:

- Historical and socio-cultural contextualization of Lapland mining (study of early modern perception of Lapland/Sápmi and reasoning that fuelled mining and modernization projects in the region; study of attitudes towards the environment espoused by various actors)
- Analysis of mining complexes in their environmental and cultural context (study of the infrastructure, planning, social and cultural arrangements at the specific mining and work sites as well as responses to and impact of mining on the local communities)
- Study of everyday material culture (assessment of the impact of mining and modernization on the level of everyday life)
- Connecting the past and present: the cultural heritage of mining (study of the local communities' perception of mining heritage and perspectives on contemporary mining)



Mining heritage can be used in negotiating social license to operate as in case of Svappavaara, where mining projects are welcomed due to economic boost and jobs they bring.



Colonial history, marginalization of local concerns, past mining disasters and industrial barrens can contribute to negative attitudes towards mining

EXPECTED RESULTS

A long-term perspective contextualizes and provides a new perspective on current issues around Lapland mining. This historical perspective will allow us to assess how contemporary policies reflect and reproduce colonial attitudes in advancing a certain style of argument and justification of mineral extraction and landscape use marginalizing local concerns and knowledge. This has important implications for the development of socially sustainable and culturally and socially sensitive policies of natural resource utilization.