

The Structure And Dynamics Of U.S. Government Policymaking: The Case Of Strategic Minerals

The global context of mineral resources in northern Europe: geopolitical and sustainability dynamics

The Arctic holds abundant mineral resources, and mining has played an important role in industrial and economic development in many parts of the region. As in other mineral-rich parts of the world, exploration has intensified in the past decade, driven mainly by high international mineral prices and expectations that demand will continue to increase. The prospect of shorter shipping routes through the northern passages as ice-free summers become more common has added to hopes of future profitability.

This history of mining in the Arctic is punctuated by periods of intense activity linked to booming markets, followed by slowdowns and closures of unprofitable mines during market downturns. The most recent boom came to an abrupt end in 2014, following a general deceleration of economic growth in several regions that had been driving high global demand, especially China.

The impacts of mining activity are felt differently on different scales, and as a result opinions vary widely, and often strongly, on whether it is a blessing, a curse, or both. Extractive activities can have highly visible effects on the local environment, and repercussions for other economic activities such as reindeer herding. At the same time they can offer jobs to those living nearby. Mining can also be an important source of revenue for national governments; although as many countries have found, a too-heavy reliance on its contribution to the national economy can lead to a "resource curse" (Mikesell 1997).

This brief seeks to locate mining in northern Europe in a global context, with a focus on sustainability concerns and changing power relationships in faraway places that may also affect mining activities in the region. The brief focuses on copper and iron, which are base metals with significant reserves in northern Europe. It is intended primarily for planners and policy-makers who want to understand the changing global context within which local plans for base metals mining takes place. It is based on a review of grey and academic literature on mineral resources, geopolitics and sustainability.



Mining is important across the circumpolar north. The map shows mining sites registered as productive in 2011 by the US Geological Survey. Some of these mines have closed and new mines opened in the intervening time. Hugo Ahlenius, Nordpol, based on data from US Geological Survey Mineral Resources Data System (<http://minerals.usgs.gov/minerals/>)

Mining in Sweden: globally small, yet regionally significant

While there are only an estimated 50 mines north of the Arctic Circle – compared to roughly 25 000 worldwide – the scale of production in some places is much more significant than the numbers might suggest (Dubamine 2004; Andrew 2013). For example, the Russian Arctic hosts the largest nickel producer in the world, while over a third of Alaska's export income comes from mining (Emmerson and Lahn 2012).

Northern Sweden is another case in point. Sweden is a regional metals giant: in 2013, it accounted for 91% of all iron ore produced in the European Union and 10% of all copper (see Figure 1). Ore extraction (mostly iron) has taken place since the 17th century in the Swedish Arctic. In 2010, the mining industry contributed 0.85% of Sweden's GDP and in 2011, 12% of gross national exports (Näringsdepartementet 2013). However, on a global scale, Sweden and the EU are small players. In 2012, the EU's total production of iron ore constituted only 1.6%

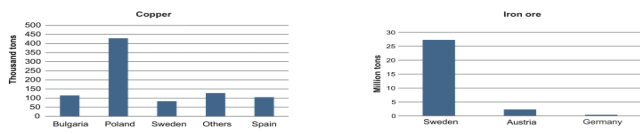


Figure 1: The top producers of copper and iron ore in the European Union, 2013, by output. Source: Geological Survey of Sweden 2014

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