



Understanding the narratives for public deliberation processes

Deliverable D5.1



Public narratives surrounding the exploration and extraction of Critical Raw Materials (CRM) in environmentally sensitive areas have evolved, driven by geopolitical changes, societal demands for sustainability, and the consequences of energy transition imperatives. Reflecting on the CIRAN findings, key observations are described on the public discourses from opponents to mining and their concerns over the growing emphasis of the importance of CRM for economic and environmental goals.

Environmental Advocacy and Opposition

Environmental groups and local communities raise concerns about the ecological and societal impacts of mining, particularly focusing on ecosystem and biodiversity threats in protected areas. This opposition is often rooted in fears of societal change, expressed through 'development yes, but not here' narratives that manifest as NIMBY ('Not In My Back Yard') or BANANA ('Build Absolutely Nothing Anywhere Near Anything') responses.

Limited public knowledge about CRM needs for current societal development and widespread mistrust towards mining companies generate fertile ground for activist narratives that pit corporate interests against environmental protection ('greed vs. green'). These messages strongly resonate with local communities due to preexisting scepticism, knowledge differences, and lived experiences of damage and destruction without compensation and rehabilitation.

This mistrust further extends to public governance, driven by perceived inadequacies in environmental protection frameworks and insufficient corporate accountability. Communities particularly criticise policy-making processes that exclude meaningful local participation and, thus, do not consider local needs and demands.

Strategic and Economic Significance

Europe's aim to reduce heavy reliance on external suppliers for CRMs, particularly China, is driving policy shifts toward domestic sourcing of such materials. These are essential for the EU energy and green transition, especially for technologies such as wind turbines and electric vehicle batteries, as well as other strategic EU industries that underpin the continent's economic competitiveness and technological sovereignty in the 21st century.

Beyond strategic considerations, mining offers significant economic advantages, generating new employment opportunities and regional development. Proponents emphasise that responsible domestic mining of CRMs is crucial for economic security and to achieve the EU's climate and energy goals.



The mining sector has increased its emphasis on sustainable practices, particularly from a circular angle, as it seeks to reconcile environmental priorities with resource extraction. This shift is reshaping industry narratives and operational approaches.

Technological advancements aimed at minimising mining's ecological footprint have emerged as a central theme in public discourse.

Circular economy models that integrate mining and recycling operations are being explored, though their implementation and effectiveness are still being evaluated.



Societal Engagement and Partnership Models

The mining sector increasingly recognises the importance of public deliberation and decision-making processes that properly engage local communities to rebuild trust and address societal concerns. While public participation frameworks continue to evolve, critics advocate for deeper integration of affected and vulnerable populations in shaping CRM policies.

Various community engagement models are emerging globally. These include community ownership initiatives that prioritise local stakeholder influence over project design and execution. In Canada, partnerships with Indigenous communities in resource projects demonstrate how such collaboration can promote economic equity and reconciliation, fostering acceptance through ownership, co-responsibility, and sense of belonging.

Community Development Agreements represent another important approach, establishing comprehensive social contracts between mining companies, communities, and local governments that extend beyond purely transactional relationships.

Governance and Policy

Policy shifts increasingly reflect environmental sustainability priorities through stricter safeguards and enhanced Environmental Impact Assessments.

The EU is navigating tensions between centralising CRM strategies and respecting local environmental and societal concerns.

Some governance frameworks are evolving to incorporate community-centric approaches, recognising that effective resource management requires meaningful local participation in decision-making processes.

The narratives around CRM extraction have shifted from polarised debates to nuanced discussions that emphasise balancing economic, environmental, and societal objectives.

As the EU strengthens its efforts to secure critical resources to achieve strategic policy objectives, building public trust through transparent governance, inclusive active engagement, and sustainable mining practices has become essential.

Stakeholder co-creation processes –bringing together industry (with innovative business models and technologies), governments (with robust governance, permitting, and grievance mechanisms), and communities (with co-created visions for the future)– offer the most promising path towards harmonising EU resource security with environmental stewardship and social equity.

Leading organisation: ALDA – European Association for Local Democracy. Council of Europe 1, Avenue de l'Europe, F-67075, Strasbourg, France.

Corresponding authors: Hládková, Pavla; Rosendo, Luis; Correia, Vitor; Falck, Eberhard

Grant Agreement No. 101091483 of the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation programme.

Available online: 10.5281/zenodo.16760497 and <https://ciranproject.eu/results/> ©2025 CIRAN Project. Designed by LPRC.



**Funded by
the European Union**

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Health and Digital Executive Agency. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them



MDB MacCabe Durney Barnes
Planning | Environment | Economics



@ciran-project-eu @CIRAN_EU