



CIRAN WP2 Case Study Selection Series

Beauvoir, France

EMILI project addresses exploration of lithium in an area with a history of kaolin extraction. Kaolin quarrying is still ongoing and is supported by a factory which produces products derived from kaolin, such as sand for public works, glass wool and tin/tantalum and niobium concentrate. The area which is the focus of the lithium exploration is the white granite, which is made of feldspar and rare metals.

It is located in Échassières in the Allier department. Échassières is located in part, in the Forêt des Colettes Zone Naturelle d'Interêt Ecologique, Faunistique et Floristique (ZNIEFF) and SAC (Special Area of Conservation). Species found on the site include Rosalia longicorn and yellow-bellied toad, both protected under the Habitats Directive.



It overlaps or is adjacent to a number of small villages.

There is evidence online of objections from both local communities and NGOs. Notwithstanding this, there is also evidence of local community support for the project. Locals are already acquainted with extractive activity owing to the local kaolin quarry and they saw it as an opportunity of employment. It is also seen as an economical possibility for the region considering that it is a reindustrialization.

National NGO, as France Nature Environment or Les Ecologistes have participated in the consultation process and have some concerns related to the activity. Two local organizations opposed the mining project as they fear for deterioration of water quality and risks for the environment.



The site has a long history of kaolin quarrying, still operative and has potential for extraction of lithium. The knowledge of mineral deposit was extensive. The designation took effect in 2013, whereas exploration and quarrying activities started in the 1960s. Lithium was first identified in the 1970s or some 40 years prior to the designation as a European site. The mine is said to be able to produce enough lithium to provide batteries for 700,000 electric vehicles.

The renewal of the Exclusive Search Permit (prospecting licence) took several years but this would not be unusual for this type of administrative procedure. There was limited to no public interest (or at least evidence of such) for the lithium exploration programme or the kaolin quarry activities until announcements were made by the company.

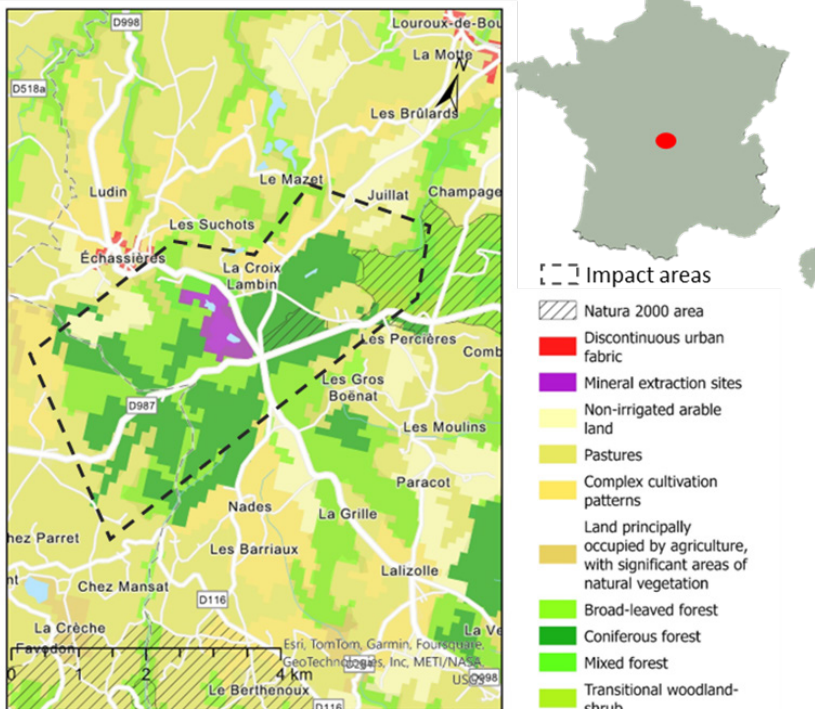


Fig. 1 Overall geographical localization. Corine Land data cover classification 2018 + Natura 2000 map (EEA) and the footprint of the PER in relation to the village of Echassières.

Mineral governance and spatial planning have separate legislation. Governance is decentralised to the regional level for minerals and some land use projects. France has one competent authority. The Prefect (regional authority acting as the state representative of both under Ministry of Economy and that of ecology...) has a key role in denomination of protected areas and in permitting and monitoring extractive activity. The conflicts and impacts of a project are solved at EIA level.



Fig. 2 View of the mining area



Company engaged with local community through the organisation of regular public meetings with local communities. Consultation with determined stakeholders and open to public, authorities, local authorities, users and landowners, NGO.



The operator has not identified effects on the Natura Site as a result of the exploration phase. This view was upheld by the competent authority. A small number of mitigation measures have been put in place as limitations on cutting trees and measures in the event that the yellow-bellied toad were to populate the drilling ditches being a favoured habitat.

The activity was possible because of the high socio-economic importance, impacts had been assessed and mitigation measures have been put in place, even with high engagement activities there is opposition and in some cases fear caused by misinformation regarding environmental impacts of Lithium operation. The operator is now progressing with a mining permit with a view to start extracting lithium in the coming years.

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