

What is a post-mining territory?

Polyphonic narrative and social construction

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Introduction

Why study post-mining?

What does the post-mining era mean for the people who experience it?



Collection of data used for this presentation

Field visits (accompanied)

Semi-structured interviews with residents/mayors/researchers (41)

More informal interactions

Objectives

- Coming face to face with the reality of post-mining territories (making the link between the content of technical reports and the reality on the ground)
- Meet the local actors *in situ* and observe them in action

- Find out in detail about their perception of the post-mining era and the way they experience it through their discourse
- Empathetic stance

- Essential for certain people who do not wish to take part in an interview

Study sites



Living after the mine: polyphonic discourses

Post-mining era: a public issue?

There are many definitions of the post-mining "problem" (Gilbert and Henry, 2012), which can be grouped into several categories:

- The post-mining era: a place to leave behind
- Post-mining: a place to live in, at the cost of personal effort
- Post-mining: an ideological battle
- Post-mining: decline after a "golden age"
- Post-mining as a heritage site

The post-mining era: a place to move on from

Those who can

- Sufficient financial resources
- Expropriation



Crédit photo : Souhir Soussou



<https://www.genie-ecologique.fr/phytostabilisation-des-haldes-minieres-des-avinieres-30-une-mise-en-securite-innovante/>

"There's resignation, we said anyway, it's silly to keep it, to fight to keep it there."

"We had to give up some of our dreams to face the facts".

The post-mining era: a place where you can live, at the cost of personal adjustments and efforts

"How to live on polluted land"; "To live is to rebuild".

From moving the chickens to a different spot, to growing only soil-less crops, to digging out part of the garden

A slightly empirical, trial-and-error approach...

"No, we haven't done the analyses, but in any case, there are no more deaths like there used to be downstairs. And now we're eating the eggs. It's a... It's a choice."

... Which has become second nature

"It's become normal not to plant carrots."

... Which doesn't prevent some people from thinking about the bigger picture:

"There's a direction that could be taken, which is the direction of living on polluted land (...) in that case, we're not dealing with the same legal concepts as normal use. And here, on the other hand, legislation has not adapted to this kind of thing. Nor to living and even less to living well."

The post-mining era: an ideological battle

The post-mining era as a paradigm for the destructive actions of capitalism

"(name of a local association) has gone into an ideological, ecological etc. battle. And also a bit anti-capitalist, *i.e.* against the (former operating company) that represents it. So that was the battle horse. So now we're into militant ecology."

"I don't know if you're familiar with Umicore's square institutional book, on Umicore's square institutional book, there are two images. Umicore is a mine on Mars. So the ravaged mine site is on the picture. And Mars is Mars, the absence of life, in other words death and the absence of life, and they're writing an institutional book on the history of the company, which means that there's hardly any truth to it (laughs). In any case, a considerable number of lies by omission, but without realising it they put the truth in a photo, they confess in a photo."

The post-mining era: decline after a golden age

Pollution is not really a problem, but rather the consequences of the end of exploitation

Question: How did you find the media's treatment of post-mining issues?

R41: Well, the questions they ask are a bit true, but...

Question: A bit true?

R41: A bit.

Question: Meaning a bit?

R41: Well, there's truth and falsehood, you know.

Question: And can you tell the truth from the falsehood?

R41: (laughs) That's a bit hard. (...) Well, you know, I've done my garden, I've done everything. Pollution is everywhere. There's less of it here than in Paris (laughs).

Former miner

The post-mining era: an area for leisure and heritage?

The post-mining era as a witness to the past: the aesthetic value of heritage...

"I think it's part of history. It's a monument, it's a bit like that". (resident)

"A mining landscape has its own charm. It has the charm of something that has stopped and shows (...) the human capacity to adapt and do things. And a form of human genius".

... Which appeals to a collective (but not so shared) imagination

"But there, rather, the more intimate side... Besides, there's the aesthetic of the gallery in the fir trees, made of wood, with the railway line sticking out of it. It has to look like a mirage. In the aesthetic, in the standard scheme, in the visual schematic structure, it has to look a bit... Because it gives a perspective. You go somewhere, there's a mystery".

Notion of mystery: the post-mining terrain as a vast playground for some?

Post-mining experience: how a similar experience can give rise to slightly different experiences (or ways of describing them)



"We were well aware of the puddles of... The colours and the smell were a bit peculiar, yes. We said to ourselves 'well, it's still not great'."

"(...) you have what's called the 'stench quagmire'. You have incredible puddles."

The perception of the post-mining era: a construct

What is accessible to the senses

Sight (predominant) and smell

- The landscape sometimes looks completely abnormal (alien comparison)

Ce qui est accessible par les sens

Sight (predominant) and smell

- The landscape sometimes looks completely abnormal (alien comparisons) → worrying nature of certain pollution spots

"When you're standing at the sterile exit and you see the fluorinated water, orange, etc., you feel like you're on Mars. It's like being on Mars."



Crevasse caused by the 1976 Cévennes storms (DREAL archive 5.4.10) Source: Saint-Sébastien d'Aigrefeuille town hall website



Detail of Reigous (Saint-Sébastien-d'Aigrefeuille)

"It was a lunar landscape with hollows and things. It was quite astonishing. People wanted to see it because it was a bit of an amazing sight. It looked like the moon."

What is accessible to the senses

Sight (predominant) and smell

- Sometimes the landscape looks completely abnormal (spatial comparisons)
- Sometimes the signs are more discreet, not necessarily attributable to pollution.

"We were well aware of the puddles of... The colours and the smell were a bit peculiar, yes. We said to ourselves 'well, it's still not great'."

"My goats died rather prematurely. But I can't make the connection, I have no proof. Anyway... That's it. Nor do I want to link everything that can happen to this pollution. Because... Maybe not. That's all. So I think we need to remain a little reasonable."



Cercle de l'Issart, Saint-Félix-de-Pallières

What is accessible to the senses

Sight (predominant) and smell

- Sometimes the landscape appears completely abnormal (spatial comparisons)
- Sometimes the signs are more discreet
- Pollution is sometimes invisible → idea that you can't trust your senses

"It's lovely. I mean, with all the hamlets... I mean, the very layout of the village, I find... I find it very nice. But it's visual."

"Beauty is associated with nature. In other words, when it's beautiful, it's clean. Which isn't necessarily true (laughs)".

"I've realised that you can't really spot."



Mine Joseph

What is accessible to the senses



Résidus miniers de la mine de Pallières (1982)

Crédit photographique : Michel Bourgeat pour ADAMvm · Source : www.adamvm.fr

Polysemy of the word sterile, leading to confusion

The word 'sterile' originates from an economic approach.....

Which can be interpreted as an understatement... (Hadna, 2018)...

And which can convey the idea of soil on which nothing grows, without necessarily being toxic?

"Because "haldes", "terrils", dykes - that's another cosmetic term, dyke, it's wonderful. As long as we were saying "terril" or "crassier" there's the filth side of it". (Saint-Félix resident)

What needs to be revealed, particularly by scientists

Knowledge mediated by tools (pH, dust measurements, etc.) that make pollution visible

State (Géoderis, ARS...)

- Reports, public meetings (CSI)...

Researchers (expert or researcher positions)

- Scientific articles (less accessible to the general public, more informal interactions; sometimes collaborations)

Scientists/residents in local associations

- Informal interactions, site visits

Media that take up the conclusions of reports and the conclusions of researchers who publicise their work (broad spectrum)

- TV programmes, regional press, occasionally national press...

Facilitators

- Personalities who want to get involved
- Interest from local residents

What needs to be revealed, particularly by scientists

Structural locks

- Timeframes often incompatible
- Communication problems
- Reluctance to popularise
- Sometimes self-censorship

The HAS reports on arsenic and cadmium: "If this report, as was unfortunately the case with arsenic, remains in a drawer, it's of no use".

"I felt that some of my colleagues, whom I really like and who are extremely competent, were a little reticent about what I was doing. Not colleagues from the school, I must say. But I felt they were a bit reticent, saying to themselves that if we put our foot down, we might be less funded." - (researcher - expert)

What needs to be revealed, particularly by scientists

Voluntary or strategic locks

- Portrait of the situation a little too "sensational" in the media
- Sometimes, withholding information is perceived as strategic
- Fear of catastrophising without providing solutions

"And I'm afraid that this reasoning applies in quite a few situations. But this agency didn't want to fund the study because funding a study would mean that it was aware that there was a problem, in fact." (researcher - expert)

"That's why I often feel a bit guilty because I'm anti-catastrophic, i.e. I'm afraid to play things down so as not to panic them (the residents). Because I feel sorry for them and I don't want to arrive as the person who doesn't live there, who is far away from it all and who arrives saying "your thing is lousy, your thing is lousy, goodbye". And I say to myself, no, it's horrible to leave people like that. (researcher - expert)

Effects of unveiling

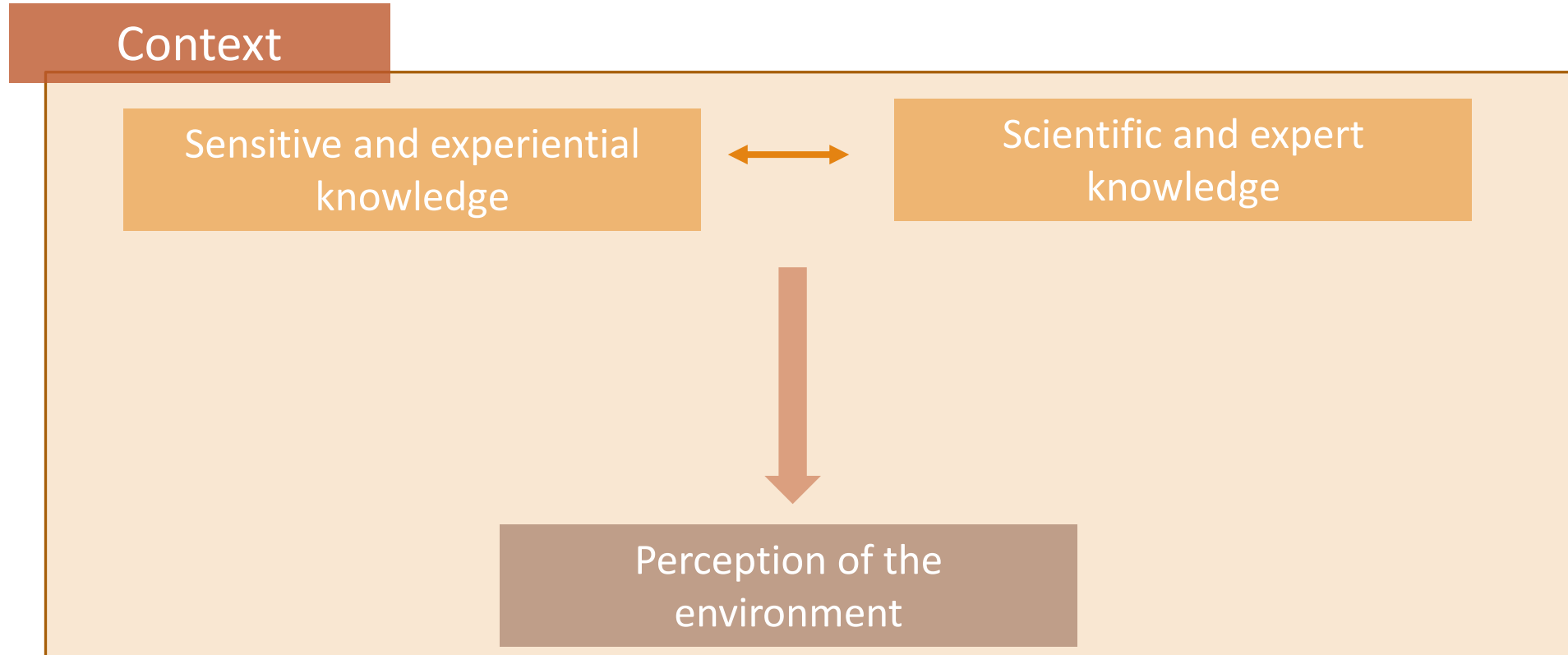
Effects of unveiling

- Better knowledge of polluted areas and precautions to be taken (with limits)
- Develop a special focus on the environment

Look out for the subtle signs of pollution: bio-indicator plants in particular

"Here, it was supposedly already depolluted. It was already finished. Except for the roads. On the roads and pavements, you could see the little plants (*Thlaspi carulescens*, now *Noccacea carulescens*) that I was studying there (in the field where the experiments were being carried out). They were still growing all along the field. So you could see that it was still bad soil. *Thlaspi*."

Perception of the environment: a social construct



How is post-mining management perceived?

In a nutshell...



Detail of the Umicore dike



Umicore dam (2022)

Those who do not question their effectiveness

Those who have doubts (more or less categorical) about their effectiveness