

Workshop Mineral Extraction versus Ecology: Foes or Allies ?

Co-organised by Geologica Belgica and BLUG/UBLG on 27 November 2015 in Brussels

Summary of the Workshop & activities to be organised in 2016

Summary Geologica Belgica and the BLUG/UBLG co-organised the workshop titled "Mineral Extraction versus Ecology: foes or allies" in Brussels on 27 November 2015. The workshop was attended by experts from the raw materials industries representing sand, gravel, hard rock and lignite extraction. Experts representing the biological sciences, geoheritage specialists and representatives from academia and government attended as well.

The experts provided interesting and concise presentations. These presentations proved that reclaimed mining sites and even older initially not reclaimed mining areas have a valuable ecological function. In many cases such former mineral extraction sites have a higher degree of biodiversity than the original terrains.

The participants agreed that each individual raw materials extraction branch (sand, clay, lignite, hard rock) has its own positive experience with raw materials extraction and a restored (even enriched) ecology and biodiversity on former extraction sites. Each branch has its own positive experience with ecology and raw materials extraction at different phases of extraction ranging from planning to the production phase and the period (short- and long-term) after production ended. Multiple examples of former extraction sites being transformed into Natura 2000 areas, into other protected nature areas or being incorporated into geoheritage sites exists.

There was a consensus among the participants that there is enough proof that the thesis that ecology and mining are allies has to be accepted.

Mineral Extraction and Ecology, activities proposed for 2016

The participants agreed that there is an added value to the November 2015 kick-off workshop if it is followed by other activities concerning the subject Mineral Extraction and Ecology. Therefore the participants, Geologica Belgica and the BLUG/UBLG propose the following activities:

Activity 1, summarising the existing information

The relevant information about ecology and raw materials extraction, discussed during the workshop will be made available on the website of Geologica Belgica and the BLUG/UBLG. Valuable documented experience and information is already available on the web (e.g. Fediex).

Activity 2, learning from each other in the following domains

The different experts invited the other attending experts to visit the different examples of their industry and to learn directly under the guidance of the experts on site. In 2016 Geologica Belgica and the BLUG/UBLG will organise the framework to visit the different sites representing (A) Mining and ecology during extraction, (B) Mining and ecology directly after extraction activities end (short-term after mining), and (C) Mining and ecology after extraction activities end (long-term after mining).

The different phases in more detail:

A) Mining and ecology during extraction.

This phase deals with aspects such as "temporary nature". During the discussion the different experts explained how they handle the advantages of subjects such as temporary nature and what potential drawbacks there are for the extractive industry to promote "temporary nature on extractions sites".

B) Mining and ecology directly after the extraction activities on a site have ceased (short-term after mining). “speed up colonisation” and “early accessibility of extraction sites asap after extraction stopped”. Nature and people should be given opportunities directly after extraction to use again the former extraction sites.

C) Mining and ecology after the extraction activities on a site have ceased (long-term after mining).

As discussed above the fact that ecology and mining are allies has been proven by many examples put forward by the participants. This information will be bundled (activity 1). However, experts from the different branches still can learn from each other by e.g. upgrading former extraction sites into valuable geo-heritage sites (long-term) or even Natura 2000 reserves.

Activity 3, presenting the insights to a larger public

In the course of 2016 we, the participants in the field visits and the kick-off workshop in November 2015, will decide, on the basis of the exchange of information and the knowledge we extended during the site visits, on how we can use our extended knowledge to raise the public awareness (by e.g. organising a symposium or a publication) of the fact that mining and ecology are allies.

Tentative time table:

1) January 2016: Presenting the information and presentations of the November 2015 kick-off workshop on the websites of Geologica Belgica and the BLUG/UBLG.

2) Spring 2016: Visit to the reclamation project at Hambach Opencast Mine.

This site is part of the category: B) Mining and ecology immediately after extraction activities ends (short term after mining).

3) Spring 2016: Visit to the Natura 2000 former extraction site Merlemont by Lhoist and the potential geo-heritage site Resteigne in the aspiring UNESCO Geopark Calestienne.

These two sites are part of the categories: A) Mining and ecology during extraction (temporary nature) and C) Mining and ecology after extraction activities have ended (long term after mining).

3) Spring 2016: Visit to the reclamation of glass sand quarries in Opgrimbie by Sibelco and transfer to National Park Hoge Kempen.

This site is part of the category: B) Mining and ecology immediately after extraction activities ends (short term after mining).

4) Summer 2016: Visit to the non-reclaimed sites at Moelingen and the Göhltaal (La Calamine).

These sites are part of the category: C) Mining and ecology after extraction activities ends (long term after mining).

5) Summer 2016: Activity inspired by the ‘charter quarries and biodiversity’ by FEDIEX and Pierre et Marbres de Wallonie.

6) November 2016: Symposium in the Museum of Natural History in Brussels.

7) November 2016 - February 2017: Working group to publish the position paper "Ecology and Mining" based on the insights gained during the year 2016.

More information on the organising associations websites and in the Miscellanea Geologica.

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