

Call for papers Mining companies and transitions: long-term perspectives for *Entreprises et Histoire*

Founded in 1992, *Entreprises et Histoire* is an international journal that publishes articles in French and English on business history, as well as debates, unpublished documents, news from the archives, ... The journal is published four times a year in print and electronic versions.

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The journal *Entreprises & Histoire* is calling for papers for an issue dedicated to the theme of “**Mining companies and transitions**”, for which you will find below the deadlines and a presentation of the call for papers.

The average length of articles is between 30,000 and 45,000 characters. Detailed instructions for authors can be found here: <http://entrepriseshistoire.ehess.fr/note-aux-auteurs/>

Please do not hesitate to contact the coordinators of the issue if you have any questions (email addresses below).

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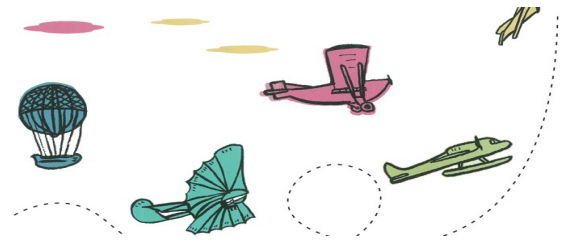
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Deadlines and provisional timetable:

Abstracts in French or English (approx. 3,000 characters) with a short biographical note on the author (5 lines) should be sent by **15.11.2024** to francesca.sanna@univ-tlse2.fr, lena.masson@univ-lille.fr, anne.dietrich@univ-lille.fr. A feedback will be made to the authors before the end of november.

Full papers are expected by early **February 2025**.



After 30 years of constant mine closures, the European Union (EU) has decided to revive its mining activity. European countries have realized the extent of their energy dependence, particularly on China and its “rare metals”, of which it has a virtual monopoly (extraction, transformation), and which are essential both to the production of everyday objects and to the development of low-carbon technologies needed for the ecological transition. In 2023, the Critical Raw Materials Act (CRMA) - issued in support of the Net Zero Industry Act and the Green Deal - set out targets for strengthening of the supply chains for critical materials: by 2030, the European Union would have to be able to extract at least 10% of its metal consumption, to refine at least 40% of its ores, and to set up a specialized recycling branch. Because of the environmental and social acceptance issues, long associated with the mining industry, the CRMA focuses on processing activities more than on extraction activities - despite the fact that EU’s subsoil is rich in mineral resources¹.

Several mining projects have been announced in EU in recent years: LKAB has launched graphite and rare earth mining operations in Kiruna; in France, Imerys is going to operate a lithium mine in the Allier region², while Eramet and EDF are planning to extract lithium from geothermal water in Alsace. France is reviewing its energy policy to ensure the supply of resources now considered as strategic, and to regain a sovereignty that has been weakened³. At the same time, a project to reform the French Mining Code is underway, with the aim of simplifying the procedures for obtaining grant concessions⁴. The latest reform of the Code in 2022 was thus presented as a step forward in the way indicated by the EU directives, resulting from the White Paper on environmental liability (2000), and in particular the directives in line with the principles of “sustainable mining”⁵.

The revival of extractive activity in France would lead to mines that are “safe, highly regulated, socially and environmentally remarkable”⁶. These political statements imply that responsibility should be considered at several levels: micro, the mine itself and its operator; meso, since mining exploitation would strengthen the country's energy sovereignty and the economic development of the territories concerned⁷; macro, because mining in Western countries would

¹ Cartography by Bureau de Recherches Géologiques et Minières, 2021. URL : <<http://infoterre.brgm.fr/>> accessed 07.10.2024.

² « Le projet de mine de lithium dans l’Allier suscite des doutes », *Le Monde*, 02.10.2024.

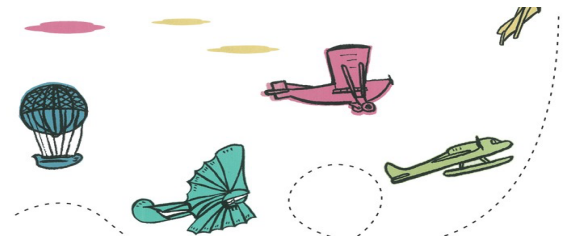
³ Cf. *Revue Française de Gestion, les nouveaux enjeux de la souveraineté*, vol. 48, n°305, juillet-août 2022.

⁴ T. Schellenberger, « La réforme du Code minier à l’ère de la transition écologique », *Revue juridique de l’environnement*, Vol. 48, n. 1, 2023, p. 139-155.

⁵ White Paper on environmental liability, February 9, 2000, [COM(2000) 66], URL : <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/FR/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM:l28107&frontOfficeSuffix=%2F>> accessed 06.10.2024.

⁶ Remarks by B. Le Maire, Villetaneuse, on the challenges of geothermal energy and the simplification of mining law as part of the ecological transition, April 12, 2024, URL: <<https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/293805-bruno-le-maire-12042024-geothermie#top>> accessed 06.10.2024.

⁷ Although debates on the links between mining and economic development and on the effect of the resource curse are still open. Cf. R. Auty, *Sustaining development in the mineral economies: the resource curse thesis*, London, Routledge, 1993.



avoid extracting mining resources in countries with little concern for the negative externalities generated by the activity. On a broader level, the reopening of mines would also help solve some of the problems associated with climate change. In this way, mining companies themselves are embracing the rhetoric of energy transition, feeding the techno-solutionist scenario without further questioning the idea of transition. Hence, they would participate to solve the environmental and economic problems encountered by civil society, while at the same time ensuring responsible exploitation of the subsoil. While we have seen a strengthening of social and environmental responsibility discourse and practices (green mining or responsible mining⁸, described by some as greenwashing⁹) in recent years, they have actually been developing since the 2000s in response to criticism of mining activity¹⁰.

The idea of responsible, safe and exemplary mining may seem paradoxical, however, given the scale of the environmental and social damage they caused¹¹. Long-term pollution, risks of tailings dam failure (e.g. Baia Mare disaster, Romania, 2000), hydrogeological destabilization (e.g. subsidence of the town of Kiruna, Sweden), etc. - all of which have an impact on local populations. In addition to these environmental threats, there are industrial ones, such as the difficulties of managing and storing toxic waste (e.g. failure of the Brumadinho dam, Brazil, 2019). Finally, we can underline the social problems associated with mining, mainly related to health and safety at work. Indeed, working in mines is recognized as the cause of many occupational diseases, leading to “collective disasters”¹². In terms of workplace safety, while the mining industry accounts for only 1% of the global workforce, it is responsible for around 8% of fatal workplace accidents every year¹³ (e.g. Benxi, China, 1942; Copiapo, Chile, 2010; Soma, Turkey, 2014). These accidents can easily be related to the strategies of mining companies, from which the standards and management methods governing production processes and work are deriving.

If mining and social and environmental responsibility seem incompatible in practice, how can we account for the rhetoric that promotes a “responsible mine”? What role(s) do technical and political discourses play in the adoption and justification of resource exploitation and production strategies? What influence do companies and experts have on these debates? Through a historical or longitudinal perspective, this issue of *Entreprises et Histoire* explores

⁸ Cf. H. Jenkins, « CSR and the mining industry. Conflicts and constructs », *CSR and Environmental Management*, vol. 11, n. 1, 2004, p. 23-34.

⁹ Cf. A. Whitmore, « The emperor’s new clothes: Sustainable mining? », *Journal of Cleaner Production*, n. 14, 2006, p. 309–314.

¹⁰ L. Rojas, J.-P. Passaqui and A.-F. Garçon, “Crises, résilience et temporalités dans le monde minier”, e-Phaïstos, XI-2, 2023, URL : <<http://journals.openedition.org/ephaistos/12084>> accessed 05.10.2024.

¹¹ L. Donnelly, « Mining Hazards », in P. T. Bobrowsky, B. Marker, (dirs.). *Encyclopaedia of Engineering Geology. Encyclopaedia of Earth Science Series*, Springer, 2018, p. 649–656.

¹² J. Rainhorn (dir.), *Santé et travail à la mine: XIXe-XXIe siècle*, Presses universitaires du Septentrion, Villeneuve d’Ascq, 2014.

¹³ X. Baraza, N. Cugueró-Escofet, R. Rodríguez-Elizalde, « Statistical analysis of the severity of occupational accidents in the mining sector », *Journal of Safety Research*, Vol. 86, 2023, p. 364-375.



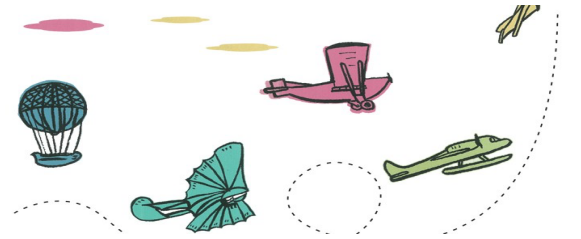
the intersections and interplay of actors between CSR and social changes that may or may not underpin the rhetoric of a return to mining and a convergence between the so-called “energy transition” and “ecological transition”.

Possible themes for the issue:

Proposals can be made in the following areas, with particular attention to the historical dimension:

- **The mine as an actor for the energy and ecological transitions.** Today, the mining industry is at the heart of a national and EU policy that aims to strengthen resource control methods in order to help mitigate climate problems among other things. In that respect, the mining industry of the future (at least in the West), framed by social and environmental restrictive rules, must demonstrate responsibility. Facing with discourses associating “energy transition” and “responsible mining” – discourses which may be subjected to questions and analyzes - and to developments resulting from reforms of the Mining Code, which roles and which positions are taken by the firms in the mining industry, particularly in terms of CSR strategy? Which influence - including political - do they exert on the debates resulting in the formulation of public policies as well as legislative and regulatory frameworks related to the issues of “transition”? Contributions may also question other periods of “transition” – marked by environmental or energy problems- in the history of the mining industry, in order to offer an analysis of business strategies and their positioning in relation to the political discourse of change.
- **The ages of the mine.** The times of pioneers, the times of companies, the times of modernizations, the times of decline ... The Mining industry has experienced a number of changes (technical, social, cultural, etc.). Today it is the subject of questions regarding its strategic positioning with regard to the social and environmental issues. So far, the mining industry’s responses to environmental problems were quite varied, between denial, compensatory measures and attempts to circumvent legislation, which is sometimes little restrictive. The formalization of CSR policies being quite recent in the industry, it is necessary to question the strategic choices of mining firms in response to social and environmental issues, in connection with changes in historical contexts, in actors involved and/or in technical systems that have marked the industry over time. It is also possible to question how mining firms have evolved over the years according to social and environmental issues related to their activity, as well as the forms of responsibility (or irresponsibility) that they have taken.
- **Risks and responsibilities of mining companies.** Industrial disasters often lead economic actors to take remedial or preventive measures in terms of health and safety at work and in terms of environmental impact. In the mining industry, which role(s) have these disasters played in changing strategies and practices dealing with corporate responsibility? At another level, how have mining disasters helped to transform the institutional aspects linked to firms’ responsibility?

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- **Mining law and the Mining Code.** Taking into account the multiple risks associated with the mining industry and adapting to the new conditions of the expected recovery in mining industry, may require a reform in mining law or codes: whether to facilitate the opening of new mines, regulate operations or address environmental and social concerns of residents and workers in a territory... What do these reforms focus on? Which problems are they revealing? Which roles are firms playing in these problems? In the French case, for instance, specialists point out that the reforms have failed to make up for the lack of clarity on several points concerning the mining activity's regulation, both before and post-extraction. From a historical perspective, we invite contributors to trace changes in mining law (in France or abroad, comparative approach welcome) and their stakes regarding mining firms.