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Connecting with Heritage of Post-Industrial Spaces: Lessons for Arctic Communities

POLICY BRIEF

Summary

The Arctic's vast territory contains both natural landscapes and areas shaped by centuries of human activity. Understanding past industrial uses and their connection to the natural environment helps us to envision better futures for these regions. By examining how historical industrial activities created lasting environmental impacts, and how we interpret these cultural and natural artifacts today, can help to guide our way into the future of Arctic development.

This policy brief introduces research from Nordic Arctic and European industrial heritage sites. It explores how natural and cultural artifacts gain meaning across different locations, examining how history and heritage bring new life to post-industrial spaces. The analysis highlights both official and unofficial heritage-making processes, creative reuses of old mining sites, and how different stakeholders understand and relate to industrial heritage.

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Key Messages

⇒ Powerful mining interests often use industrial heritage stories to justify ongoing or new mining project, even when local communities (with less power) and environmental evidence of former and future mining operations raise serious concerns.

⇒ Pro-mining stakeholders emphasise positive historical constructs of the past. This means that these stakeholders tend to highlight the nostalgic sentiments often related to the social cohesion and sense of identity of workers in former mining settlements, downplaying environmental and other negative impacts of mining in the same area.

⇒ Mining companies present current operations as fundamentally safer and environmentally less damaging than historic operations. This is used to dismiss concerns about repeating past mistakes.

⇒ When the same institutions oversee both heritage preservation and mining interest, the industrial heritage interpretation becomes one sided. Thus, there is an obvious need to highlight an importance of alternative community understanding in the role played by industrial heritage promoting inclusiveness and debate.

⇒ Local communities must have meaningful input in how their cultural heritage is interpreted and preserved. Local conditions and bottom-up involvement need to be emphasised to provide more equal possibilities for the local societies to embrace the value of preserved heritage and to reconcile with the past that is multifaceted.

⇒ Current and future policies must balance heritage tourism and economic development with honest education about the environmental and social impacts of mining. There is a need to strike a balance between the needs of the postmodern consumptive activities of former industrial landscape and the realities of its impact.

⇒ At the same time, we shall not forget the lessons of our mining "pasts", especially in relation to our abilities to create socially cohesive local societies and utilise a power of storytelling and immersive experiences while developing tourism products and services.

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