

DESIGNING DIFFERENTIATED APPROACHES TO COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE: LESSONS FROM THE H2020 SECREETS PROJECT

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The SecREEs project aims at developing a secure and stable European supply of critical rare earth elements based on a sustainable extraction from European apatite sources used in fertiliser production. With pilots and production sites located in three different European countries, the SecREEs project proposes a different approach to rare earth element (REE) extraction, optimising existing apatite manufacturing processes and focusing on unused REE sources. Compared to most raw materials projects, SecREEs has the specificity of not incorporating any new mining processes or any recycling: the SecREEs value chain is extracting and manufacturing REE as a by-product from the fertiliser production.

Although no new mining is involved, SecREEs still has to adapt its approach to comply with EU requirements regarding social acceptance and community outreach in the field of raw material processing and manufacturing. The concept of Social Licence to Operate as defined by Boutilier & Thomson (2011)¹ traditionally applies to mining processes outside the Western world, and it designates the degree of acceptability of industrial processes as perceived by the local community. With some modifications this conceptual framework is still applicable to SecREEs, in a context of non-extractive raw material processing and REE manufacturing. In this presentation, a parallel will be made between the traditional meaning of Social Licence to Operate in an extractive context and the case of SecREEs. The industrial context of SecREEs, whose innovation mostly consists in developing European industrial symbiosis, implies very little technological disruption for local communities. The tailoring of the Social Licence to Operate concept to a European by-product-based supply chain will be detailed.

The multi-level approach to public and stakeholder engagement in SecREEs will be detailed: SecREEs has chosen to engage stakeholders both locally at the industrial sites involved in the value chain, and at a European level with international events

and clustering activities with other EU-funded projects. Working with local stakeholders in different locations, SecREEs had to adopt differentiated methodologies, tailored to the different pilot sites and the different local communities, with their own social, cultural and economic context, a process that will be explained in this presentation. In addition, outcomes of the first engagement activities and their impact on SecREEs will be detailed, along with The first lessons learned from the SecREEs approach to social acceptance will be presented along with foreseen mitigation procedures.



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References

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