

WOUNDED EARTH

Consequences of unconscious management of natural wealth - baggage on the backs of our posterity

Local community Župa Nikšićka is settled in the river Gračanica valley, about 20km east from Nikšić. It consists of 12 villages where 3700 inhabitants live. Beside the numerous springs and torrents, rich forests and hardworking people, this area is also known as the largest source for red bauxite ore in the country.

The first research in the ore potential of this area was carried out by the French Vijala de Somijer who was invited by the ruler Petar I, while later, the ruler Petar II Petrović Njegoš invited the researcher Jegor Kovaljevski. The exploitation of the ore started in 1948, when the company „Rudnici boksita Nikšić“ ("Bauxite mines Nikšić") was established. The excavation was done on 8 open mines (Bunić, Zagrad, Lokve, Kutsko brdo, Đurakov do, Biočki Stan, Štitovo and Borova brda) and two caves - in Seocima and at Kutsko brdo. During the first year, the excavation totaled 8.000 tons of bauxite, while the most successful year was 2002 when 611 500 tons was excavated. The opening of the new working places in the after-war period created the large economic benefit for more hundreds of inhabitants and their families. But, as every medal has its other face, so it this Župa's medal shined with its red glow.



open mine Borova brda (photo: NGO „Mačak“ Župa Nikšićka)

As the consequence of the ore exploitation during several decades, numerous ecological problems appeared. All of them have in common the deposit of heavy metals, primarily the iron and aluminum. Winds that blow over the open mines and during the transport blow off the finest ore particles, so often villages are covered in red dust; large agricultural areas are destroyed forever; mining create large caves and channels that changed the flow of underground water and caused its pollution; in 2001 the ore entered in the part of the village water supply system; the transport of ore in heavy trucks ruined the road infrastructure.

According to the Mining Law in Montenegro (Official Gazette no. 65/08 i 74/10) the companies that work in the area of exploitation of mineral resources are obliged to invest the part of the created income into the rehabilitation and re-cultivation of the ground (article 73). The Managers of the company did not realize this obligation, and the exploited mines are simply deserted. In 2008, the Ministry of defense decided to use the deserted mine Borova brda to destroy about 1200 tons of explosive. Hearing this, the citizens, led by local NGO organized daily peaceful protests to fight against this decision. About this events we interviewed **Milodarka Popović, director of NGO „Mačak“** and one of the organizations of the protest: „I am very proud of my people from Župa, that were determined, but dignified in their fight and managed to fight off their right to live. First we had a gathering of the citizens in the center of our village, after that we organized the guarding of the entrance of the mine during day and night, and we planted about 1000 black pine trees. From the Ministry and the Centre for Eco-toxicological research we were assured that there was no bad influence for our environmental and that this issue was of highest state importance. We managed to fight off by our unity and belief in the idea that the right to healthy life is something that no one has a right to endanger.“



planting of pine trees in mine Borova brda (photo: NGO „Mačak“ Župa Nikšićka)

In the electronic bulletin „Ekolog“ of NGO „Ozon“ the words of some participants in the protest were quoted: „Dr Danko Živković, medical worker in the Brezovik Hospital, in the letter sent to the participants of the protest said that destruction of the 600 000 kg of different ammunition, 18 000 mines of RB types, 1000 tons of underwater mines and hand bombs, 1500 rockets type would cause some new „Balkan syndrome“. It would be enough that small particle of uranium dust, smaller than 5 microns, enters the lungs to create lung cancer. And if the dust particle doesn't stop there, but enters the kidneys and reproductive organs, the illness might be transmitted to the posterity.“

Mr Luka Mitrovic, professor of the geomorphology states that, having in mind that the terrain is made up from limestone and dolomite that are sedimentary and water permeable, the poisonous particles would very fast reach the underground water and existing springs. (www.ozon.org.me - „Ekolog” br.8).

And this is how reporters from our country and the region reported during those days:



Press clipping (photo: NGO „Health food production” Župa Nikšićka)

Up to now the solution for the deserted mines problems is not found. Beside the problem of rain constantly washing remaining ore and beside the fact that open caves ruin the beauty of the landscape, there is the permanent danger that these places are used for something similar that was planned in 2008. For the past several months the company „Rudnici boksita Nikšić“ is in bankruptcy. The large problem is left for the future generations to solve. Only the conscience about the depth and importance of this problem, prior all citizens and local government should move up the activities that will return the beauty to this picturesque area.

Radovan Vojinović (14) and Ivan Bojović (14)

(Elementary school „Dušan Bojović“ Župa Nikšićka)