



“With or Without You”: Developing and Applying a Meaningful Stakeholder Engagement Analysis Framework in a Mining Project Context

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Abstract

The growing demand for lithium and the recent discovery of one of Europe's largest lithium reserves in Covas do Barroso have positioned Portugal at the center of the European Lithium Strategy. This discovery encouraged the Barroso Lithium Project (BLP) led by Savannah Resources. However, the project has faced strong opposition from local communities due to environmental and social concerns emphasizing the growing importance of Meaningful Stakeholder Engagement (MSE).

Consequently, this dissertation aims to develop an analysis grid based on frameworks that classify the strategies within an MSE approach. This grid was applied in the BLP, to assess the strategies implemented by Savannah. After reviewing the existing literature on stakeholder engagement, three models were chosen: IAP2, MSE and EIM. Then, a narrative literature review of twelve documents was performed to identify all the strategies that were assessed by the analysis grid.

Findings reveal that most strategies adopted by Savannah Resources were instrumental and compliance-driven, primarily aimed at informing stakeholders rather than fostering empowerment or participatory decision-making. Engagement efforts were reactive, emerging in response to strong local opposition.

The study concludes that future engagement should prioritize collaborative mechanisms—such as Dialogue Tables and Community Benefit Agreements—to enhance trust, legitimacy, and sustainable project outcomes.

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Resumo

O crescimento da procura de Lítio e a descoberta de uma das maiores reservas de Lítio em Covas do Barroso, posicionaram Portugal como o centro da Estratégia de Lítio da Europa. Assim, isto deu início ao Projeto de Lítio do Barroso liderado pela *Savannah Resources*. No entanto, este projeto enfrenta uma forte oposição pela população local devido aos impactos ambientais e sociais enfatizando a importância de *Meaningful Stakeholder Engagement* (MSE).

Consequentemente, esta tese tem como objetivo desenvolver uma grelha de análise com três modelos que classificam as estratégias de acordo com a abordagem de MSE. Para tal, o Projeto de Lítio do Barroso foi utilizado como caso de estudo. Desta forma, realizou-se uma revisão de literatura narrativa de 12 documentos para identificar as estratégias utilizadas pela Savannah Resources. Posteriormente, estas estratégias foram analisadas e classificadas de acordo com esta grelha proposta.

Este estudo revelou que a maioria das estratégias adotadas eram instrumentais, orientadas para a adesão do projeto por parte da localidade e com o objetivo de informar e não de promover o empoderamento da população local ou a participação no processo de decisão. Estes esforços foram maioritariamente reativos a uma oposição. Foi concluído também que no futuro, Mesas de Diálogo ou CBA podem ser estratégias que beneficiem o envolvimento da comunidade, aumentando a confiança e a aceitação social neste projeto.

Title: “With or Without You”: Desenvolvimento e Aplicação de um Quadro de Análise de *Meaningful Stakeholder Engagement* no Contexto de um Projeto Mineiro

Author: Matilde Vasconcelos

Palavras-chave: Envolvimento das comunidades, Projetos de mineração, Lítio, Minas do Barroso, Savannah Resources

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List of Abbreviations

Li	Lithium
MSE	Meaningful Stakeholder Engagement
BLP	Barroso Lithium Project
UN	United Nations
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
SLO	Social License to Operate
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
KNET	Kenya's National Environmental Tribunal
FPIC	Free, Prior, and Informed Consent
CBA	Community Benefit Agreements
RHC	Reindeer Herding Community
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
GIAHS	Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
IAP2	International Association for Public Participation
EIM	Exclusive and Inclusive Model
SIA	Social Impact Assessment

Introduction

Mined materials play a critical role in supporting life in both developed and emerging nations (Hodge, 2022). In fact, the demand for this kind of raw material is certainly increasing, since, because of climate change and carbon emissions, there is an active concern about the transition for low-carbon energy (Riquito, 2025). Mining activity is of uncontested importance, namely, to obtain Lithium (Li), a mineral essential for several products but currently its demand is essential for the batterie industry (Pereira, Leite, & Cecicila, 2025).

The mining industry comes with a set of activities, consisting of “drilling, blasting, transporting, and processing minerals” that, however, has a significant impact on the environment and in the community health, especially in the mining phase, since this “must sacrifice forests by clearing land for open-pit mining, followed by the development of mining roads, worker and processing facilities, and waste disposal sites, the scale of which reaches thousands of hectares” (Suryaputra, Sayuti, Kharunnisa, & Kanigara, 2025). These impacts along with the injustice in the distribution of the wealth and benefits associate with the extractive industries activity have raised social conflicts with the local communities (Maier, et al., 2014). Moreover, local communities are also battling against the lack of information, the lack of consultation and the poor participation and compensation by the mining companies (Walter & Wagner, 2021). These conflicts raised by the lack of stakeholder engagement can lead to the delay, cancelation, extra costs, property damaging, among other consequences (Kowszyk, Vanclay, & Maher, 2023).

In an effort to linking the recognized importance of mining with its deep rooted challenges, companies nowadays look for strategies to improve the stakeholder relationship, since it is essential to the functioning of the mine and for the business itself (Pons, Vintorò, Rius, & Vilaplana, 2021). In this context, contemporary proposals around stakeholder engagement like Meaningful Stakeholder Engagement (MSE) practices, IPA2 and the EIM model are central as they offer frameworks to anticipate, understand, and address the root causes of stakeholder engagement challenges. These proposals are receiving growing awareness in the face of local communities and civil society frustration with the poor participation and consultation in new infra-structure projects (Buhman, Fonseca, Andrews, & Amatulli, 2025).

Despite the importance of these engagement practices there is no systematic effort to apply them to the analysis of real-world projects. Consequently, the aim of this dissertation is to develop a stakeholder engagement analysis matrix based on contemporary frameworks and apply to a real-world project. In this context the case study selected was the Barroso Lithium

Project (BLP). This project is an interesting case to apply an engagement analysis matrix as it is currently facing a strong opposition by the local community, some environmental organizations and the media (Saleth & Varov, 2023). With this we hope to help understanding what strategies are being used to engage with the local community, what are the gaps according to our matrix, and how the results can inform the design of a stakeholder engagement plan.

In order to achieve this, the dissertation is organized in an introduction of the concept MSE, other complementary approaches to this concept, that are used later in the analysis grid: IAP2, MSE and EIM. Then, a literature review to explore successful and not successful cases of MSE and its impacts. After, there is an explanation of the BLP, with a literature review on the case to study the strategies of engagement, a description of the adopted methodology, the analysis grid built based on the frameworks classifying the strategies listed, a discussion of the results and the conclusion.

Conceptual Background

Meaningful Stakeholder Engagement

Previously companies used the concept Stakeholder Engagement, and this was defined as “as the interaction among a firm and its stakeholders that addresses knowledge problems to improve correspondence in understanding between managers and stakeholders, thereby to assist in resolving ethical challenges faced by managers” (Mitchell, Mitchell, Hunt, Townsend, & Lee, 2020). Over the last two decades, this concept has shifted from a procedural, **compliance-driven practice** to an increasingly **normative, rights-holder-oriented** approach centered on *meaningfulness* for those affected (Buhman, Fonseca, Andrews, & Amatulli, 2025). This change was due to the frustrations in relation to the engagement of the stakeholders regarding the poor participation or the lack of empowerment of the local communities within infrastructure projects (Buhman, Fonseca, Andrews, & Amatulli, 2025).

At the same time, “the emergence of a range of public, private, and hybrid normative frameworks on sustainable value chains and responsible business conduct are creating pressure for, and contributing to, the institutionalization of MSE.” This leads to the adoption of guidelines embedding the concept of MSE. Instruments like the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises—were essential in driving companies to begin integrating MSE into their practices (Buhman, Fonseca, Andrews, & Amatulli, 2025).

Why does this differ from the concept of Stakeholder Managing? “The emphasis on meaningful stakeholder engagement offers opportunities for shifting assessments of adverse impacts from being top-down to a bottom-up focus on communities’ perceptions” (Maher & Buhmann, 2019).

As Buhman et al., explain, MSE depends strongly on every element: Meaningful Stakeholder Engagement. First, to be Meaningful, means to be authentic, it must include all the relevant voices, and it should be a process and an outcome in which every action should be founded. It also should remain open to alternatives, prevent harm, and provide solutions when harm occurs, guided by ethical principles. Secondly, regarding stakeholder, according to the Freeman’s Stakeholder Theory, a stakeholder is everyone that is “affected” or can affect the organizational objectives. This concept emphasizes the fact that is beyond shareholders, it can be a person, a group or an organization, but the Handbook highlights the affected stakeholders as the right-

holders, so the ones that their human rights are not being considered. In most cases, the stakeholders that are affected are the local communities, which is the one that this research will focus on. Lastly, the word “Engagement” means to go further than just inform or to consult, it is conceptualized as an interactive, two-way process that should start from the beginning, and it should adapt to every stage, making it into an accessible and timely approach for the stakeholders. (Buhman, Fonseca, Andrews, & Amatulli, 2025). (See Figure1).

Figure 1 - Extant and Emerging Conceptualizations of Meaningful Stakeholder Engagement (Buhman, Fonseca, Andrews & Amatulli, 2025)

	Meaningful	Stakeholder	Engagement
Extant conceptualization	- Genuine (no tick-boxing) - Inclusive - A process and an outcome - Technically sound	- Beyond shareholders - Person, group or organization - Who can affect or is affected	- Beyond consultation - Interactive - Two-way - Adaptive
Emerging conceptualization	- Attentive to the needs, concerns and interests of affected stakeholders - Attentive to power disparities - Attentive to long-term effects - Attentive to cumulative effects - Open to alternatives - Open to changes - Avoids harm - Mitigates and remedies when harm cannot be avoided - Ethical	- Includes, but cannot be confused with rights-holder - Potentially or actually affected - Aligned with relevant normative and regulatory frameworks - Recognizes social differentiation among stakeholders	- Ongoing process (includes pre- and post-engagement activities) - Happens throughout the lifecycle of projects and plans - Multi-directional (attentive to the various stakeholders) - Able to learn

According to Chipangamate et al, using MSE have several benefits: build confidence and reinforce stakeholder backing, better financial outcomes, encourages organizational adaptability and knowledge development, prepare company for uncertainty, help to plan for a situation of post-mining closure and cultivate intangible assets such as the Social License to Operate (SLO) (Chipangamate, Nwaila, Bourdeau, & Zhang, 2023).

In a more practical and streamlined view of MSE Moreira and Esteves (2025) describe two classes of engagement – procedural versus meaningful, based on the Meaningful stakeholder Engagement Book by Buhmann et al. Both approaches differ in several aspects: while the Instrumental is initiated with legal requirements, the meaningful starts with the project planning; the instrumental is Compliance-driven and Performance-oriented, on the contrary of the Meaningful that is purpose-driven and outcome-driven. The first approach has a tight inclusion criteria and the second has a broad inclusion criteria; and, lastly, a instrumental engagement is ad-hoc and reactive and the Meaningful engagement means that is a process-

oriented and proactive as is shown on the next figure (Moreira & Esteves, Psychology Informed IA, 2025).

Figure 2 – Figure from Moreira, S & Esteves, AM (2025). Psychology Informed IA, IAIA25, Bologna, Italy. Based on: Buhmann et al (2024); reproduced with the permission of the authors.

Engagement: a “Symptom”		 Key Idea
Instrumental	Meaningful	
Initiated with legal requirements	Initiated with project planning	
Compliance-driven	Purpose-driven	
Performance-oriented	Outcome-oriented	
With tight inclusion criteria	With broad inclusion criteria	
Ad hoc and reactive	Process-oriented and proactive	

Buhmann et al (2024). Meaningful stakeholder engagement. In K. Buhmann, A. Fonseca, N. Andrews, & G. Amatulli (Eds.) pp. 3-39. Routledge.

CiG COMMUNITY INSIGHTS GROUP

Psychology Informed IA | Slide 42

Complementary Approaches to Engagement

Other complementary approaches have been described in the literature. To classify the engagement strategies, besides the previous model described, this dissertation included the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum, which outlines levels of engagement from informing to empowering stakeholders and the Exclusive-Inclusive model emphasizes the degree of openness in decision-making processes, contrasting approaches that limit participation with those that foster inclusive. Additionally, it is important to stress the concept of SLO that highlights the importance of gaining ongoing community acceptance beyond regulatory compliance, positioning trust and legitimacy as critical for project success.

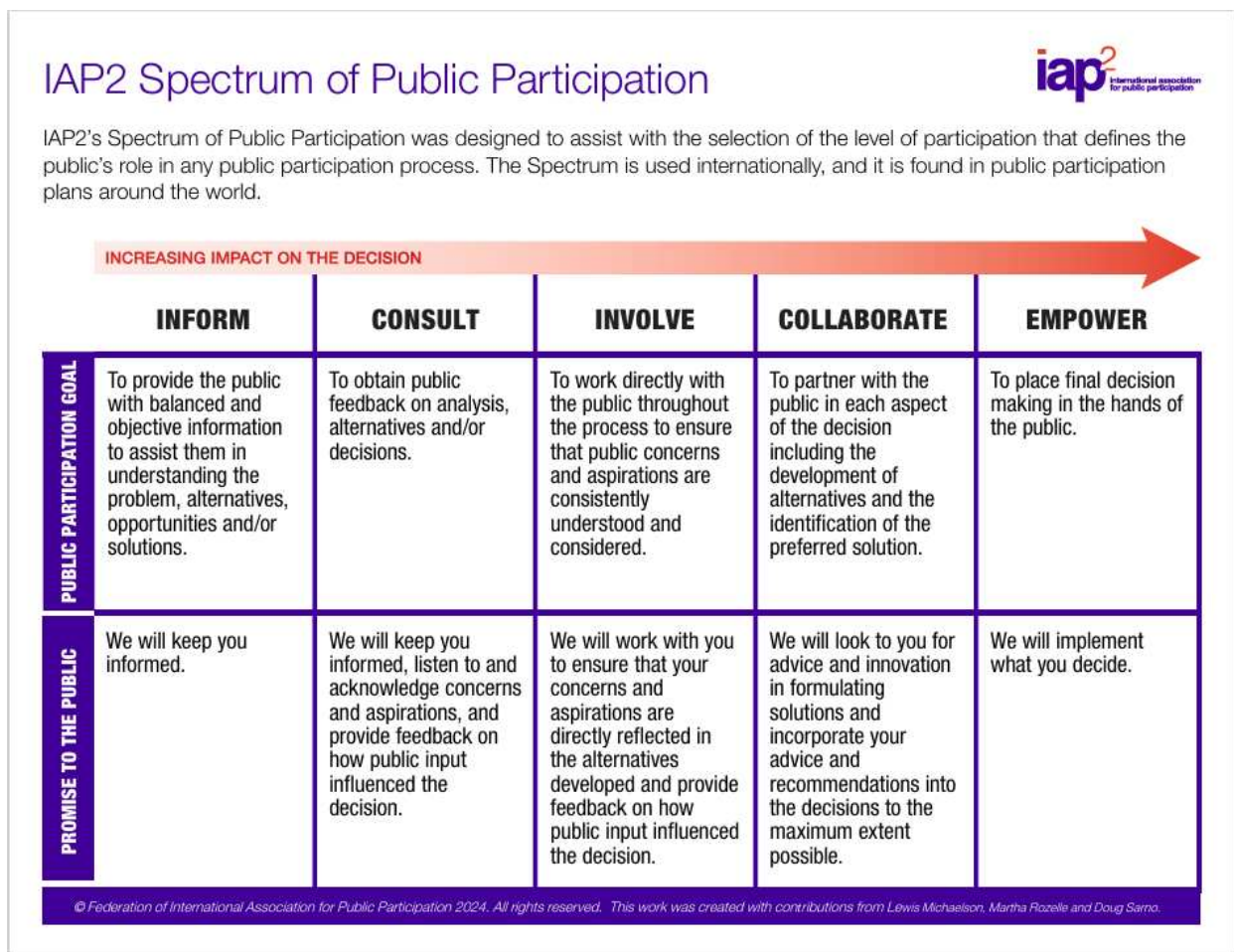
IAP2

The International Association for Public Participation is an international association of members founded in 1990 as a response to the worldwide interest in public participation. Its current mission is “simple yet powerful: to promote and advance public participation /

community engagement globally through targeted initiatives that are guided by culturally adaptive standards of practice and core values” (IAP2, 2025).

This association created a Spectrum of Public Participation: IAP2’s Spectrum of Public Participation. This spectrum helps to clarify the degree of involvement that characterizes the public's role in any public participation process. The spectrum is shown in the next figure (IAP2, 2025). This divides the level of Public Participation in five phases: Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate and Empower as it is shown in the next figure.

Figure 3 - IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation (IAP2, 2025)



Excusive / Inclusive Model (EIM)

The last model was designed by Lima, Moreira, and Marques in 2012, inspired by the Abrams, Hogg, and Marques’ social psychological approach. This model divides itself into two categories: Inclusive and Exclusive. The inclusive approach “aims to promote a sustainable decision and therefore to incorporate practices of social participation in such processes.” Conversely, the exclusive approach looks at the relationship with the community as something

secondary, so the process of decision making is majorly technical. The lack of public consultation is usually related with the perception of a threat to the company's interests (Lima, Moreira, & Marques, 2012)

This model involves several categories: agents involved in the decision-making process, the perspective of decision-making, base ideology, the relationship with the community, how the local community represented, the perception of the public participation and its consequences. (Lima, Moreira, & Marques, 2012)

Figure 4 - Comparative summary table of two decision-making models (Lima, Moreira, Marques, 2012)

	Exclusive model	Inclusive model
Agents involved	Limited. Experts and a restricted group of entities (e.g. mayors, environmental organizations).	Broad. Experts and a broad group of local entities, including diverse social agents and interest groups.
Decision-making perspective	Technical. A mere technical issue, confined to the physical space of the river.	Technical and social. A technical – but also social and community – issue, including the physical space of the river and its surroundings.
Base ideology	Technocratic. Centralized and bureaucratic, maintaining that only experts should influence the decision.	Democratic. Emphasizes a pursuit of sustainable development and, as such, promotes local participation.
Relationship with local community	Secondary. A secondary aspect of the process, often limited to asymmetrical and unilateral communication: dissemination of information, normally in technical jargon and inaccessible to laypersons.	Essential. An essential part of the process. In addition to unilateral communication (information), it also includes bilateral communication: ensures consultation and encourages active involvement.
Representation of local community	Homogenous and simplified. Lacking the resources, interest or ability to participate. A homogenous mass of people with limited technical (and even cognitive) resources, expected to have a self-centred, egotistical, irrational and emotional attitude.	Heterogeneous and complex. A more complex picture of local communities. Residents are seen as a heterogeneous group including individuals with relevant knowledge, interests in the process and useful skills.
Participation	Potential threat. Represents a loss of power and control in the process. It is also an unnecessary loss of money and time, with the same end result.	Potential opportunity. Decisions can be modified according to the contributions of these partners with solid local knowledge.
Consequences	Impoverished decision. Potential to provoke negative reactions and open conflict with local communities.	Enriched and sustainable decision. The participation of local agents enhances a climate of rapport, and makes decisions seem fairer.

Social License to Operate

SLO is a concept that is defined by Thomson and Boutilier as “a community’s perceptions of the acceptability of a company and its local operations” (Boutilier & Thomson, 2025). Companies look for this acceptance since if they do not have it, the local communities can resist in several ways (Vanclay & Hanna, 2019). So, since the companies realize the importance of SLO granted by the stakeholders, the industry has placed greater emphasis on how mining development impacts nearby communities and the influence stakeholders have in determining whether a mining project succeeds or fails (Teschner & Holley, 2021).

Integration of MSE Practices

Several studies have found that the practice of stakeholder engagement has been characterized by processes that are often out of touch with the experiences of affected people whose daily lives intersect with the activities of industry, specially in the mining sector, “that long been recognized to be problematic with regard to social and environmental impacts” (Buhman, Fonseca, Andrews, & Amatulli, 2025).

With the growing trend of the green energy transition, the mining sector is becoming more important so this means an increased number of projects around the world and “although mining is a venture that contributes greatly to the development of nations, economies and civilizations, large-scale open pit mines can become an irreversible environmental hazard if not handled well” (Kaonda & Nsontaulwa, 2024). Hence, it is imperative that MSE is used as a framework in these projects and not only because of environmental and social impacts, but also due to reduce costs, conflicts, and reputation damage. Social conflicts between mining companies and stakeholders can increase delays, frustrations, costs, risks, and even complete stoppage of the mining (Teschner & Holley, 2021).

So, it is vital that MSE is integrated throughout the whole life cycle of the project, this includes informing, planning, implementation and monitoring phases (Buhman, Fonseca, Andrews, & Amatulli, 2025). This should happen since, as Chipangamate et al. suggest “the beneficial outcomes are more likely to be achieved as mining industry managers resolve knowledge problems and ethical challenges by integrating stakeholder engagement as a part of the digital transformation strategy.” (Chipangamate, Nwaila, Bourdeau, & Zhang, 2023).

The Role of MSE in Mining Projects

MSE is recognized as critical practice to foster trust, reduce conflict, and enhance project legitimacy, yet its outcomes vary significantly across contexts. Projects that use genuine and clear MSE strategies demonstrate clear benefits, such as improved social license to operate and stronger community relations. Comparatively, cases that failed to care about MSE experienced higher costs, delays and even cancellation. Understanding these contrasting experiences provides a foundation for evaluating the effectiveness of engagement strategies in Barroso.

Therefore, in this chapter a literature review was conducted. The first review explores successful and unsuccessful cases of MSE in mining projects worldwide, identifying patterns that contribute to positive or negative outcomes. These reviews offer critical insights into how engagement practices influence project acceptance.

Project performance in the absence of MSE

In the article “*Between control and confrontation: The pitfalls and potential of corporate-community participatory development in Africa’s energy and extractive industries*,” the case of the Lamu Coal Power Project, in Kenya, led to the cancellation of the project due to the lack of MSE. In this situation, an Environmental Impact Assessment was made, but with no consultation whatsoever of the local community. Moreover, since there was also a “lack of sound mitigation measures,” the Kenya’s National Environmental Tribunal ended suspended the EIA in 2019. The case extended until 2025, when the project was cancelled by the KNET, but throughout this time, there was no attempt at engaging the local community regarding the project (Abe, 2022).

The same happened across several cases in Argentina. In “*Mining struggles in Argentina. The keys of a successful story of mobilization*”, Walter and Wagner tell us that companies ignored the local communities, resulting in several mass mobilizations by the community that were successful in the cancellation of 50% of the projects; new provincial laws stricter to the mining sector were implemented, several lawsuits were conducted and more conflicts in the projects. (Walter & Wagner, 2021).

Additionally, there were studies reporting manipulative or coercive tactics, like the cases of the Toronto Ventures or the OceanaGold, where companies were accused of exploiting FPIC and manipulating the Indigenous leaders to get the Social License to Operate. Thus, the opposition and the distrust among the community towards this project increased, both companies faced

lawsuits and conflicts, their reputation was damaged and the SLO was failed to obtain (Asuncion, et al., 2022).

In Mexico and Peru, facing the complaints if the local community, both mining companies decided to adopt dominant management styles. In the Peñasquito mine, individual negotiations were preferable and technical language was used to difficult the negotiations. While in Peru, there was use of police for force and aggressive expansions towards the frustration manifestation of the host community. Both these Latin American projects managed to continue its activities, but they faced persistent conflicts, their international reputation is damaged, furthermore the project in Mexico faced severe water shortages (Kowszyk, Vanclay, & Maher, 2023).

Other situations where this kind of strategy were used was in South Africa, in Limpopo. In this situation, there were records of manipulation of Stakeholder Engagement strategies, like Community Engagement Forums, Recognition of Traditional Leaders and benefit distribution that resulted in exclusion of some members of the community due to favoritism and elitism. Consequently, this lack of engagement resulted in failure to obtain the SLO, persistent conflicts and opposition by the local community. This has effects on the company's and the government's reputation since their legitimacy of the CSR is considered weak (Hofmeyr, 2023).

Lastly, in Sweden, Jokkmokk, Lindahl, et al. 2023, there was a strong opposition from Sámi reindeer herding communities and there was a distrust in company communication. The MSE strategy was not activated in the beginning but only as a Reactive Compliance and the result was the loss of Community Trust & Acceptance. (Lindahl, Suopajarvi, Tulilehto, Poelzer, & Eerola, 2023)

Project performance in the presence of MSE

In “*Community Benefit Agreements in the Nordic mining context: Local opportunities for collaboration in Sodankylä, Finland*”, we can see the local population complaining about the lack of power to deny mining territory on EIA, the lack of mining tax, negative environmental and social impacts and poor communication among stakeholders in the mining industry. This was solved with Community Benefit Agreements, which is a tool of negotiation between mining companies and local communities: “the impacted community grants their consent for the proposed mining activities in exchange for benefits guaranteed by the agreement.” This CBA manages for the company to grant the Social License to Operate, Acceptance, Trust and

Credibility, Good Reputation and improved efficiency (Kotilainen, Peltonen, & Reinikainen, 2022).

In the article previously mentioned “*Conflict management in the extractive industries: A comparison of four mining projects in Latin America*”, one of the cases, in Vazante, Brazil, where the company incorporated a good strategy of MSE: an Integrating Management Strategy, where the focus is not only the self, but the others too. This kind of strategy made the company work the complaints of Environmental degradation and unfairer benefit distribution and gaining Social License to Operate (Walter & Wagner, 2021).

In Sweden, three of the four cases managed to have a real MSE: Gällivare (Sweden), Ylitornio and Rovaniemi (Finland), managed to get acceptance and trust and credibility by implying strategies like: consultation meetings, informing landowners and Sámi RHCs by mail, improved quality of permit applications, engagement with authorities and initiative-taking communication – local office, village meetings, target information – and the use of low-impact exploration technologies (NLIMET) (Lindahl, Suopajärvi, Tulilehto, Poelzer, & Eerola, 2023).

Michigan was another successful case of MSE. By listening to the complains of the local Indigenous community, socio-cultural concerns, among other were listened and the solutions were implemented, including Mining Forum and Community Engagement Initiatives were started engaging the population in the project. This made the local community conditionally accept the project (Deberdt, Smith, & Bullock, 2025).

In the article *Integrating Indigenous knowledge and skills in mining operations: A systematic literature review*, some challenges were identified, like exclusion of the Indigenous consultation, land and cultural loss, distrust, among others. These issues were address throughout FPIC, Free Prior and Informed Consent and other strategies like participatory programs, re-design of projects, among others, that resulted in gaining the trust for the company and the indigenous rights avoiding conflicts (Alonzo, et al., 2025).

Finally, in *Making or breaking social license to operate in the mining industry: Factors of the main drivers of social conflict* (Saenz & Ostos, 2021), there is a description of two cases in Peru, where the local population was distrusting the company, the SLO was weak and the relationship between the stakeholders and the company was poor. However, in this article, there is something different: the role of other stakeholders, like the Government and NGOs, which play a fundamental part in processes where the voice of the communities is not being listened

to. In the first case, it was the government that created a Dialogue Table with locals, employees, and various levels of the government, which facilitates transparent communication, gave access for the community to be listen and to participate in the decision-making process. In the second case, it was an NGO that aided the local population to be heard by creating Dialogue Meetings and a committee that supervised the operations of the mine. This solution resulted in an increase of trust and acceptance by the locals for this project since there was an opportunity for discussion (Cesar & Jhony, 2021).

Current Study

The dissertation focuses on this project, is to apply an engagement analysis matrix to assess the engagement strategies used according to the existent literature. To operationalize this matrix within a case study, the BLP was selected due to its status as a mining initiative facing significant local opposition. The objective is to examine the engagement strategies implemented regarding what current scholarship defines as a MSE approach.

In fact, to study an actual ongoing case of social distrust against a mining project in Portugal and what were the strategies applied by the mining company, can help design a stakeholder engagement plan. Nowadays, there is growing concern about the increasing lack of MSE as well as about the misuse of SLO (Friends of the Earth Europe; European Environmental Bureau (EEB); Amigos de la Tierra; MiningWatch Portugal; MINOB, 2025) since as it was shown on the first literature review can have severe consequences to their projects. Thus, this research aspires to benefit other projects regarding their MSE approach, since stakeholder engagement strategies are necessary to develop mine-community partnerships (Dall-Orsoletta, Verrier, Uriona-Maldonado, Dranka, & Ferreira, 2025).

Methodology

This study selected the BLP as a case study to apply for a MSE analysis grid. In this section we describe the case, the documents selected for analysis, and the proposed analysis grid.

Barroso Lithium Project Case

Before there was the BLP, the rights of exploration and research were given by the Portuguese State to a Portuguese company, Saibrais in 2001. This company found outcrops of aplitepegmanite containing Feldspar and Lithium. These reserves were seen as an enormous potential for the Portuguese economy (Carballo-Cruz & Cerejeira, 2020). Then, in 2006, Saibrais got a license for feldspar and quartz mining; this license covered an area of 120 ha in the south of Covas do Barroso. The activity performed almost only affected 1ha, for 12 years, so in 2016 this area was expanded to 592ha (Associação Unidos em Defesa de Covas do Barroso; MiningWatch Portugal, 2024). This expansion was transferred to Slipstream Resources Portugal Unipessoas Lda, who decided for a partnership with Savannah Resources, for the developing and research of the project. It was in 2019 that Savannah Resources secure the full responsibility for the BLP that oversees the exploration, development, and sale of minerals (Carballo-Cruz & Cerejeira, 2020).

Savannah Resources is a UK-based mineral exploration and development company created in 2010. This company is listed and regulated on the London Stock Exchange's Alternative Investment Market (AIM) and its mission is "to be the supplier of choice for Europe's Lithium" (Savannah Resources, 2025). Today, Savannah has three projects on going: a partnership with Rio Tinto on a project of heavy mineral sands project, in Mozambique, which was recently awarded three Mining Licenses; a copper project in Oman, in the final phase of licensing; and the LCT pegmatite exploration project in Portugal (Carballo-Cruz & Cerejeira, 2020).

This concern about the Lithium supply comes from the focus on "green energies" – low on carbon emissions due to the climate change and the reduction of the carbon emissions. The global shift has driven a sharp increase in demand for minerals and metals has been increasing over the years, especially Lithium. Li is an alkaline metal that can be used for ceramics and glass, but nowadays, its primary application is in Lithium-ion batteries for vehicles, which helps the reduction of the carbon emissions contributing for the SDG (Jesus, et al., 2024). Global lithium demand is expected to rise between 500% and 600% by 2050, driven mainly by the expansion of electric mobility and renewable energy storage (Canelas & Carvalho, 2023). As a result, lithium has been classified as a *critical raw material* by the European Commission due

to its economic importance and high supply risk (Savannah Resources, 2025). Hence, this places Lithium as critical raw material and Portugal, with the biggest Li reserve in Europe, as the center of the Lithium strategy. (Pereira, Leite, & Cecicila, 2025)

Hence, it is estimated that this project extracts 27 million tons of rock, primarily to produce lithium concentrate, alongside by-products such as feldspar and quartz, which are intended for use in the ceramic and glass industries (Carballo-Cruz & Cerejeira, 2020). The Project was originally designed to run until 2023 but is renewable for 20 years (Savannah Resources, 2025). In its current formulation, the BLP consists of four open-pit mines, tailings storage facilities, a processing plant, and supporting infrastructure (Dunlap & Riquito, 2023). In August 2024, Savannah discloses a total area of 840 hectares, which 542 were allocated by the primary mining concession, 51 hectares for the extension of the mining concession area and 247 were dedicated to additional infrastructure (roads, buffer zones) and installation of inert rock reserves (Savannah Resources, Aug 2024).

All this area is situated in the north of Portugal, more precisely in surroundings of Dornelas and Covas do Barroso, which belong to the municipality of Boticas, district of Vila Real. Barroso is a hilly region that was classified as a World Agricultural Heritage and as a Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) (Saleth & Varov, 2023). This recognition shows how local populations merge traditional farming techniques, irrigation practices, and communitarian values with the preservation of biodiversity (Riquito, 2025). There are only 11 GIAHS in Europe and Barroso is the only one in Portugal. This land is distinguished by small-scale agriculture, so healthy soil and the communally owned land (*baldios*) are vital factors from which the population depends on. Furthermore, in Barroso there are “endangered and vulnerable species” like the Iberian Wolf, the Freshwater Pearl Mussel or the Shining *Macromy dragongly* (Associação Unidos em Defesa de Covas do Barroso; MiningWatch Portugal, 2024). Additionally, the high rainfall levels turn Barroso into one of the Portugal’s areas with the best water resources (Dunlap & Riquito, 2023).

Regarding the population, there has been a sharp population loss in the municipality of Boticas, due to a lower birth rate, higher mortality rate and due to a migration to urban areas, affecting Covas do Barroso (Carballo-Cruz & Cerejeira, 2020). The last census confirmed a total of 191 inhabitants in 2021 in Covas do Barroso (Brinkhoff, 2025). The local economy depends on “agriculture, stockbreeding, beekeeping and ecotourism” (Canelas & Carvalho, 2023).

Savannah Resources expects that this initiative brings growth to the national and EU's economy. The company states that the Li-mining in Portugal will improve the conditions for millions of Europeans, besides the economic benefits. However, the most significant promise is the amount of job creations, which according to the company will be around 215 direct jobs and 500-600 indirect jobs. Moreover, the job creation may lead to the migration of young families to the Boticas region (Saleth & Varov, 2023).

Despite these projected benefits, several studies highlight strong opposition to the mine by the local organizations, the local population, and the landowners. This disapproval is because of ecological degradation, community well-being in face of potential disruptions to traditional livelihoods, perceptions of exclusion from decision-making processes, lack of transparency, and limited trust in both corporate actors and public authorities (Dall-Orsoletta, Verrier, Uriona-Maldonado, Dranka, & Ferreira, 2025).

Local opposition has taken various forms, including public demonstrations, legal challenges, and collaboration with national and international environmental organizations. Firstly, the resistance of the local population referring that the economical impact of the mine, is something that can disrupt the traditional way of living, "since the mine is expected to decrease soil and water quality, thereby undermining agricultural ways of living and traditions" or that their main products will be associated with Lithium, as the mayor of the municipality said «"We will still be Barroso, but the honey will be associated with dust, and the beef with lithium. It will affect our image"» (Saleth & Varov, 2023). Secondly, although the access to the *baldios* was granted by the Portuguese state to Savannah, representing 70% of the total concession area, the company is having a hard time to buy private property since the landowners are refusing to sell the land (Riquito, 2025). Then, the fact that there has been several issues with transparency (Pereira, Leite, & Cecília, 2025), like the fact that the farmers were not consulted about the exploration activities, made them create an association: UDCB, Association United for the Defense of Covas do Barroso, that by legal mechanisms, managed to express the concerns about the first EIA, resulting in the rejection of this one by APA in 2022. Thus, the local community is conducting several initiatives to raise resistance against the BLP (Saleth & Varov, 2023).

Although there was a recent request to the European Commission to remove Barroso from the list of "strategic projects" under the Critical Raw Materials Regulations, this was rejected (LUSA, 2025). So, Savannah is currently conducting Definitive Feasibility Study (DFS) and plans to complete this study and obtain the environmental license process in 2026

(Investing.com, 2025). After this, Savannah is planning to start construction in 2026 and production in 2028 (LUSA, 2025).

Document Selection

To explore which strategies were integrated in the BLP, a qualitative research approach was chosen, so narrative literature review was conducted to synthesize the existing research on MSE applied in this project. A Narrative review is “a type of knowledge synthesis grounded in a distinct research tradition” (Sukhera, 2022). This type of review was chosen due to its broadening variety of studies that can be included due to its non-systematic and dynamic approach, which was essential for this research since the MSE strategies in this project are not included only in scientific articles, but also in grey literature, like reports, digital media, newsletter, among others.

For this narrative review, two databases were operated: Google and ScienceDirect. In these databases, the keywords used were: **"Mina do Barroso" OR "Projeto Minas do Barroso" OR "Savannah Resources" OR "lithium mining Portugal" OR "Barroso lithium project" OR "Minas do Barroso" AND "stakeholder engagement"**. Regarding the inclusive and exclusive criteria, only the data range was chosen so the articles would only be from 2020 to 2025. In this research, among sixteen articles in google Scholar, only three were selected and with ScienceDirect, among the 21 articles showed, just 3 were selected. Furthermore, it was necessary to dive into more grey literature about the MSE strategies used by Savannah Resources. As a result, there was research conducted on local and national news about the project using the Google News platform, which resulted in one news. Additionally, the website of Savannah Resources was consulted to check several volumes from their newsletter about the project and the leaflet delivered to the community. All the research results are discriminated against in the following table.

Table 1 - Overview of Articles Included in the Literature Review

Source	Article	ID
Universidade do Minho (Carballo-Cruz & Cerejeira, 2020)	<i>“O Projeto da Mina do Barroso Impactos Económicos e Desenvolvimento”</i>	1
Journal of Political Ecology (Saleth & Varov, 2023)	<i>“Anticipating lithium extraction in northern Portugal: A Sacrifice Zone in the making?”</i>	2
IBIMA Business Review (Pereira, Leite, & Cecília, 2025)	<i>“Balancing Costs and Benefits in Lithium Mining: Management and Sustainability Challenges in Barroso, Portugal”</i>	3
Energy Research & Social Science	<i>“Social warfare for lithium extraction? Open-pit lithium mining, counterinsurgency tactics and enforcing green extra-activism in northern Portugal”</i>	4
The Extractive Industries and Society (Dall-Orsoletta, Verrier, Uriona-Maldonado, Dranka, & Ferreira, 2025)	<i>“How does social acceptance affect transition minerals production in Europe? A system dynamics approach and case study in Portugal”</i>	5
Food and Chemical Toxicology (Jesus, et al., 2024)	<i>“Study around the Barroso mine (Portugal): Baseline levels of lithium for assessing future exposure and risks from Li mining activity”</i>	6
London Stock Exchange (Savannah Resources, 2025)	<i>“More progress made at the Barroso Lithium Project”</i> https://www.londonstockexchange.com/news-article/SAV/more-progress-made-at-the-barroso-lithium-project/16978735	7
Savannah Resources (Savannah Resources, 2025)	<i>Barroso lithium project community information sheet January 2023</i>	8
	<i>Barroso Lithium Community Newspaper – June 2025</i>	9
	<i>Barroso Lithium Community Newspaper – November 2024</i>	10
	<i>Barroso Lithium Community Newspaper – October 2025</i>	11
	<i>Barroso lithium project community information sheet January 2023</i>	12

Results

The stakeholder engagement strategies used in the BLP identified in the documental analysis are listed in Table 2.

The first strategy found was **door-to-door visits and engagement via local intermediaries**. Savannah Resources did door-to-door visits to gain the acceptance from the local community regarding the project since it was described as “seeking to push people to sign or, at the least, sow fear, hesitation and doubt in the people opposing mining”, but the local community saw

this approach as a way of manipulation since “that Savannah is targeting «those people that are more malleable», notably the poorer demographics or the aging ones, who often express indifference about their future or the region’s” and that they were “trying to get into people’s head,(...), scaring them...” (Dunlap & Riquito, 2023). In addition, community members were acting as mediators between the company and residents to help establish an initial business relationship and reduce tensions.

Local information points were also built in Covas and Boticas **and project materials**, such as newsletters, were developed. The aim of this strategy was to guarantee accessible information and details and to update the local community about the project.

Moreover, Savannah invested in **broadcast and sponsorship-based public relations**. They started a radio podcast to answer any doubts about the project, and they also started to finance events like summer festivals, local sports teams, and cultural events.

Regarding **the land acquisition**, Savannah tried to **negotiate the contracts with staggered payment** terms to combine upfront payments with promises of full compensation environmental approvals, alongside land cleaning and surveying to create positive perceptions.

The company also asked for University of Minho to **perform a technical study** to reinforce credibility. Furthermore, to improve the relationships with the local community, they had **goodwill cultural gestures**, like offering Bolo-Rei, and create informal gatherings to reunite the employees and the community of Covas.

There is also the promise of **local employment with this project**, contributing to economic development, as well as the creation of a **benefit-sharing mechanism** for the development of the region and a **municipal royalty-sharing scheme**.

Lastly, Savannah Resources performed a **Social Impact Assessment with external experts**, CIG. In this, an interview was conducted with 22 community members to listen to the locals’ complaints with the assurance that these issues were going to be listened to and solved.

However, not all the strategies mentioned to gain social acceptance and trust on the project are MSE strategies since they do not look for a two-way interaction, for the engagement itself since the community was never consulted about this. This is the case of negotiations for land acquisitions, the creation of local jobs, the development fund, and the royalty-sharing scheme.

Table 2 – Stakeholder engagement strategies used in BLP.

Strategy	ID	Quote
Door-to-door engagement via local intermediaries	2,4	2: "Other community members have established first business relationships or taken up 'mediation' jobs offered by Savannah to improve the relationship between the company and residents". 4a: "In addition to going door-to-door in Covas and neighboring villages..." 4b: "These local intermediaries were instrumental to the mines arrival and to securing the long-term presence of the company."
Local information points and project materials	2, 4, 7, 8, 9, 11	2: "Just opposite the fence, on the other side of the main square, Savannah Resources has opened an information center about the mine." 4: A few weeks ago, they opened up an information center, like the one they have in Covas, in Boticas, in the regional municipality itself." 7: "The team continued to engage regularly with local stakeholders through (...) providing accurate information on key aspects of the Project, particularly around the topics of land and access." 8: "The team continued to engage regularly with local stakeholders through supporting, hosting, and sponsoring local events and providing accurate information on key aspects of the Project, particularly around the topics of land and access." 9: "Centro de Informação de Covas do Barroso - Um ponto de contacto direto com a comunidade, preparado para partilhar informação sobre o Projeto". 11: "Qualquer residente pode agora dirigir-se ali (Novo Escritório) para colocar questões, recolher informações ou simplesmente conhecer melhor o projeto."
Broadcast and sponsorship-based public relations	2, 4, 7, 8, 10, 11	2: "In addition, the company has developed a comprehensive PR strategy around the project and presented its mitigation strategies at political events". 4a: "Savannah also produces a monthly newsletter that promotes the mine and the company's civil performance. The newsletter, however, complements a wider media strategy, which sponsors numerous regional magazines or newspapers, as well as regional radio advertisements." 4b: "So, they engage in this strategy of financing sports teams, racing events, festivals and what not." 7: "The team continued to engage regularly with local stakeholders through supporting, hosting, and sponsoring local events..." 8: "The team continued to engage regularly with local stakeholders through supporting, hosting, and sponsoring local events and providing accurate information on key aspects of the Project, particularly around the topics of land and access." 10: "A Savannah Responde é um programa de rádio criado para esclarecer dúvidas e manter um diálogo aberto e transparente sobre o Projeto de Lítio do Barroso." 11: "Apoio Savannah - Contribuições da empresa para eventos comunitários"
Land contracts with staggered payment term	4, 11	4: "Multi-pronged pacification efforts combine offering money with the threat of land expropriation. To secure land, the company pays 10 % up front and says it will pay the other 90 % once the government approves the Environmental Impact Assessment. This strategy is further combined with cleaning (and measuring) the land to gain positive perceptions and the social conditions to persuade inhabitants." 11: "Além disso, a par da servidão, mantém-se ativo o programa de aquisição voluntária de terrenos: a Savannah continua empenhada em negociar amigavelmente com os proprietários que queiram vender as suas parcelas dentro da área do projeto"
Technical studies and university partnerships	1, 4	1: "A empresa contratou a Universidade do Minho para que realizasse um estudo independente sobre os impactos económicos do projeto e o seu enquadramento nas economias nacional e local e, inclusivamente, na economia Europeia". 4: Overall, Savannah has attempted to enact a professionalization strategy to meet EU standards, engage stakeholders, employing university researchers and is laying the foundation for the social engineering of extraction in the politically feasible avenues available.
Informal relationship-building through cultural gestures	4, 10, 11	4: "Public relations' efforts extent even to offering the traditional Christmas Cake (Bolo Rei) to residents of Covas, Romainho and Muro." 10: "Aproveitámos as frias noites de Inverno aqui no Barroso para promover mais um encontro comunitário no nosso Centro de Geologia."

(e.g., sharing traditional food)		11: “Savannah organized a special trip to the Castro Verde region, open to all interested parties in the community”.
Local employment creation	2, 3, 5, 10	1: “Os impactos económicos do projeto ao nível local são, potencialmente, também muito significativos, nomeadamente em termos de geração de atividade adicional e de criação de emprego.” 2: “The most noteworthy promise is the creation of 215 direct and 500 600 indirect jobs in the region for the years to come”. 3: “[This development] (...) also contributes to local economic development by creating jobs and providing raw materials for other industrial sectors.” 5: “Employment creation, with estimates of 300 direct and 500–600 indirect jobs” 10: “Novas Oportunidades De Emprego e Contratação Local - Continuaremos a fazer crescer a equipa, apostando em pessoas da região e a contribuir para o fortalecimento da economia local através da criação de novas oportunidades de trabalho”.
Community Development Fund for benefit-sharing	1, 5	1: “(...) a empresa promotora do projeto está disponível para assegurar o bom funcionamento dos mecanismos de partilha de benefícios e contribuir financeiramente para um Fundo de Desenvolvimento Comunitário que financie diversos programas centra dos na comunidade local”. 5: “In an effort to address these concerns, Savannah Resources has implemented several initiatives, including a «Benefit Sharing Plan» and a «Good Neighbor Plan». These programs aimed to enhance community welfare by prioritizing local procurement, providing shared transportation services, and supporting education, employment, and social support activities.”
Municipal royalty-sharing revenue mechanism	1	1: “Nesta fase da negociação está previsto que o município receba aproximadamente um terço dos royalties que a empresa deverá pagar todos os anos ao governo central (entre 0,75% e 1%, dos 3% dos royalties a aplicar)”.
Social Impact Assessment with external experts	12	12: “A Savannah iniciou um estudo designado “Avaliação de Impacto Social” ou AIS. A AIS analisa possíveis mudanças que as pessoas – indivíduos e comunidades – podem viver como resultado do Projeto e que podem influenciar seu bem-estar. (...) A Savannah está a trabalhar com especialistas sociais da Community Insights Group (CIG) para conduzir a AIS. A primeira etapa consistiu em entrevistar 22 pessoas, de forma a obter uma visão inicial dos temas considerados como fundamentais para o seu bem-estar, e de como estas podem ser afetadas pelo Projeto, tanto de forma negativa como positiva.

Analysis Grid

After listing the strategies used by Savannah to engage the local community, an analysis was organized to classify them, according to the categories from the three models previously explained on the Conceptual Background: IAP2, MSE, and the Exclusive/ Inclusive Model.

Table 3 - Strategies Analysis according to IAP2, MSE and EIM

Strategy	IAP2	MSE	EIM
Door-to-door engagement via local intermediaries	Inform	Instrumental	Exclusive
Local information points and project materials	Inform	Instrumental	Exclusive
Broadcast and sponsorship-based public relations	Inform	Instrumental	Exclusive
Informal relationship-building through cultural gestures (e.g., sharing traditional food)	Inform	Meaningful	Exclusive
Technical studies and university partnerships	Collaborate	Instrumental	Inclusive
Social Impact Assessment (SIA) with external experts	Consult	Instrumental	Exclusive
Municipal royalty-sharing revenue mechanism	NA	NA	NA
Land contracts with staggered payment term	NA	NA	NA
Local employment creation and skills opportunities	NA	NA	NA
Community Development Fund for benefit-sharing	NA	NA	NA

According to the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum, most of Savannah's strategies correspond to the "Inform" level of public participation. This was the case with the door-to-door visits, the local information center, the Broadcast and public relationships, as well as the Informal gatherings, since there were moments to provide information in different ways. So, these actions were primarily designed to provide information to the local community throughout various occasions, but not to foster dialogue or shared decision-making.

On the contrary, the only strategy aligned with the goal of Collaborate was the partnerships with the Universities. By asking to University of Minho to perform a technical study, Savannah provided an opportunity to the University to assess the project and to propose alternative solutions, therefore extending the decision-making agents. Additionally, the Social Impact Assessment (SIA) conducted by external experts (CIG) reflects the “Consult” level, as Savannah sought the public feedback and their concerns about the project.

From the perspective of MSE, most strategies were classified as “Instrumental.” The way Savannah approaches the company was initiated primarily to meet legal requirements, and the purpose was to secure compliance with the local community and not to promote genuine participation. Additionally, initiatives like the broadcast, and the technical study, were reactive, rising from strong opposition rather than as proactive initiative. The only partial exception was the Informal Gatherings, which, although not participatory in decision-making, aimed to improve the relationship with the local community.

Lastly, applying the Exclusive-Inclusive Model (EIM), most strategies fall under the Exclusive category, as decision-making authority remained entirely with Savannah. The only partial exception was the technical study since it was the only strategy that was open to other agents, it promoted the public participation of a university that was not related to the company. Additionally, it ensured the consultation of others. Regarding the other strategies, the only one participating in the decision-making process was Savannah, so they were clearly within the exclusive model.

Discussion

This dissertation aimed to build a stakeholder engagement analysis matrix and to apply it to a real case study, the BLP. To achieve this, this matrix was built based on three contemporary frameworks: IAP2, MSE and EIM. Then, the strategies incorporated by Savannah were classified according to this matrix.

BLP as a case of absence of MSE

The findings indicate that Savannah primarily adopted an Instrumental approach for its Stakeholder Engagement and focused more on informing the local community. Although its strategies sought to gain the Social License to Operate and community acceptance, the strategies were compliance-driven, and they lacked empowerment or exclusive decision-making process.

Effectively, most of the strategies were majorly one-way and were not open to interactive dialogue.

For the local community, the major perception was that the efforts applied by Savannah were more a sort of manipulation. As one source claim: “Savannah Resources has made numerous attempts of social engineering (a term which refers to the continued sociopsychological manipulation of communities into performing actions or accepting actions they would not otherwise wish to) over the past years” (Associação Unidos em Defesa de Covas do Barroso; MiningWatch Portugal, 2024). Although this interpretation reflects bias, after this analysis, it is shown that Savannah Resources prioritize informing the stakeholders over an inclusive approach.

There is some literature explaining the reasons why public participation is not a goal among infrastructure projects. According to Moreira, Vanclay and Esteves, there are 8 fallacies that often are associated with the lack of management of social issues in these projects. From these, although there is no scientific evidence that clearly says which one may explain Savannah’s approach, it seems that there are 3 fallacies that may suggest this behavior: naivety, self-serving, and rigidity (Moreira, Vanclay, & Esteves, 2022).

First, the fallacy of Naivety is described by the view that “people are ignorant and need to be provided with factual information” and companies prefer to “restate the objectives facts”, often using technical language, than actually emphasizing and engaging with the community (Moreira, Vanclay, & Esteves, 2022). Savannah stresses the “misconceptions” and “misinformation” about the project and the need to provide cleared information, however when community expresses complex fears (environmental impact, conflicts, loss of landscape, sound), the company responds with technical clarifications or just simply refusing these issues throughout information center, community information sheets, rather than discussing it with the locals. Secondly, the fallacy that may explained Savannah’s behavioral is the Self-Serving, sense it looks that they assume that the communities are only concern about the “negative impacts of the project and refuse to see the positive benefits” (Moreira, Vanclay, & Esteves, 2022). Savannah often describes the opponents as not representative of the communities living closest to the project and part of the movement as “radical,” suggesting they are guided by narrow or ideological agendas rather than legitimate local concerns. (LUSA, 2025). By contrasting “activist” or “local farmers” with the Europe’s Lithium strategy and the “EU energy independence” it implies that they are not looking to the broader society benefits. Lastly, the

fallacy of Rigidity, it assumes that “once committed to a position, people won’t change their minds” (Moreira, Vanclay, & Esteves, 2022). So, by stating the opposition as “increasing radical” and not representative of the local community label the resistance as rigid and not open to dialogue whereas external analyses note that locals have engaged for years through legal actions, petitions, and formal participation processes, which contradicts the idea that they are simply immovable or irrational. All these fallacies may lead to the overlooking of the management of the social issues and may have led Savannah to choose for an Inform approach that failed to engage the local population.

Ways forward to MSE in BLP

Based on the analysis and on the existing literature, future MSE strategies should prioritize empowering the local community and ensuring their inclusion in decision-making processes. Approaches previously discussed – like negotiations through Community Benefits Agreements (CBA), allow local populations to express their preferences regarding compensation. By empowering the local community to negotiate and agree on compensation terms regarding the project impact, the public acceptance can increase, and the conflicts can be reduced.

Another recommended option is the creation of a Dialogue Table, providing the opportunity for the local community to speak. This approach fosters transparency, eases the communication and permits the empowerment and the consultation of the public population.

After analyzing the case of BLP, I believe that these two options are more aligned with the MSE standards and that could improve the relationship with the population since the complaints of the local community are driven by the environmental impact as well as by the lack of consultation on the early stage. The frustration kept going when they were not listened to and when they were forced to take an established price for their land. So, giving the opportunity to the local community to speak, to participate in the decision-making process, could result in lowering the conflicts, enhancing trust in the project, a fairer compensation and in an improvement of Savannah’s reputation.

Conclusion

This dissertation had the goal to create an analysis grid based on three MSE approaches. Therefore, to apply this grid, the BLP was used as a case study to explore the stakeholder engagement strategies implemented by Savannah Resources and to evaluate their alignment with the MSE Standards.

The analysis demonstrated that effective MSE strategies can generate benefits for the companies, like gaining the Social License to Operate, Acceptance and trust. On the contrary, the cases where these principles failed often lead to increased costs, conflicts and, in extreme cases, even project cancellations.

Focusing on the BLP, the main findings were that the engagement strategies applied by Savannah were predominantly instrumental, exclusive and they prioritize information dissemination to the local community rather than to empower or to collaborate with them. Therefore, these strategies do not fall under the MSE principles. Although in the literature there are several reasons described why companies undervalue public participation, in this case, no clear justification was found for such an exclusive approach by the company. However, there are some mechanisms that can be used to improve stakeholder engagement like Dialogue Tables or CBA.

It is important to recognize the limitations of this study. The analysis depends primarily on publicly available documents and interviews with local community members, which may introduce bias. Additionally, the geographical distance factor may constrain opportunities for direct observation of project activities. Future research should incorporate the perspectives of the company and other stakeholders to provide a more comprehensive understanding of engagement practices and their outcomes.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Failure Cases of Not using MSE.

Article	Complains	Failure to MSE	Outcomes
Between control and confrontation: The pitfalls and potential of corporate-community participatory development in Africa's energy and extractive industries (Abe, 2022)	There was no opportunity for Kenyans, especially the host community, to participate in a public hearing for the project	No or Minimal Engagement	Project Cancelled
Mining struggles in Argentina. The keys of a successful story of mobilization (Walter & Wagner, 2021)	Lack of engagement and participation of the local community;	No or Minimal Engagement	Project cancellations: (~50% suspended or stopped); Legal and Regulatory consequences; Conflicts; Damaged Reputation
Challenging the binary of home vs. host state governance: Canadian transnational mining behavior and local communities in the Philippines	Selective distribution of CSR benefits; intimidation, manipulation, exclusion,	Manipulative or Coercive Tactics	Legal & Regulatory Consequences; Loss of Community Trust & Acceptance; Environmental & Livelihood Damage; Conflicts

extractive industry (Asuncion, et al., 2022)				
Conflict management in the extractive industries: A comparison of four mining projects in Latin America (Kowszyk, et al., 2023)	Nueva Unión	Exclusion and Mistrust of company attitudes;	No or Minimal Engagement	Project Delayed; Legal & Regulatory Consequences; Conflicts
	Peñasquito	Unfair distribution of mining income and suffered water shortages;	Manipulative or Coercive Tactics	Conflicts; Environmental & Livelihood Damage
	Yanacocha, Peru	Violent repression and Criminalization of protest (Y)	Manipulative or Coercive Tactics	Damaged Reputation
How do mining companies induce community participation? Processes, rationales, and contestation in South Africa's platinum-rich Limpopo Province (Hofmeyr, 2025)	Exclusion, elite capture, contested legitimacy, lack of transparency;		Cosmetic CSR; Elite Capture & Exclusion; Manipulative or Coercive Tactics	Lost of Reputation. Conflicts

Factors affecting local attitudes to mineral exploration: What is within the company's control? (Lindahl, et al. 2023)	Strong opposition from Sámi reindeer herding communities; Distrust in company communication;	Reactive Compliance Only	Loss of Community Trust & Acceptance
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Appendix 2 – Success Cases of MSE

Article	Complains		MSE Strategies	Outcomes
Community Benefit Agreements in the Nordic mining context: Local opportunities for collaboration in Sodankylä, Finland (Kotilainen, e. al, 2022)	Lack of power to deny mining territory on EIA; Lack of mining tax; negative environmental and social impacts; poor communication among stakeholders in the mining industry;		Community Benefit Agreements	Improved efficiency; Social License to Operate; Acceptance, trust, and credibility; Good Reputation
Conflict management in the extractive industries: A comparison of four mining projects in Latin America (Kowszyk, et al., 2023)	Vazante (Brazil)	Environmental degradation and unfaier benefit distribution;	Integrating Strategy	Social License to Operate; Acceptance, trust, and credibility
Factors affecting local attitudes to mineral exploration: What is within the company's control? (Lindahl, et al. 2023)	Gällivare (Sweden)	Environmental impacts; Distrust in fairness; bias toward mining interests	Consultation meetings; informing landowners and Sámi RHCs by mail; Improved quality of permit applications; engagement with authorities.	Acceptance, trust, and credibility

	Ylitornio/ Rovaniemi (Finland)	Anxiety and uncertainty about future mining impacts; Environmental concerns about exploration	Initiative-taking communication: local office, village meetings, targeted information.; Use of low-impact exploration technologies (NLIMET).	Acceptance, trust, and credibility
From opposition to conditional acceptance: Corporate environmental and socio-economic engagement in critical minerals mining in Michigan (Deberdt, 2025)	Environmental; Transportation impacts; Socio-cultural concerns (Eagle Rock sacred site, Indigenous rights); Distrust in communication / transparency		Community Environmental Monitoring Program (CEMP); Redesigning of the mine; Mining Forum and community engagement initiatives (education, entrepreneurship, sponsorship)	Conditional Acceptance
Integrating Indigenous knowledge and skills in mining operations: A systematic literature review (Alonzo, et al., 2025)	Exclusion, land/cultural loss, distrust, exploitation of knowledge, resistance in sacred areas.		FPIC, integration of ecological/cultural knowledge, participatory programs, recognition of holistic knowledge, withdrawal/redesign	
Making or breaking social license to operate in the mining industry: Factors of the main drivers of	Copper mining project in	Environmental Impact (water scarcity); Benefit sharing; Engagement;	Creation of a Dialogue Table with diverse interests – local communities, the company, and the government (Set up by the government)	Social License to Operate

social conflict (Saenz & Ostos, 2021)	southern Peru	Community Development		
	Copper mine in the southern Peruvian Andes.	Land as economic capital; Environmental Impact; Benefit sharing; Engagement; Community Development; Human rights	Dialogue meetings and creation of a participatory environmental committee.	Acceptance of the Project