



# STATUS AND CHALLENGES OF PHOSPHORUS RESERVES FOR AGRICULTURE: A MATTER OF QUANTITY AND QUALITY

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GPI & DANUBE UNIVERSITY AUSTRIA

Global Symposium on Soils for Nutrition | 26-29 July 2022





# PHOSPHORUS AS LIFE'S BOTTLENECK & ARE WE RUNNING OUT OF PHOSPHORUS?

*"... LIFE CAN MULTIPLY UNTIL ALL THE PHOSPHORUS IS GONE, AND THEN  
THERE IS AN INEXORABLE HALT WHICH NOTHING CAN PREVENT ..."*

Asimov, I. Asimov on  
Chemistry; Doubleday &  
Company: Garden City,  
NY, USA, 1974;  
ISBN 978-0-385-04100-3.



*ARE WE RUNNING OUT OF PHOSPHORUS?*



*REFUTING THE PHOSPHORUS SCARCITY FALLACY*



*FUTURE IMPLICATIONS: FUNCTIONAL & INSTITUTIONAL  
REQUIREMENTS TO AVOID SIMILAR FALLACIES*

**WHO WE ARE:**

**THE GLOBAL PHOSPHORUS INSTITUTE (GPI)  
&  
THE TRANSDISCIPLINARITY LAB FOR  
SUSTAINABLE MINERAL RESOURCES  
(DANUBE UNIVERSITY AUSTRIA)**

# THE GLOBAL PHOSPHORUS INSTITUTE (GPI)

<https://www.tgpi.org/en/home>

IS A GLOBAL ORGANIZATION WITH A HOLISTIC VISION, FOOTPRINT AND PARTICIPATION TO ENSURE RESPONSIBLE USE OF PHOSPHORUS THROUGH CUTTING-EDGE SCIENCE AND STAKEHOLDER DIALOGUE.

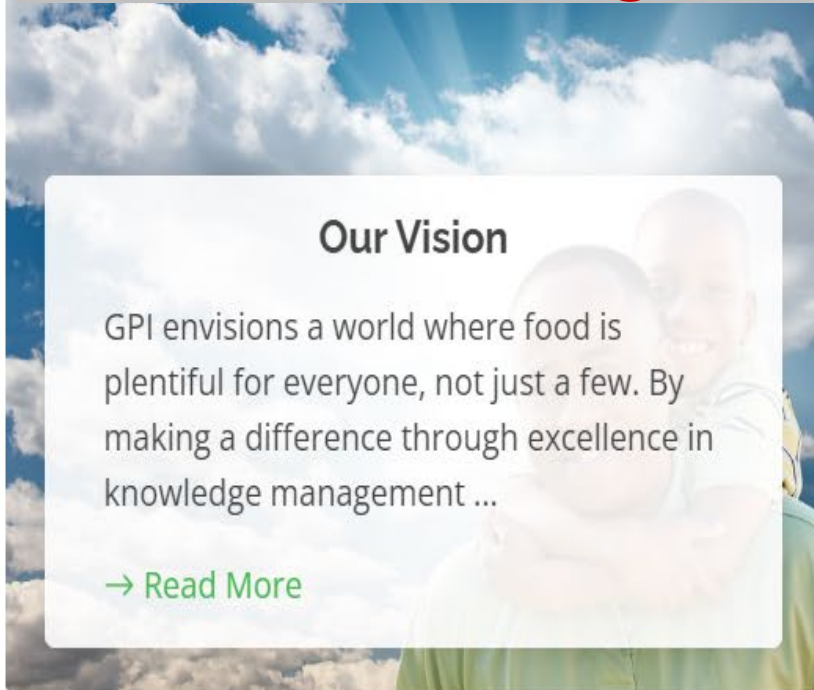
KNOWLEDGE

COLLABORATION

INTEGRITY



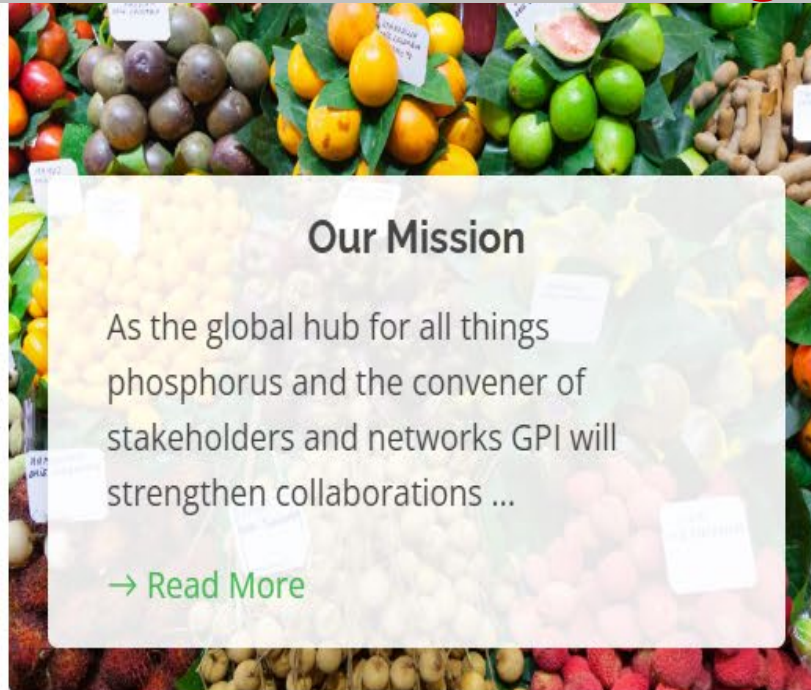
## How to build a global data and knowledge hub for phosphorus?



### Our Vision

GPI envisions a world where food is plentiful for everyone, not just a few. By making a difference through excellence in knowledge management ...

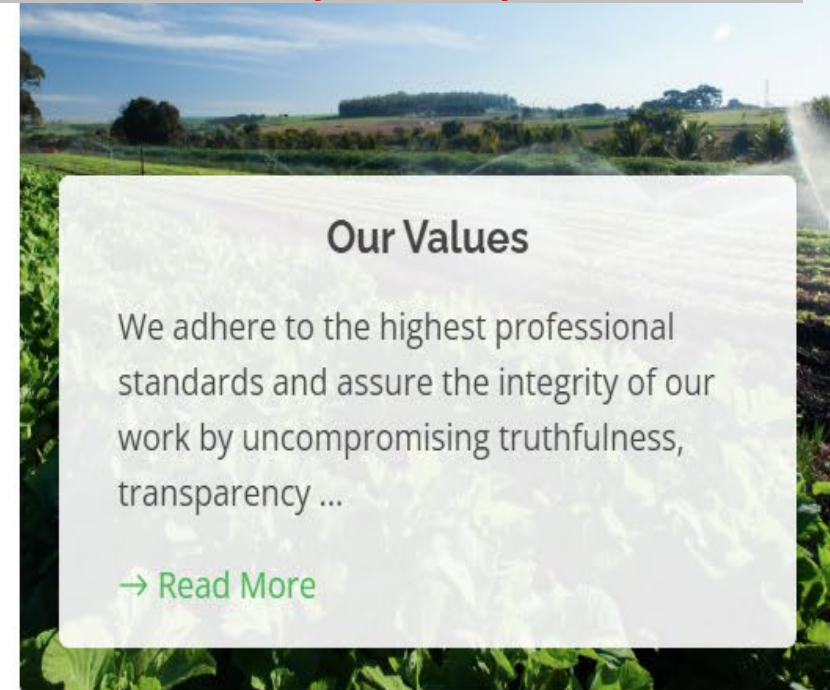
→ Read More



### Our Mission

As the global hub for all things phosphorus and the convener of stakeholders and networks GPI will strengthen collaborations ...

→ Read More



### Our Values

We adhere to the highest professional standards and assure the integrity of our work by uncompromising truthfulness, transparency ...

→ Read More



# THE TRANSDISCIPLINARITY LAB FOR SUSTAINABLE MINERAL RESOURCES

(SMR TD-LAB) WITH EMPHASIS ON GLOBAL FOOD SECURITY AND PHOSPHATE ROCK DOING RESEARCH FOR A RESPONSIBLE, SUSTAINABLE, AND EFFICIENT USE OF THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENT PHOSPHORUS.

Co-Lead Science (Full Professors)		Co-Lead Practice	
	<b>Gerald Steiner</b> (Danube University Austria & CSH, Systems- and Complexity Sciences)		<b>Michael C. Mew</b> (CRU International, Mineral Resources Management Advisor)
	<b>Roland W. Scholz</b> (Danube University & ETH Zürich, Environmental System Sciences)		<b>Ludwig Hermann</b> (President of the European Sustainable P Platform ESPP and Proman Consulting)
	<b>Martin Bertau</b> (TU Bergakademie Freiberg, Technical Chemistry)		<b>Nils Haneklaus</b> (UN & Danube University, Nuclear Energy)
	<b>Michael Obersteiner</b> (Oxford University, Global Change)		<b>Friedrich-W. Wellmer</b> (Former president of The Federal German Geological Survey)

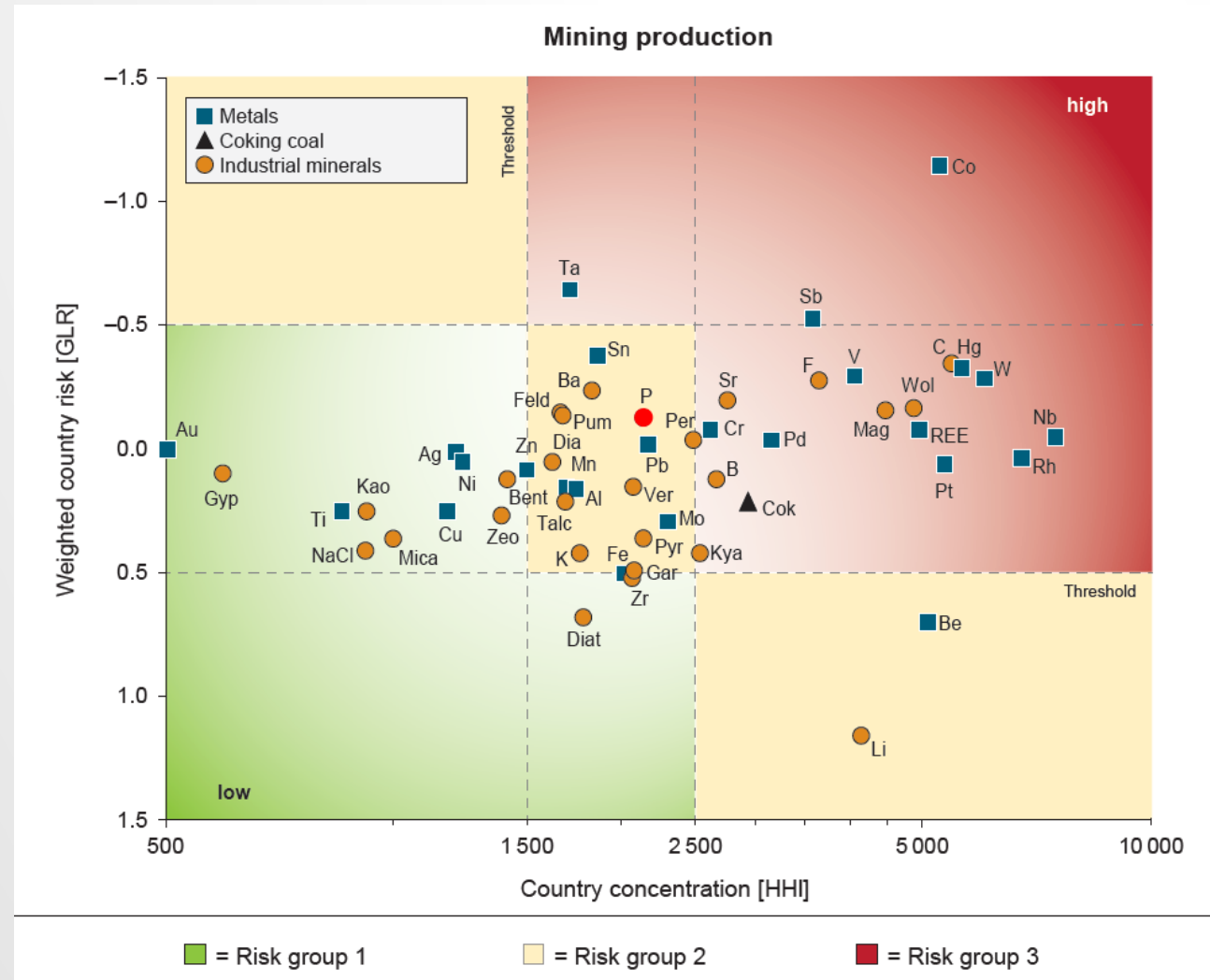
[www.donau-uni.ac.at/smr-tdlab](http://www.donau-uni.ac.at/smr-tdlab)

## **BACKGROUND:**

# **TWO PERSPECTIVES ON SCARCITY**

- (1) SHORT-TERM CRITICALITY**
- (2) LONG-TERM PHYSICAL ACCESS**

# HHI-INDICES FOR MINING PRODUCTION OF 53 COMMODITIES IN 2018

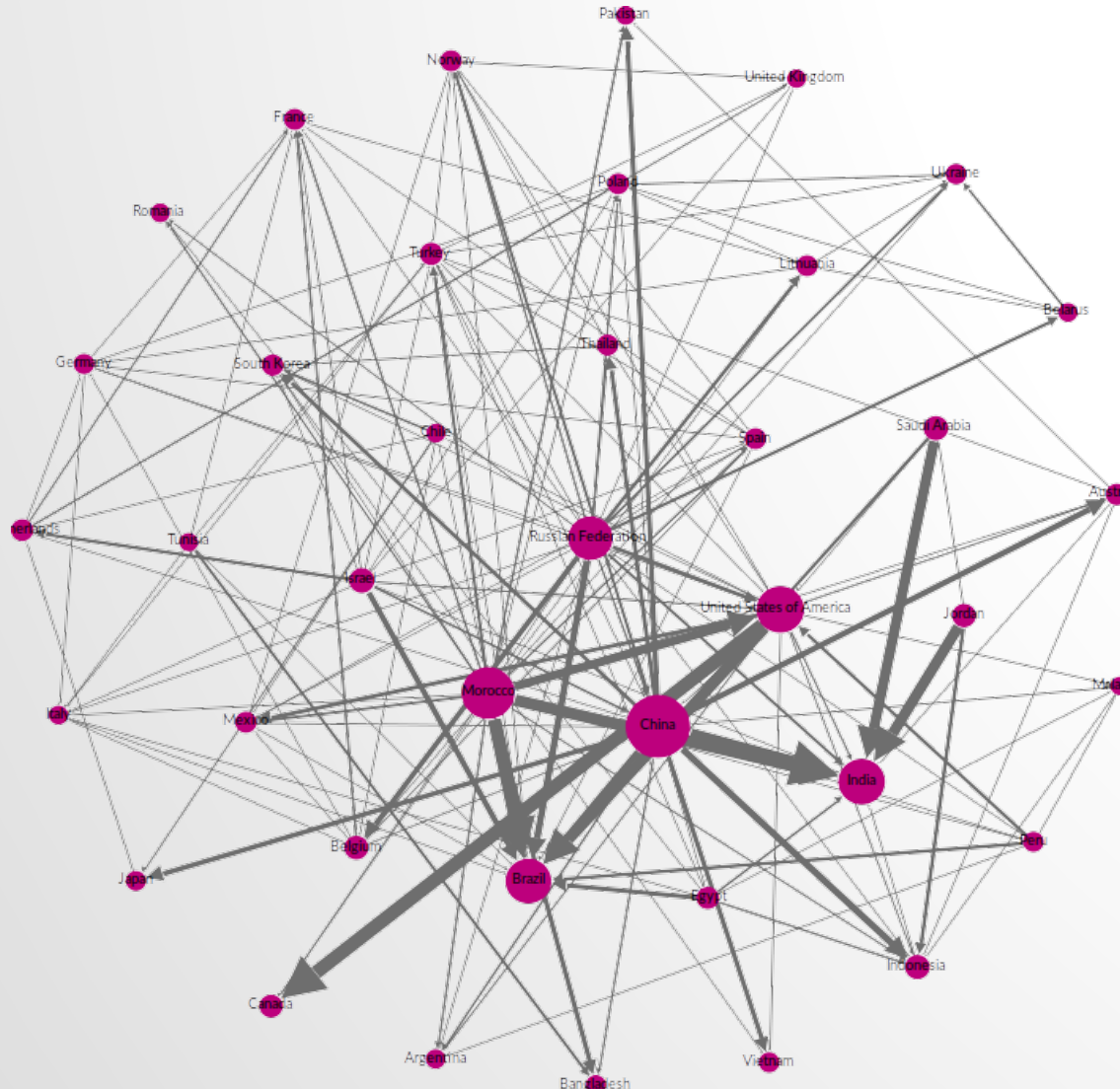


„The few countries fallacy“

BGR (2021): Bundesanstalt für Geowissenschaften und Rohstoffe BGR-raw materials databank;

Bertau, M., Wellmer, F.-W., Scholz, R.W., Fröhlich, P., Haneklaus, N., Laubichler, M.D., Birmann, B.M., Caniglia, G., Schernhammer, E., Weitzer, J., Steffelbauer, I., Zenk, L., Mew, M., Steiner, G. (2022). The Future of Phosphate Rock-Processing – Why We Have to Leave Trodden Paths (forthcoming).


# DISTURBANCES: POLITICAL TURMOIL RISK ANALYSIS (WORK IN PROGRESS)



- **Phosphorus-related trade flows**
- including raw minerals, fertilizers and chemical products for the 39 largest countries by trade. The node size and link width is proportional to the traded amount in USD. Bilateral flows are netted.\*
- based on Comtrade data from Harvard Growth lab for 2019. Based on SITC (Rev2) 2713, 5622, 5222\*\*, 5232\*\*, 5629\*\*
- \*links with less than 10m USD are not visualized
- \*\*weighted according to approx. P content



## ORIGINS OF THE PHOSPHORUS SCARCITY FALLACY & COUNTER VOICES



**ECOLOGIST**  
REVIVING THE ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT SINCE 1970


**The New York Times**  
Tuesday, September 27, 2011

WORLD U.S. N.Y./REGION BUSINESS TECHNOLOGY SCIENCE HEALTH SPO

April 27, 2010, 6:42 AM

### Peak Phosphorus

*Today's idea: Our dwindling supply of phosphorus for fertilizer threatens to disrupt food security across the planet during the coming century, an article argues. "This is the gravest natural resource shortage you've never heard of."*



Stephen Morrison/European Pressphoto Agency

The world relies on phosphate fertilizer to meet rising demand for food: tilling the soil in Kenya.



**SPIEGEL ONLINE INTERNATIONAL**

04/21/2010 Print | E-Mail | Feedback

### Essential Element Becoming Scarce

#### Experts Warn of Impending Phosphorus Crisis

By Hilmar Schmundt



Phosphorus is essential to agriculture, but experts warn reserves are starting to run out.

**The element phosphorus is essential to human life and the most important ingredient in fertilizer. But experts warn that the world's reserves of phosphate rock are becoming depleted. Is recycling sewage the answer?**

AFP

### Potential P-Scarcity triggered by, e.g.:

-Roosevelt FD (1938) Message to congress on phosphates for soil fertility, 20 May 1938. In: G Peters, JT Woolley, The American Presidency Project.

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=15643>

-Déry P, Anderson B (2007) Peak phosphorus. Energy Bulletin.

- Cordell D, Drangert JO, White S (2009) The story of phosphorus: global food security and food for thought. Glob Environ Change-Human Policy Dims 19(2).



### Counter voices, e.g.:

-van Kauwenbergh, S. J. (2010). World phosphate rock reserves and resources. Muscle Shoals, AL: IFDC.

-Scholz, R.W., Wellmer, F.-W., 2013. Approaching a dynamic view on the availability of mineral resources: what we may learn from the case of phosphorus? Glob. Environ. Chang. 23, 11–27.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2012.10.013>.

-Jasinski, S. M. (2022). Phosphate rock. In US Geological Survey (Ed.), Mineral Commodity Summaries 2018 (pp. 122-123). Washington, DC: USGS.

## PHOSPHATE ROCK: WORLD RESERVES AND MINE PRODUCTION (2013/2020/2021)



2013

data for 2013	Production volume (USGS, 2015)	Reserves (USGS, 2015)
	million metric tons / [share of world production]	million metric tons / [share of world reserves]
Morocco	26.4 [11.73%]	50,000 [74.63%]
China	108 [48%]	3,700 [5.52%]
South Africa	2.3 [1.02%]	1,500 [2.24%]
United States	31.2 [13.87%]	1,100 [1.64%]
Russia	10 [4.44%]	1,300 [1.94%]
Brazil	6 [2.68%]	270 [0.4%]

U.S. Geological Survey, Mineral Commodity Summaries, Phosphate Rock, prepared by Stephen M. Jasinski, January 2022.

<https://pubs.usgs.gov/periodicals/mcs2022/mcs2022-phosphate.pdf>

2020/  
2021

United States
Algeria
Australia
Brazil
China <sup>6</sup>
Egypt
Finland
India
Israel
Jordan
Kazakhstan
Mexico
Morocco
Peru
Russia
Saudi Arabia
Senegal
South Africa
Togo
Tunisia
Turkey
Uzbekistan
Vietnam
Other countries
World total (rounded)

### Mine production

2020	2021 <sup>e</sup>
23,500	22,000
1,200	1,200
2,000	2,200
6,000	5,500
88,000	85,000
4,800	5,000
995	1,000
1,400	1,400
3,090	3,000
8,940	9,200
1,300	1,500
577	530
37,400	38,000
3,300	3,800
14,000	14,000
8,000	8,500
1,600	2,200
1,800	2,000
942	1,200
3,190	3,200
600	600
900	900
4,500	4,700
870	1,000
219,000	220,000

### Reserves<sup>4</sup>

1,000,000
2,200,000
51,100,000
1,600,000
3,200,000
2,800,000
1,000,000
46,000
53,000
1,000,000
260,000
30,000
50,000,000
210,000
600,000
1,400,000
50,000
1,600,000
30,000
100,000
50,000
100,000
30,000
2,600,000
71,000,000

Steiner, G., B., Watson, I., & Mew, M. C. (2015). Efficiency developments in phosphate rock mining over the last three decades. *Resources, Conservation and Recycling*, 105, 235–245. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.resconrec.2015.10.004>

Geissler, Bernhard, Mew, M. C., Weber, O., & Steiner, G. (2015). Efficiency performance of the world's leading corporations in phosphate rock mining. *Resources, Conservation and Recycling*, 105, 246–258. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.resconrec.2015.10.008>

(Data in thousand metric tons)





# NO PHOSPHORUS SCARCITY BUT WHAT IS NEEDED FOR THE FUTURE

In a nutshell: A rough static 'rule-of-thumb calculation' (all data from the USGS Mineral Commodity Statistics, 2022)

→ Annual PR consumption for 2021	0.22 Gt PR
→ Current reserves:	71 Gt PR (=318 times of the 2021 PR consumption)
→ Current resources:	300 Gt PR (=would last for 1,681 years based on 2021 PR consumption)

BUT

(1) These figures will increase if prices increase, technology improves, or new phosphate rock resources are identified (Scholz & Wellmer, 2013).

(2) The rule that price increases reserves (as lower ore grades can be mined) raises these numbers.

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(2) The rule that price increases reserves (as lower ore grades can be mined) raises these numbers.

**Consequence:** For a better understanding of this reserve-resource dynamics we need a new institutional setting and a rigorous science approach relying on transdisciplinarity (as an enabler of mutual learning).

- Building a knowledge **network**
- Standardization of data and classification schemes**/instruments
- Conceptual Framework of system mechanisms** (feedback loops) of future P supply dynamics as a basis for the **data architecture**
- Sufficient analysis and **state-of-the-art modeling** (e.g., complexity science with network analysis, ABM etc.) & **digitalization** (e.g., digital twin, decision theatre etc.)

**What is needed for doing so: A Global Phosphate Data and Knowledge Hub**

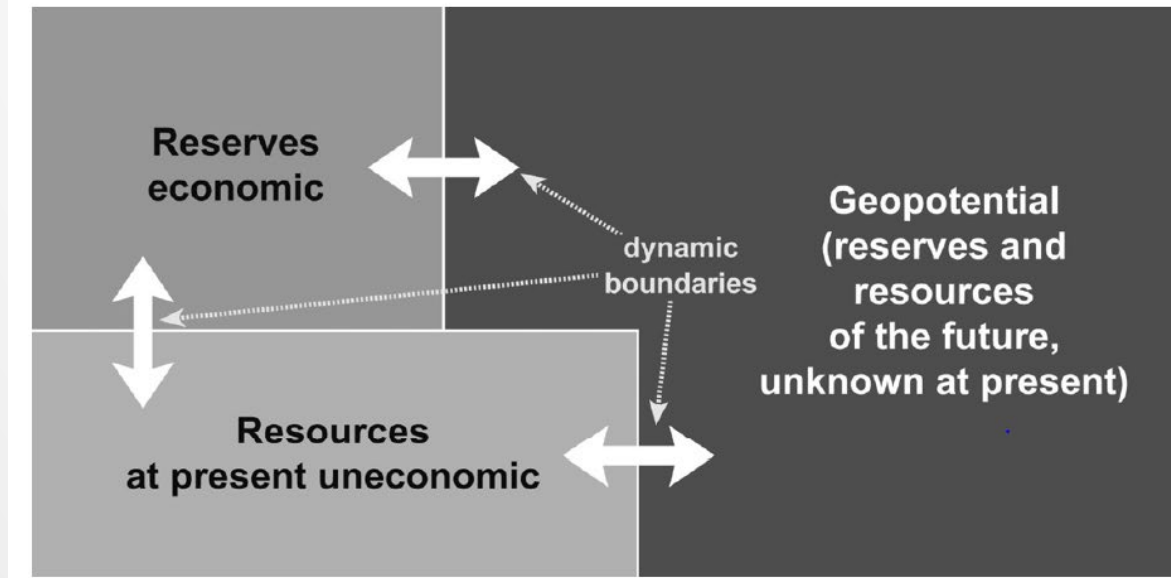


# RESERVES, RESOURCES, AND GEOPOTENTIAL: A DYNAMIC CONCEPT

→ **Reserves:** share of resource which can be economically extracted at currently given price and available technology under socio-ecologically acceptable conditions

→ **Resources:** known to a certain level, but economically not viable at the moment

→ **Geopotential:** only known by geological reasoning



Scholz, R.W., Wellmer, F.-W., 2013. Approaching a dynamic view on the availability of mineral resources: what we may learn from the case of phosphorus? *Glob. Environ. Chang.* 23, 11–27. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2012.10.013>.

Geissler, B., Mew, M., Steiner, G. (2019). Phosphate supply security for importing countries: Developments and the current situation. *Science of the Total Environment*, 677: 511–523. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scitotenv.2019.04.356>

This is how we want to answer the question how much phosphorus will be available in the future, and with how much effort/at what price.

# AN OUTLOOK FOR BETTER UNDERSTANDING & COLLABORATION

Looking forward to collaborate with you!

Executive Director Kaushik Majumdar and Mr.  
Abdellah El Houari & colleagues



Co-Leaders from Science and Practice &  
colleagues Roland Scholz, Friedrich Wellmer,  
Martin Bertau, Michael Mew, Ludwig  
Hermann, Michael Obersteiner & colleagues

**Transdisciplinarity Laboratory Sustainable  
Mineral Resources (SMR Td-Lab)**



**Global Phosphate Data and Knowledge Hub  
P-DaKH**





THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!  
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