

# **Characteristics of sensor-based sorting technology and implementation in mining**

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I hereby certify that this study has been supported by TOMRA Sorting Solutions and that no proprietary or confidential data or information is published within the same.

I further certify that all materials in this thesis which are not my work have been identified and that no material has been previously submitted or approved for the award of a degree by this or any other university

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "C. Robben".

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Christopher Robben



## I. Acknowledgements

I dedicate this piece of experience and hard work to my daughter Sophia Rachel and I hope that the findings will be a building stone for a sustainable and better future for her generation and for her.

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## **II. Executive summary**

Sensor-based sorting is a sustainable processing technology for the separation of coarse particles. Through its impacts on all processes of the mineral production chain and the technical options to separate on new separation criteria at relatively low cost it becomes a disruptive technology. It is still at the market entry level in many commodities and applications and far from reaching a technical saturation level with sensing technology and mechanical platforms developments still accelerating. As a tool for evaluating the need for sensor-based sorting in specific applications and for building strategies for implementation the technology roadmap is identified. When designing a technology roadmap the philosophy of resource-to-product-integration must be followed to cover all impacts on the mineral production chain.

The impacts of sensor-based sorting onto mineral production are discussed using technical-financial scenarios that isolate and highlight characteristic effects. The main scenarios offering high economic benefit are installation of SBS for decreased capital expenditure for downstream plant equipment, increased productivity through relief of production capacities from barren waste, ore type diversion into specialised plant lines, amongst others. The scenarios show that sensor-based sorting not only contributes to an environmentally friendly operation through reduced resource consumption and environmental impact, but also decreases costs. Highest possible economic benefit can be achieved when maximising productivity either through increased feed grade or increased overall recovery.

The impacts of the sub-processes of sensor-based sorting onto the total separation are evaluated and captured in process efficiency functions. These functions, in combination with the liberation function, constitute a four-dimensional process function of a specific application, which links the recovery to yield, particle size and throughput. This concept shows characteristics of sensor-based sorting technology and allows for future analysis of sub-process efficiency contributions for different applications. Analogue to the process function, operating cost functions and capital expenditure functions show the expenditures in dependence of yield and throughput for stationary and semi-mobile applications.

All investment decisions are made on the basis of data derived from sampling and testing procedures. As coarse particle separation sensor-based sorting introduces challenges due to the Fundamental Sampling Error. The Theory of Sampling offers a proven scientific and

practical framework that must be applied in the context of single particle tests for sensor-selection, calibration and validation and bulk tests for gaining operational data.

The study introduces the basic components of sensor-based sorting plants and the respective requirements. Both stationary and semi-mobile installations are evaluated and two developed semi-mobile plants described. As semi-mobile installations are relatively compact they allow for flexible application at strategic logistical positions which is in many cases close to the mining face. This requires the implementation into the mining system, especially due to the resulting backfill activities.

Process efficiency testing of sensor-based sorters is effective with applied tracers and partition curves. Sensor-based sorting can be applied as a sampling tool for liberation analysis and process efficiency testing. The variographic analysis is identified as highly applicable for process efficiency testing and evaluation of the Total Sampling Error.

The study at hand evaluates the technical and financial characteristics of sensor-based sorting technology as well as for its implementation in mining applications. It introduces a framework and methodology for project development and evaluation, for implementation, for efficiency testing and optimisation and for future research and development.

### **III. Zusammenfassung**

Sensorgestützte Sortierung ist ein nachhaltiges Aufbereitungsverfahren für die Trennung von groben Partikeln. Durch die Einflüsse, die es auf alle Prozesse der Produktionskette von mineralischen Produkten hat und durch die Einführung von neuen Trennkriterien wird es zu einer disruptiven Technologie. Die Technik befindet sich heutzutage immer noch auf dem Level der Markteinführung und ist weit davon entfernt, eine technische Sättigung zu erfahren. Weiterhin finden große Entwicklungsschritte auf den Bereichen der Detektionsmethoden und mechanischen Plattformen statt. Als ein wirksames Werkzeug für die Auswertung der Anforderungen an sensorgestützte Sortierung in spezifischen Applikationen und für die Erstellung von Strategien für die Implementierung stellt sich die Technologie Roadmap dar. Beim Erstellen einer solchen, muss der Philosophie der Ressourcen-zu-Produkt Integration gefolgt werden, um alle Einflüsse auf die Produktionskette abzubilden.

Technisch-ökonomische Szenarien, die bestimmte Charakteristika isolieren eignen sich besonders, um die Einflüsse der sensorgestützten Sortierung auf die Produktionskette zu analysieren. The hauptsächlichen Szenarien, die hohen ökonomischen Mehrwert zeigen, sind Installation von sensorgestützter Sortierung für die Verringerung von Investitionsausgaben für nachfolgende Prozessschritte, erhöhte Produktivität durch die Entlastung von Produktionskapazitäten von taubem Nebengestein und Erztypumleitung in spezialisierte Aufbereitungslinien, unter Anderem. The Szenarien zeigen, dass sensorgestützte Sortierung nicht nur zu einem umweltfreundlichen Betrieb durch verringerte spezifischen Ressourcenaufwendungen beiträgt, sondern auch die spezifischen Kosten verringert. Die höchste Wertschöpfung kann erreicht werden, wenn die Produktivität durch einen konzentrierten Aufgabegehalt oder durch ein gesteigertes Gesamtausbringen erreicht werden kann.

Prozesseffizienzfunktionen eignen sich am besten, um die Einflüsse der Sub-Prozesse von sensorgestützten Sortierung auf das gesamte Separationsergebnis zu beschreiben und zu evaluieren. Diese Funktionen führen in Verbindung mit einer dreidimensionalen Aufschlussfunktion zu einer vierdimensionalen Gesamtprozessfunktion, welche das Wertstoffausbringen in Abhängigkeit von Massenausbringen, Korngröße und Durchsatz darstellt.

Alle Investitionsentscheidungen werden auf der Basis von Proben durchgeführt, mit denen Versuche durchgeführt werden. Eine besondere Herausforderung ist die relativ grobe Korngröße der verwendeten Proben aufgrund des fundamentalen Probenahmefehlers. Die

Theorie der Probenahme bietet ein bewährtes wissenschaftliches und praktisches Rahmenwerk für die Einzelkornversuche zur Auswahl der Detektionsmethode, Kalibration und Validation sowie für Massenversuche zur Gewinnung von Produktionsdaten.

Hauptkomponenten von Installationen zur sensorgestützten Sortierung sind Brecher, Siebe, Kompressoren und Entstaubung. Stationäre Anlagen können einfach an hohe Massenströme und mehrstufige Sortierung angepasst werden. Durch den relativ kompakten Aufbau gesamter Anlagen, bietet es sich an, auch semi-mobile Anlagen an strategischen Positionen in der Förderkette einzusetzen. Idealerweise ist diese Position nah zur Ortsbrust. Eine Einbindung einer semi-mobilen Anlage ist vonnöten, besonders in Bezug auf die Versatztätigkeiten.

Die Prozesseffizienz von installierten sensorgestützten Sortierer lässt sich besonders gut mit Simulanten und mit der Hilfe von Partitionskurven testen. Sensorgestützte Sortierer können auch selber als Probenahmegerät für das Testen von Prozesseffizienz und Aufschluss eingesetzt werden. Das Variogramm bietet ein machtvoll Werkzeug für die Prozessanalyse und Bestimmung des Gesamten Probenahmefehlers.

Die Studie fasst technische und finanzielle Charakteristika der sensorgestützten Sortierung sowie für deren Implementierung im Bergbau zusammen. Sie führt Methoden und Rahmenbedingungen für die Evaluation von potentiellen Projektentwicklungen und für zukünftige Forschungstätigkeiten ein.

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