



**Is there a future for the sacrifice zone?**

**Understanding mining conflicts and local community engagement in Bor and Majdanpek, Serbia**

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# Research background

Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) and mineral extraction as a development model on the (semi)periphery.

Factors: low labor costs, deregulated land ownership, weak environmental standards.

Neo-extractivism: monopolized resource extraction, privatized profits and externalized costs, close state-private capital ties, generated value is not directed toward the local population negatively affected by extractive activities, nor to those (individuals or institutions) who may have a legal right to a share of the profits.

Developmental (economic growth, jobs, infrastructure) vs. critical perspectives (environmental damage, social exclusion, weak local influence) on resource extraction.





An aerial photograph showing a town with several tall apartment buildings and a green sports field, situated in a valley. To the right of the town is a massive, terraced open-pit mine with steep, rocky walls. The mine extends into the distance, with a large body of water at its base. The surrounding landscape is covered in dense green forest, and distant mountains are visible under a blue sky with scattered white clouds.

# Theoretical framework

*Sacrifice zone*  
(Scott & Smith, 2017)



# Theoretical Framework Activism and Conflicts



- Professional, Participatory (Della Porta and Dianni, 2006) and Transactional (Petrova and Tarrow, 2007) Activism (spectrum, sometimes conflicting) (Vukelić et al., 2021).
- Ecological Distribution Conflicts (EDCs) (Martinez-Alier and O'Connor, 1996):
  - Conflicts over unequal environmental benefits and harms;
  - Mining leads to pollution, displacement, distrust in companies;
  - Conflicts may escalate or lead to cooperation.
- Mining conflicts (Martínez-Alier, 2001; Urkidi and Walter, 2011; Conde and Le Billon, 2017; Scheidel et al., 2018).



# Contextual framework

Mining in Bor and Majdanpek

# Mining in Bor and Majdanpek: Local Context

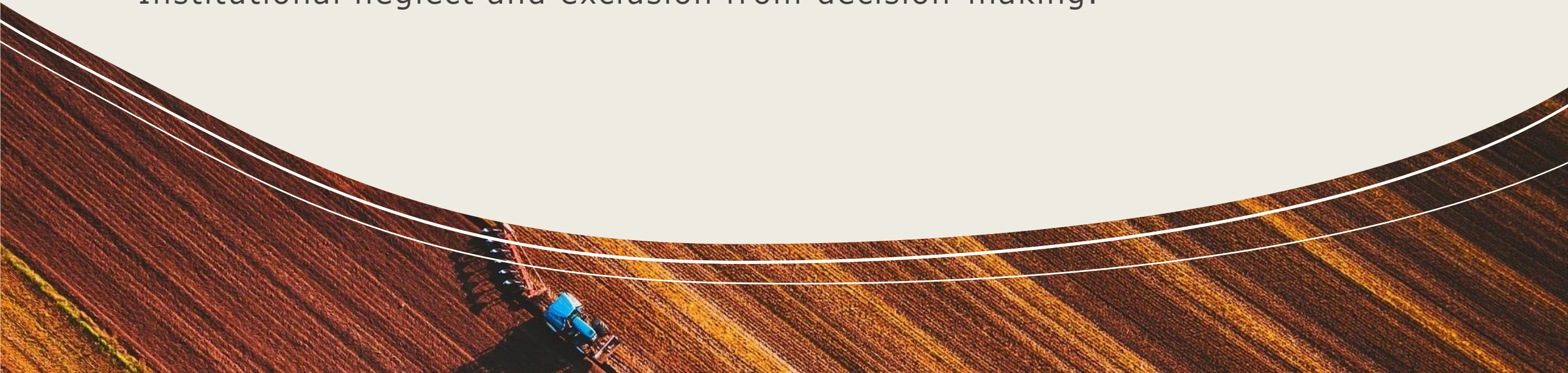
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- Bor and Majdanpek as historical mining hubs, Copper mining since the early 20th century.
- 2018: Privatization of RTB Bor – acquisition by Chinese company Zijin.
- EU integration and Green Agenda ambiguities:
  - Accession pushes stricter environmental standards;
  - Demand for critical raw materials increases mining activity (and conflict).



# Environmental and Social Impact

- Air, soil, and water pollution (sulfur dioxide, land degradation, toxic waste).
- Public health deterioration.
- Limited local benefits from resource extraction.
- Institutional neglect and exclusion from decision-making.



## Environmental and Social Consequences

- A report by the National Institute of Public Health from 2019 documents that pollution in this area is life-threatening.
- The publication "Improving the Management of Contaminated Sites in Serbia" defines Majdanpek as an ecological black spot.
- “For all malignant tumors except skin cancer, there is a significantly higher risk of illness for both men and women” (Čubrilo Filipović, 2022).





# An Analysis of Secondary Sources on Community Engagement in Bor and Majdanpek

- Local initiatives: Borani se pitaju, Ne damo/Nu dau (We don't give), Ne damo Staricu (We won't give up Starica), Društvo mladih istraživača iz Bora (Society of Young Researchers, Bor).

Ekoloski ustanak (Ecological Uprising)

Evropski Majdanpek (European Majdanpek)

Majdanpek.info (engaged local community media)

- Actions: Protests, petitions, media campaigns
- 2022: Activist camp on Mt. Starica against open-pit expansion.
- Framing of struggle as defence of home, nature, and rights.



"The goal is to finally find out what the boundaries of the mine are" (Čubrilo Filipović, M., 2022).





## Activist camp: protest on Starica mountain (2022)

- Starica mountain: a symbol of Majdanpek
- A hydrogeological collector for the water supply of the entire area
- Without warning, the Zijin company detonated rocks from one of the peaks of this mountain in June 2022
- Citizens organized an activist camp at the top of the mountain, trying to prevent further blasting
- Arrests, police brutality against the activists





*It can't go on like this, by force, completely ignoring the people. We used to have resorts, sports fields, a ski resort, a swimming pool, a hotel... This makes no sense, except for the investor. All we are left with is pollution and destruction, as if they want to push us out (Čubrilo Filipović, M., 2022).*

*We want to know if we need to move because of the mine*

*(Đukić Pejić, J. 2022).*



# Discussion

The residents primarily participate in activities organized by local activist groups and citizens' associations. They create grassroots groups, which are close to the participatory type of activism.

The experiences of activist groups from Bor and Majdanpek may prove important in organizing resistance strategies to other projects, contributing to the development of the broader grassroots anti-mining movement in Serbia.



# Photo sources

## Photo Sources

Marko Popović, Flickr.com

dw.com

Udruženje građana Ne dam

Mitrović, N,. 2022, BBC News na srpskom

## Web Source

ZaMedia. Story about the demolition of "Starica" – video report.  
Available at:

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The background is a light beige color. It features several large, irregular, organic shapes that resemble paper cutouts. These shapes are layered and have different textures: a large purple one on the top left, a brown one with small dark specks in the center, a dark brown one on the top right, and a green one with fine yellow fibers on the bottom left. Each shape is outlined with a thin white border.

# Thank You

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