



MINIPART aims to identify the most appropriate participation methods tailored to all stakeholders in mining areas.

MINIPART

IMPROVING PARTICIPATION IN SPATIAL PLANNING OF MINING AREAS

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Media discourses and public participation in mining projects

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Introduction

- The rise of populist movements and resource based conflicts are stressing democracies worldwide.
- There is a need to recognize how best to prepare and defend democratic standards.
- Concept of Creating Shared Values can support community planning efforts since they may clearly indicate:
 - economic,
 - environmental, and
 - socio-cultural relationships and outcomes associated with local or regional developmental projects.



Introduction

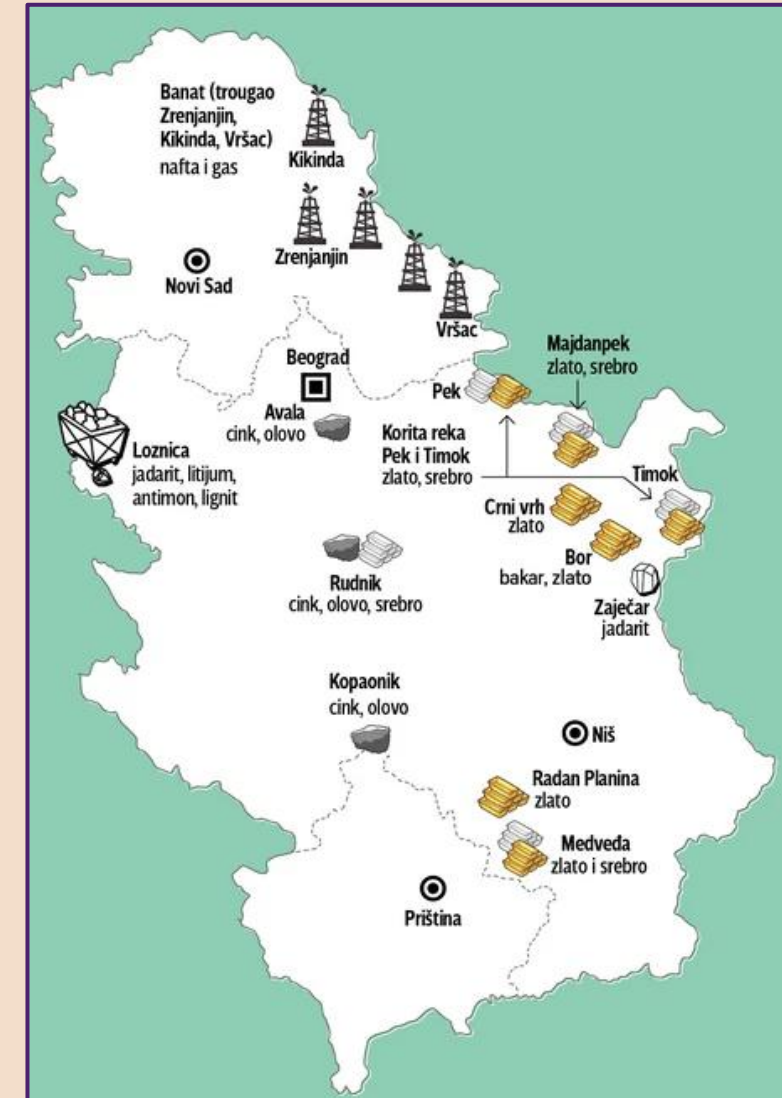
- What to include in a shared developmental strategy presents a significant challenge.
- In mining-impacted areas is even more difficult to achieve a sustainable strategy of land use.
- Yet, due to an increased participation of citizens, this goal is possible to achieve.
- Recently, in the mining and other regions of Serbia have been frequently appeared mining disputes.
- The most prominent case relates to the potential lithium excavation in the Jadar area (Western part of Serbia).



Introduction

Problem:

- The large-scale lithium extraction project impacts the *local community* and *environment*, mostly negative (monofunctional economy; health problems; environment degradation; involuntary resettlement).
- Non-compliance with legislation?
- Objective assessment of economic gains?
- Compliance of International Mining Companies with national environmental laws?
- Opposition of communities & experts against mining in Serbia intensified since 2000s, since local population's opinion often neglected.
- The absence of transparency in the process of getting of Licence to Operate.



Source: RAS Srbija, www.blic.rs



The role of media

- Print media (PM) provides information to interested citizens by opening space for their direct participation (meetings, protests, discussions).
- PM introduces innovative ideas into the public discourse and directs readers' attention to pressing issues of the day.
- Newspapers offer more room for the confrontation of different viewpoints.
- Newspapers' articles significantly shape public perceptions of the sensitivity of various issues.
- Registry – online info on draft planning documents, summaries of observations, proposals, public meetings

Caution: Governments often rely on the media to implement public policies. This creates space for manipulative actions. There is an increasing synergy between mining magnates and media moguls. Whether this trend serves the best public interest?



Methodological approach

- This research involves content analysis (CA).
- CA is appropriate when it is necessary to *determine, describe, and classify* the characteristics of a message.
- CA still holds a respected position among qualitative methods.
- It allows for *critical reflection*, considering the context in which the data were collected.
- Media content on the potential exploitation of lithium in Serbia, published in print media, was analysed.
- Two influential daily newspapers were analyzed: *Politika* and *Danas*.
- Two periods of sampling: the shorter (from July 23 to August 2, 2024), and, the twelve-month period (from October 1, 2023, to September 30, 2024).



Results

The topic of lithium began to attract the attention of the wider public in Serbia in November, 2019.

The Spatial Plan for the Special Purpose Area of implementing the Jadar project for the exploitation and processing of jadarite minerals, along with the accompanying strategic environmental assessment, was presented.

During the public review, potential environmental impacts were revealed.

The issue of lithium extraction then became *contradictory*, eventually becoming the basis for *mass protests* and eventually being *politically* articulated.

It could be said that the topic of spatial planning moved into the *ecological* sphere and then into the *political* sphere.

Despite the heightened attention, there was no resistance during the public review that would have prevented the adoption of the plan.

On January 2022, the Government halts the plan that has been adopted in 2020.

Results

Table 1 – News coverage about lithium mining by journalistic format

<i>Journalistic format</i>	Danas	Politika
News	22	6
Report	19	4
Interview	8	1
Article	23	5
Reportage	2	-
Commentary	10	-
Cartoon	5	-
Critical view (opinion)	17	7



Results

- In comparison to *Politika*, the daily newspaper *Danas*, used more frequent *informative* formats (news, reports, and interviews), as well as *analytical* journalistic formats (primarily commentary).
- This newspaper published as many as 107 contributions in order to convey more comprehensively not only the views of journalists on the possibility of "reviving" the Jadar project but also the opinions of environmental activists and experts in the field of technology (from July 23 to August 2, 2024).
- Most of the texts consisted of news and reports on protests held throughout Serbia.
- The space in the newspaper *Danas* was also used by the company Rio Tinto on two occasions to present its side of the story.



Lithium narratives

Economic narrative

- Energy transition; Electromobility; Critical materials (mainly lithium, Li); Technologies (lithium extraction, Li-ion batteries);
- Serbia as part of European energy security;
- The need of mining development and new mines;
- Geopolitics of extraction of critical raw materials
- Economic benefits for the economy and the local community; Creating shared value; Value chain; Development of lithium mines in the world (USA, Finland, France, Portugal);
- Obligation of companies to respect environmental standards;
- Prejudices and misinformation about mining.

Socio-ecological narrative

- Risks and dangers of lithium mining and extraction technology (polluting water, waste disposal, use of sulfuric acid);
- Endangerment and loss of agricultural land;
- Little benefit from mining to the local community;
- Fairness (unequal distribution of profits between the local community, the state and the company);
- Distrust in the environmental responsibility of multinational mining companies (Rio Tinto);
- Putting Serbia in a neo-colonial position;
- Legitimacy of citizens' expression of dissatisfaction at protests;
- Cooperation between the government and leading mining companies; Distrust of citizens in institutions.



Conclusion

- The success of mining projects is largely based on the consent of the local and wider public.
- Public misunderstanding of the importance of a mining project arises mainly when the company externalizes the social, environmental and economic effects.
- The necessary pillars to achieve efficient mining rest on *land use planning, dialogue and cooperation between all stakeholders*.
- The lack of transparency and information of the citizens before the development of the spatial plan opened a training ground where it was possible to develop *two opposite and restless media discourses*.
- There are, it seems, irreconcilable values among investors and authorities, on the one side, and, NGOs and citizens, on the other.



Thank you for your attention

Project partners:



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