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PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES IN MINING REGIONS



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PREFACE

PREFACE

The initial impetus for composing this edited volume emerged from the continued prevalence of problematic practices in the extraction of natural resources – both minerals and energy resources – across the world. This has inspired our research conducted within the scientific project **MINIPART – Improving Participation in Spatial Planning of Mining Regions,** supported by the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia, #7598. Despite major advances in international and national legislations, policy frameworks, and various voluntary guidelines intended to improve environmental governance and social responsibility in mining practice, local communities in extraction regions still bear the social, environmental, economic, and cultural burdens of extraction processes, while the majority of benefits remain concentrated within national governments and mining corporations. This imbalance continues to generate conflicts, mistrust, and long–term socio–spatial inequalities, particularly in regions heavily dependent on extractive industries. In the international literature and practice this has been recognised as the "natural resource curse" or the "paradox of plenty", where regions rich in resources (especially in oil, gas, or minerals) generally experience slower economic growth, weaker democracy, more severe environmental degradation and overall worse development outcomes than the resource–poor countries, while the macro–level financial windfalls concentrate with national and regional authorities and multinational corporations.

Against this backdrop, the book before you seeks to contribute to the growing international discussion on the necessity of meaningful citizen and community involvement in the planning, governance, and implementation of mining and energy transition processes. The accelerating global demand for critical raw materials – driven by decarbonisation agendas and the transition toward low–carbon economies – has further intensified the urgency of addressing questions of justice, legitimacy, transparency, and democratic participation in extraction regions. In such contexts, participation cannot remain merely procedural or symbolic; rather, it must become a substantive mechanism through which local communities can shape political and development decisions affecting their territories, livelihoods, identities, and futures.

The chapters gathered in this volume bring together invited experts, researchers, as well as practitioners from Bulgaria, Finland, Serbia, South Africa, and the United States of America. Coming from diverse institutional and professional backgrounds — including academia, governmental bodies, mining companies, civil society organisations, consultancies, and research institutes — the contributors examine participatory governance in mining regions from multiple perspectives and through a variety of methodological approaches. Together, they provide a broad comparative perspective on the challenges and possibilities of citizen engagement in resource–dependent regions across both developed and developing contexts.

The volume opens with a global perspective on participatory community engagement in mining, identifying systemic barriers to meaningful inclusion and proposing solutions grounded in procedural, distributive, and recognition justice. Subsequent chapters examine specific regional experiences and governance practices in diverse socio–political settings: the contested just transition process in Bulgaria's Stara Zagora coal region; innovative cultural planning approaches in the Finnish peat extraction region of Ilomantsi; and collaborative governance and partnership–building experiences in South African mining municipalities. The concluding chapter further deepens the discussion through empirical research conducted in Serbian mining regions, exploring the persistent gap between institutional participatory frameworks and citizens' actual perceptions, motivations, and experiences of participation.

A particular contribution of this edited volume lies in its interdisciplinary and comparative approach. Rather than treating participation solely as a formal planning requirement, the chapters collectively conceptualise it as a complex social, political, cultural, and institutional process shaped by power relations, trust, governance capacity, historical experiences, and local identities. The contributions, therefore, move beyond normative calls for participation and critically examine the conditions under which participatory processes become meaningful, legitimate, and transformative in extraction regions.

The analyses and recommendations presented throughout the book offer valuable insights for policymakers, planners, scholars, mining practitioners, civil society organisations, and local communities engaged in sustainability transitions and extractive governance. By highlighting both obstacles and innovative practices, this volume aims to support the development of more inclusive, transparent, and equitable models of governance capable of balancing resource development with social justice and long–term community wellbeing.

On this path toward fairer and more democratic governance of resource extraction, we extend our deepest gratitude to all contributors for generously sharing their knowledge, expertise, and experiences with us. Collaborating with them has been an enriching experience for us as editors, enabling deeper reflection on the diverse realities of participation in mining regions worldwide. We are equally grateful for their patience, professionalism, and commitment throughout the review and editing process.

We would also like to sincerely thank the peer reviewers whose engagement, dedication, and constructive feedback significantly enhanced the quality of this volume. Their careful and thoughtful reviews greatly contributed to strengthening the scholarly and practical value of the chapters presented here.

We hope that this book will encourage further research, dialogue, and policy innovation concerning citizen participation in mining and resource governance, while also contributing to broader debates on just transitions, democratic planning, and socio–environmental justice in extraction regions globally.

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