



MINING

BETWEEN HERITAGE
AND FUTURE:

ECONOMIC,
SOCIAL, AND
ENVIRONMENTAL
PERSPECTIVES

13-14. NOVEMBER 2025.
INSTITUTE OF ECONOMIC SCIENCES



MEĐUNARODNA KONFERENCIJA

**Rudarenje između nasleđa i budućnosti: ekonomske,
društvene i ekološke perspektive**

Institut ekonomskih nauka, Beograd,
13-14. novembar 2025

KNJIGA APSTRAKATA

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

**Mining Between Heritage and Future:
Economic, Social, and Environmental Perspectives**

Institute of Economic Sciences, Belgrade,
November 13-14, 2025

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

Publisher:

Institute of Economic Sciences

Zmaj Jovina 12, Belgrade, Serbia

Tel. (+381 11) 2622-357, 2623-055

Fax. (+381 11) 2181-471

www.ien.bg.ac.rs

office@ien.bg.ac.rs

For publisher:

Dr. Jovan Zubović, Director

Editors

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Circulation: 50

Image on the cover page: Designed by Milja Mladenović

ISBN 978-86-89465-82-2

Online-only publication

This Book of Abstracts is co-financed by the Ministry of Science, Technological Development and Innovation of Republic of Serbia.

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PROBLEM SVOJINE NAD ISCRPLJIVIM PRIRODNIM RESURSIMA I TEORIJA RENTE

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Postoje različiti oblici svojine nad iscrpljivim, odnosno neobnovljivim prirodnim resursima u koje prevashodno spadaju mineralna i rudna bogatstva. Svojinski režimi se kreću u rasponu od državne do privatne svojine i njihove uzajamne kombinacije. U poslednjih više od pedeset godina državni intervencionizam se razvijao u pravcu kontrole eksploatacije, razvoja naknada za zagađenje i ubiranja renti od ekonomskih efekata transfera prirodnog u proizvodni i finansijski kapital. U prethodne dve Jugoslavije, a samim tim i u Srbiji, eksploatacija prirodnih neobnovljivih resursa kretala se od modela dominacije inostranih rudarskih kompanija do modela podružtvljavanja ekonomskih efekata, koji su isključivali smisao i potrebu za uvođenjem rudnih renti. Današnja Srbija se u ovoj oblasti dominantno kreće ka režimu sličnom onom koji je vladao u Jugoslaviji nastaloj posle Prvog svetskog rata. Otvoreno je pitanje ekonomskih koristi i ekoloških šteta koje nastaju eksploatacionom neobnovljivih prirodnih resursa. Ekonomske koristi od resursa neophodno je posebno analitički razmatrati kroz uzajamni odnos prirodni kapital – rente. Dakle, prethodni aspekt, neophodno je odvojeno analizirati od ekonomskih tokova investiranja u razvoj, eksploataciju, ekstrakciju, preradu i tržišnu realizaciju proizvoda dobijenih od prirodnih neobnovljivih resursa. Takođe, rente na eksploataciju prirodnih neobnovljivih resursa, neophodno je posebno analizirati u odnosu na naknade za troškove zagađenja životne sredine. Ukoliko se ležišta neobnovljivih mineralnih rudnih bogatstava kao i ugljovodonika posmatraju kao stokovi aktive, onda bi kumulativna veličina renti dobijenih od tog resursa morala da zadovolji ključni uslov, a to je da je zbir svih renti jednak vrednosti navedene aktive. Postojanje rente vezano je za mogućnosti koje pruža naučno tehnološki napredak, koji otvara prostor da se ranije beskorisni i nedostupni resursi transferišu u, za ekonomsku aktivnost, korisne i upotrebljive proizvode.

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RUDARSTVO, JAVNI INTERES I NEOKOLONIJALNO POTČINJAVANJE SRBIJE

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Ministarstvo rudarstva i energetike Republike Srbije izdalo je oko 200 istražnih prava za različite mineralne resurse, na prostoru od oko 6% nacionalne teritorije, čime je obuhvaćeno 536.000 hektara. Istražna prava se odnose, dominantno, na rezerve zlata, litijuma, bora, srebra, bakra, nikla i antimona. Tražioci istražnih prava su, uglavnom, privatne rudarske kompanije, registrovane u Srbiji, kao firme-ćerke globalnih rudarskih korporacija, ili domaće kompanije. Istražni prostori u pojedinim regionima Srbije zahvataju od 50 do 150 km², i locirani su u stabilnim poljoprivrednim i šumskim predelima (dolina Jadra i Rađevina; Levač; Šumadija; Homolje). Procesi iskopavanja i prerade ruda zahtevaju primenu složenih hemijsko-tehnoloških procesa, sa upotrebom velikih količina agresivnih i veoma toksičnih materija (sumporna, fosforna i hlorovodonična kiselina, natrijum-cijanid), koje nose veliki rizik od zagađenja zemljišta, voda, vazduha, ugrožavanja živog sveta i pogoršavanja pokazatelja javnog zdravlja lokalnog stanovništva. Zanemaruje se neiskorišćen potencijal srpske poljoprivrede, koji, pored materijalne koristi, može da donese potpunu sigurnost u proizvodnji kvalitetne hrane, prosperitet seoskih sredina i opšti rast svih pokazatelja ekonomskog razvoja. Neophodno je strateško, strukturno preispitivanje privrednog modela Srbije u cilju objektivne procene dostignutih rezultata i definisanje ciljeva ekonomskog suvereniteta, na bazi održivosti i punog poštovanja javnog interesa.

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BEFORE THE FIRST SHOVEL: WHAT SERBIA CAN LEARN FROM GLOBAL MINING FAILURES

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As Serbia faces immense pressure to accept large-scale lithium extraction without transparent documentation, proper environmental assessments, or democratic consensus, the local population is increasingly burdened with the risks of decisions made elsewhere. These pressures are often wrapped in the illusion of exceptionalism, promises that this time mining can be green, efficient, and beneficial for local development. However, a closer look at global mining frontiers suggests that such assurances are part of a broader, systemic pattern that transcends geography. This presentation examines how planetary extractive systems adapt to contemporary challenges through three interconnected trends: onshoring of mining to the Global North, the rise of the so-called Fourth Machine Age and quantum leaps in automation, and the proliferation of public-private partnership (PPP) agreements that structurally favor foreign capital.

Through a comparative analysis of lithium extraction in Chile's Atacama Desert, Argentina's salt flats, and Nevada's Thacker Pass, I trace how onshoring (Riofrancos) does not disrupt the global extractivist logic. It merely shifts the location while maintaining asymmetrical power relations and social displacements. These patterns are amplified by the increasing robotization and logistical acceleration (Arboleda) observed in cobalt and copper mines in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zambia, where automation intensifies labor fragmentation and undermines local bargaining power, leaving workers precarious and communities destabilized.

Additionally, PPP mining contracts in Peru and Ecuador reveal how formal legal frameworks entrench the dominance of foreign investors while local populations face displacement, the breakdown of social cohesion, restricted democratic participation, and long-term ecological degradation. These consequences are not incidental but structural. Extractivism globally reproduces the same social fractures under the language of development.

Serbia's mining trajectory is not an isolated dilemma but part of a planetary system designed to prioritize supply chain security and capital flows over local agency and well-being. The key lesson is not to mine better but to demand less, extract less, and reimagine development beyond the logic of resource dependence.

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SPEAKING FOR THE SILENCED: EPISTEMIC VIOLENCE AND GREEN COLONIALISM IN SERBIA'S LITHIUM SACRIFICE ZONE

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1. Context, relevance and motivation

The "green transition" creates new extractive frontiers that reproduce global power asymmetries. Serbia's Jadar lithium project exemplifies how peripheral regions become raw material suppliers for core economies' decarbonization, while local subaltern voices are systematically silenced. Applying Spivak's question "Can the subaltern speak?" reveals strategies of epistemic violence that maintain hegemonic power structures in supposedly green development. The case demonstrates how extractivist projects create sacrifice zones (Martinez-Alier, 2012) and facilitate unequal ecological exchange (Hickel et al., 2022) through value chains that extract resources from peripheries while concentrating benefits in core economies.

2. Possible Research questions

1. How does the Jadar project within global value chains reinforce dependencies between core and peripheral economies?
2. What specific strategies of epistemic violence silence subaltern voices in "green transition" discourse? How do transnational institutions maintain hegemony by controlling knowledge production?
3. (Eventually this one as well) What counter-hegemonic strategies might contribute to alternative visions aligned with degrowth?

This paper transcends the nation-state-centered analysis, by examining how global power networks and transnational resource flows fundamentally shape local environmental conflicts. It extends Frame's (2023) integration of degrowth and world-systems theory through empirical study of how "green" projects reproduce core-periphery dynamics within Europe. The research identifies mechanisms of epistemic violence as they emerge from supposedly democratic contexts, contributing to Lang's

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(2024) work on degrowth and global asymmetries by revealing similar patterns of marginalization in European peripheries as in the Global South.

Hypotheses or main arguments

1. "Green extractivism" reproduces unjust global interdependence by externalizing environmental costs while concentrating economic benefits elsewhere.
2. Hegemonic powers employ specific epistemic violence strategies: selective distribution of voice, binary oppositions between "expert" and "local" knowledge, geopolitical colonization of context, and discursive inversion portraying corporations as victims.
3. The lithium value chain represents unequal ecological exchange with disproportionate environmental burdens in Serbia while benefits flow to Western Europe.
4. Opposition articulates counter-hegemonic visions of global interdependence aligned with degrowth principles.
5. "Ecological debt" helps explain how historical extraction patterns are reproduced through "green" dependencies.

Conceptual/theoretical framework

This research integrates world-systems theory's core-periphery analysis with political ecology approaches to unequal ecological exchange and environmental justice. It employs Spivak's concept of epistemic violence to identify specific silencing strategies while drawing on Latour's (2018) notion of interdependence to examine how global connections can either reinforce or challenge hegemonic power relations.

RELENTLESS POLITICS, SACRIFICE ZONES AND THE JADAR MINING PROJECT BETWEEN SERBIA AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

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Since May 2025, lithium extraction in Serbia's Jadar valley is part of the European Union's selected strategic projects within the Union's "Critical Raw Materials Act." Lithium mining in Jadar has been the subject of extended public debate and protests in Serbia, with the government leading a swaying politics between accommodating a local wish of abandoning the project and a agreeing to international investigations and engagement in developing an externally funded and governed extraction project. Yet, under cover of European Union support and repeated calls to ensure a European supply of critical raw materials, Serbia is now on the way to allowing the opening of a mining project.

Inspired by the concept of "sacrifice zone" (de Souza 2020; Juskus 2023), this paper aims to explore how European Union and European public discourses surrounding the idea of "critical raw materials" serve to justify the planned extraction project in Serbia. How do European union spokespersons balance the consideration of environmental protection with the supposed need for a fixed amount of "critical raw materials"? The paper argues that both European and Serbian policy makers pursue a relentless politics characterized by a capacity to systematically disregard or wait out any kinds of protests or opposition to their strategic goals. This is done, the paper suggests, by compartmentalizing different ideological and political considerations, a practice that allows policy makers to discursively foreground certain privileged considerations, such as the supply of "critical raw materials", and thereby marginalizing other related considerations, such as local environment or more long-term economic and ecological sustainability.

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REFUSAL OF LITHIUM MINING IN SERBIA: EXPLORING POST- GREEN EXTRACTIVISM

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This article is concerned with the refusal of what was set to become Europe's biggest lithium mine – an element widely understood as crucial for the “green” transition. The Jadar Project in Serbia, led by the mining corporation Rio Tinto, has been met with widespread resistance, and tens of thousands of people have protested over the years. Post-extractivism presents a well-established challenge to coloniality, modernity, development and exploitation of resources, particularly from the Indigenous and peasant contexts in Latin America. Yet accounting for the rapid expansion of green extractivism towards Europe and the Global North, this article theorises post-green extractivism from rural Serbia. Through ethnographic investigation bordering research and activism, this article brings together three empirical examples of refusal's emancipatory and affirmative potential. It is through the refusal of the mono-green futures of growth and extractivism that I explore post-green extractivism as already enacted by opening alternative visions.

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DYNAMIC MODELING FOR THE OPTIMAL UTILIZATION OF NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCES: A CASE STUDY OF LITHIUM

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This paper introduces a system dynamic analysis approach for modelling optimal use of non-renewable resources for potential application to lithium extraction in Serbia's Jadar Valley. The approach is using a modified Ruth-Hannon model for non-renewable resource use. The model enables a deeper understanding of the economic, ecological, and social implications of non-renewable resource mining by simulating interactions among extraction rates, marginal costs, scarcity rents, environmental impacts, and local community resistance.

The first objective of the paper is to illustrate a key strength of dynamic modeling in its ability to simulate feedback loops and scenario evolution over time—offering a significant advantage over static cost-benefit approaches. In the case study, the original Ruth-Hannon framework is adapted to the Serbian context, incorporating variables such as regulatory shifts, global lithium market fluctuations, and the intensity of local resistance.

The second objective of the paper is to examine three core scenarios: (1) Business-as-usual – unregulated extraction; (2) Accelerated extraction – prioritizing short-term economic gain; and (3) Sustainable pathway – balancing economic development with ecological preservation and social equity.

Sensitivity analysis will identify key parameters that influence sustainability and benefit distribution among stakeholders. The model highlights leverage points where targeted policy interventions can shift extraction toward more sustainable outcomes.

The paper will show some preliminary answers to the following research questions: (a) Long-term sustainability of lithium extraction depends on balancing short-term economic returns with long-term ecological and social costs. The model is used to reveal decision points where extractives trajectories can transition toward more sustainable, community-centered alternatives; (b) Effective management of non-renewable resources requires attention to temporal dynamics and stakeholder interactions. The model is used to identify leverage points where interventions can

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Key-note Lecture

support long-term environmental stewardship and local wellbeing; and (c) The investigation should offer actionable insights for policymakers aiming to align critical mineral extraction with Serbia's broader goals of sustainable development and environmental protection.

FENOMEN OSNIVANJA RUDNIKA I RUDARSKIH NASELJA - URBANIZACIJA RURALNOG PROSTORA (XII-XVII VEK)

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Fenomen osnivanja rudarskih naselja, kao i samih rudnika, predstavlja neistraženu teritoriju, koja do sada nije ispraćena niti komparativno, niti u dugom vremenskom toku, što zapravo predstavlja osnovu za praćenje jednog istorijskog procesa, koji u datom slučaju najpre odlikuje urbanizacija ruralnog prostora, kako bi se stvorili neophodni uslovi za rad i život rudara i njihove konzumentske potrebe, te se paralelno sa uspostavljanjem istih, naseljavaju i zanatlije, a samo naselje i rudnik se obezbeđuju i sa pratećom infrastrukturom (građevine, radnje mešovite robe, trg/pijaca). Istovremeno, u svakom od tih ekonomskih celina, koje čine rudnik i naselje, odvijala se srednjovekovna protoindustrijalizacija, a sami rudnici ili njihovi delovi od samog osnivanja davani su u najam. U pojedinim, značajnim naseobinama, u slučaju da postaju i ekonomski centri, maltene paralelno se osnivaju i kovnice. Stoga je ovo predavanje upravo posvećeno datim pitanjima, a sam fenomen biće ispraćen komparativno na teritoriji srednjovekovne Evrope i Osmanskog carstva, sa posebnim osvrtom na teritoriju Srbije u periodu od XII-XVII veka. Dodatno, pažnja će biti posvećena i kulturnom transferu u okviru rudarstva, koji između ostalog podrazumeva kako transplantaciju novih tehnologija i znanja, tako i osnove zakonodavstva, koje upravo možemo da primetimo i u samom zasnivanju rudnika i pratećih naselja.

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OKNARI RUDARSKE UPRAVE MAJDANPEK (1848–1859): SOCIOLOŠKO-EKONOMSKI ASPEKT

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State Archives of Serbia

Rad je fokusiran na prikazivanje života i uslova rada rudara u prvom srpskom rudniku koji je formiran po nemačkim standardima – Rudarskoj upravi Majdanpek. Kneževina Srbija je uvidela i smatrala da će zapostavljena privredna grana – rudarstvo omogućiti razvoj industrijalizacije i pružiti direktnu ekonomsku dobit. Državne vlasti su zbog nedostatka školovanog, stručnog kadra morale da otvore vrata stranim inženjerima, geolozima, čak i rudarskim radnicima koji su najčešće bili austrougarskog i saksonskog porekla. Istraživanje je bazirano na neobjavljenoj arhivskoj građi koja nam je omogućila da steknemo uvid u radne obaveze, visinu plate, ishranu, najčešća oboljenja, zdravstvenu i socijalnu zaštitu, kao i društveni život rudara Rudarske uprave Majdanpek. Rad prikazuje da su rudnici uz pomoć svoje infrastrukture postali glavni industrijski, geostrateški, privredni, medicinski i društveni centri Kneževine Srbije. Osnivanje Rudarske uprave u Majdanpeku donelo je velike ekonomske pogodnosti za Okrug, ali isto tako i mogućnost zdravstvene nege za stanovništvo naseljeno u neposrednoj blizini rudokopa Majdanpek. Administrativna organizacija Rudarske uprave Majdanpek poslužila je kao model za osnivanje drugih rudarskih uprava u Kneževini Srbiji i postavila temelj za dalji razvoj srpskog rudarstva.

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MINING, URBAN SPACE AND SOCIAL IDENTITIES: THE TREPČA MINES AS A CATALYST FOR SOCIO-SPATIAL DIFFERENTIATION IN THE MITROVICA AREA

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Mining has been an important motor for urban development throughout global history. This is particularly the case for communist Eastern Europe, where extractive industrialisation determined urbanisation patterns, including the very location of cities as well as regional and intra-urban differentiation. Building and expanding on Gentile and Sjöberg's model of landscapes of priority (*Europe-Asia Studies* 58/6, 2006), this contribution analyses the role of mining in the socio-spatial development of the Mitrovica area in Kosovo. The paper focuses on the city itself as well as the peri-urban mining settlements of Zvečan, Prvi Tunel and Stari Trg. The presentation consists of three parts. It starts by sketching a periodisation of urban development from the 1930s and 1980s with a particular focus on the emerging patterns of socio-spatial differentiation. The paper then demonstrates that for each of the distinguished periods of urban development, the lead and zinc mines of Trepča played a crucial yet varying role. The specificities of the urban landscape in the Mitrovica region thus correlate with the rhythms of mining in the area. In a third step, the paper presents some thoughts on the social relations to urban space during the 1970s and 80s, arguing that the mining-driven urban landscape had a strong impact on social polarisation in the area. The paper is based on research at the Mitrovica municipal archives, a close reading of the Trepča factory journal and urban observations.

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NO COUNTRY FOR OLD MINES: COMMUNITY RESPONSES TO THE END OF COAL MINING IN BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

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This paper examines how traditional coal communities in Bosnia, once the backbone of socialist era industry, are reacting to the rapid decline of coal mining under today’s “green transition.” Drawing on fieldwork in Breza (a town facing mine closures), I treat local responses as the outcome of collective agency interacting with broader economic and political constraints. By mapping out how residents mobilize—whether through protest and rejection, embracing the change, or remaining passive—I show how these strategies both challenge and reinforce existing inequalities in postsocialist extractive regions (following Dietz/Engels 2020, building on Ivanović et al. 2023). My analysis builds on a growing body of literature that links extractivism with contentious politics (Conde/Le Billon 2017; Conde 2017), particularly in contexts marked by uneven development and historical dependency (Dietz/Engels 2017; Sydd et al. 2023).

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SENJSKI RUDNIK I AFERA PRVE SRPSKE BANKE

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Namesnički režim maloletnom Milanu Obrenoviću (1869-1873) je dominirao srpskom političkom scenom, i zaslužan je za stvaranje Ustava iz 1869. godine. Namesnik Jovan Ristić je postao vođa liberala i najuticajniji srpski političar. Veliku formalnu i neformalnu moć imali su članovi dve moćne porodice, Hadžitomići i Babadudići. 1873. godine, opozicija protiv namesničkog režima jača i pojavljuju se glasine o velikim zloupotrebama, za koje su odgovornost nosili članovi Ristićeve vlade. Afere su bile Belimarkovićeva afeta (velika vojna afeta) i manje zapažena afeta Prve srpske banke.

Predsednik upravnog odbora Prve srpske banke, osumnjičene za neurednosti i zloupotrebe, bio je Živko Karabiberović, jedan od najmoćnijih Babadudića. Karabiberović je bio osumnjičen i zbog Senjskog rudnika. Ministar finansija u namesničkoj vladi, Panta Jovanović je tužen u skupštini za davanje senjskog rudnika ispod ruke svom rođaku, Živku Karabiberoviću.

Cilj rada je da istraži nepravilnosti i zloupotrebe vezane za Senjski rudnik i Prvu srpsku banku. To je važan doprinos istraživanju korupcija i zloupotreba u devetnaestovekovnoj Srbiji, budući da su ove afere slabije istražene od železničke afere i Belimarkovićeve afere. 1873. godina je takođe značajna za sukobe najjačih grupa na srpskoj političkoj sceni. Konzervativci su ojačali i njihov predstavnik Jovan Marinović je postao predsednik vlade nakon Ristićevog pada. Babadudići i Hadžitomići, koji su ranije dobro sarađivali, sukobili su se tokom Belimarkovićeve afere. Afere koje će istražiti rad mogu pokazati neke epizode o saradnji i konfliktima između najmoćnijih ljudi u Kneževini Srbiji 1870-ih godina.

Istraživanje će obuhvatiti i arhivski materijal iz Državnog Arhiva Srbije, i objavljene izvore poput pamfleta koje su Ristić i konzervativci pisali jedni protiv drugih, *Vlada Namesništva sa svojim ograncima i Kabinet Marinovića*, i *Srpski konzervativci. Odbrana i kritika*.

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BRITANSKI KAPITAL U RUDARSTVU KRALJEVINE JUGOSLAVIJE. MODERNIZACIJA I EKONOMSKA ZAVISNOST

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Britanski kapital u rudarstvu Srbije ima tradiciju još od 19. veka. Međutim, većina ovih rudarskih preduzeća u Beogradu bila je osnovana, ili preuzeta od strane britanskog kapitala tokom četvrtdecenije 20. veka, kada je eskalirao sukob oko strateških sirovina između Velike Britanije i Trećeg Rajha. Britanske kompanije su tada držale nalazišta olova i cinka, hroma, zlata i nafte. Oko izvora nafte vodila se naročito žestoka borba između nemačkih i anglo-američkih grupa.

U ovu kapitalno-intenzivnu granu industrije strani kapital je dolazio u najotvorenijem obliku. Britanski kapital je u Jugoslaviji činio skoro polovinu ukupnog stranog kapitala u ovoj oblasti. Pored toga, najveći deo ukupnog britanskog kapitala uloženog u Jugoslaviji bio je upravo u rudarstvu i topioničarstvu. Najveći izvoznik kapitala bio je „Selection Trust Co.“ iz Londona. Samo u Jugoslaviji ovaj koncern je imao četiri društva (Trepča, Zletovo, Novo Brdo i Kopaonik). Glavnica ovih društava bila je uglavnom plasirana kod banaka sa britanskim kapitalom.

Rad britanskih rudnika u Jugoslaviji 1930-ih godina jasno odražava način modernizacije i industrijalizacije zemlje u tom periodu, koji je podsticao strukturnu ekonomsku zavisnost, ograničavao razvoj na primarnu proizvodnju, i svodio ekonomsku politiku zemlje na izvoz sirovina. Mreža domaćih stručnjaka u ovim britanskim preduzećima ukazuje na veliko prisustvo klijentelističkih mreža. Prateći njihove aktivnosti u privredi i politici može se doći do značajnih zaključaka o strukturi jugoslovenske privrede u kojoj je rentijerstvo bilo najpopularniji vid investicija.

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EKSPLOATACIJA I PRERADA NAFTE U JUGOSLAVIJI: IZMEĐU MODERNIZACIJE I UVOZNE ZAVISNOSTI (1965-1979)

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Društveno-ekonomski razvoj Jugoslavije u posleratnom periodu omogućio je da ona dostigne nivo srednje industrijalizovane države. Dinamičan ekonomski razvoj zahtevao je i odgovarajući stepen proizvodnje i potrošnje energije. U periodu od druge polovine 1960-ih godina u Jugoslaviji se uočava značajan rast potrošnje nafte i naftnih derivata uslovljen razvojem transporta, turizma, mehanizacijom i tehnološkom modernizacijom proizvodnje. U isti mah primetno je i opadanje stope rasta domaće proizvodnje nafte, ali sa druge strane i rast rafinerijskih kapaciteta, a samim tim i rast uvoza sirove nafte. Ovakva situacija dovela je do porasta zavisnosti jugoslovenske privrede od uvoza nafte, a činjenica da Jugoslavija raspolaže malim rezervama kvalitetnih energenata nije imala nikakav uticaj na energetske potrošnju. Trend rasta uvoza tečnih goriva primetan je kroz čitav period 1970-ih godina, dok jugoslovensko rukovodstvo nije uspevalo niti da podstakne domaću proizvodnju, niti da ograniči uvoz. Ovakav razvoj događaja doveo je do toga da Jugoslavija u godini druge energetske krize, 1979. godine, troši 17 miliona tona nafte, te da udeo nafte u ukupnoj energetskej potrošnji dostigne 45%, dok je oko 2/3 utrošene nafte poreklom iz uvoza. Cilj našeg istraživanja je da u periodu od 1965. do 1979. godine, sagledamo razvoj dve ključne grane jugoslovenske nafte privrede, proizvodnju i preradu nafte, te da analiziramo stvaranje disproporcije između kapaciteta za eksploataciju i kapaciteta za preradu nafte, koji su u velikoj meri doprineli stvaranju zavisnosti jugoslovenske privrede od uvoza nafte. Kroz analizu modernizacijskih procesa sa jedne i razvoja zavisnosti, sa druge strane, moguće je sagledati i niz ključnih pojava koje su tokom 1970-ih godina obeležili jugoslovensku privredu, poput: hroničnog deficita platnog bilansa usled velikih uvoznih potreba, nepromišljene investicione politike i stvaranja predimenzioniranih prerađivačkih kapaciteta, a samim tim i stvaranja sve većeg jaza između baznih i prerađivačkih industrija. Upravo ovi procesi, koji su se odvijali tokom 1970-ih godina, daće veliki doprinos izbijanju krize spoljnog duga u prvoj polovini 1980-ih godina.

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GO STRAIGHT, ATOM! URANIUM AS A STRATEGIC RAW MATERIAL IN SOCIALIST YUGOSLAVIA

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Even before the official launch of the U.S. Manhattan Project in 1942, uranium had emerged as a strategic raw material, primarily due to its potential application in nuclear weapons development. By the late 1950s, its significance expanded further with the rise of civil nuclear power, envisioned as an inexhaustible energy source that would be, as the slogan went, “too cheap to meter.” This global “uranium frenzy” triggered a worldwide competition among both nuclear powers and aspiring nations to locate, secure, and control all potentially valuable uranium deposits.

Yugoslavia entered this race in 1948, marking the beginning of its own ambitious nuclear program. The early phase of this endeavor was characterized by an urgent effort to identify domestic uranium resources, driven largely by the program’s initial military orientation. The development of an atomic bomb remained its primary objective until the mid-1960s, even though various civilian uses, including construction of nuclear power plants, were simultaneously explored. However, Yugoslavia’s starting position was extremely modest. The country lacked qualified experts, comprehensive geological maps, and technological experience. In response, a nationwide geological survey was launched, encompassing everything from misidentified “promising” ores and radioactive coal deposits to weak uranium-bearing veins scattered across the country. Despite these challenges, by the early 1960s Yugoslavia succeeded in establishing at least one operational uranium mine in Kalna (Serbia), supported by domestically developed technologies for ore extraction, refinement, and the production of uranium metal.

This presentation explores how Yugoslav decision-makers conceptualized and implemented uranium mining and production as a high-priority strategic project. It examines both the successes and the shortcomings of these efforts, as well as the political and technical obstacles they faced along the way. Finally, it reflects on how these historical experiences might inform contemporary debates in Serbia regarding the governance, risks, and strategic significance of future strategic mining projects.

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THE VIOLENT WORK OF MINING

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It is often assumed that violence is an intrinsic aspect of »mining culture« and is closely linked to miners' identity traits (gender, race) and interpersonal relations (Abrahamsson and Johansson 2020; Breckenridge 1998; Charman 2018; Cuvelier 2014; Miller Klubock 1996). Based on the preliminary ethnographic and archival research in several locations in former Yugoslavia, this paper aims to complicate the relationship between mining and violence and to challenge this idea of centrality of relational aspects of violence in the context of mining and instead emphasize its structural and long-durée nature. I argue that violence is historically constitutive of mining as a profession and relevant to miners' personal and social lives beyond the realms of occupational health risks and illnesses. Focusing on the longue-durée practices of collective memory making in mining communities across former Yugoslavia, the paper elucidates the ways in which violence inherent to mining (and manifest as a history of mining accidents and disasters, environmental and health damage) is not only inscribed in the social contract, but is also generative of social life in mining communities and constitutive of labour, family, and community relations.

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ECOCULTURAL IMPACT OF MINING IN EASTERN SERBIA: THE FIRST AND SECOND VLACH UPRISING

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Eastern Serbia has been known for its rich copper, gold, silver, iron, and lead deposits since antiquity, but the development of mining in Serbia in the true sense of the word can be traced back to the mid-19th century. In the modern period, mining has had a positive impact on the economy, but in many cases a devastating impact on the environment, biodiversity, as well as on the linguistic and cultural diversity of the region. One of the minorities most affected by mining in Eastern Serbia were the Vlachs.

In this paper I focus on the region of Bor and the two ecological uprisings almost a century apart: *Vlaška buna* (“the Vlach uprising”, 1935), which I call “the first Vlach uprising”, and *Kriveljksa blokada* (“the blockade of Krivelj”, 2024), which I call “the second Vlach uprising”. Regarding *Vlaška buna*, the triggers were the destructive effects of mining in Bor on the environment. The villagers, together with miners, protested against the loss of their crops and the pollution of their soil by heavy metals from mining. The works of the mining company were halted for one month, and the villagers made history, since this is considered the first environmental uprising in Europe. As for *Kriveljksa blokada*, the triggers were again the lack of regulations regarding the environmental impact of mining activities in Krivelj, in the vicinity of Bor, the exposure of locals to underground water pollution, dust, and noise, as well as the unkept promises of the authorities to relocate the village as a whole. *Kriveljksa blokada* lasted for 78 days and, unlike *Vlaška buna*, was mainly organized by women. Although neither of the two uprisings had an exclusively ethnic character, but encompassed and affected Serbs and Vlachs alike, I focus on their devastating ecocultural impact on the Vlach minority. The paper is based on archival research, interviews and participant observation.

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SISTEM TE LAŽE: GRASSROOTS MEMORY AND THE HERITAGE OF PROTEST IN SERBIA'S LITHIUM CONFLICT

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The proposed paper explores how civil society in Serbia has mobilized against the planned lithium extraction in the Jadar Valley, with particular attention to the Rio Tinto project. Framed by EU green energy ambitions and German industrial demand, the project has triggered one of the largest environmental protest movements in post-Milošević Serbia due to its failure of securing broad public legitimacy (SLO). Instead, it catalyzed one of the most sustained environmental protest movements in the region, with civil society groups reframing lithium mining not only as an ecological threat but also as an assault on democratic participation and local sovereignty.

Drawing on qualitative evidence and discourse analysis, the paper examines how local communities, environmental activists, and cultural heritage advocates conceptualize lithium mining as a form of green colonialism, and how protest practices transform from environmental activism into a broader struggle for sovereignty, environmental justice, and the right to shape local futures. This paper specifically engages with how the Serbian civil society has transformed resistance into a form of heritage-making, connecting ecological concerns with cultural narratives of place, history, and identity. Protest slogans such as “Nećeš kopati” (“You shall not mine”) or “Sistem te laže” (“The system is lying to you”) highlight the erosion of trust between communities, the state, and transnational capital. This trust deficit is further exacerbated by the lack of transparent consultations, perceived procedural injustices, and the absence of inclusive decision-making processes. These dynamics reflect broader tensions in post-socialist societies, where extractive megaprojects often collide with historically rooted skepticism towards political elites and foreign investors.

Such slogans have become part of a collective lexicon that links environmental threats with past struggles against authoritarianism and foreign exploitation. Moreover, this paper will contextualize how digital tools like Google Maps and social media have been used to document endangered landscapes and mobilize public awareness, while simultaneously reinforcing localized notions of environmental and cultural heritage, re-claiming both physical and symbolic space.

The analysis positions Serbia's lithium resistance not only within environmental and economic debates but also within cultural memory politics in a post-Yugoslav context. The proposed contribution aims to enrich discussions on how extractivist conflicts can

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Panel 5: Dig Where It Hurts: Mining, Violence, and the Legacy of Struggle

lead to the emergence of grassroots heritage movements and how green transitions risk reproducing imperial hierarchies unless grounded in participatory justice. Additionally, the paper argues that resistance is not merely a rejection of extraction but a call for participatory justice and democratic governance in defining sustainable development. It offers a critical lens on how SLO is constructed, contested, and ultimately reimagined from below.

CIP - Каталогизација у публикацији
Народна библиотека Србије, Београд

622:33(048)(0.034.2)
622:316(048)(0.034.2)
502.21(048)(0.034.2)
502.131.1(048)(0.034.2)

**МЕЂУНАРОДНА конференција Рударење између наслеђа и
будућности: економске, друштвене и еколошке перспективе (2025;
Београд)**

Knjiga apstrakata [Elektronski izvor] / Međunarodna konferencija Rudarenje između nasleđa i budućnosti: ekonomske, društvene i ekološke perspektive, Beograd, 13-14. novembar 2025 = Book of abstracts / International conference Mining between heritage and future: economic, social, and environmental perspectives, Belgrade, November 13-14, 2025; [editors Marko Miljković, Vladimir Andrić, Emilija Cvetković]. - Belgrade: Institute of economic sciences, 2025 (Belgrade: Institute of economic sciences). - 1 elektronski optički disk (CD-ROM);
12cm

Tiraž 50.

ISBN 978-86-89465-82-2

1. Миљковић, Марко, 1980- [urednik]

а) Рударство -- Друштвено-економски аспект -- Апстракти

б) Природни ресурси -- Коришћење -- Одрживи развој -- Апстракти

COBISS.SR-ID 181185033

Institute of Economic Sciences

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ISBN 978-86-89465-82-2

Online-only publication