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Re-mining Punta Corna. A Laboratory on the Local Impacts of the Critical Raw Material Act in the Alpine Region

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PLANNING AS A TRANSFORMATIVE ACTION IN AN AGE OF PLANETARY CRISIS



BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

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The need to expand the idea of justice from the individual human subject to the non-human and the planetary is increasingly recognized today, thanks to a growing body of theory nurtured by Indigenous, decolonial, and feminist posthuman philosophies (Winter, 2022). The emerging field of Multispecies Justice recognizes the interconnectedness of human and other-than-human oppression, seeking to build fairer interspecies relationships (Celermajer et al., 2021). Here, the role of urban design and planning is compelling, as the design of space is part of a biopolitical action that has an inherent responsibility to make space (or not) (Secchi, 2015) for the living to thrive. As Metzeger notes (2023), even in the "incompossibility" of the perfect coexistence for all beings simultaneously in any space, planning can certainly act on reducing the degree of violence and segregation that its processes produce.

In reasoning about socio-ecological spatial justice, I argue that a multispecies justice framework can help unveil blind or overlooked injustices spots. Indeed, the landing of this sensibility into urban design practice questions us about its spatial repercussions. Where do the social and ecological demands create friction when we consider the interests of all the species and other-than-human actors involved, and not just human well-being?

Drawing on interviews and fieldwork in Brussels with people involved in projects using a more-than-human approach (students, engaged citizens, urban practitioners, university researchers, administration workers, etc.) I propose a critical reflection on the places of multispecies spatial injustice, helped by a radical ecological standpoint that seeks nothing less than the emancipation of the living (Ouassak, 2024). Alongside spaces where transspecies socio-ecological injustices are more evident (i.e. contested undeveloped abandoned land in the compact city), the research underpins how the major sites of violence were deliberately planned out-of-sight/out-of-town and still are often forgotten in the major discourse about city ecological transition, where the Brussels capital region is depicted as an island forgotten of its territory.

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Keywords:

multispecies justice, radical ecologies, more-than-human cities

SS_02 DISCUSSING SPATIAL JUSTICE FROM/TOWARDS A SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE / 1911

Re-mining Punta Corna. A Laboratory on the Local Impacts of the Critical Raw Material Act in the Alpine Region

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The transition to a clean energy economy necessitates securing critical minerals—such

as nickel, copper, and cobalt—essential for advanced technologies and low-carbon solutions. The European Critical Raw Materials Act (2023) seeks to enhance the EU's self-sufficiency by mandating domestic sourcing of mined, processed, and recycled materials, while addressing the geopolitical challenges of dependence on external suppliers. This proposal explores the environmental and socio-economic implications of renewed extractive activities in Europe, focusing on the Alpine landscapes, particularly investigating Italy, which possesses 16 of the 34 critical raw materials identified in the Act but lacks active metal mining since the 1970s.
Our investigation centers on the proposed strategy by the Italian government to revitalize old and open new mines, particularly in the Alpine regions, alongside the need for substantial technological investments. Among the significant sites is Punta Corna, once Europe's largest cobalt mine, now a focal point for examining the clash between extractivist development and sustainable local economies rooted in tourism. Through a cartographic analysis, we analyze the competing narratives surrounding these mining initiatives, characterized by a traditional extractivist model and the "enrichment economy" (Boltanski & Esquerre, 2019) which emphasizes ultra protective territorial development strategies as territorial patrimonialization. This contrast raises critical questions about the sustainability of mining projects and their alignment with the values of local communities experiencing peripheralization and depopulation.
Our findings shed light on the intricate conflicts arising from rare earth extraction, illustrating the tension between economic aspirations and environmental integrity but also across different development paradigms. By framing Punta Corna as a case study, exploring its extractivist dynamics as advantaged laboratory for understanding the fears and hopes of local communities linked to the European Critical Raw Materials Act projects, we aim to ultimately contributing to broader discussions on sustainable resource governance and the socio-political complexities of extractive economies.

Keywords:

re-mining, alpine region, territorial patrimonialization, extractivism, depopulation

References:

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SS_02 DISCUSSING SPATIAL JUSTICE FROM/TOWARDS A SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE / 1912

Ecopublica: a tool for socio-ecological emancipation

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The paper proposes to explore the issue of spatial justice through the concept of the eco-public network, conceived as the intersection of spaces that integrate ecological and social values.
North-East Italy, the object of this analysis, is characterised by a recurrent tendency towards disconnection, with a growth model that has produced fragmentation and territorial, economic and environmental fragility. However, the wide meshes of this territory suggest new opportunities for enhancement, focusing on open space as a de-polarised ecological framework of variable intensity, which is activated and reorganised on the basis of multiple factors and conditions. This network involves on the one hand physical and spatial elements (urban and rural open spaces, open porosities in the urbanised area, slow mobility routes, collective infrastructures, community spaces), and on the other hand expectations and imaginaries that over time have defined ecological roles and values in relation to uses and practices.
Observing the eco-public network, with its uneven and plural movements, allows us to