
A Relational Approach to Understanding the 2024-25 Serbian Protests in the Context of the Contradictions of Serbian European Integration

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Abstract:

This paper examines the 2024-25 Serbian protests against lithium mining in the Jadar Valley through the lens of ecological footprint assessment and green extractivism. Focusing on the proposed Rio Tinto project, the analysis highlights the profound implications for rural planning, where large-scale mineral extraction threatens to irrevocably transform agrarian landscapes and livelihoods. The project underscores critical planning failures, as it risks displacing rural communities, contaminating soil and water resources, and undermining long-term agricultural viability and ecological security. It critiques the European Union's contradictory role in promoting a green transition while enabling extractive practices that export immense ecological footprints to Serbia's rural periphery. Adopting a processual relational approach, the study frames the conflict as a fundamental challenge to sustainable rural planning, exposing the tension between externally driven resource exploitation and the principles of local ecological stewardship and just territorial development. The protests thus emerge as a defense against the unsustainable ecological footprint of "green extractivism," advocating for planning models that prioritize environmental justice, participatory land-use governance, and the preservation of rural socio-ecological systems over predatory resource extraction. This research contributes to discussions on integrating comprehensive ecological burden assessments and community rights into the core of rural and regional planning in resource-rich regions.