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## Socio-spatial dynamics of conflicts over mining

### The case of the „La Colosa“ Gold Mine, Colombia

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Berlin, 01 December 2016

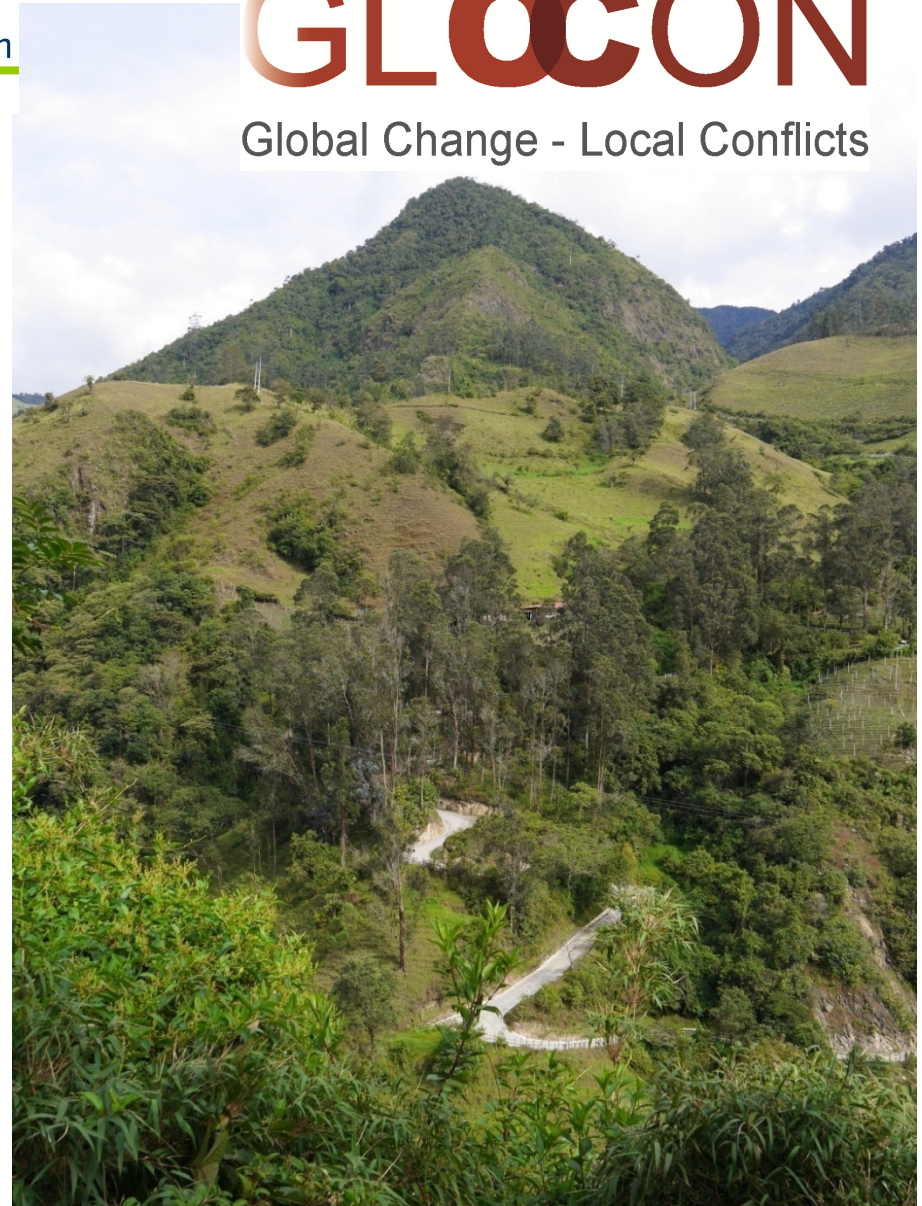


Foto: Hanna Thiesing

[www.land-conflicts.net](http://www.land-conflicts.net)

# Questions

## Questions:

1. How do social actors contest the enforcement of industrial mining projects?
2. With what political effects?
3. How does space, especially scale matter?

## Case:

- La Colosa, Colombia; Field work 2015/16

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# Structure

1. Theoretical reflections: conflicts, space, scale
2. Mining in Colombia: regulations and socio-spatial power relations
3. The Colosa conflict: project, actors, issues and strategies
4. Conclusion

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# Theoretical starting points

## Conflicts over mining

- Conflicts = social actions, structured by power and interests; based on interaction
- not space or spatial forms, but social actors, act (Mayer 2008)
- Space is socially produced and productive
- Social action is embedded in particular multidimensional spatial forms, e.g. scalar configurations of power

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# Theoretical starting points

## Scale

- „socio-spatial processes that regulate and organize social power relations“ (Swyngedouw 2004, 132)
- „spatio-institutional condensations of power relations“ (Wissen 2009, 886)
- socially produced, productive, contested
- not hierarchical, but relational

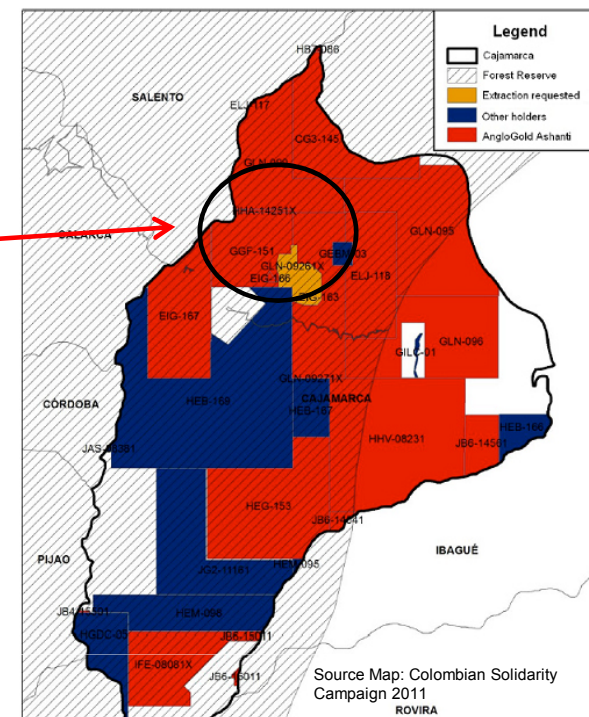
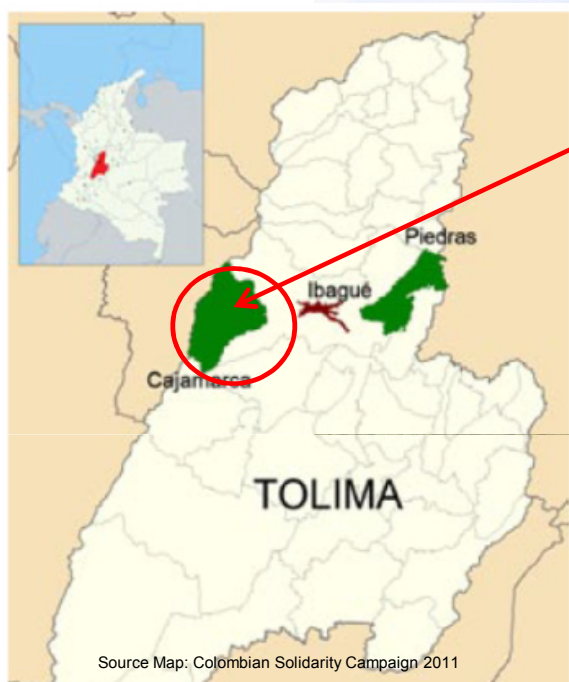
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# Mining in Colombia

- Since 2000s mining boom: concessions, FDI, production
- 2001 new mining law
  - under SAP and influenced by IFIs
  - specific spatio-institutional configuration of power
  - subsoil vested to the national state
  - regulation through concession system
  - interventions of subnational entities and citizens are widely restricted
- ⇒ Concentration of political power at the national scale
- ⇒ State = abstract landlord (Coronil 1997, p. 65)

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# The „La Colosa conflict“

Who are the actors opposing the project?

- multi-scalar, multi-sector, across classes alliance
  - local and regional social movement:  
*Environmental committee in defense of life and territory*
    - Peasant and urban grassroots organisations
    - entrepreneurs
    - Academics and students
    - national and international NGOs
- state actors: Local/regional governments
- politicians: members of local councils & national congress



Fotos: Hanna Thiesing

# The „La Colosa conflict“

What are the strategies applied?

- alliances with NGOs and other anti-mining movements (e.g. in South-Africa, Latin America)
- alternative media-campaigns
- blockades (local scale)
- manifestations (*marcha carnaval*) (local and regional scale)
- popular consultations (local scale)

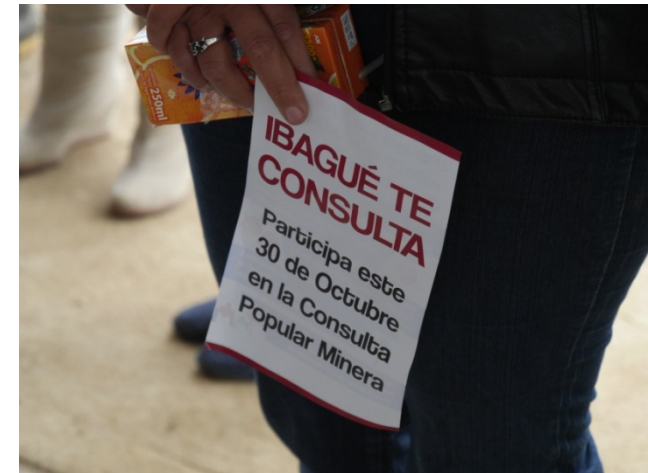


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# The „La Colosa conflict“

## Popular consultations

- 2013: **Piedras** (retention basin) held in July 2013: legally sanctioned, not acknowledged by government and company
- 2016: **Ibagué** – planned for October 30, – suspended by State Council based on lawsuits filed by individuals
- 2017: **Cajamarca** – announced for January 22, 2017?  
A lawsuit by the company has already been filed



Fotos: Kristina Dietz & Hanna Thiesing

# Conclusion

1. How do social actors contest the enforcement of industrial mining projects?
  - Multi-scalar strategies and multi-sector alliances
  - Combination of traditional protest strategies and legally sanctioned spaces of participation (consultations) (s. Walter/Urikidi 2015)
  - Creation of new opportunities to participate and contestation of both, the project and scalar politics of mining

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# Conclusion

## 2. With what political effects?

immediate effects related to the project:

- change of project design (Piedras)
- Uncertainty related to project cancelation

mediate effects:

- wittingly or unwittingly challenge of existing scalar politics of mining  $\Rightarrow$  re-scaling of political power
- politicization effect with national outreach: who decides at what scale over the exploitation of resources?
- struggle over a mining project  $\Rightarrow$  struggle over scale

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Many thanks for your attention!

Suggestions and comments highly  
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