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RE: The Political Economy of the Extractive Imperative in Latin America

Title: Tools of Resistance: Maps verses Facebook in protesting large scale mining projects in Colombia and beyond.

Abstract:

Colombia's internet connectivity has exploded over the last four years. Colombia has also "opened for business", leading to an influx of extractive projects to which many social movements objected heavily. Studies on the role of digital media in political mobilisation in developing countries are still scarce. Using document and theoretical analysis, interviews, surveys, GIS and content analysis from social media, this study examines the role of digital and social media in protest movements and to what extent increased digital connectivity can help spread knowledge about human rights and environmental issues. Results show that the use of social media in Colombia is still embryonic and hindered by strong hierarchical power structures within social movements, meaning its effect on political mobilisation is often limited, or negative. This implies that social media do not spontaneously produce non-hierarchical knowledge structures, and that social movement organisations in Colombia need to further develop their knowledge dissemination strategies. The study goes on to ask whether it is then maps rather than the much lauded social media that will help legitimize knowledge around human rights and environmental abuses associated with the extractive industries in a way that moves beyond documenting abuses and towards holding those responsible to account.

Bio:

Doug Specht is a Doctoral Researcher at the University of Westminster where he is exploring how digital media and GIS are used in legitimizing and codifying local knowledge within the context of International Development. He is also the Director of VOZ, a PGIS platform that supports human and environmental rights through community mapping. He has worked in Colombia, Chile, Venezuela and throughout Central America. He is also an editor for the Environmental Network for Central America.

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