

Transforming towards Post-Extractivism – Calling from Southeast Asia

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Within the Southeast Asian region, overall, extensive growth in GDP has been realized and poverty reduction has been impressive. During the last decades, however, the working class and nature endured significant drawbacks. The process of marketization and economic integration into global capitalism resulted in the privatization of commons like mineral resources. Moreover, new sites of production came with massive environmental degradation. Dr. Poppy S. Winanti and Nanang Indra Kurniawan, Vice Dean for Research, Cooperation, Community Service and Alumni Affairs at the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences of Universitas Gadjah Mada in Indonesia, argue how the extractive sector - characterized by the exploitation of natural resources - unleashed many serious problems for the local population: extractive regions are often plagued by conflicts, there is little direct positive impact on the local economy, and finally, extractive industries are non-renewable. To resist the increasing exploitation of natural resources, post-extractivism emerged as an economic and political strategy.

Indonesia, for instance, holds globally 15% of tin, which is essential for the production of electronic devices like laptops and smartphones, and the province Bangka Belitung in Western Indonesia makes up 90% of Indonesia's total tin production¹. During the early 1990s, the state-owned tin mining company PT Timah ceased its operations in Belitung due to diminishing resources, and thousands of people were left jobless and in poverty. Nevertheless, the population in Belitung moved beyond extractivism by turning to tourism and fisheries to reduce dependencies on extractive industries. This development was supported by local political leaders that joined forces with civil society and through this additionally contributed to the emergence of post-extractive initiatives. The tin mining case in Bangka and Belitung shows that, certainly, the socio-political context is highly dependent upon local conditions: policies cannot simply be replicated without taking local

¹ Kate Hodal, Death metal: tin mining in Indonesia, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2012/nov/23/tin-mining-indonesia-bangka>, (accessed 10 March 2020).



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specificities into account. An environment is needed, in which all social actors can freely participate to develop alternatives to extractivism.

The research by Dr. Poppy S. Winanti and Nanang Indra Kurniawan reveals that oftentimes those who have benefited from extractive industries, such as private companies and governmental actors, hold different interests from the working class. They are skeptical and even hostile towards alternatives because their sources of income would be threatened. Indeed, there are still many challenges to be overcome: concrete and sustainable alternatives need to be provided, which could be within but are not limited to manufacturing, agriculture, and tourism. Even if these alternatives can be realized, they do not automatically guarantee better working and living conditions for working people. As Dr. Poppy S. Winanti and Nanang Indra Kurniawan put it, a transition towards a post-extractive economy “will never be a reality if extractive activities continue to expand and if there are no specific alternatives for gradually cutting them back by means of a properly planned process of change.” For the sake of society and nature, and the future of our planet and our children, ultimately a planned and coordinated process - nationally and internationally - needs to be installed.

