The Mine or the Mire? Mobilising Place in Natural Resource Struggles

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Abstract
This article examines how place and place-basedness are essential to understanding the conflict dynamics of natural resource use. Based on a single case study and using an ethnographic approach to examine a place, the paper unearths how place is mobilised in corporate–community relations. This study defines place-basedness as having two relational elements: ecological and social embeddedness. It finds four positions with differing place identifications, meanings, and relationships with the ecological and social place. This article concludes that while ecological embeddedness enhances the ability to resist natural resource use through knowledge attribution and actively mobilising a place, the social embeddedness of some positions constrains local people’s ability to resist. It also identifies attachment to and detachment from place as two aspects of a central mechanism whereby countering positions are mobilised in the hegemonic struggle. The findings contribute to our understanding of place as a constituting part of corporate–community relations and place-basedness both as a resource for and hindrance to resistance.

Keywords Place-basedness · Embeddedness · Hegemonic struggles · Corporate–community relations · Mining

Introduction

Struggles over land and natural resource use are increasing globally as our modern lifestyles require further extraction of the world’s finite resources. As this extraction moves closer to human habitats and threatens traditional livelihoods and biodiversity, local people have begun to mobilise in defence of the environment, to maintain their ways of life, their relationships with the land, and the meanings they attach to places (Conde, 2017; Maher, 2018). One of the many places where such a struggle is ongoing is in the northern Finnish municipality of Sodankylä, where a multinational mining corporation is planning a mine underneath a protected mire, Viiankiaapa.

Viiankiaapa has been described as follows:

One of the most outstanding aapa mires in the Sodankylä area. It is characterised by vast flark fens, on which strings may extend unbroken for several kilometres. The flarks are wide, and there are also large open water pools. The mire is flanked by pine bogs.

The site also features rich birch fens which are typical of aapa mires in Central Lapland.¹

The mire is home to many plants, birds, and other species, dozens of which are endangered. Viiankiaapa has been under a national conservation programme since 1988. Finland’s Nature Conservation Act and the European Union’s Natura 2000 Network of unique natural environments protect the mire. The aapa mire is also the home of a reindeer herd, and summer place of hundreds of reindeer. It has trails and campfire sites and is listed as a nature site worth visiting. However, the mire is also the location of a mining project set to exploit what may be Europe’s largest nickel deposit.

Places are locations we live in, materialities of physical environments, and meanings we give them (Gieryn, 2000). Places are constantly reproduced through interpretations and meanings and are therefore, relational and overlapping (Beyes & Steyaert, 2012). Places can be part of the web of life (Ehrnström-Fuentes, 2022); they can provide meanings and mobilisation for individuals (Jones et al., 2019) and communities (Cavotta et al., 2021), and they ground organisational resilience (Kim et al., 2019). Places are often understood by the materiality of the physical world interacting with the individual or organisation. However, this understanding omits the social relations within a place.

¹ https://www.nationalparks.fi/viiankiaapa.
which significantly contribute to place-basedness (Bansal & Knox-Hayes, 2013). To understand place as the contextualised relationship between people and the physical environment on one hand (Banerjee et al., 2021), and the social web within which people live on the other (D’Cruz et al., 2021), I define place-basedness as a relationship with two elements: ecological (Whiteman & Cooper, 2011) and social embeddedness (Massey, 2005), where both include the attachment to, knowledge of, and meanings attributed to the place.

I argue that this conceptualisation enables more nuanced perspectives of the struggles taking place, particularly with extractive industries. The physical location and materiality of extraction constructs a place as the central feature of the struggles over desired meanings and futures. They connect places, as localities, to broader power geometries of globalisation (Barenholdt & Granas, 2008). These conflicts have been studied particularly concerning corporate–community relations (Holley & Mitcham, 2016; Maher, 2018; Owen & Kemp, 2013; Prno & Slocombe, 2012), stakeholder engagement strategies (Yakovleva & Vazquez-Brust, 2012), questions of local legitimacy (Gifford et al., 2010), and sustainable development (O’Faircheallaigh, 2015). Struggles over land use have been conceptualised as ontological (Ehrnström-Fuentes, 2019), hegemonic (Furnaro, 2019), and ideological (Banerjee, 2018). This paper advances the literature on corporate–community relations by shedding light on how place identifications, attachments, and meanings enable or hinder resistance. The guiding research question is as follows: How are place and place-basedness mobilised in natural resource struggles?

To identify why some groups with strong relationships with the land speak up while others feel powerless, I use the Gramscian concept of power to explain the space between active consent and active dissent (Gramsci, 1971). The study takes an ethnographic approach and identifies four place positions occupied by locals and mining company representatives: Extractors, Protectors, Dwellers, and Habiters. Each uniquely identifies with and attaches meanings to the place. These positions and their place mobilisations are both socially and ecologically embedded, and place-based attachment not only enables but can also constrain local mobilisation. The findings show that ecological embeddedness enhances resistance through knowledge attribution and actively mobilising the place, while different degrees of social embeddedness transfer some opposition to more covert forms of placid resistance (as contained and passive dissent) or silent resistance (as passive consent).

This paper offers new theorisation on how place identifications, attachments, and meanings are constituted at the two levels of ecological and social place, forming place-basedness as a contingent relationship between the actor and place. The paper contributes to the literature on corporate–community relations by explaining through the concept of place-basedness the different positionality in those relations, and the dynamics and different degrees of resistance in a place. This paper also offers new insights for the business ethics literature on social embeddedness (Cavotta et al., 2021; D’Cruz et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2019; Lähdesmäki et al., 2017) by illustrating how social webs in local communities may constrain some resistance.

**Place and Place-Basedness as Ecological and Social Embeddedness**

The sociology of place defines a place as a three-dimensional concept: a geographical location, material form, and imbued with meanings and values (Gieryn, 2000). Places have histories; they are part of our memories and can provide part of our identity. The longer we live in a place, the more we are attached to it. Places are constantly made and reproduced both materially and socially through interpretations and meanings (Gieryn, 2000). This socially constructed nature of the place signifies that multiple and contradictory spaces can exist in the same physical location (Richardson & Jensen, 2003). Struggles over the uses of a place can strengthen its symbolic meanings and place-based identities, and the outcomes can produce hegemonic understandings of a place (Barenholdt & Granas, 2008). We live in and mould places, and they, in turn, influence us through meanings, values, and material factors, thereby providing histories, identities, and livelihoods (Beyes & Steyaert, 2012). These relationships also influence how we mobilise place-basedness in everyday practices and conflict situations.

Previously, places have often been understood as contexts in which institutions exist (Lawrence & Dover, 2015) or as particular essential and concrete territories or natural landscapes (Bansal & Knox-Hayes, 2013). Yet, the spatial turn in organisation theory has emphasised organisations’ spatial configuration in places and performance through space-writing, that is, the material uses of space (Beyes & Holt, 2020). People form identities based on places (Howard-Grenville et al., 2013) and interact with material forms to shape, stabilise, and institutionalise their meanings of a place (Jones et al., 2019), or resist managerial policies through appropriation and reconstruction (Courpasson et al., 2017). Furthermore, places can shape and are shaped by organisational fields through meaning and materiality (Staggs et al., 2022). Following Beyes & Steyaert’s (2012) suggestion that a processual and performative approach to place and spatiality should be adopted in organisation studies, place-based meanings and identities are conceptualised in this paper as fluid and multiple. To describe the dialectical interaction between places and people, place-basedness is conceptualised as having two elements: ecological materiality and...
a social web of relations. Put another way, place-basedness involves ecological and social embeddedness.

Following Polanyi (1944), researchers have examined how multinational corporations (Heidenreich, 2012), small and medium-sized enterprises (Lähdesmäki et al., 2017), entrepreneurs (Kim et al., 2019), and global value chains and workers (D’Cruz et al., 2021) are embedded in the relations of a particular context. However, the conceptualisation of social embeddedness here does not refer to market actor embeddedness (Granovetter, 1985). Instead, I use Massey’s (2005) concept of place as a particular appreciation of social interrelations in a specific moment among those networks, meaning places are unfixed and contentious but still grounded in particular ecologies. As such, social embeddedness denotes the interconnected social relationships within socio-spatial and cultural contexts (D’Cruz et al., 2021; Reinecke et al., 2018). As D’Cruz et al., noted, ‘social relationships—have a high degree of local “stickiness”, [as] actors are geographically embedded in the long-standing structures and relationships of place’ (2021, p. 3).

Lähdesmäki et al. (2017), meanwhile, used the term ‘social proximity’ to define the local embeddedness of social relationships through familiarity, closeness, and personal obligations when describing the local embeddedness of small business owners. In addition, the institutional approach to places of social inclusion (Wright et al., 2021) verged on the idea of social embeddedness, but for those authors, it was an immobile institution. In contrast, I assign it a relational position as part of overall place-basedness. While social embeddedness often functions as a resource for the underprivileged (Chowdhury et al., 2021; D’Cruz et al., 2021), it can also form a constraint.

The second element of place-basedness refers to the grounding of place in an ecological reality (Dirlik, 1999). Whiteman & Cooper (2011) define ecological embeddedness as connecting ecological materiality to sense-making, which may enhance people’s resilience. According to them this deep knowledge of the ecological place—to notice and interpret ecological cues and be attuned to changes in that ecological environment—allows actors to react quickly and mindfully in surprising situations. I use Whiteman and Cooper’s conceptualisation of ecological embeddedness and extend it from innate sense-making to active mobilisation of that deep ecological knowledge to defend the identifications, meanings, and value attachments of the place. As such, ecological knowledge is actively mobilised through knowledge attribution in the conflict over the place. Lefebvre’s (1991) distinction of knowledge as both connaissances and savoir is useful to deploy here. While the deep, innate knowledge of the ecological materiality of the place that enables sense-making is based on connaissances, the knowledge used to defend or criticise a land use plan—in this case, natural resource extraction—is based on savoir since it combines information and ideology. This particular knowledge as savoir leads people to attribute representations to the place to defend its existing uses or advance extraction (Richardson & Jensen, 2003).

**Place as a Site of Resistance**

Places are also sites of local–global interactions and part of the broader power geometries of globalisation (Dirlik, 1999). As sites of mineral extraction, places are imbued with political and economic action and struggles over desired meanings and futures. Places are enacted in these struggles through materiality, the politics of nature, and imaginations (Barenholdt & Granas, 2008). Local struggles over the futures of places penetrated by the global political economy of extraction have been well reported in the literature (Hamann, 2019; Holley & Mitcham, 2016; Owen & Kemp, 2013; Prno & Slocombe, 2012). In corporate–community relations, places are socially reproduced with contested political and economic positions (Banerjee, 2018; Haarstad, 2012; Kirsch, 2014). In these conflicts, place becomes an important theme in the corporate–community relations given the need for social license to operate (Mayes, 2015) and the ecological, social and cultural impacts of mining (Bridge, 2008), which are often worst nearest the mine. While previous research has largely covered the challenges of corporate–community dialogue processes given the power inequalities (Banerjee, 2018; Conde, 2017; Maher, 2018) and how the place-based identity of a community can enhance its opportunities to resist extraction (Avci & Fernández-Salvador, 2016; Escobar, 1999), the present study offers new theorisation on how place identifications, attachments, and meanings may trigger different levels of resistance.

Drawing on Gramsci, Furnaro (2019) noted that while extractive hegemony might fail to secure locals’ active consent, the ability to limit overt forms of conflict can function to contain dissent. For Gramsci, hegemony denotes a specific and dominating social order resting on societal, economic, and ideological power structures and operates in three spheres: the economy, state, and civil society (Gramsci, 1971). Hegemony can be exercised by combining force and consent, prompting the majority to consent by using ideological means rather than coercion. Domination is not stable but contingent and, therefore, must be maintained, though it can be challenged by counter-hegemonic forces (Levy & Egan, 2003). Prior research has explored hegemonic struggles at the societal (Levy & Egan, 2003), field (Levy et al., 2016), infra-political (Böhm et al., 2008), and multi-stakeholder initiative (MSI) (Moog et al., 2015) levels. This paper takes ‘local’ and ‘place’ as the central points from which to examine how the broader extractive hegemony and the counter-hegemonic struggle play out in a local
context both overtly and covertly. This space between active consent and overt counter-hegemonic mobilisation is interesting to explore. Previous research has referred to contained dissent (Furnaro, 2019), passive dissent (Clarke & Newman, 2007), and the politics of resignation (Benson & Kirsch, 2010) when describing the feelings and practices of locals who express more than passive consent but yet do not or cannot actively and openly dissent. I elaborate on those notions in this paper, focussing on the place and place-basedness.

**Methods and Data**

**Research Context—The Place**

The longer we live in a place, the more we become attached to it. Our different place experiences, histories, and values result in multiple place meanings for the same territorial space. Viiankiaapa mire—as described above—is a place of unique flora and fauna, home to endangered species, and a double-protected mire. For some, it is just another stretch of bog land, of which Lapland boasts many, without any specific value. The struggle is also about the impacts of the potential mining project on the surrounding place, the municipality of Sodankylä. The immediate implications for life in nearby villages, traffic on the main road, and reindeer herders’ livelihoods may be significant. On the other hand, many people are concerned about jobs, growth, and livelihoods in the future. The debate largely originates from the uncertainty of the impacts and what we can and cannot know.

The municipality of Sodankylä, where the aapa mire is located, consists of a town centre and 35 villages with 8300 residents collectively. The Sodankylä area has hosted mining since the mid-1990s, when the small Pahtavaara gold mine was opened. More recently, in 2012, the Kevitsa copper and nickel mine was opened as one of the largest open-pit mines in Finland (based on overall extraction), employing approximately 350 people. Meanwhile, the service industry and public sector remain the largest sources of employment in the area. Sodankylä is also the second largest municipality for reindeer herding in Finland, with 20,000 reindeer living in the area. As a livelihood, reindeer herding is passed through generation after generation; for these herders, though they are not Sámi, this is the traditional way of life. Some herders work part-time while holding another job to provide for their families, and others depend on herding entirely. The two reindeer herding cooperatives in the area of the planned mine, Oraniemi and Sattanen, represent about 11,500 reindeer owned by 280 herders.

Local people’s place connections are fluid and multiple, as are the meanings they attach to the place. The same person might be a part-time reindeer herder and work for the town, and have relatives working in the mine. They are a villager, resident of Sodankylä municipality, and part of the social webs of their workplaces and broader families. In the smaller localities, these social webs are often very dense. Most residents of the Sodankylä area have lived there for most of their lives. Not all stay, however; the mobility of people is outwards to bigger towns in Lapland and Finland. Accordingly, the municipality has been suffering from negative population growth despite the opening of the mines, which were expected to reverse that trend.

The mining company has been developing the project in the area since 2015 (see Fig. 1). The company has invested a lot of time in building good relations with locals through open dialogues, receiving praise for that even from environmental non-governmental organisations (NGOs). In practice, the company has invited all local people—even those resisting the project—to communicate with them and launched an extensive dialogue process to secure a social licence to operate. Most company employees involved in the dialogue process were from and live elsewhere, but in the meetings there have always been one or two representatives living in Sodankylä. These dialogues, however, have not been about whether the mine should be built; instead, they have concerned the conditions under which it will be built and any concessions the company is ready to make in that process, such as how much reindeer fencing should be installed and where. The dialogues and hearings in 2019–2020 were related to the environmental impact assessment (EIA) process of the project. At the end of 2020, the company submitted the EIA to officials, but it was deemed inadequate and required additions detailing the impacts on water reserves in the Viiankiaapa mire.

**Research Design and Data**

To delve into and properly understand the meanings of the place for different groups, in this research, I adopted an ethnographic approach to data gathering. The method is well suited to understanding shared values, localised corporate social responsibility practices, and interactions between people (Bass & Milosevic, 2016). I have followed the case since 2015 through the media. Given that I share similar culture and dialect has enabled the interpretation and contextualisation of the data in terms of the area’s broader historical and cultural developments. At the same time, my years spent living away from the place, an academic education and active self-reflexivity helped me to keep a necessary

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2 Unlike in Norway and Sweden, in Finland, there are both Finnish and Sámi reindeer herders; it is not solely an indigenous livelihood.
Most of the empirical data were gathered during 2019 and 2020. These included participant observations of eight face-to-face stakeholder meetings during spring 2019, with four specialized stakeholder group meetings (reindeer herders, land and water rights owners, environmental protectors and recreational users, and municipalities) and four meetings in the villages. The main programme at the meetings was always the same: the company delivered a PowerPoint presentation on what was happening in the project, the implementation options, and their expected economic, social, and environmental impacts. In the first round (2019), a participatory approach was used, giving people the opportunity to comment on their preferences and the company a chance to learn local knowledge such as snowmobile routes that could affect the location of water discharge pipes. Meeting lengths varied from two to three hours, and I made detailed notes at each of them. See Table 5 for an illustration of the meeting with reindeer herders in 2019.

In my role as a researcher at these meetings, I introduced myself at the beginning and then stayed silent, observing and making notes, for the official portion. After that wrapped up, I then often had informal conversations with company employees and participants; these discussions centred on their feelings and experiences of the meeting just held. Additionally, I interviewed some participants following the meetings, whether face to face or over the phone; we talked about their perceptions of the project, whether they felt they were heard, and how things with the project had changed.

The second phase of stakeholder meetings occurred in autumn 2020, that is, during the COVID-19 pandemic. This meant I could not attend in person but had to use Microsoft Teams. The company arranged two meetings with reindeer herders (one with each affected collective), one with land and water rights owners, one with environmentalists, and two with local villages. The meetings were held in Sodankylä with restricted attendance and an online participation option. These second-round meetings (2020) were more about giving a status update to locals before submitting the official EIA report, introducing the new manager of the project, and answering people’s questions. This continued the company’s aim to be a ‘good and open neighbour’. I attended four meetings online, making detailed notes of each. These meetings were also followed by online interviews I held with stakeholders and company representatives. Although the online environment creates distance, which can diminish the connection between the researcher and...
interviewee, having already met and established a connection with the informants helped to overcome the sudden and unexpected changes in the fieldwork due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

While participant observations provide the core of the data, I also conducted additional key informant interviews to support the observations made during the dialogue rounds. The 10 interviews with key actors included reindeer herders, villagers, civil society activists, community leaders, and company employees. In addition, unrecorded phone conversations were held with informants, where notes were taken both during and afterwards. I also collected some secondary interview data by speaking with representatives of ministry and state agencies, mainly about mining in Finland but not specifically about this mining project. Furthermore, the EIA documents were reviewed, including statements for and against the project, along with media materials from local and regional newspapers (Table 1 provides a detailed list of the data sources).

While all the interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed, the meetings were instead recorded as fieldnotes. Ethnographic fieldnotes often contain short quotes and the author’s highlights of what was said, as well as describing the location and atmosphere (Jarzabkowski et al., 2014). My notes included, for example, the visual materials presented, the location and setup of each meeting, how friendly the atmosphere was, whether people seemed to know each other and, above all, how they made connections with the place. These extensive fieldnotes provided tentative ideas for concept building and theorisation. It was during the first round of meetings that I grasped the profound importance of the place (and attachment to it), not only for the local stakeholders but also for the company.

Understanding the Power of the Place

First Phase

The ethnographic approach offers an intense and immersive understanding of how people relate to a place and one another (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2011). Through long-term engagement, participant observations, and building relationships with people, a researcher can learn about a place and provide narratives of locals and their embeddedness in the context (Bass & Milosevic, 2016). The first step was to write narratives for the different stakeholder groups identified in the process. These were, during the first phase, environmentalists in local and national NGOs, reindeer herders represented by the two cooperatives, and the less clearly defined group of villagers, with a particular concentration on the narratives offered by people living in Sattanen and Kersilõ, the villages nearest the proposed mine site. Based on my fieldnotes and interviews, I reconstructed the main narratives of how these groups related to the place and their perceptions of the meetings. Narrative strategy is useful for understanding the richness and complexity of the research setting (Langley, 1999). Here, it helped me to understand the different groups living and operating in the place, their relationships with the place, the kinds of attachment they had to it, and how they saw themselves as part of the social space of Sodankylä.

I also wrote a composite narrative of how the company used the place in its ways of relating to the locals. Composite narratives merge multiple events into a single account of a more conceptually revealing pattern (Jarzabkowski et al., 2014). Here, I merged all meetings and place-making occurrences into a single storyline of how the company engaged with the place, for example, through visual materials, map-marking activities, and interactions with people in the meetings.

Second Phase

I moved on to an abductive approach (Mantere & Ketokivi, 2013) and went back to the literature on space and place, with the latter as a multi-dimensional and relational concept (Beyes & Holt, 2020). Then, I reviewed the research data again to identify passages that helped in the following areas: the history of each group and its attachment to the place, the kind of savoir (as information and ideology) they held of the place and were using, and how they engaged with the place based on that savoir. I also wanted to understand how different groups spoke to and about each other, and especially about how conflicts were perceived or managed. To those ends, by building on their narratives, I could position the groups using their outlooks on the Viiankiaapa mire and each other. To reflect this relationality and the reality of the place more precisely, I reorganised the data into positions instead of groups. Positions better illustrate people’s connections to a place, which are relational and fluid: local people can occupy more than one position, and their positions can change over time. These positions are of course analytical tools and, as such, will never fully capture the richness of the real world, which is impossible to exhaustively describe. However, they offer important descriptions. The four positions I identified were Protectors, Dwellers, Habiters, and Extractors.

I then began outlining how the people who occupied these positions referred to one another and the mining project in general. What was their stance towards the project? How did they talk about it, about others who were for or against it, and about their possibilities to influence the project? Here, the key informant interviews provided support for some notions of antagonistic relations, which I had picked up on during the dialogue participant observations, and offered insights into what lay beneath people’s overt or covert
behaviour. Based on how people referred to one another not only in the meetings but also in the interviews—and whether their assessments were positive (for example, ‘they are nice people and easy to work with’) or negative (for example, ‘no one really trusts them’) —I came to understand the nuanced positions within the struggle between hegemony and counter-hegemony. A Gramscian power analysis enabled me to identify the dynamics of attachment and detachment, and external and internal, as emerging points of contention within the place and place-making and also the hegemonic/counter-hegemonic discourse between the Extractors and Protectors.

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**Table 1** Description of the data

| Data | Participants | Duration (approx.) | Type of data |
|------|--------------|--------------------|--------------|
| **Participant observation of stakeholder meetings in-person in spring 2019** | | | |
| Reindeer herders | 10 (plus 4 company employees and 4 consultants) | 3 h | Detailed notes |
| Land and water rights holders | 9 (plus 4 company employees and 1 consultant) | 2 h | Detailed notes |
| Environmental protectors and recreational users | 9 (plus 5 company employees and 1 consultant) | hours | Detailed notes |
| Municipality and other livelihoods | 20 (plus 4 company employees and 1 consultant) | 2 h | Detailed notes |
| Sattanen | 31 (plus 3 company employees and 1 consultant) | 3 h | Detailed notes |
| Kersilö | 10 (plus 3 company employees and 1 consultant) | 2 h | Detailed notes |
| Puolakkavaara | 8 (plus 4 company employees and 1 consultant) | 2 h | Detailed notes |
| Moskuvaara | 16 (plus 4 company employees and 1 consultant) | 2 h | Detailed notes |

**Participant observation of stakeholder meetings online in autumn 2020**

| Environmental protectors | 5 present, 4 online, and 4 company employees | 3 h | Detailed notes |
| Reindeer herders | 10 present, 3 online, and 4 company employees | 3 h | Detailed notes |
| Sattanen villagers** | 10 present, 3 online, and 4 company employees | 3 h | Detailed notes |
| Land and water rights holders | 10 present, 3 online, and 4 company employees | 2 h | Detailed notes |

**Key informant interviews**

| Company 1 | 1 h | Recorded interview |
| Company 2 | 1 h | Recorded interview |
| Company 3 | 45 min | Notes on group conversation |
| Stakeholder 1 | 1 h | Recorded interview |
| Stakeholder 2 | 1 h | Recorded interview |
| Stakeholder 3 | 2 h | Recorded interview |
| Stakeholder 4 | 45 min | Notes on phone conversation |
| Stakeholder 5 | 1 h | Recorded interview |
| Stakeholder 6 | 1 h | Recorded interview |
| Stakeholder 7 | 1 h | Recorded interview |

**Textual data**

| Source | | |
|---|---|---|
| Media article 1 | Guardian | Text document |
| Media article 2 | Guardian | Text document |
| Media article 3 | YLE (national public broadcaster) | Text document |
| Media article 4 | Lapin kansa (regional newspaper) | Text document |
| Media article 5 | Sompio (local newspaper) | Text document |
| EIA program report | Ministry of the Environment | Text document |
| EIA evaluation report | Ministry of the Environment | Text document |

**Other data**

| Fieldnotes | Video | Website |
| Informal conversations with stakeholders | | |
| Video from Viiankaapa movement | | |
| Parliamentary election results 2019 | | |

Some people participated twice, such as at a village meeting and a special group meeting

**There were a total of three meetings, but only the first one was also online**
Table 2  Composite narrative of features of silencing at the stakeholder meetings in villages

The meetings take place in a similar fashion, led by the company representatives with their extensive PowerPoint presentation on their studies being carried out and options for the mine. The presentation leader regularly asks for questions and offers to clarify points. The participants mostly sit silently and follow the proceedings. Occasionally, someone raises a hand with a question on an impact, most often concerning water, dust, or light pollution. Most questions come from a few people in the groups; one later comments that it feels like a duty to come and pose questions that would not otherwise be asked (these people occupy the Dweller position). When people review the maps of the different options, they seem more active and talk about the pros and cons of each. In only one meeting does a clear voice and note on a map state 'option zero is the best'.

When I talk to participants afterwards, they comment it is nice that the company comes and explains its plans, but, of course, life would be better without the mine. As one puts it, 'we can't really do anything about it; it will happen anyway'.

Some informal talks with participants highlight an issue. I comment that people were strikingly silent, and they confirm that even locals who they know oppose the mine stayed silent. Some do not want to voice negative comments or opposition for fear of stigmatisation or later preventing their children or relatives from getting jobs at the mine. Some say these are pro-project meetings so speaking up is pointless. Others are just afraid of speaking up: 'Many do not want to voice their views in front of other people. One might be against and another for the project, but they'd rather stay silent because it so easily... causes tensions in small communities.' They advise me that the mine will be opposed elsewhere, referring to the official EIA processes for making statements and giving opinions.

After speaking with a young person who has joined a village meeting, I realise the average participant age is skewed. Mostly elderly are attending, whose lives the mine will not greatly affect (with construction beginning in 10 years or more). Company representatives also voice a concern about young people’s absence from the meetings since they have not managed to attract them.

An indication of covert resistance comes from the election in 2019, in which the lead figure of the environmental movement runs as a Green Party candidate, with one of the key campaign messages 'no mines in Viiankiaapa' and a demand for changes in mining regulations. They receive 15% of the votes in Sodankylä (ahead of all other candidates) and 22% of the votes in Sattanen village (nearest to the planned mine). This is the first time the Green Party, which has never before succeeded in the area, receives these kinds of vote totals.

Third Phase

In this final phase, I returned to the literature on Gramsci’s power analysis and place embeddedness to unearth how and why the in-between positions of Dwellers and Habiters left the people who occupied them neither engaging in overt forms of resistance nor consenting to the project. Using an abductive analytical approach and moving back and forth between conceptual ideals and empirical data, I made discoveries that supported my theory building (Van Maanen et al., 2007). Based on this abductive approach, I could delineate two overlapping but different places, the ecological Viiankiaapa mire and social Sodankylä, and how different groups were embedded. Different connections started to reveal the dynamics of place mobilisations and how they enabled or hindered resistance. To describe how a social position might lead to covert resistance, I again wrote a composite narrative (see Table 2).

Findings

Through this research, I identified four relational positions, which all have particular place relations that position-holders mobilise in the struggle. Furthermore, I found place-basedness has two elements, ecological and social embeddedness, which can enhance or constrain resistance, sets out the main characteristics of the four positions.

Below, I explain how the different position-holders use or mobilise the place and interconnect, after which I introduce the conceptual model (Fig. 2).

Overt Conflict and Ecological Embeddedness

Overt conflict occurs at the level of ecological embeddedness, which is defined as ecological materiality and knowledge attribution, including ideology, information about impacts and certainties, and the ideal use of the place. This includes competing narratives on and uses of the Viiankiaapa mire as a specific ecological place. Hegemony may be established or reproduced through the use of knowledge attribution concerning a place (Lefebvre, 1991); then, place-basedness as ecological embeddedness is the level at which oppositional uses, knowledge, and values of the place are contested. The hegemony represented by Extractors and counter-hegemony represented by Protectors draw from both local and global sources to legitimise their positions. Hegemony is backed by national and regional pro-mining policies, the global growth paradigm and related need for extraction, the instrumental value of nature, and local extractive traditions. The counter-hegemonic movement, meanwhile, draws from the global narrative of the fight against climate change and biodiversity loss, emphasising the intrinsic value of nature, the protected status of the aapa mire, and local uses of the place for recreational purposes. These groups attempt to fortify their positions through socio-spatial practices (Richardson & Jensen, 2003).
### Table 3 Main characteristics of the parties in different positions

| Who they are                                                                 | Extractors                                                                 | Dwellers                                                                 | Protectors                                                                 | Habitors                                                                 |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| **Who they are**                                                             | The representatives of *Beacco* (pseudonym), a Finnish subsidiary of a multinational mining company. It has advanced this project since 2011, seeking to extract what it refers to as a world-class deposit. The company is expending a great deal of effort and resources on the stakeholder engagement process to gain local acceptance. | Reindeer herders of two cooperatives (Orianiemi and Sattasniemi) in the Sodankylä area with about 11,000 reindeer. Some are part-time and others full-time herders. Their priority to use the area for herding is protected by law. Previous experiences (especially with Kevitsa mine) have left reindeer herders critical and sceptical of mining. | This includes the local sections of environmental NGOs, particularly the Viiankiaapa Movement, which was developed to preserve the aapa mire. Some of the people live in the Sodankylä area and/or have relatives there, while others live elsewhere in Northern Finland. | This position is occupied by the people living in the area who ‘would be happy without the mine’. They are sceptical about the promises made by the company of not harming the environment and fear the ecological impacts on the mine and the broader Sodankylä area, such as increased traffic. People living in the nearby villages of Sattanen and Kersilö will be especially affected by the project. |
| **Place**                                                                    | Viiankiaapa                                                                | Broader Sodankylä area                                                  | Viiankiaapa                                                                | Broader Sodankylä area                                                  |
| **Place relation**                                                           | Place of large-scale ore deposit, and accordingly, the planned place of a subterranean mine. There is a need to avoid harming the place comprising the protected mine on the surface. | Place of the reindeer; the aapa mire is especially important for their summer feeding and yearly roaming path (reindeers are hard to relocate as they adopt specific roaming routes) | Place of pristine and unique nature, including endangered flora and fauna | Mixed—for some, it is a place of histories and stories, recreation, and foraging for berries; for others, it is land they used to own; for others still, it represents pristine northern nature. |
| **Ecological embeddedness**                                                   | Instrumental ecological embeddedness; knowledge of subterranean geology    | Deep ecological embeddedness through lived experience                   | Deep ecological embeddedness through knowledge and experience              | Dispersed ecological embeddedness; the connection is to the broader area of Sodankylä, not necessarily to the particular ecology of Viiankiaapa |
| **Social embeddedness**                                                       | Making efforts to embed itself in the local society. Dialogues are an important method of telling people how the project is proceeding, engaging with them, and building trust and good relations. | They are socially embedded in the place, and their livelihoods are place-based and part of the broader web of the place | Some live in the area or have relatives or other connections to the place, but their everyday lives are not bound by the social web of the place | Strong social embeddedness: most live in the place, with thick social webs of families and friends. Accordingly, they do not want to be stigmatised by openly speaking out against the mine. |
| **Main narrative used**                                                       | Represents the extractive hegemony supported by municipal decision-makers. Links local job creation narratives to the global growth paradigm and the necessity of extraction for modern, middle-class lifestyles. Framed in that way, the company offers employment, economic growth, and a vibrant future for the peripheral area, which has suffered from a declining population for the past 20 years. Mining represents a key industry for the development of Lapland, according to the regional state agency. | Another mine already operational has caused a lot more harm than anticipated, where promises were not kept. The proposed mine will permanently end some reindeer herding. There is a need to negotiate compensation as officials do not decide in their favour. Reindeer herding is not valued by society | They defend the intrinsic value of the place and link its protection to global environmental threats such as the sixth mass extinction, climate change, and the need for degrowth. As such, they are directly opposed to the job creation and economic growth discourse of the company | While stating that life would be better without the mine, they feel they do not really have a say in it, that the decisions are made elsewhere by more powerful people. They hope it will not cause harm to the mire or their way of life. |
For the Extractors, that practice is engagement in corporate-community relations, where they can present themselves as part of the future of the place through multiple means of place-making and provide their knowledge about the place through the studies they have commissioned. Accordingly, Tables 4 and 5 illustrate how meetings were led by company representatives who presented expert information they gathered through reports, studies, and impact evaluations. By doing so, they positioned themselves as knowledge holders of the ecological place. While the Extractors were originally external to the place they tried to embed themselves in both the socio-symbolic reality of the broader Sodankylä area, to gain the social licence needed to operate, and the ecological place (Viiankiaapa), to extract the instrumental value of the ore deposit.

During the meetings, the Extractors aimed also to embed themselves in the future ecology of the place through performative acts of place-making. For instance, they used visual materials such as videos, maps, and pictures to remake the place with the mine added. The illustrative videos presented different options for realising the mine, which enhanced its tangibility and created a sense it would certainly come into being. The videos recreated the place with the mine by visualising the changes in the landscape and its future appearance. Participants were invited to view and add notes to the maps with different options for the mine. At this point, people often made remarks such as ‘here is our house’ or ‘that is his plot’. The company also asked participants to mark the best options and snowmobile routes, thus engaging them in ‘doing the mine’. The presentations of the different options and the conversations around them recreated the place as a mining site, subtly influencing the participants’ perceptions of option zero: no mine. This is illustrated by the following short conversation between two people looking at the maps:

Person 1: ‘Option number one is clearly the most sensible [least impact], given recreational use and the valuable nature of the area’. Person 2: ‘Well, there is option zero; that would be the best and cause the least impact’.

Then, when the company asked participants to pick the best option, ‘no mine’ was not listed among the choices, despite being in the official EIA.

The Extractors also actively tried to detach any notions of harm caused by the mine from the place by specifying the distance between the protected mire and the mine, thereby separating the surface (protected aapa mire) and subterranean (mine) zones. This detachment based on the depth of the mine was illustrated using pictures of famous monuments such as the Eiffel Tower. The head of the project reinforced that sentiment by stating to The Guardian, ‘most of
the mining will happen at more than 1 km depth. We are not going to destroy Viiankiaapa” (Wall, 2019). This active detachment from the protected land was an important tool to deploy in the dialogues with all position-holders, as in principle, no mining should occur on protected lands.

Protectors, on the other hand, actively attached the potential mine to harm to the mire. They noted how there had already been harmful impacts and underscored both the intrinsic value of the place as the home of unique flora and fauna and the double-protected status of the aapa mire. While the Protectors largely used other forums to mobilise their knowledge attribution of the place, they did participate in the meetings, emphasising the uncertainty of the Extractors’ knowledge of the impacts—or lack thereof. As one Protector remarked, ‘your worry about these oil spills and the efforts you will take to prevent them is somehow absurd and endearing, when at the same time, your whole project will destroy nature in such a broad area’. This was followed by an exchange between Protectors and Extractors on the amount of harm and whether an environmentally friendly mine was even possible.

The Protectors are ecologically embedded in the place; they have deep knowledge of it through their educational backgrounds and also time spend there. The Protectors actively mobilised the place and its uniqueness through socio-spatial practices of performance both in and with the place, seeking to reinforce the cultural and place-based identities of the Dwellers and Habiters for the protection of the mire. Such place mobilisations included organising music shows, dance events, and exhibitions of Viiankiaapa, as well as hikes across the mire.

For the Dwellers, the place signifies the wider Sodankylä region. Accordingly, they are concerned about the impacts of the possible mine not only on the aapa mire but on the greater area where the reindeer roam. Their involvement is not aimed at protecting the mire per se, but more broadly, maintaining the grazing lands. As one herder explained: ‘The best solution for us would be [option] zero, with no mine, but I don’t think we can decide. But, yeah, with

Table 4  Dynamics between extractors and protectors at two meetings

| Title                              | 2019 in-person meeting                                                                 |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The company staff go through the same presentation as at the other meetings, emphasising oil spills and their prevention, the status of the impact studies being carried out by consultants, and the different options. Now, option zero (no mine) is included for consideration, and the mining operations’ sustainability through electrification is emphasised. The atmosphere is calm and friendly throughout the presentation. Conversations arise about excess traffic and its impacts, the ore deposit’s extent, and whether the mine will one day grow to cover all area beneath the aapa mire. At this point, some people state option zero is best as it will cause the least impact. A few heated conversations arise: |
| P: ‘There is no such thing as an environmentally friendly mine. No matter what you do, there will be impacts on the Natura protection area.’ |
| E: ‘Our studies have shown there won’t be significant impacts.’ |
| Everyone is still invited to look at the maps and mark the best option. Some participants make marks, but others do not. (This ‘politics of resignation’ was explained later in an interview to be a deliberate choice of non-action.) |

| 2020 online meeting (with some in-person attendance)                                                                 |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The company has an extensive slide deck and starts with an online presentation again covering the studies being carried out and key results, the projected job creation and regional economic growth, the timeline for permitting and building the mine, and options for its development. From early on, a few online participants representing environmental NGOs challenge the company: |
| P: ‘You claim there is no significant impact, but even a small impact is significant. Explosions and other mining activities will break the bedrock and impact the water balance of the mire as water runs down cracks in the bedrock. This will inevitably cause harm to the protected area. It was founded to protect biodiversity and conserve the flora and fauna, and from that perspective, this project is not acceptable.’ |
| E: ‘Thank you. Yes, as you said, certain mechanisms can affect the water balance. We study them and have seen that, after exploration, they return to normal. But, of course, we must plug the holes. Once again, it is a question of the impacts and their significance’ |
| Later in the meeting, the following exchange occurs: |
| E: ‘Our studies have shown there won’t be significant impacts.’ |
| P: ‘It is wrong that you are trying to destroy a protected area with a mine. You claim there is no significant impact, but even a small impact is significant… the dust and water impacts will harm the protected land. This project can in no way be acceptable when this place was founded as a sanctuary to protect biodiversity.’ |
| E: ‘Yes… We, of course, must do everything we can to diminish the impacts, and we have learned how to deal with them. Again, it is a question of the impacts’ significance.’ |

(P = Protector, E = Extractor)
Table 5  Stakeholder meeting with reindeer herders

In a wooden cabin 10 kms from town, coffee cups and buns are set out for the invitees. Company personnel—including the project leader, head of sustainability, and a few handling community relations—make final preparations for the presentation they will give. Maps on the tables and walls illustrate the different project options.

Once the participants (approx. 10) have arrived, the company personnel begin the PowerPoint. The first 15 min of their presentation are on last year’s oil spills, how they were handled, and the steps taken to prevent a recurrence. The spills generated some negative publicity last year, but later, a participant comments that it is funny how much time they spent on such a small matter.

The presentation continues with an explanation of the project direction and different background studies in progress. Participants are active and often challenge the company. Multiple speakers express mistrust towards mining companies in general—‘the credibility of mining firms here is zero’—along with distrust of the consultancy firms and the entire EIA process: ‘the industry always wins’.

The information about the impacts and its trustworthiness are discussed at length. The herders raise concerns about self-monitoring and demand outside reporting: ‘if there is a mine, there is harm’. The company representative asks how to improve the information’s reliability, but a talk about different research approaches worldwide ends on this frustrated note: ‘Why must we tell you what information to look at? You are the professionals; you should know which impacts on the area to consider.’ Distrust centres around the collar research on the reindeer; the information seems unreliable since few collars were implemented. A dispute arises about the number of collars sent/received and how to use them. In addition, the research’s lack of comparability or a clear, concise outcome seem to bother the participants. One herder states they find it frustrating how they know and can explain where their reindeer are in the forest and how they move, but the decision-makers need black-and-white evidence to believe them.

The company has three options for the project (with A and B variations) that differ on where the tunnel starts, its location, and how the ore is transferred. The first option is a fully underground tunnel; the other two involve some ground transportation. Variations A and B have alternate road locations. The options are presented with illustrative pictures and preliminary videos depicting the overground operations’ location, their visibility, and the tunnel’s depth underground, with the Eiffel Tower illustrating a 700-m depth. The point of operations being deep underground to protect the surface is emphasised in the verbal presentation.

The representative states the meeting’s aim is to discuss which option is best for herders and how the company can diminish the impacts on their livelihoods. One herder comments, ‘Well, I thought there was also option zero: no mine.’ That draws the response, ‘Yes, of course, that is an option.’ However, that option is not discussed in the meeting.

reindeer, you don’t need mines’. In the meetings, the Dwellers also raised issues of increased traffic and resulting accidents involving animals.

The Dwellers feel a deep ecological connection with the place and the land. They have spent a lot of their time in the forests with the reindeer; they know where they roam and how changes in the landscape influence the animals, as described by one herder:

Now they have the data from those collars [radio collars used to track reindeer movements]. [But] We already knew that the reindeer won’t go anywhere near there [existing mine]. We are in the forest every day. We know the animals.

Mining directly impacts the Dwellers’ livelihoods as reindeer are highly sensitive to changes in their living environment. Accordingly, the nearby Kevitsa mine has completely changed the rotational grazing of the animals and diminished the overall amount of grazing land. Research carried out as part of the EIA application showed reindeer did not go within a six-kilometre radius of the outer fences of the Kevitsa mine because of its noise and dust. If the Viiankaapa mine is built, it will permanently eliminate one reindeer herd and may affect others through a loss of grazing land.

The Dwellers who oppose the project vocally favour the ‘no mine’ option (known as ‘option zero’ in the EIA document). They mobilise their positional rights as herders in the official processes by asserting that their herding will be harmed. They also mobilise their unique knowledge of and position in the place by openly voicing distrust of the Extractors and demanding more research, credible information, communication, and proper compensation, as illustrated in Table 5. Yet, their activation of such resistance can be characterised as placid due to their social embeddedness, as I explain in the next section.

Habiters’ ecological embeddedness is based on their everyday existence in and with the place. The surrounding ecological environment is not necessarily the basis for their livelihood or even a source of direct income, although it can provide income for some who sell foraged foodstuffs or make other uses of the ecological place. Its importance, however, is as an essential part of the Habiters’ everyday reality and enjoyment. For the villagers of Kersilö, Sattanen, and Moskuvaara, the Viiankaapa mire is a place for recreational pastimes such as skiing, foraging for berries and mushrooms, birdwatching, and hiking. Furthermore, for many of the villagers, the threat posed by mining is not only to the mire but also the Kitinen River and the area’s groundwater, with the potential for water usage and fishing to be affected. However, the Habiters’ everyday ecological embeddedness was difficult for them to transform into defendable claims in the
Social Embeddedness in Overt and Covert Conflict

Social embeddedness denotes the socio-spatial dialectic relations within the social web of a place. The relationship between Extractors and Protectors can be understood through the mechanism of attachment and detachment, which functions not only through ecological element, as explained above, but also through the social element of place-basedness. The Extractors deny the Protectors’ attachment to the social web of relations in Sodankylä, to manage some of the active dissent. They described the Protectors as being from elsewhere and having agendas, as opposed to reasonable local people with connections to the place and commitments to its best interests. This is a common narrative in mining to differentiate between ‘good’ locals and ‘bad’ NGOs or activists who (ostensibly) come from elsewhere to cause trouble. Accordingly, the relatively large vote share a key local activist—whose campaign was built around opposing the mine and who is the leading figure of the movement to protect the Viiankiaapa mire—received in the parliamentary election was dismissed by an Extractor position-holder who referred to them as popular only among voters outside the Sodankylä area: ‘I don’t think she got lot of votes from Sodankylä; they were from elsewhere in Lapland’.

The relationship between Extractors and Protectors tended towards the agonistic when embedded in the social web of the place, and they became more antagonistic with physical distance. This is exemplified by the two meetings held between the company and the Protectors (see Table 4). In both, the Protectors expressed their objection to the project and its threats to the unique natural bounty of the area. While at the first meeting in Sodankylä, the expressions were mild (refusal to participate in map-making and calmly voicing opposition), at the second meeting, which was organised online, some Protectors were much more openly antagonistic in their positions and repeatedly claimed the project was harmful or even illegal. Meanwhile, the more socially embedded Protectors were antagonised by the Extractors’ co-optative tendencies, where they posited the movement to protect the Viiankiaapa mire was ‘a critical partner’ with whom they had good relations, downplaying its ontological opposition to the project. As one Protector described in an interview:

They want to give the image that this dialogue is somehow working even though we have a completely different viewpoint—they ask us every time, many times, if we have anything to ask or add. It’s so frustrating at times to keep on repeating that we are absolutely against the mine, that nothing they could do better would somehow make us accept the project. The risks and uncertainty are too high.

Extractors sought to establish a hegemonic position and obtain the consent of the Dwellers and Habiters by becoming ‘friendly neighbours’ and, with the planned mine, re-making the future of the place. This effort to embed themselves in the social web of the place by aligning the Extractors with local realities was carried out by deploying local employees at the meetings. There was always at least one company employee who was from the place, to enhance both the ‘localness’ and the sense of the company being part of that place, since ‘being from the place’ is an asset. This enhanced the company’s ability to participate credibly in conversations about how the town and nearby areas had changed over the years. Similarly, talking about the traffic and good places to forage for berries was aimed at garnering people’s trust and giving a sense of their knowledge of the place. Such perceptions of them as knowledgeable were fortified by including locals who were viewed as allies of the project in discussions: ‘Tell me, Mike, those trees there on the river bench are about 5 m tall, right?’.

The positions of both the Dwellers and Habiters are ecologically and socially embedded in the place. Accordingly, the Dwellers can mobilise their ecological embeddedness, valued place knowledge, and priority position as users of the land to resist the mining development. Yet, the social embeddedness of people in these two positions constrains their willingness to engage in overt conflict, though neither welcomes the mine with open arms. Accordingly, the two positions of Dwellers and Habiters may be differentiated. While the Habiters’ silent resistance can be conceptualised as a form of passive consent, the Dwellers’ placid resistance is not consenting; instead, it combines forms of covert and overt dissent, though without making relations antagonistic.

While the Dwellers resisted the mine, instead of uniting with the Protectors in an overt conflict to defend their counter-hegemonic position, they mobilised their preferential stakeholder position to directly negotiate fences with and compensation from the Extractors. Such actions can be described by the term passive dissent. Partially, this positioning can be understood as a pragmatic move supported by previous experiences (in which Extractors won in the end) but it can also be explained by the social embeddedness of the Dwellers. They do not want to be obstacles to development, and the jobs and work associated with the mining project offer a genuine benefit to the area. The Dwellers may also have families whose members work at another mine or depend in part on contracts connected to the mines, which will affect the actions they take.
This cautious approach was evident in how they voiced their views, knowing the company was listening: ‘You don’t necessarily want to comment on all (questions). Because then if something happens in the future, they’ll say, “well, it was the reindeer herders who wanted it this way”’. For the Extractors, all non-overt dissent is manageable; they can contain it by downplaying the antagonisms and posing them as difficulties to be negotiated, as described in these two excerpts on the relationship between Extractors and Dwellers:

Dwellers: ‘Well, you have to get along with them, but we have said to them multiple times that our option is zero. They know it very well.’

Extractors: ‘With reindeer herders, we converse a lot; they are always very welcoming and … they are like, “We’ll find a solution”, so it’s not difficult with them.’

Habiters, meanwhile, are deeply embedded in the Sodankylä area as most have lived here all their lives and have family roots in the area going far back. They have a connection to the place through both ecological and social lived experiences. Habiters are concerned about the potential harm the mine will cause and sceptical of the promised jobs and economic growth, as promises made by Extractors during earlier projects did not come to fruition. They recognise that supporting extraction in the area is economically important to the municipality but hope less destructive alternative plans will be put forwards, which will be more viable. Habiters’ social embeddedness in the wider Sodankylä region is much stronger than their ecological embeddedness in the specific aapa mire. This does not mean they are not deeply embedded in the place, but the scale and type of their embeddedness differ from those of the Protectors and Dwellers.

As Table 2 shows, key reasons for the Habiters either not participating or remaining silent in the meetings were a fear of asking stupid questions (sense of inferiority) and sense of weariness brought on by the constant, unstoppable change. Many feel they cannot make a difference, or they do not want to be stigmatised as ‘difficult’ because that could limit the possibilities for their children to work at the mine. One person commented after a meeting that these were nice events and the company did well to describe its plans, but local people lacked any real ability to influence whether the project would go ahead: ‘I mean they [company employees] are nice people, but of course, life would be better without the mine’. As such, their perceived powerlessness and social embeddedness combine to silence resistance and shift any effort at dissent into passive consent. While some Habiters also occupy the Dweller position, they are more active as Habiters. In some cases, when their relatives are Extractors, passive consent helps them avoid open conflict with their kin.

Overall, as illustrated by the conceptual model in Fig. 2, the struggle over the place exists at two levels. First, at the ecological/material level, the opposing knowledge attributions of information and ideology are operationalised by the hegemonic group, the Extractors, and the counter-hegemonic group, the Protectors. These opposing narratives—of the instrumental versus intrinsic value of the place, of growth and job creation versus protecting nature and fighting against biodiversity loss, and of minimal harm versus destruction—are operationalised through the mechanism of attachment or detachment. This mechanism operates as attribution or...
denial of harm regarding the proposed mine’s potential impact on the protected mire. Second, at the social embeddedness level, the Extractors seek to use the same mechanism to delegitimise Protectors by detaching them from the place, by calling them outsiders. Importantly, people’s degree of ecological and/or social embeddedness defines their position(s) in the hegemonic struggle.

Overt conflict materialises at the ecological level over the meanings, knowledge, and narratives concerning this aapa mire, while covert conflict and struggle reveal themselves in the social web of the place, represented here by the broader municipality. This signifies that while ecological embeddedness occurs through knowledge attribution, socio-spatial place mobilisations are an active place of resistance, with social embeddedness functioning to hinder different groups’ resistance. This is shown by the two positions deeply embedded in the social web of relations—the Dwellers and Habiterst—whose placid or silent activation of their resistance ultimately leads them to mobilise passive dissent and passive consent, respectively. Although the Protectors are also socially embedded, this constrains them less since their social webs are often broader than the Sodankylä area, and thus allows them more mobility in the social place.

Discussion & Conclusions

This paper offers new theorisation on how place identifications, attachments, and meanings trigger different levels of resistance by utilising the concept of place-basedness as grounded in the two elements of ecological and social embeddedness. The place is not merely a context in which potential natural resource extraction and the struggle over it occur but also a constitutive part of the corporate–community relations and struggle. Previous research has covered local struggles against natural resource extraction and shown, for example, how the disembeddedness of mining projects is the root cause of local resistance (Banerjee et al., 2021), how power differences between the extractive industry and local communities constrain those communities’ abilities to resist (Banerjee, 2018; Furnaro, 2019), and how mining companies can silence resistance through co-optation and domination (Maher, 2018). The place has become an important factor in these struggles, as companies need a social licence to operate (Mayes, 2015) and the place can offer a strong collective identity that may stand against efforts from the company to obtain such a licence (Haarstad & Campero, 2012). That identity often supports political action and resistance to extractive projects (Escobar, 1999), with local people’s different value systems and positions offering counter-hegemonic narratives that can be mobilised in those struggles (Conde & Le Billon, 2017).

This paper extends the previous literature on corporate–community relations by showing how actors can occupy and draw from multiple place-based positions, and how their relationships with the ecological and social place inform both their relationships with the company and their activation of resistance. Accordingly, place-basedness may be defined as a relationship between the actor and place constituted and mobilised through both social and ecological embeddedness. As shown by the Fig. 2, the strength of the ecological and social embeddedness of the positions varies, and the dual influence of the place-basedness impacts the positions’ ability to draw from knowledge resources and whether the social webs of relations support or constrain them in their positional resistance.

Previous research has shown how ecological embeddedness as ecological materiality and sense-making enables actors to interpret their environmental surroundings and thereby enhances their resilience (Whiteman & Cooper, 2011). Here, I have shown how ecological embeddedness as ecological materiality and knowledge attribution can strengthen group-level resilience when those involved draw from their knowledge and experience of the ecological environment. Yet, while all the positions identified in this research are ecologically embedded, their knowledge attribution varies and, therefore, so does their ability to mobilise ecological embeddedness. Overt struggle happens at the level of knowledge attribution, with different kinds of knowledge offering information and ideology about the place (Lefebvre, 1991). For instance, this may involve information regarding the ecology of the place and the potential impacts on its flora and fauna (through studies, reports, and observations), and ideologies leaning towards either an instrumental or intrinsic value of the place (as a source for economic growth or ecological sustainability). Attachment to the mine and detachment from potential harm to the mire, or vice versa, will result from that knowledge attribution, which can be mobilised to support the hegemony or counter-hegemony, respectively. To participate actively in the struggle over the (future) use(s) of a place, actors must draw from their ecological embeddedness in such a way. Yet, those whose knowledge is based on the everyday lived experience (connaissance) of that place may struggle to mobilise their position as easily, limiting how they can actively assert claims (Maher et al., 2020).

Meanwhile, place-basedness as social embeddedness is the level of covert conflict where people’s social relations can constrain their dissent because are motivated to maintain social cohesion (Friedkin, 2004). The example of the Dwellers illustrates this point. They have deep ecological embeddedness and can mobilise their specific knowledge of the place; however, their social embeddedness constrains them from engaging in open dissent. They are part of the social web of relations of the place through their immediate
families, more distant kin, and physical proximity (Lähdesmäki et al., 2017), and the social ‘stickiness’ surrounding them presents a hindrance to speaking out. Previous research has often highlighted how social embeddedness offers a power resource for those who are vulnerable or in less advantageous positions (Amato et al., 2021; Cavotta et al., 2021; D’Cruz et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2019). However, social embeddedness can also silence certain actors in corporate–community engagement, especially in relatively small places. The goal of maintaining social cohesion drives some actors, when conducting social relations in a certain place, to prioritise the common good over personal or ingroup preferences (Schiefer & Van der Noll, 2017), but this might prevent such local people from freely voicing their concerns. The structuring of corporate–community relations as organised and led by the company—which may gather only the like-minded and those unlikely to voice any concerns in front of others—can add to the silencing effect. Potentially as a result, active dissent was more strongly voiced in the online meetings than when the opponents came face to face in a location and setting chosen and controlled by the company.

The paper advances the literature on community mobilisation (Cavotta et al., 2021; Conde, 2017; Ehrnström-Fuentes, 2022; Maher, 2018) by offering a nuanced account of different levels of local resistance. Instead of one community making a singular resistance effort, I propose that people in different positions hold different place identifications, attachments, and meanings, and the ecological and social embeddedness of these positions influences people’s resistance. While ecological embeddedness can support resistance through knowledge attribution and active mobilisation of the place, different degrees of social embeddedness transfer some of the opposition to more covert forms of placid or silent resistance. In Gramscian terms, placid resistance denotes contained and passive dissent, while silent resistance describes individuals’ passive consent.

Silence can be a feature of resistance rather than evidence of its absence (Komu, 2019; Raitio et al., 2020). In this case, it is the outcome of certain locals’ sense of powerlessness and inability to influence the unwanted situation (Clarke & Newman, 2007). Placid resistance as passive dissent, meanwhile, involves subtle forms of resistance, for instance, striving to control or manipulate the outcomes by adopting a double strategy of engaging in community–corporate dialogue as a performance and yet advancing an opposing position through other means. Everyday resistance may be mobilised through such covert forms of dissent, even while maintaining a social web of relations. Alternatively, as previous research has acknowledged, resistance can be expressed through negotiation, and in such a way, engaging with the hegemony is a common feature of subaltern resistance (Banerjee et al., 2021). Hence, a lack of active resistance cannot be equated to passive consent. Instead, dissent may be expressed through official state-led channels (such as in the EIA process) and in negotiation with the extractive hegemony.

Limitations and Future Research

The ecological dynamics of place-basedness are often referenced in natural resource conflicts where the ecology of a place and impacts on that space are central (Ehrnström-Fuentes, 2022). This study has investigated one place threatened by the impacts of mining, and to extend the work, the dynamics of place-basedness should be further researched in other places of corporate–community conflicts. While considerable research has explored resource struggles in the Global South (Banerjee et al., 2021; Ehrnström-Fuentes, 2019; Maher et al., 2020), the resource rush in the Arctic and resultant place-based dynamics have only attracted interest recently (Lassila, 2020). This paper contributes to the latter stream of research, where looking ahead, more studies are needed to understand the similarities and differences between the place-based dynamics in the Global South and Arctic regions.

This study has unearthed how social embeddedness can constrain local resistance, instead of offering a power resource. However, this study has focused on a relatively small place, and the dynamics may differ in places of larger sizes. The sociocultural coherence and degree of collective identity of a place may also have further effects. Additional research is thus required to improve our understanding of the boundary conditions for the constraining dynamics of social embeddedness.

The research has also some practical implications for redressing corporate-led dialogue meetings as a method for obtaining local acceptance, given that natural resource extraction often takes place near small communities. When the process, no matter under what guise, is simply designed to secure locals’ acceptance, any deviation on their part requires effort, resources, and a willingness to fight, and a lack of at least one in most cases silences dissenting voices. As such, while participatory mechanisms can enable resistance in particular spaces (Kesby, 2005), the process can also readily silence resistance in others (Cooke & Kothari, 2001), especially in close-knit social settings where people are deeply embedded in the social web of relations. I propose that the ideas and praxes of dialogues should be redesigned to counter the hindering effects of social embeddedness and the imbalances created by power differences. Questionnaires, voting with anonymous responses, and third-party-led dialogues stand out at first thought as tools that may offer improved outcomes.
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Declarations

Conflict of interest There are no potential conflicts of interest.

Ethical approval No external funding was received for this research. All procedures involving human participants were performed according to the ethical standards of the institutional and national research committees and the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments. Informed consent was obtained from all interview subjects in the study. This article does not concern any studies with animals.

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