

Using PGIS to promote human and environmental rights



UNIVERSITEIT VAN AMSTERDAM

**The World Bank Study '*Voices of the Poor*'
concluded that many people desired access to
knowledge rather than charity to enable them to
move out of poverty.¹**

1. Narayan, 2000 in Hordijk & Baud, 2006: 671.



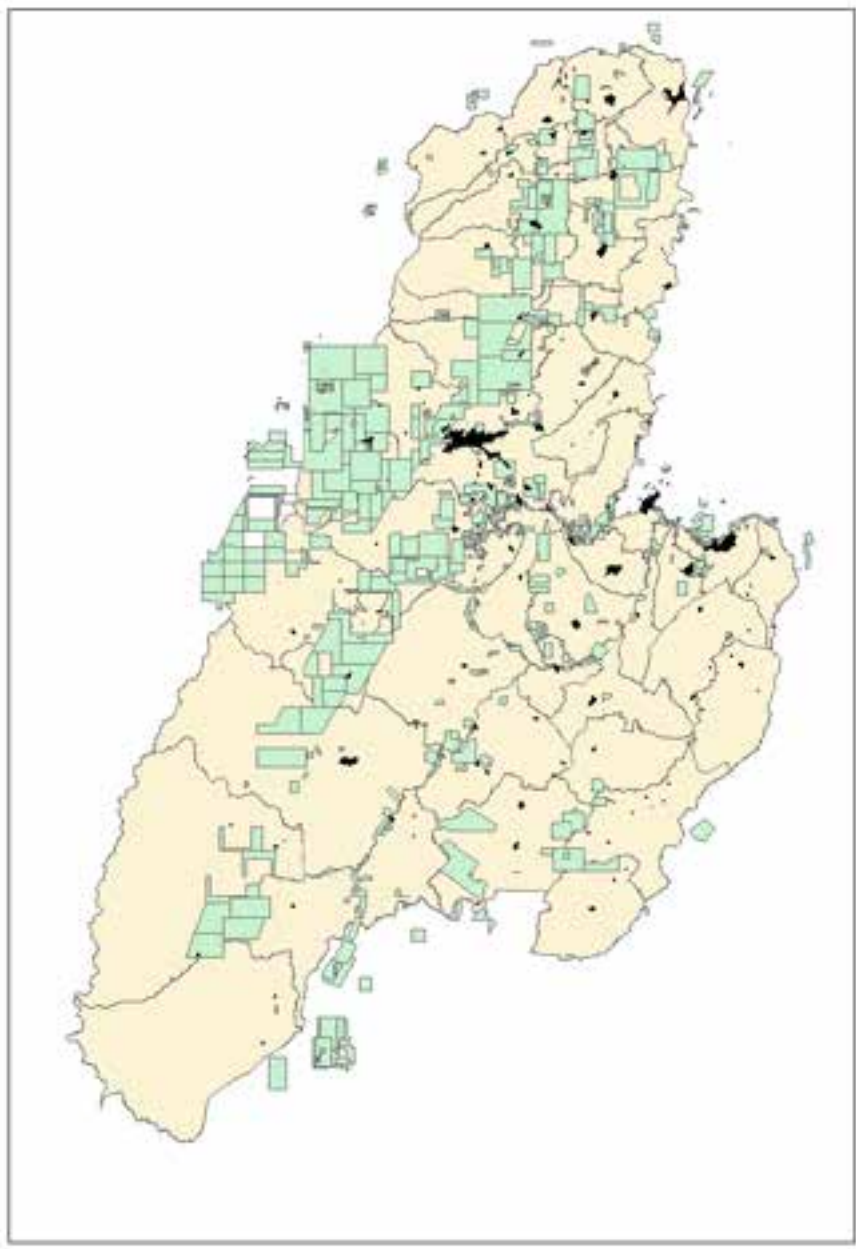
voz1voz

<https://1voz.org>

Research Location

Tolima, Colombia

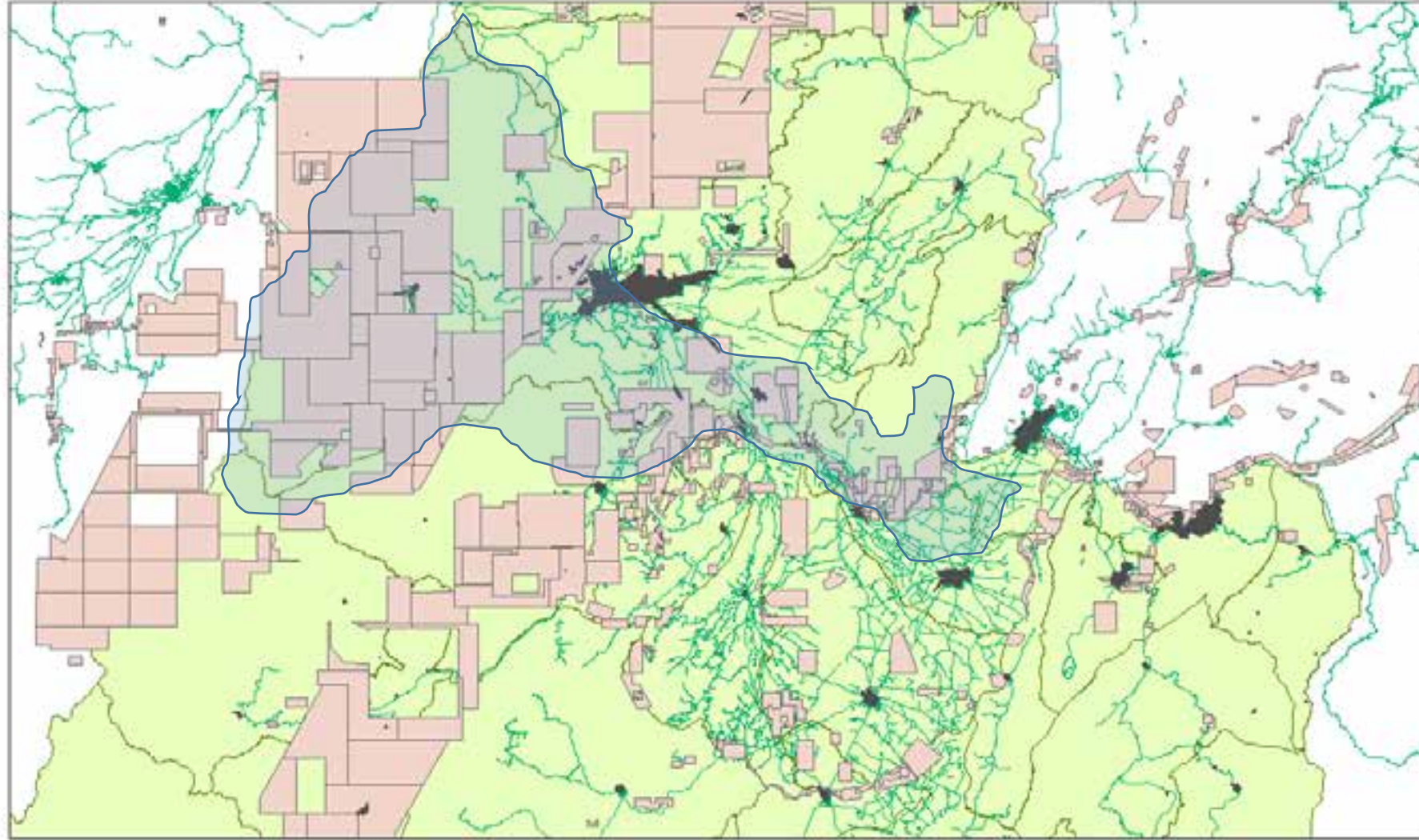
- Subject to large scale mining
- Home to the Páramo
- Within the Andes Mountain Range




Maps produced by VOZ Geographic
Information Systems using ArcMap 10.1



Research Location



| | |
|---|------------------------|
|  | Populated Area |
|  | Municipal Boundaries |
|  | Coello Basin |
|  | Mining Concession 2012 |
|  | Roads |

Maps produced by VOZ Geographic Information Systems using ArcMap 10.1



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Human Rights Abuses

- Death threats
- Execution of César García
- Robberies (data theft)
- Heavy military and ESMAD presence

Can PGIS offer help?

- Mobile technologies have already begun to cheapen the costs of mobilisation and connectivity.
- True PGIS is able to transcend socioeconomic boundaries
- Maps produced collaboratively hold a much more diverse range of information, and in some cases highlight the importance of issues not otherwise considered by the SMO.
- Spatial data is invaluable to SMOs in both legal fights and in engaging the community.



Can PGIS offer help?

- The creation of '*neogeography*' has '*freed [GIS] from the confines of the academic and opened it up to the people*'²
- SMOs would rather invest in GIS software and tools than in social media

“We use maps in legal fights, they help us to define the terms of the struggle”.

- Jorge Rubiano of Semillas de Agua

Maps & not Social Media?

- Maps and spatial knowledge, unlike social media are more inherently political
- Maps and geographic data codify knowledge in a way that is seen as legitimate and scientifically grounded ³
- PGIS has been lorded as very successful in promoting the inclusion of marginalised communities ⁴

'By simultaneously allowing the expression of a variety of knowledges... ..PGIS creates a level playing field for comparing knowledge consensus and division. In so doing it allows a wider exploration of the cultural and political conditions that direct human understandings of the environment' ⁵

3. Robbins, 2003

4. (Robbin, 2003; see Also: McCall, 2003; McCall & Dunn, 2012; Rambaldi *et al.* 2006)

5. (Robbins, 2003: 238).



Limitations to people using PGIS

- Money
- Fear of Reprisals
- Education
- Fear of the unknown
- Ownership of Knowledge

'most local people, asked if they can make a map, say no'⁶

More than 50% of total respondents appeared to be concerned by companies and the government having access to their data translating into a little over half of respondents re-considering the publication of information.

How VOZ addresses these issues

- A simplified interface that can be taught very quickly.
- Reports are posted by people who are right there at the scene providing first hand, local information.
- Dispersed populations can work together on similar problems.
- People can quickly report on and review local issues, enabling greater community response to problems.
- Information is also available internationally.
- VOZ offers a level of security not seen in any other PGIS tool.



Conclusion

- Maps are social constructs that must be viewed in the context of their inherent power
- There is a significant shift in the power of maps and the sources of the information they represent

'PGIS practice is geared towards community empowerment through measured, demand driven, user friendly and integrated applications of geo-spatial technologies'.⁷

Conclusion

VOZ allows us to articulate the work of social movements. It is very useful to visualize spatially what happens in our territories and share this with the world.

- Comité de seguimiento Colombia



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