The Central Queensland Sapphire Mining Community
Case of Common Property and Cultural Capital
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Abstract: This paper discusses the case of the sapphire mining community of Central Queensland, Australia, and its changing fortunes as a result of its dependence on publicly-owned and regulated sapphire deposits. These fortunes were subject to changes recently to the introduction of capital-intensive mining with employed labour, and vertically integrated sapphire marketing. This affected the viability of individual miners who operated small-scale mines, and the overproduction and falling demand for sapphires which followed quickly drove most large miners out of the area as well. In response to these events, local entrepreneurs are turning to tourist enterprises which still have their basis in the sapphire deposits, but now repackaging the cultural capital accumulated by the long history of small-scale mining to sell it to tourists as an 'authentic small-miner experience': descending a facsimile sapphire mine, washing ostensible sapphire-bearing gravel, finding whatever sapphires have been 'seeded' there, and offering them to local gem-cutters who cut the stones in the sight of the tourists and set them to specification. Against this background, we identify and then discuss a paradox: the common property resource of the sapphire deposits were originally privately exploited to create livelihoods for those individuals who lived and worked in this community. However, the capitalist transformation of this petty bourgeois industry has imploded the long-term privatisation of the common resource by over-exploiting the original deposits to the point where now few owner-operators are able still to make any kind of living from the quantity of sapphires they mine. Interestingly, even though the common resource has been substantially exhausted, the community is still building its sustainability on it. This is due to the ties which the locals have with this resource, expressed in the local 'culture' – a culture being packaged and sold as tourist products to visitors, thus sustaining a viable economic base for the community. The remaining section of our paper provides an analysis of this process, in which we employ the concept of 'community cultural capital' (used in a different sense from Bourdieu (1997)) to encompass the traditions of the small-scale sapphire miners.

Keywords: Sapphire Mining, Common Property, Community, Cultural Capital

We have been interested in changes on the Central Queensland Gemfields for some time now, and have tried a variety of theoretical frames to account for what has been going on here for the closing four decades of the twentieth century. In this paper, we reflect on those changes again, this time within the privatisation debate, and here we use a common property model to help account for recent and projected changes, and to propose what to us represents a better path forward.

The argument runs as follows. The industry of the Central Queensland Gemfields was established on petty capitalist exploitation of a natural resource – the sapphire deposit – as miners were granted a licence (a miner’s 'right') to a portion of this 'state commons' into private wealth through individual exertion in low-capital mining. A change occurred in the late 1960s though, as ever-larger leases were granted to those with access to big capital (especially heavy earth-moving machinery) and they began to exploit the gem deposits in ways which rapidly reduced them to vestiges, and thereby endangered the prospects for small producers to continue making their living through petty bourgeois mining. That is, privatisation and commoditisation of the commons jeopardised the viability of the local community and placed the very common itself in peril, too. The fields languished in this condition for a few years, as depressed international gem markets – manipulated by 'big producers', and especially by international buyers – made it difficult for small miners to earn an acceptable living from the region's principal industry. More recently, the Gemfields have been reinvigorated by a blossoming of the tourist industry, with the gem deposits apparently being redefined by local entrepreneurs and the community as a collective resource which can be differently privatised, now by field-dwellers selling their own ‘claim’ on the community's cultural resources.

It might be said that the paper attempts to demonstrate a direct causal link between the destruction of sustainable, viable small-scale miners’ livelihoods and the introduction of “capital intensive” mining, but that is not its main theme. The major concern is with changes to definitions of property which have accompanied the former changes. Neither do we enter in detail into the economic viability of
small-scale miners, there being a range in the scale of their enterprises and evidence of a flow of personnel into and out of the industry, sometimes in celebration of success, and at other times in recognition that the enterprise has been an economic failure for that particular miner. By the same token, it can easily be argued that some miners were more susceptible than others to the competitive influences of the large-scale enterprises, which were them selves variable in size and differentially long-lived in the competitive conditions we describe their activities having precipitated.

Methodological Approach

Using legislative documents, government and newspaper reports, and some interviews, we adapt common property concepts to investigate the effects of state intervention and globalization on the commons and to point to what we hope will be a more sustainable future for the sapphire industry in this part of Australia. In a slightly different metaphor, the paper offers insight into contemporary problems experienced by "protected (natural resource) areas" and makes suggestions about how law and policy could be better designed to promote and balance the needs of conservation and resource-dependent local communities.

For our case study, we collected structured interviews with sixteen local tourism-oriented businesses to obtain current data on how long they have been in operation, how many employees they have, the approximate number of visitors they catered for each year, and so on. The structured interviews were followed up with unstructured ones, within three weeks, in which the interviewees spoke freely on a variety of context-dependent topics, explaining in rich detail their mental connections between the things that make the place attractive to them and for its visitors (the redefined 'common resource'), and the possibility of benefiting from such things if they could be 'packaged' (and made individually valuable) for tourist consumption.

Privatisation

Capitalism and the global market seem to be driving the world towards increasing privatisation of natural resources. More and more, the commons and communal ('national') resources are being converted to private property, where exclusion rather than inclusiveness becomes the norm. These kinds of situations, which have been going on for a long time (Coop and Brunckhorst, 1999), weaken communal rights and even eliminate common property (Blainey, 2003). Scholars and governments need to be concerned with the question, what is the role for the state in this process? And, how will the public interest be maintained when common pool resources are thoroughly privatised?

To develop its economy, the state frequently allocates the land and other natural resources to the private sector, either through privatisation (freehold) or by providing certain licenses and authorities to private individuals and industries to manage and exploit natural resources (leasehold). In the utilisation of the land and natural resources, government has a dominant role (state owned or state property) and often acts as a representative of the public – that is, in the name of the people – and to justify this they refer to efficiency of natural resource management and efforts to increase the community's livelihood and collective wealth (Edwards, 1999).

In this paper, we use common property concepts to theorise about how local communities can or cannot maintain and defend their rights and their local institutions, and we use a case study to show how in one particular circumstance, internal and external factors of the society weakened and even destroyed local existing institutions. We show too how the dynamics that exist within the society permitted response to the economic, social and political changes from outside, bringing the community to new life – both economic and social vitality. We focus on the actors with significant roles from outside or within the community, and on the processes of institutionalisation – the economic and political impact, the legal reform and government policies. The argument begins with a consideration of the nature of property and tenure in it.

Property (Rights and Obligations of Tenure)

Discussing property, Bromley (1997: 7–11) treats "...four broad types of resource management regimes...: (1) state-property regimes; (2) private-property regimes; (3) common-property regimes; and (4) non-property regimes (alternatively called open access)". As regards the first of these, State-property regimes are those where ownership and control over natural resource use and management rest in the hands of the state through various government agencies. Individuals and groups may use the natural resources, but only with the approval of the administrative agency responsible for carrying out the wishes of the larger political community....

Public land and other natural resources are thus State Property, in Bromley's terms, and the "crown lands" of Queensland ought to be regarded as a government common – and it is in this sense that the article is about "common property", as the title suggests. If the citizens of Queensland were to think about the matter at all, they would probably bring the ownership closer to home and regard themselves
(collectively) as owners of the State of Queensland (despite its name). National forests, national parks, and military reservations fall into this category, too.

Ostrom (1990: 91–101) proposes that the most enduring common property resource arrangements have been characterised by clearly defined boundaries, congruence between appropriation and provision rules and local conditions, collective-choice arrangements, monitoring, graduated sanctions, conflict-resolution mechanisms, minimal recognition of right to organize, and nested enterprises. According to Bromley’s schema, the State of Queensland holds a common property right (on behalf of all its people) over a resource – in the case which interests us, a mineral deposit – and the state directly manages the resource overall while leasing parts of it to ‘users’ (refer Blainey, 2003: 6, 18-22, too). State property regimes deny the user the kind of total control which private property regimes imply, but, nevertheless, many such regimes, by their very nature, convey secure expectations (‘rights’) for some interests. The state/government then makes a reciprocal claim against the miners on behalf of the citizenry, the rents/fees they are required to pay.

Talking about the rights which attach to property control/access, Bromley (1997: 4-6) comments, When one has a right in something it means that the benefit stream arising from that situation is explicitly protected by some authority system. The authority system gives and takes away rights by its willingness or unwillingness to agree to protect one’s claims…. To have a property right, therefore, is to have secure control over a future benefit stream. … [Property rights] are simply the socially sanctioned and enforced normative elements of civil society. Property rights extend … legal force to the realm of objects and benefit streams.

As this applies in the State of Queensland, "historically, a resource is made available for development – which is an increase in the intensity of use of land – according to this sequence:

the owner of the resource (originally the State,…) allocates it to a potential user to a specified extent, by propertorial or tenure-related mechanisms such as leases, which alter the legal ‘interest’ in the resource, and for which it receives rent and royalties;

a State department … regulates the use and development of the resource by its holders, through regulatory mechanisms such as planning schemes, by-laws, taxes, rates and levies;

the holder of the resource manages it to achieve personal goals, by management mechanisms.… Ultimately, the other mechanisms feed into and affect management (Edwards, 1999: 3)".

Legally, development can include change of use, although development may occur without any change of use being involved – present use may just be 'deepened', so to speak. The primary purpose of propertorial and regulatory mechanisms is to ensure that resources are suitably managed, and to achieve this, a regulatory regime is needed which will command respect and cooperation. Modern nation states have been successful in redistributing access to public resources to individuals who show willing to 'develop' them and in policing their access and 'royalty' remittances ultimately by force of law, but mostly by persuading the public that this is in their interest, and the users that theirs is a moral responsibility. Private property has become a ruling idea of modern society through incorporating it into public knowledge and its public role is institutionalised into social awareness.

Institutions…not only create restraints. Institutions enable, authorize and legitimize. Institutions empower, they provide licenses and, hence, opportunities. They confer rights as well as responsibilities. They define what is appropriate for a particular person to do, what is required of him [sic], what is morally accepted and justified, and they help…make sense of the world…. Interests are socially constructed, not naturally derived, and institutions define what these interests are, [and] how they are acquired and get internalized by the individual (Jentoft, 1997: 1).

Our story focuses on the birth of those initiatives in one place, the process that occurred, the actors who played significant roles from outside or within the community, and also on the processes of institutionalisation following upon the achievements that had been reached – the government policies, the legal reform, and the economic and political impact.

The Community and its History

The Anakie Gemfield, a small community in Central Queensland, emerged based on mining operations conducted mainly by small-scale miners who worked individually or in small partnerships to extract sapphires from alluvial deposits with hand tools, and later with the aid of a few mechanised devices that complemented hand mining. (The Marxian tradition calls this 'petty bourgeois' mining.) The main towns, Sapphire and Rubyvale, are only six kilometres apart; together they straddle the Tropic of Capricorn at a point some 300 kilometres due west of the regional centre, Rockhampton.

According to Monteagle (1986), sapphires were probably discovered in the area by a government surveyor in 1878. Thereafter (Adler, 1992), because of its circumstances and history, the Gemfields community developed and refined a unique lifestyle and mining culture, reflected in mining implements, buildings, stories and sapphire-mining lore, and especially in the methods through which sapphires are
recovered from the 'washdirt'. The small miners worked in order to exist comfortably, but always entertained the chance of 'striking it rich'. For the most part, they lived and mined on the Gemfields because of intrinsic, non-economic rewards. The central values of this culture include independence and self-reliance, honesty in dealing with fellow miners, and a high level of trust among individuals who formed social and economic bonds within the mining community. These values served to support an intricate and effective system of norms that ensured a secure and fulfilling community life.

The small-scale sapphire miners had all the petty bourgeoisie characteristics: they had a secure right to their mines, they owned their tools and machinery, and they used their labour as they saw fit (Smith, 1950: 517). Any adult could obtain a Miner's Right, which entitled them to commence mining for sapphires on available Crown land, obtain a mining tenement, build a residence, use public resources such as timber, gravel and water, and freely sell their sapphires to visiting buyers – their 'right' declared that they owned what they produced, and so they disposed of their sapphires however they wished (Ryan, 1974). Interestingly though, while 'The Miner's Right' continued to exist (Anon, 1987a, and 1987b), its work conditions specified in intricate detail the obligation of the 'independent owner operator' to behave not like an entrepreneur, the custodian of a community resource, but like an employee. In effect, "if you work in your mine for eight hours per day for five days a week, you will be regarded as entitled to hold a miner's right".

Through to the late 1960s, varying numbers of miners and their families made a passable livelihood. Many, too, diversified into the down-stream processing of "rough" sapphires by gemstone faceting and jewellery making. The nearby urban centre of Emerald, too, benefited greatly from the business of the relatively prosperous Gemfields residents and the increasing tourist traffic. But, from the early 1970s, Thai gemstone merchants encouraged a boom in sapphiring activities on the Anakie Gemfields by initially paying higher prices than the local buyers, and sometimes even financing large-scale mining. They thereby achieved two things: a reliable and abundant supply of rough sapphires, and undermining of the official policy of protection for small producers in their own country (Mumme, 1988: 79; Teghe & McAllister, 2004).

Typically, large-scale miners strove to maximise profits through use of capital- and technologically-intensive mining methods. Large earth moving machinery, a larger workforce (often more than ten employees), and the open-cut method of mining ('strip mining') distinguished these miners from the small-scale, hand-held tool operators (Ryan, 1974). Nevertheless, they portrayed themselves as 'small miners', and their mining ventures as 'family interests', an image which appeared to help them enlist community support to lobby for further concessions from the state – against profit-limiting legislation (e.g., environmental protection measures), and in favour of lower taxes. Increase in their activities, along with withdrawal from the market by local sapphire buyers who could not compete with these higher prices, began to have a negative impact on the fields, and once capital became interested in colonising sapphire production in Queensland, the government actively protected and furthered its interests, even though that meant destruction of the established small-scale mode of sapphire production. So, from the mid-1980s (Queensland Govt., 1989), the region began a downturn to the extent that few small-scale sapphire miners remained on the Gemfields by 1995 (Teghe & McAllister, 2004).

The capital intensive miners had some influence in the international market, particularly inasmuch as the buyers (both in Australia and within the wider arena) were able to manipulate prices in response to gemstones' reputed quality. Elsewhere, we have shown how "Australian Sapphires" were manipulated into a poor reputation in the process of buyers chastising the market (Teghe and McAllister, 2004).

The shift in community economic composition was accompanied by a sharp decline in general wellbeing. By the early 1990s, the Anakie Gemfields became a welfare pocket, demonstrated by unusually high unemployment, low incomes, and low workforce participation rates (Teghe & McAllister, 2004) – as well as being a labour dormitory for Emerald, the Gemfields became a repository for some who could not find work. Poor people retired or settled there, taking advantage of the depressed housing prices. Furthermore, by 1995, many large-scale miners ceased operations because of a glut in the global sapphire market. The few large-scale miners remaining on the field employed a few casual, non-unionised (usually youth) workers, at low pay rates and with no overtime or shift work payments. The area was serviced by few health, civic, social or community facilities, and the various levels of government cited a variety of reasons for not providing more (Teghe & McAllister, 2005).

**The State's Role in the Demise of Small-scale Sapphire Mining**

Since the 1970s, mining legislation has been incrementally changed to favour big scale, capital-intensive mining, and discourage small-scale mining, as the Queensland government created circumstances in which large-scale privatisation of access to the sapphire deposits encouraged large-scale mining on...
the Gemfields (Anon., 1987a; Queensland Govt., 1989). In the process, the state reduced opportunities for small-scale mining and its associated community type (Anon., 1987a; Goldschmidt, 1978).

The first such change included the 'parcelling' of the Gemfields into areas for recreational mining (labelled as "fossicking areas"), while many of the sapphire-rich portions were opened to large-scale mining. Then, the Miner's Right was abolished and the miners’ previously recognised inalienable right to responsibly prospect, reside, mine, and use publicly owned resources on vacant Crown land in Queensland was extinguished (Anon., 1987a and 1987b). In effect, small-scale miners were no longer able to create a home and obtain a parcel of land in perpetuity by claiming a Miner's Homestead Perpetual Lease (MHPL), but thereafter, portions of the Gemfields were set aside for "orderly" development within the townships of Sapphire and Rubyvale, wherein some existing MHPLs were converted to freehold titles, while others became insecure short-term residential leases with a high annual rental.

Small-scale miners who had lived for years on their mining claims were told that they would be unable to hold secure title to their residences. They could still access sapphire deposits, but had to compete with large-scale miners for this access through virtually the same legal process. In further reducing the legitimacy of the small-scale miner, many of the mining activities associated with hand mining were labelled in new legislation as "fossicking" and their activities as "transient", or even those of "non-serious" sapphire hunters (Qld. Govt., 1989).

That is, the petit right to privatisate the resource common was severely restricted at the same stroke as the large scale 'right' expanded immeasurably (Ryan, 1974; Anon., 1987a). Clearly, a political choice had been set in motion, replacing small capital's right by a right exercised by big capital in other arenas. The changes, though, cannot be conceptualised here as part of an inevitable 'development' process; other 'players' saw what was happening in a much different light.

Nothing 'Inevitable'

Much of the material from the local and specialist press in the early 1970s shows an acute awareness by small miners of the short- and long-term consequences posed to their industry by the arrival of large-scale mining (and its privileged privatisation). There were numerous public meetings, and much government lobbying and public debate. However, the small miners achieved little success in curbing the government's intention of allowing large-scale machinery mining. A letter to The Central Queensland News editor, for instance (August 27, 1970), states that: "...to have a progressive community we must have people, not machines. The question thus arises: Do we want a thriving little community of family men [sic] and others, happy to make a modest living, or do we want a few big machines employing the minimum of labour?" On September 10, 1970, at a public meeting, Mrs. Gregory of Anakie presented the Minister for Mines with a petition signed by 583 people, "asking that full consideration be given to keeping the fields free for tourists to fossick and [for] small miners" (The Central Queensland News).

In a consequence of the non-success of their protests, by the early 1990s there were few small-scale miners on the Gemfields who derived all their income from mining (Adler, 1992: 71). Many of the richest deposits had been 'stripped' leaving an eroded, bare, and unsightly landscape. Tourists had to purchase fossicker licenses and pay camping fees if they wished to fossick and camp on public land within the Gemfields, and they were limited to short stays in any one place.

Hiatus

Where a small miner could process one cubic metre of sapphire-bearing material per day, a large-scale miner could process thousands. The idea of small-scale miner 'inefficiency' was progressively established as large-scale sapphire mining increased, and came to be supported by the fact that, as more sapphires were mined, prices fell. Small-scale miners also lost access to some of the richest sapphire-bearing ground to large-scale miners. Thus, they had to increase production to remain viable, and this soon became a losing battle, so fiction turned to reality: the small-scale miner really did become, by contrast with large-scale miners, uneconomic. By the late 1970s, many of the small-scale sapphire miners were increasingly unable to earn a living. The unemployment rate rose to almost fifty percent at the height of machinery mining; at the same time, what was the principal occupation group (miners) before the arrival in the community of machinery mining declined quite rapidly as a proportion of the local labour market (Teghe & McAllister, 2005).

Competition over access and exploitation of the sapphire natural resource has (for decades) prevented the development of alternative economic bases for the community’s long-term sustainability. The government appears never to have attempted seriously to assess the impact of large-scale machinery mining on the Gemfields. In both small-scale and large-scale situations, policy encouraged exploitation of natural (but often finite) resources, but apparently the underlying belief was that the faster this exploitation took place, the greater the benefit. It appears to have been
taken for granted that capital-intensive mining, employing more heavier machinery and technology, and fewer and fewer workers, is more ‘efficient’ and ‘modern’, and so, by implication, to be preferred to small-scale mining. This did not prove to be so, but only when the area’s natural resources were nearly exhausted were alternatives developed from within the community.

**From Mining to Tourism**

Our research indicates that the unemployment rate for the Anakie Gemfields community rose quite rapidly over the heydays of heavy machinery mining, and only began to fall over the period in which machinery-mining also declined. In effect, the unemployment rate rose to almost fifty percent at the height of machinery mining. At the same time, what was the principal occupation group (miners) before the arrival of machinery mining in the community declined quite rapidly as a proportion of the local labour market. Whereas in the mid-1970s over forty percent of those counted as being in the labour market identified themselves as miners, by early 1990s this proportion fell to less than fifteen percent.

Apparently due to an increase in the number of tourism-related, but small-scale, commercial ventures which appeared during the decline of large scale machinery-sapphire mining, the number of people in the Anakie Gemfields community who worked in the areas traditionally associated with tourism – including sales, accommodation and catering – grew steadily over the period from the mid-1970s to 2001 (Anon., 1989: 83; Teghe & McAllister, 2005).

Now, besides the associated types of businesses like accommodation and restaurants, the Anakie Gemfields sapphire mining tourism industry includes fossicking parks, underground and surface mine tours, guided fossicking tours to outlying sapphire fields, jewellery-making shops, sapphire faceting outlets, and art and craft shops (Anon, 1989). The tourist businesses in this community are ‘small’; none had more than six employees, while the average for the group studied was just fewer than 2.5 employees, and the average time they had been in business (when interviewed in 2001) was just under 10.8 years. As to the tourists themselves, they visit them-like sapphire mines and exhibitions, where they pay an entrance fee and where they are able to buy small lots of gravel ‘salted’ with small sapphires which they can process on the spot with the sieves provided – just as the ‘real’ miners used to do it. While there, they can also purchase cheap jewellery containing sapphires faceted and set in Thailand.

The tourism industry is interdependent with small-scale mining because of fossicking; many visitors come for it, and many more are provided with such services as guided tours, mining expeditions, and mining equipment hire. In turn, these activities depend on proven and easily accessible sapphire-bearing alluvial deposits of the ‘shallow wash’ areas, all located near one of the two townships.

**Revaluing Community Assets**

Bourdieu (1997; see also Bradburn and Coates, 2004) uses the term “cultural capital” to represent the totality of those non-economic factors upon which individuals can draw to enhance their chance of success in their lives. We have adapted this concept elsewhere (Teghe & McAllister, 2005) to argue that cultural capital can be understood more broadly to denote unique assets such as the local history and set of traditions that attract visitors to the community. A community’s cultural capital becomes of commercial value when the members of that community discern not only what it actually consists of, but also its potential as an economic resource. These assets are then used by community-based businesses to formulate and provide various packages of information, opportunities to have unique experiences, and other related services to these visitors. On the Anakie Gemfields, small-scale tourism business operators often have had formative experiences as small-scale miners and gem craftspersons themselves, which they have now been led to exploit; they make use of their own skill and knowledge and that ‘stored’ by other people on the fields to eventually build businesses around them.

When we turn this insight to the question of how to understand and deal with public ownership of both the physical capital of the gem deposits and the community cultural capital in a contemporary context, one feature of responsible land [government commons] management would seem to be that the state should begin to charge reasonable rents/licence fees to make recompense to the people of the State for the use of our (mineral) resource. It is clear, though, that such fees would alter the economics of production in these areas. That is, at one level, we engage a concern with economics in its conventional sense, but what seems to us to have happened as gemfield tourism expands is a revaluation of both natural and cultural resources (see also Kaufman and Schneider, 2004). In keeping with recent trends regarding natural resource valuation (Nord & Luloff, 1993; Stedman, Parkins and Beckley, 2004; Wilson, 2004), maintenance of the common value rather than its privatisation is seen to have more ‘valuable’ long-term contribution to make to community prosperity than wholesale resource exploitation. Tourism operators – through the exploits of their customers – make small imposts upon the sapphire deposit to combine its natural capital value with the cultural capital of...
local ‘experts’ on gemfield lore. Their activity distributes wealth locally where large scale mining had left both a reduced natural (capital) endowment (Cocklin and Dibdin, 2004) and a community in which a few became rich while most lost the basis of their livelihood and often their work, as well (compare with Goldschmidt, 1978; see also van Fossen and Lafferty, 2001).

Impediments to Sustainable Development

The Gemfields community is subject to the regulations governing mining activities, and their interpretation by enforcing agencies. The large-scale miners take advantage of favourable clauses within those regulations that allow them to take out mining tenements, and to excavate large and unsightly gouges in the areas most frequented by visitors. State government legislation enables mining development to occur without regard to the link that exists between a community’s way of life and the way it uses its natural resources. When applications for mining tenements are made, the Queensland mining regulations take no account of anything other than mining issues; there is no possibility of considering the wider context of factors that might affect community well-being. For instance, the possibility that machinery mining may affect the local tourism industry can not influence the success of mining tenement applications.

Moreover, special conditions attached to mining tenements can easily be interpreted in ways that allow for machinery mining to proceed in an area reserved for small-scale (or ‘hand’) mining. For example, one can use earthmoving machinery to excavate a water-holding facility on a hand-mining claim. Machinery miners often use this clause to excavate the shallow sapphire bearing deposits within the reserved areas, and when tourists come or return, they encounter the wholesale destruction of fossicking areas (Interviews with affected locals).

Over against that, we know in theory that, as people learn that the social forms that our society creates are the responsibility (the ‘social construction’) of each of us individually and all of us collectively, decisions are made according to the perception of images of the future and of the consequences of decisions, and they are made according to a value structure which is very largely learned, and which depends... on the individual image of identity. A soldier behaves like a soldier, a barber like a barber,... because each has an image of identity according to which only certain types of behavior are appropriate, that is, highly valued, and other types are not (Boulding, 1977: 286–7; in Hardin).

Citizens (the ultimate lawmakers) who grasp their own future and re-imagine it seem to be satisfying Ostrom’s (1990) proposal that commoners – those who have mutual responsibility for the commons – must have “shared a past and expect to share a future.” But they are capable not just of “short-term maximization but [of] long-term reflection about joint outcomes.” Our investigation reinforces the belief that when citizens take responsibility locally for how their resources are used, new understandings are forged about what is valuable and about how responsible people use their society's values to strengthen community and their ties to their place and its resources, the source of their community economic life.

Conclusion

In making our argument, we have thus followed two dichotomies, and elaborated the influence of policy on them. As small mining gave way to large, the (miner’s) ‘right’ was to mine – to turn public property into private wealth; and the ‘right’ to a working class living, compared with the capacity to grow a ‘fortune’ industry. As mining gave way to tourism, the right again is to entertain tourists by using public property to create private wealth and to involve local repositories of gemfields lore (‘cultural capital’) in this wealth-creation process. Again, this is in opposition to large-scale mining as a wealth-concentrating venture.

It might be said then, that while the region's economy and self-image has come full circle, a change has been wrought not in the nature of property as such but in the content of the right to use public property for personal enrichment. "Common property" resources have been redefined to fuel a prosperous and confident local tourism industry. Natural resource assets are now husbanded by entrepreneurial community-based businesses as they combine that natural resource/capital with various packages of information, opportunities to have unique experiences, and other related services to sell to these visitors. In this, they 'capture' community cultural capital in two senses: some locals become the 'keepers of the tradition' and they sell their monopolisation of local lore to local industry where entrepreneurs in turn uniquely combine natural resource and community culture to sell the package as 'the tourism experience'.

The Central Queensland Gemfields seem to have a relatively prosperous future, which is once again based mainly on small business dynamism and distributive equity, characteristics and relationships once highly valued in this region and industry. This can be attributed to a creative use of the past and re-definition of the 'value' of what remains of local
natural economic resource, the sapphire deposits, and of the knowledge of its 'lore' residing within the local population.

References


Glossary

- "Freehold [a Noun] is a tenure type by which land (or an estate) is held "in fee simple", or for life; it is private ownership of property.
- Fee simple: [n] a fee (bequeath of a right) without limitation to any class of heirs; they can sell it, or give it away” [http://www.hyperdictionary.com/dictionary/]
- Leasehold [n] is a tenure type held under a lease over land or other real property.
- Lease [n] is a warrant issued by the state which grants limited rights to use property, according to specified conditions.
- Mining claim [n] (or mining tenement – Smith, 1950: 518) is an application (later ratified by legal process) by a 'small scale miner' to create a mine on (and under) a "pegged" piece of mineral-bearing land.
- Miner’s Homestead Perpetual Lease [n] is a permit (issued by the state under the Miners’ Homestead Lease Act, 1913 - 1947) to hold land in perpetuity, but available only to miners, granting them the right to 'peg (or enclose) a certain area of land on which or adjacent to which they operate their mine and on which they are entitled to erect a dwelling and make their home.
- Miner’s Right [n] is a 'right', which miners generated within certain mineral fields in Britain over the historic period of mining, to have their customary claims in the product of their work on mineral-bearing land recognised in law as tantamount to 'fee simple' (Ryan, 1973-4). Agitation and rebellion against administrative variation of this perceived entitlement by miners in Australia's early gold mining history resulted in the principle being enshrined in Australian and Queensland mining law, and miners came to take as a given their entitlement to be treated uniquely by the law and to have their disputes heard in a special jurisdiction, the (Mining) Warden’s Court.
This right ceased to exist with promulgation of the 1989 Mining Act (Anon., 1987a: 143).

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