Cape York Peninsula, Australia: A frontier region undergoing a multifunctional transition with indigenous engagement

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**Abstract**

Within Australia’s tropical savanna zone, the northernmost frontier regions have experienced the swiftest transition towards multifunctional occupance, as a formerly flimsy productivist mode is readily displaced by more complex modes, with greater prominence given to consumption, protection and Indigenous values. Of these frontier regions, Cape York Peninsula has become the focus for increasingly entrenched, complex contests about regional futures, with the transition towards complex multifunctionality demonstrated in the 1970, 1990 and 2010 tenure maps. Transition dynamics are explored in tables summarising functional trajectories at these benchmark years, also with an examination of non-Indigenous and Indigenous driving forces, actors, agendas, power relations and decision processes. In this increasingly contested arena, currently the pivotal divide is between traditionalist/localist against modernist/reformist/regionalist visions of Indigenous futures, with this divide influencing the agendas and strategies of other major participants, notably conservationists and state and federal governments. The most probable functional trajectory towards 2030 can be identified, based on the partial resolution of the current flux in land tenures, property rights, power relations and economic prospects. The peninsula yields further evidence on the links between multifunctional dynamics, contestability and shifting place identities.

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1. Towards an integrative approach in interpreting multifunctional dynamics

The multifunctionality concept has attracted a wealth of contributions among mainly European rural researchers over an extended period, as revealed in comprehensive reviews (Wilson, 2007; Renting et al., 2009). European research has been criticised for its preoccupation with farming systems and its lack of attention to the broader dynamics of rural change, within which agriculture is only one component (Lowe et al., 2002; McCarthy, 2005; Holmes, 2006). In their recent definitive review, Renting et al. (2009, p. S119), argue that ‘...different approaches have remained fragmented and developed largely in parallel...it is not just sufficient to further elaborate existing approaches. Instead, new meta-level frameworks of analysis are to be developed to make a decisive step towards a more integrated approach.’

The eight co-authors identify five key elements in this proposed decisive step, namely: (1) farming practices to be understood in terms of co-production; (2) characterized and dependent on spatial heterogeneity and temporal non-linear fluctuations, necessitating the continuous contextualization of processes and features; (3) with mechanisms operating at different scale levels; (4) attention to territorially embedded and interconnected nature of relevant actors; (5) better understanding of the role of consumers and citizens (pp. S119–S121) (authors’ italics).

In endorsing their case for ‘new meta-level frameworks’ and ‘a comprehensive and integrative transitional framework’, I need to reiterate my earlier position (Holmes, 2006) liberating the multifunctionality concept from its restrictive application solely to agriculture and recognising the multifunction rural transition (MRT) as a pivotal component in the reconstitution of rural space. This redirection can be interpreted as a transition from productivist monofunctionality towards complex multifunctionality, where consumption and protection values have emerged, contesting the former dominance of production values, with continuing diverse outcomes over time and space. Consistent with this approach, I argue that Renting et al.’s second ‘key element’ provides the necessary and sufficient foundation towards achieving a ‘comprehensive and integrative transitional framework, with the other four ‘key elements’ being ancillary and/or sequential.

Necessary components in this overarching theoretical construct include: acceptance that multifunctionality is an attribute of rural landscapes at large and not limited to farming systems; recognition of...
of the dynamics of landscape functionality, including variability over space and time; attention to the current persistent trend towards complex multifunctionality (but, again, with variability over space and time and potential reversibility); greater recognition of the interplay between biophysical dynamics and anthropogenic processes in shaping ecosystem functionality; development of a generic typology (or typologies) of functionality, consistently applicable across diverse (multi)functional landscapes; and exploration of the driving forces shaping the current trend towards multifunctionality, involving the complex interplay between production, consumption and protection values, also involving multiple local and non-local actors.

Related recognition of multifunctionality as an increasingly critical attribute in the human occupation of rural landscapes has opened fresh avenues for innovative rural research, usually focusing on ecological and economic sustainability (Helming and Wiggering, 2003). The potential of a landscape framework is revealed by de Groot (2006) in an article appropriately titled ‘Function-analysis and valuation as a tool to assess land use conflicts in planning for sustainable, multifunctional landscapes.’ de Groot utilises a comprehensive three-stage research design, comprising function analysis, function valuation and conflict analysis with the final stage requiring an integration of analytical valuation methods with stakeholder participation techniques. de Groot’s micro-scale methodology shows promise of fulfilling Renting et al.’s call for an integrative framework, when allied to ‘meta-level...transitional frameworks’ exploring complexity, variability and volatility of the multifunctional transition, (Marsden, 2003; McCarthy, 2005; Barr, 2005; Holmes, 2006, 2010a,b; Wilson, 2007).

In an attempt to interpret emerging regional complexity, I have proposed categorising generic modes of human occupation of rural space according to the relative role of production, consumption and protection values as driving forces shaping divergent regional modes and trajectories within rural Australia (Holmes, 2006). There is an imperfect parallelism between these three proposed generic categories and de Groot’s ecological, sociocultural and economic functional categories. As proposed in my 2006 article, modes of rural occupation can be depicted within a triangular diagram depicting relativities between production, consumption and protection values. See Fig. 1, which contains two important revisions to that depicted in my 2006 publication in this journal. Firstly, a complex multifunctionality mode is recognised, replacing the so-called peri-metropolitan mode. This mode has emerged at the intensive and extensive margins of rural occupation. The intensive margin is characterised by endemic, intense conflicts between production, consumption and protection values, most commonly occurring in peri-metropolitan zones, with their distinctive trajectories, within this complex mode. At the extensive margin, complex multifunctionality emerges when a flimsy mode of productivist occupation provides an expansive space for the recognition of consumption, protection and any surviving Indigenous values. This trajectory is revealed in the federal lands of western United States and in Australia’s northernmost frontier regions (Holmes, 2010b). The other revision is the removal of the so-called Indigenous mode from the classificatory schema.

In my 2006 article, I explored broadscale spatial variability in rural Australia, by identifying and characterising seven generic modes of rural occupation according to the relative weight of production, consumption or protection values as forces driving rural change. Tables 1 to 7 in the 2006 paper provide a structured framework for interpreting the increasingly differentiated territorial expression of the multifunctional transition. Within each mode, variability in the type, intensity and trend of resource use can be scrutinised through the identification of alternative occupation trajectories, as described in the tables in my 2006 article. Where an occupation trajectory leads to a shift in the relative weight of production, consumption or protection values, this shift can additionally be termed a functional trajectory, capable of depiction in the triangular functional diagrams, as shown for all tropical savanna regions (see below). Where a functional trajectory leads to a discernible shift to a different occupation mode, this shift can be described as a functional transition.

2. Time-space variability in the multifunctional transition in Australia’s tropical savannas

The broadscale, Australia-wide categorisation in my 2006 paper can serve only as a preliminary inquiry into complexity and diversity over space resulting from the multifunctional transition. It can be questioned on two counts, namely that it fails to engage in micro-scale function-analyses and lacks any supportive evidence comparable to that presented in de Groot’s research; also it fails to capture transition dynamics, given that it addresses only variability over space but not over time.

In recognition of these deficiencies, I have recently been explored time-space dynamics contributing towards increasingly divergent regional outcomes within Australia’s tropical savanna zone, with postulated regional modes and trajectories from 1976 to 2006 shown within the production/consumption/protection triangular relationship (Holmes, 2010a,b). Supportive evidence was presented, with the most substantial being the objective record of changes in land tenure, land use and land ownership over the thirty-year period. This tenure record is a critical indicator, not only because of its clarity and verifiability but also because, more so than in well-settled zones, shifts in land title, land ownership and property rights are the most influential mechanisms in pursuit of functional transitions.

The occupation trajectories for the three most marginal, ‘frontier’ regions (Cape York Peninsula, Northern Territory Gulf and North-west Kimberley) are shown in Fig. 2. For all three regions, the depicted trajectories indicate a sequence of transitions from
speculators, tourist operators, recreationists, traditional native titleholders, Indigenous communities, conservationists and public agencies, but also within these constituencies, most notably within Indigenous communities (Nursey-Bray, 2009) and within conservation organisations (Pickerill, 2009). These contests have required innovative legislative, judicial, administrative, consultative and voluntary actions across federal, state, regional and local jurisdictions and interest groups. Currently the pivotal contest is between traditionalist/localist versus modernist/reformist/egalitarian visions of Indigenous futures, with other influential players, notably conservation organisations and state government politicians and agencies needing to align their agendas around these contested visions. These contests become intensified and entrenched not only by complexity, diversity and uncertainty of alternative trajectories but also by changes in power relations and in the aspirations and actions of the main interest groups.

Given the complexity and volatility of these contests, only a truncated account can be presented here. For more detailed discussions on the complex agendas, power relations and decision processes underpinning contests about peninsula futures, see Pickerill (2009), Nursey-Bray (2009) and Holmes (2011a). Changes in peninsula land tenures and property rights as a means of ‘social engineering’ towards resolution of these contests, with a focus in Holmes (2011b), tied to benchmark years at twenty-year intervals, namely 1970, 1990 and 2010. Maps of land tenures for these three benchmark years are also used here (Figs. 3–5) and linked to summary tabulations of mode, trajectory, driving forces, core attributes and power relations (Tables 2–4). Table 5 comprises projected outcomes towards 2030. A necessarily abbreviated discussion of functionality in these years is anchored to these maps and tables, and also to a table of percentage areas in each tenure (Table 1). The rationale for reliance on land tenure changes in Australia’s tropical savannas is developed in Holmes (2010a, pp. 269–271). The tenure record is a critical indicator, not only because of its clarity and verifiability but also because, more so than in well-settled zones, shifts in land title, land ownership and property rights have been the most influential mechanism in achieving a transition towards multifunctionality and towards recognition of Aboriginal land rights.

4. 1970: the peninsula’s continuing role as a development frontier

Australia’s tropical north has for long been seen as a national development challenge. Although offering less potential for irrigation and agricultural projects than the Darwin hinterland and the Kimberley region, Cape York Peninsula has not been exempt from the northern development drive. As suggested in the map of land tenure (Fig. 3) and in Table 2, in 1970 the peninsula continued to be dedicated to productivist goals. In the absence of grandiose agricultural projects, the Queensland government fostered pastoral and mining ventures on the peninsula. The Lands Department maintained a policy of ensuring any vacant crown land was transferred to pastoral lease tenure, using the rationale that all land needed ‘management’. As shown in Table 1, in 1970 77 percent of the peninsula was held in pastoral leases. However, given the formidable barriers to closer settlement, the peninsula remained held in large, undercapitalised, poorly managed pastoral ‘runs’.

Expectations were fleetingly lifted during the 1960s land boom, based on anticipated productivity gains through advances in land clearing, pasture improvement, herd upgrading with adaptable Brahman breeds and improved road transport. Ambitious, if short-lived, development programmes were undertaken on some properties, foundering on the twin burdens of high cost and technical failures in clearing and pasture improvement. Within a few years
all major pasture improvement projects were abandoned. As elsewhere in the savannas pastoral zone, the expectations of the 1960s were displaced by the realities of the 1970s, when beef prices plummeted and the problems of pasture maintenance proved intractable (Holmes, 2011b, p. 224).

In 1970, 17 percent of the peninsula was held in Aboriginal reserves. Consistent with the state’s development agenda was the removal of Indigenous peoples, other than station workers, from settled pastoral lands and their confinement on reserves, usually run by church missions. Under state legislation, Indigenous people were subject to authoritarian, paternalistic rule. While the long term goal was assimilation, this was being pursued using strict control over work, finances, property and mobility. However, whereas almost all Indigenous people elsewhere in Queensland had been forcibly removed from their traditional lands to enable unfettered pastoral expansion, a large proportion of the peninsula’s Indigenous peoples remained on traditional lands, if only by default, being on lands not well suited to pastoral occupation. These continuing traditional links were to become significant in shaping peninsula (and national) Indigenous futures over recent decades, as shown later.

Fig. 3. Cape York Peninsula land tenures, 1970. Sources: Holmes (2010b), Queensland Department of Lands.
The third tenure category, other than State Reserves, shown on the 1970 map comprised mining leases which had been inserted into west coast Aboriginal Reserves. In 1957, almost all of the Aboriginal reserve attached to the Weipa mission was revoked to accommodate the Comalco bauxite mining venture. In 1963, the Aboriginal people of the Mapoon mission were evicted and all buildings demolished to enable the granting of an extensive bauxite mining lease to Alcan. (Mining has not yet commenced, the mining right has been transferred and some residents of Mapoon have recently returned). The mining township at Weipa was created as a non-Indigenous enclave divorced from its regional surrounds. Extreme isolation, lack of infrastructure and an unfavourable climate had precluded investment in tourism or other consumption-oriented activities. Over this period, Indigenous and conservation voices were muted or silent, with negligible influence in shaping peninsula futures. Conservation values were yet to be recognised, with the peninsula lacking any National Parks or conservation reserves.

Fig. 4. Cape York Peninsula land tenures, 1990. Sources: Holmes (2010b), Queensland Department of Land Management.
5. 1990: volatility as a prelude to multifunctionality

5.1. Pre-1990: rearguard state resistance against national policy directions

The final years of conservative pro-development rule by the state government were characterised by rearguard resistance against national trends towards Aboriginal self-determination and land rights (Brennan, 1992). Nevertheless, given the shift of powers on Aboriginal matters and on racial discrimination from the states to the federal government, the state government had been obliged to de-gazette Aboriginal reserves and convert these lands to other tenures, also being obliged to relax strict controls over Indigenous communities. The intention of the state government was to avoid recognition of traditional Indigenous land title and to maximise its role in the oversight of Indigenous lands and

communities, even if it also was obliged to cede local management to community leaders. Also, seemingly inconsistent with the state’s pro-development agenda was the sudden, unanticipated declaration of seven National Parks over the 1977–1979 period. These parks embraced 14,877 square kilometres and included some areas of high conservation value (Fig. 5). However, at least in the matter of the first declaration, namely of the Archer Bend lease, the state move was undertaken to prevent its purchase with federal funds for transfer to traditional Indigenous owners. As with the de-gazett ing of reserves, this was a swift response to frustrate federal action by using existing state legislation. Other park declarations appear to have been undertaken for a variety of reasons, with some in response to their conservation value. In any case, pastoral prospects had been severely diminished with many properties, mainly in the far north, unable to satisfy the herd management provisions imposed by the Brucellosis and Tuberculosis Eradication Campaign and some compulsorily destocked.

Confronted with the continuing failure of agriculture and pastoralism in the peninsula, the state government assiduously pursued alternative development projects. Of these the most prominent was an ambitious proposal for a spaceport and ancillary projects on a northern lease. This proposal triggered a speculative land boom, further fuelled by the government’s overgenerous support for a multitude of unfunded resort projects along the entire east coast. The peninsula was at the northern extremity of this speculative boom. As described in Holmes and Knight (1994) and Holmes (1996), the speculative boom was propelled by lax administration of the state’s land tenures leading to a mismatch between land title and land use, with an overextension of property rights incident to pastoral leases. By the early 1990s, speculation had subsided, partly because of the demise of the spaceport and resort projects, but, more tellingly, as an outcome of the newly elected Labor government’s stricter adherence to the lease tenure provisions, together with its emerging, ambitious conservation strategy, involving purchase of relevant leases at prices not too far above their pastoral value. Inaccessibility, lack of infrastructure and the cumulative evidence of failure combined with state and federal policies in support of conservation and Indigenous values have precluded any subsequent substantial private capital flows into either production or consumption sectors on the peninsula, save only associated with bauxite mining.

In retrospect, the late 1980s witnessed the first steps in the transition from monofunctional productivist occupation towards multifunctional occupation. These beginnings were not auspicious. Emerging consumption values were heralded by an unbridled land boom, with a hyperinflated, speculative premium attached to the land market. Emerging protection values were first given state imprimatur by the declaration of the Archer Bend National Park, not to serve conservation outcomes, but to prevent the first transfer of a lease to an Indigenous traditional owner. Emerging Indigenous values thus experienced an initial veto. These setbacks were temporary. Cape York Peninsula could no longer be insulated from changing values within Australian society. Quite the reverse. It was to become a prominent national arena in which these values were engaged and contested.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tenure and ownership</th>
<th>1970</th>
<th>1990</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pastoral lease: private pastoralist</td>
<td>77.2</td>
<td>67.9</td>
<td>47.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastoral lease: Indigenous</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastoral lease: conservation (1)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal reserve</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal ‘Freehold’ (2)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Park</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Park (CYPAL) (3)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining lease</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Reserve (4)</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total percentage</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Calculated by author from land tenure files showing the area of each title.
(1) Lease held by non-profit conservation organisations.
(2) Land held under Aboriginal community-owned non-transferable titles, with rights equivalent to freehold.
(3) Land held in non-transferable freehold title by traditional Aboriginal owners to be managed in perpetuity as national park.
(4) Formerly Crown reserves and timber reserves, now resource reserves.
Sources: data files on areas of each individual tenure parcel from Departments of Lands, 1970, Department of Land Management 1990 and Department of Resource Management 2010.

Table 2
Cape York Peninsula Occupation Mode and Trajectory: 1970.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Productivist pastoralism and mining.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trajectory</td>
<td>Prospective enhancement of production values through expanded mining operations and productivity gains in grazing and cropping.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Indigenous Driving Forces</td>
<td>Production National and state goals of northern development were tied to emerging agricultural and mining projects and towards transformation of low-input, extensive pastoralism through innovations in herd nutrition, pasture improvement and herd efficiency using Brahman and other resilient, tick-resistant breeds and improved road transport, leading to a short-lived investment boom. Recent, localised, large-scale bauxite mining at Weipa, an enclave activity with limited regional links. Consumption Isolation, an adverse climate and lack of infrastructure precluded any impetus towards amenity-led consumption investment. Protection No national parks or conservation reserves; ‘protection’ was perceived as solely a matter of paternalistic control of Indigenous peoples in managed reserves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous Driving Forces</td>
<td>Production Declining role as low-cost support workforce on pastoral stations. Continuing hunting, fishing and collecting activities, increasingly with non-Indigenous technology. Consumption and Protection The last bioregion in Queensland where Aboriginal people were able to maintain customary material, cultural and spiritual ties to their country, with a holistic relationship by which consumption and protection values were embedded within production modes of resource use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core Attributes</td>
<td>Extreme isolation with a steep inaccessibility gradient northwards. Deficient regional infrastructure with exceptionally high service costs. A fragile, ‘frontier’ regional economy, with limited income sources. Underdeveloped labour market with declining reliance on local Indigenous labour. Governmental support of mining and pastoralism, through applied research and investment in infrastructure. Strong governmental management of Indigenous communities, formerly outsourced to church missions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power Relations and Decision Processes</td>
<td>Lack of autonomous power circuits capable of shaping regional futures. Pre-eminence of mining and pastoral interests in influencing government policies and programmes. Dominance of state political and bureaucratic decision-makers, most notably in Indigenous communities; negligible role of federal government or its agencies. Near-absolute powers held by non-Indigenous managers on Indigenous reserves but retention of subordinated customary political networks within Indigenous groups.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3
Cape York Peninsula Occupance Mode and Trajectory: 1990.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Marginalised productivist, tied to pastoralism and mining.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trajectory</td>
<td>Environmental and locational constraints had defeated pastoral and agricultural expansion, facilitating a belated recognition of consumption, protection and Indigenous values.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Indigenous Driving Forces</td>
<td>Production: The failure of the ‘pasture revolution’ and the management problems exposed by the Brucellosis and Tuberculosis Campaign had ensured a reversion towards extensive grazing on low-quality native grasses, with limited inputs of capital, labour and management. Apart from bauxite mining at Weipa and coastal/estuarine fishing from mainly non-local ports, no other significant activity in the production sector had been initiated. Consumption: Improved roads and the popularity of self-sufficient 4WD tourism and recreation activities were impacting on the region’s landscapes, but with negligible benefits to the regional economy. Land markets experienced a speculative boom, prompted by proposals for a spaceport and coastal resorts and facilitated by tax administration of pastoral lease tenures, with no benefits to the regional economy. Protection: The peninsula’s relatively intact rivers and landscapes of high conservation value were gaining belated recognition, signalled by the first conservation campaigns. The first major declarations of National Parks occurred in the 1977–79 period, with at least some being designed by the state government to thwart lease transfers to Indigenous ownership.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous Driving Forces</td>
<td>Production: Deterioration in Indigenous engagement in both the cash economy and also in traditional sustenance activities. Consumption: Increasing reliance on welfare payments. Protection: Nascent articulation of Indigenous cultural and spiritual ties in providing a foundation for protecting ‘country’, fostered by imminent recognition of native title.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core Attributes</td>
<td>Continuing problems tied to isolation, climate, deficient infrastructure and a fragile regional economy. Reduced Indigenous employment in pastoralism; emergence of welfare dependency. Increasing responsibilities undertaken by both federal and state governments, with reduced emphasis on resource development and more attention to social welfare, land rights and preservation of landscapes of high conservation value.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power Relations and Decision Processes</td>
<td>Emergence of a new generation of capable, articulate Aboriginal leaders, able to negotiate effectively with federal and state governments in shaping regional and community futures, loosening of the state’s former authoritarian role on Indigenous matters. Loss of political influence by the formerly powerful pastoral constituency. Parallel diminished bureaucratic influence of land administrators. Increasing political influence of conservation groups, expressed mainly in electoral campaigns. Greater role played by federal government and its agencies, through its external powers and powers relating to Aboriginal matters.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4
Cape York Peninsula Occupance Mode and Trajectory: 2010.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Complex multifunctionality with strong Indigenous engagement.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trajectory</td>
<td>A recent, rapid transition to increasingly complex multifunctionality, with the emergence of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous consumption and protection values shaping regional futures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Indigenous Driving Forces</td>
<td>Production: Further diminution in the role of non-Indigenous pastoralism, with localised bauxite mining remaining as the dominant production sector in the regional economy. Consumption: Very modest regional income from self-sufficient 4WD and safari tourism, with continuing dearth of tourism infrastructure; end of era of land speculation. Protection: Effective campaigning by conservation organisations has awarded national iconic status to the peninsula’s ecosystems and ‘wild rivers’, with their preservation becoming a pivotal element in the continuing electoral success of state Labor governments since 1995.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous Driving Forces</td>
<td>Production: Currently very limited engagement in the production economy. Actions towards enhanced Indigenous engagement in the resource sector through participation in the mining workforce. Expectations, yet to be adequately realised, for new Indigenous ventures in agriculture, forestry, pastoralism and other enterprises. Consumption: Services to Indigenous communities remain the dominant consumption sector, second only to mining in the regional economy. Protection: Currently the main dynamic in shaping regional futures with judicial and legislative recognition of Aboriginal land titles providing the foundations for Indigenous ascendancy in land-related determinations, currently with a focus on resource use, protection of ‘country’ and sacred sites.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core Attributes</td>
<td>Continuing problems tied to isolation, climate, deficient infrastructure and a fragile regional economy. Ongoing incapacity to attract private investment, save in bauxite mining. Enhanced national profile as an iconic bioregion with very high conservation values. Also a pivotal role in efforts to set new directions in Indigenous futures, with contested visions about these directions. Interventionist, inconsistent state policies directed towards both resolution of Indigenous disadvantage and preservation of peninsula landscapes, rivers and coasts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power Relations and Decision Processes</td>
<td>Ascendancy of Indigenous traditional owners and community leaders in shaping regional futures, founded on legal recognition of land ownership and on population preponderance outside the mining town of Weipa. Indigenous aspirations impeded not only by the peninsula’s resource and infrastructure limitations but also by welfare dependency, labour incapacity, cultural constraints and leadership schisms. Influential conservationist organisations provide a rival power source, primarily through focussed campaigns in successive state elections since 1995. Currently, the prime contest cannot be seen as between Indigenous versus conservationist agendas, but between modernist(reformist)regionalist versus traditionalist/localist visions of Indigenous futures, with conservation organisations aligning policies towards these visions. In response, the state government has adopted interventionist policies, specific to the peninsula, involving radical changes to land tenures, land ownership and environmental control. Inconsistencies in policies have led to heightened contests. Rare, selective federal intervention, either activated or proposed, towards Indigenous advancement or sustainable resource use.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
During the 1990s the peninsula’s accelerating transition towards multifunctional occupancy was being driven by a complex of socioeconomic and political impulses, operating at local, regional, state and national levels. The regional trajectory away from production and towards protection goals was evidenced in the continuing decline of pastoralism and failure to discover alternative commodity outputs other than mining, allied with the recognition of this bioregion as a prime arena in furthering national and state policies on broadscale conservation of iconic landscapes. Of greater significance, however, was the shift towards Indigenous leadership in shaping regional futures. While this shift was founded on the judicial and political recognition of Indigenous land rights, it was driven by the emergence of a strong, articulate Indigenous leadership with a ‘sophisticated understanding of white politics, history and law’ (Reynolds, 1990) capable of influencing outcomes in national, state and local arenas. With greater occupational, physical mobility, Indigenous leaders were able to form regional coalitions, including the Cape York Peninsula Land Council and the Balkanu Corporation. Backed by newly acquired judicial and legislative recognition of traditional native title, Indigenous leaders demonstrated formidable capacity to shape policies and programmes at national and state arenas.

In the political history of Queensland, 1989 was a landmark year with the election of the Goss Labor government in November. Two central planks in the party’s election platform were the recognition of Aboriginal land rights and self-management, and the expansion of the conservation estate. The peninsula was to emerge as the pivotal arena in furthering these goals. The change of government created expectations of entirely different futures for the region, expectations which were only partly realised. On Indigenous rights, the Labor Party’s 1989 policy platform endorsed land rights, promising inalienable freehold title, self-management, a strong negotiating position on mining and a support fund from land tax. These were close to those being pursued in other Australian states. 1990 was a year of high optimism among both Indigenous and conservation groups. However, as fully documented in Brennan’s (1992) first-hand account, the Goss government’s Indigenous policies fell well short of the electrode platform,

### Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Attributes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expansion of the Indigenous estate to embrace at least 75 percent of the bioregion's area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited private investment, directed mainly to mining, infrastructure and tourism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diminishing role of state government, following finalisation of low-cost, high-return conservation policies and programmes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diminished role of conservation organisations in shaping peninsula futures, following successful completion of the most readily achievable goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased, ongoing federal engagement, mainly through joint federal-state-local programmes to advance Indigenous education, health and employment status and mitigate dysfunction tied to welfare dependency.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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#### 5.2. 1990–1999: the emergent recognition of indigenous and conservation values

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During the 1990s the peninsula’s accelerating transition towards multifunctional occupancy was being driven by a complex of socioeconomic and political impulses, operating at local, regional, state and national levels. The regional trajectory away from production and towards protection goals was evidenced in the continuing decline of pastoralism and failure to discover alternative commodity outputs other than mining, allied with the recognition of this bioregion as a prime arena in furthering national and state policies on broadscale conservation of iconic landscapes. Of greater significance, however, was the shift towards Indigenous leadership in shaping regional futures. While this shift was founded on the judicial and political recognition of Indigenous land rights, it was driven by the emergence of a strong, articulate Indigenous leadership with a ‘sophisticated understanding of white politics, history and law’ (Reynolds, 1990) capable of influencing outcomes in national, state and local arenas. With greater occupational, physical mobility, Indigenous leaders were able to form regional coalitions, including the Cape York Peninsula Land Council and the Balkanu Corporation. Backed by newly acquired judicial and legislative recognition of traditional native title, Indigenous leaders demonstrated formidable capacity to shape policies and programmes at national and state arenas.

In the political history of Queensland, 1989 was a landmark year with the election of the Goss Labor government in November. Two central planks in the party’s election platform were the recognition of Aboriginal land rights and self-management, and the expansion of the conservation estate. The peninsula was to emerge as the pivotal arena in furthering these goals. The change of government created expectations of entirely different futures for the region, expectations which were only partly realised. On Indigenous rights, the Labor Party’s 1989 policy platform endorsed land rights, promising inalienable freehold title, self-management, a strong negotiating position on mining and a support fund from land tax. These were close to those being pursued in other Australian states. 1990 was a year of high optimism among both Indigenous and conservation groups. However, as fully documented in Brennan’s (1992) first-hand account, the Goss government’s Indigenous policies fell well short of the electoral platform, departing only slightly from those of the previous government. Major changes were subsequently propelled more by federal policies and by the High Court judgments recognising common-law native title in the 1992 Mabo and 1996 Wik cases (Hiley, 1997; Holmes, 2002).

In sharp contrast with its stance on Indigenous issues, the Labor Party found electoral advantage in deploying high-profile conservation policies, with Cape York Peninsula belatedly identified as a prominent, low-cost arena by which to gain green electoral preferences in successive elections. Stating that ‘we cannot afford to have holes in the cheese’, prior to the 1995 election Goss promised to acquire all leases to establish a conservation zone along the entire east coast from Cooktown to the northern tip. The final ‘holes’ were recently filled to complete a continuous strip of National Parks and Aboriginal lands along the coast. See Fig. 5. However, as shown later, some Aboriginal leaders are actively seeking to develop pastoral, forestry, horticultural or aquacultural projects on their lands.

#### 5.3. 1990–2010: the genesis and entrenchment of conflict

Complementing its policy agendas on Indigenous and conservation matters and in recognition of emerging contests about
regional futures, the incoming Labor government initiated an ambitious five-year, federal-state strategic planning programme, titled Cape York Peninsula Land Use Strategy. However, the CYPLUS process has had negligible influence in shaping peninsula futures. Its failure was probably inevitable, given its bureaucratic structure and technocratic processes (Holmes, 2011b, pp. 226–7). Failure was guaranteed when the process was outranked by external judicial decisions recognising native title in the Mabo and Wik cases and by 1995 electoral imperatives in which the proposed ‘wilderness’ zone loomed large.

Tensions were heightened, nationally and locally, by the 1992 High Court decision in the Mabo case, recognising that, in common law, elements of native title might survive where not extinguished by other tenures which had been awarded prior to the declaration of the Racial Discrimination Act 1975. Discord was further inflamed by the court’s 1996 Wik determination, recognising that elements of native title may coexist on pastoral leases. See Hiley (1997) for an authoritative appraisal of Wik outcomes and Holmes (2002) for an overview of the prospective incidence of native title in the range-lands. Given the strong evidence of ongoing traditional Indigenous connection to land over the entire peninsula, the legal task involving recognition and acceptance of traditional ownership has been the most influential force driving change on all peninsula tenures, notably on pastoral leases and on national parks. Native title issues also impact on legislative and regulatory actions affecting property rights, including tree-clearing regulations and wild rivers declarations. Indigenous empowerment based on land rights has posed challenges to all non-Indigenous interests on the peninsula, most notably pastoralists, mining companies, conservationists and the state government. Subsequent negotiations between the leading interest groups, formalised in the Cape York Heads of Agreement 1996, failed to resolve the main substantive issues and subsequently collapsed (Holmes, 2010a, pp. 61–3).

For conservationists, the peninsula bioregion has acquired national iconic status, matched only by that of southwest Tasmania. However, these two regions are marked by highly divergent functional trajectories. The preservation of southwest Tasmania’s core wilderness area is now safeguarded under conservation tenures inscribed on the World Heritage list. Functionality contests, such as those involving clearfelling and road construction, are confined to the margins. Within the core zone, current contests are confined to managing the impacts of recreationists, both non-local walkers, climbers and rafters and local shooters, fishers and horse riders. Indigenous concerns are modest, requiring the dedication of three heads of agreement 1996, failed to resolve the main substantive issues and subsequently collapsed (Holmes, 2010a, pp. 61–3). By contrast, contests within the peninsula seem incapable of resolution, given this region’s trajectory towards complex multifunctionality involving both Indigenous and non-Indigenous interests.


6.1. 2000–2010: transition dynamics driven by power shifts and revealed in land titles

Over the first decade of this century no other Australian bioregion has matched Cape York Peninsula in the intensity, potency and intractability of contests about future directions for the region’s lands and peoples. The transition to multifunctional occupancy has been marked by continuing uncertainty, demanding recurring rounds of engagement and shifting alliances between the main players. Contests are directed towards issues of land ownership, use, access, custodianship and management. There have been major shifts in land tenures and land ownership as shown in Table 1 and Figs. 4 and 5. These provide only a partial indicator of the complexities of contemporary and emerging land ownership in the peninsula. Of critical importance is the discovery and resolution of native title claims, still in process and with an ongoing pivotal role in further re-allocations of formal titles while also affecting management, access and use on all existing tenures.

From a position of dominance until the demise of National Party rule in 1989, prospects for the pastoral industry continued to diminish through the negligible restocking of marginal properties following the enforced destocking imposed by the national Brucellosis and Tuberculosis Eradication Campaign. The environmental and locational disabilities confronting pastoral enterprises on the peninsula are comparable with those encountered in the Northern Territory’s Gulf Country, as reported in this journal. See Holmes (1990), recently summarised in Holmes (2010b, pp. 353–355). The loss of land held privately in pastoral leases accelerated over the period 1990 to 2010, occurring mainly on the northernmost, least productive, undercapitalised leases. By 2010, less than half of the peninsula’s land was held by private lessees, including two recently purchased by non-profit conservation organisations. See Table 1 and Fig. 5.

Of greater consequence for the peninsula’s future has been the creation over the last two decades of entirely new land tenures, most notably non-transferable Aboriginal freehold titles requiring new modes of governance tied to traditional titleholders but also with often contested participation by other community members. Aboriginal freehold title (or its equivalent) has been awarded over all former reserves and has recently been extended to some former pastoral leases along the east coast. Under legislation enacted in 2007 a further new title was created, namely National Park (CPAL) with the initials standing for Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal Land. All existing and proposed National Parks in the peninsula can be converted to Aboriginal freehold title awarded to traditional owners but with the land to be managed in perpetuity as a National Park.

6.2. 2000–2010: indigenous and conservation visions and schisms

Indigenous and conservation values have become increasingly pivotal in ever-changing contests about peninsula futures, with consensus seemingly unachievable.

Over the four decades since 1970 the peninsula’s Indigenous people have escaped from colonial subjection, only to find themselves trapped in a paradoxical situation. Through radical changes in land titles and land ownership together with community self-management, they have become pivotal players in shaping future landscapes and occupancy modes. Yet their own futures remain uncertain and unpromising, isolated in often dysfunctional communities caught in the welfare trap (Pearson, 2009; Sutton, 2009). Obstacles include not only the limited resource base, lack of infrastructure and poor accessibility of the peninsula and the continuing gap between local Indigenous skills and norms and those required in a contemporary western economy. Obstacles are compounded by the ‘intense localism’ (Sutton, 1990) which exists within Indigenous communities where ‘no-one wants to concede what little power they have’ (Pickerill, 2009, p. 76) precluding regional consensus on any critical issue.

Of these complex contests, the most pivotal is the polarisation between modernist and traditionalist visions of Indigenous futures, with this polarisation also expressed in regionalist against localist modes of decision and action. Noel Pearson and the Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership, linked to the Balkanu Corporation, are the influential, forceful advocates for modernisation and regional strategies. Pearson’s Institute has set itself the goal of enhancing Indigenous capabilities through education, training, health, welfare reform, advocacy and responsible governance,
linked to the second goal of creating ‘real jobs’, preferably within the peninsula. Balkanu Corporation provides a complementary role in supporting economic projects, including earthmoving, plantations, carbon capture, tourism, caring for country, digital networks, land acquisition and engagement in the tenure resolution process. While both exercise strong influence in shaping state and national Indigenous policies, they encounter strong opposition in some peninsula communities.

The modernist/traditionalist divide is influencing the agendas and strategies of non-Indigenous constituencies, notably the state government and conservation lobbies. Conservationists are characterised not only by varying shades of green, but also by their readiness or otherwise to recognise Indigenous interests (and, more recently, alternative articulations of those interests). See Pickerill (2009) and Holmes, (2011a) for insight into the policy dilemmas and practical challenges confronting conservationists in negotiations with Indigenous peoples. The two leading national organisations have recognised the primacy of Indigenous interests in shaping peninsula futures but have adopted increasingly divergent strategies. The Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) has recognised that priority must be given to overcoming socioeconomic disabilities and dysfunctionality in Indigenous communities. Accordingly ACF has endorsed Pearson’s modernist or reformist agenda. ACF has expressed willingness to forego declarations on National Parks where in conflict with substantial Indigenous concerns.

In opposition to this vision are the goals pursued by The Wilderness Society (TWS), which has targeted the peninsula as major arena for an ambitious campaign in bioregional conservation, comparable to its earlier, successful campaign in southwest Tasmania. Core elements in its campaign include: an ambitious programme of National Park declarations, including completion of the continuous east coast ‘wilderness’ zone; alliances with native title-holders to preserve ‘wilderness’; opposition to any pastoral, agricultural or mining initiatives; vigorous support for recent Wild Rivers declarations; and support for inscription of the peninsula as a World Heritage property. TWS has successfully pursued a two-pronged strategy, eliciting strong support from two markedly divergent constituencies. TWS has assiduously fostered alliances, including land management agreements, with traditional, local Indigenous leaders focussing on holders of native title and those resistant to Pearson’s agenda. TWS has also mounted exceptionally successful state electoral campaigns, in alliance with the Greens, who have directed preferences to the Labor Party in return for a succession of conservation programmes, with Cape York Peninsula occupying prime place as a low-cost, high-return locale.

6.3. 2000—2010: discordant state initiatives

Over the last two decades, Cape York Peninsula’s prominent, contested role in national and state policy arenas has prompted the Queensland government to pursue a succession of regionally-specific legislative, regulatory and consultative initiatives towards two goals, which to date have proved incompatible. The first goal is towards resolution of the peninsula’s unique challenges and constructing modes of community engagement and governance towards a sustainable, multifunctional future with priority given to Indigenous aspirations. The second is to maintain electoral success through satisfying non-local constituencies of whom the green lobby is currently most influential. A succession of legislative and other initiatives is directed towards achieving these two goals.

Actions in support of the conservation agenda are readily identified. In addition to the statewide implementation of stricter tree-clearing controls under amendments to the Vegetation Management Act 1999, the state government has pursued two significant actions which have particular impact on the peninsula. A third initiative, namely towards World Heritage listing, has also been foreshadowed. The first of these two initiatives has been the finalisation of the continuous east coast ‘wilderness’ zone by the acquisition of the remaining pastoral leases, against vigorous opposition from lessees and their lobby groups. The size of this extensive conservation zone has raised a succession of issues, of which the most contentious have been questions of Indigenous ownership and use, discussed below. In addition, there are growing concerns about parks being under-resourced and inadequately managed, with threats to conservation values from pigs and other pests.

The second initiative has been the passage of the Wild Rivers Act 2005 together with a listing of rivers to be assessed for prospective declaration. Apart from a few minor streams elsewhere, all listed rivers were in the tropical savannas, the majority being in the peninsula. This listing is consistent with changing societal appraisals of streams, placing greater value on the pristine qualities of Australia’s tropical rivers (Jackson et al., 2008). The legislation excludes any limitation on customary Indigenous use and also permits a wide array of low-impact developments in catchments. However, it places tight controls on riverine and riparian impacts and on high-impact developments in urban catchments. It also involves a burdensome round of assessment and approval procedures on any development within declared areas.

Vegetation management, national parks and wild rivers may well be important initiatives towards a sustainable, multifunctional future for the peninsula, but they also have added complexity in a difficult decision context. The state government has been compelled to undertake a succession of initiatives primarily designed to achieve a working arrangement between Indigenous, conservation and pastoralist interests. In 2004, the government formally established the Cape York Tenure Resolution Implementation Group (CYTRIG), chaired by a government appointee with members from Balkanu Corporation, Cape York Land Council, ACF and TWS. CYTRIG’s role is to advise the government on resolution of native title claims in national parks, requiring fresh legislation together with negotiation of tenures for each park. It is anticipated that 17 conservation properties encompassing 1.3 million hectares will be transferred to Aboriginal title.

Complementing CYTRIG was a major legislative initiative. Designed to mollify all interests, the government passed the omnibus Cape York Peninsula Heritage Act 2007. Among many matters, this act provided for the following: designation of Indigenous community-use areas; protection of native title rights under the Wild Rivers Act; designation of areas of international conservation significance; establishing joint management arrangements with Indigenous landowners in National Parks; extended pastoral lease terms subject to completion of a Property Management Plan and Indigenous Land Use Agreement; a requirement that ministers responsible for natural resources and for environment consult with a special advisory committee comprising all stakeholder interests on peninsula matters.

Simultaneously, the Nature Conservation Act 1992 was amended to allow for the creation of a new class of protected area titled: ‘National Park (Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal Land)’. All existing and proposed parks in the peninsula can be converted to Aboriginal freehold title provided the area will always be managed under the Nature Conservation Act as a National Park (CYPAL). The government has promised to employ up to 100 Indigenous Wild River Rangers and to fund art, cultural and tourism enterprises. Indigenous engagement in management of National Parks should provide substantial economic, social, cultural and environmental benefits.

The core problem is how to reconcile seemingly irreconcilable positions, evidenced in the statements of the various power groups.
and vigorously endorsed by their supporters. Widely divergent views are presented on pivotal issues such as: priorities in reconciling conflicts between mining and conservation values; agricultural and pastoral potential; regional strategies towards overcoming constraints imposed by an unfavourable environment, extreme remoteness, limited infrastructure and inadequate, unskilled human resources; the viability of alternative economic activities such as ecotourism; the ‘wilderness’ values of the peninsula and its role as a ‘sacred’ place; threats to traditional cultural values and lifestyles; strategies to counter the dysfunctionality of Indigenous communities and alternative avenues to escape welfarism.

7. Functional trajectories towards 2030

These highly divergent visions of regional futures and related priorities are characteristic of occupancy trajectories in remote, marginal regions with fragile economies and dependent communities (Holmes, 1981; Leimgruber, 2004). This fragility has been sharply exposed in the economic devastation and depopulation of Russia’s northern frontier regions following the end of central planning and the withdrawal of state support (Rautio and Tykkyläinen, 2008). Potentially influential driving forces can be identified at global, national, state, regional and local scales. Given current global trends, external drivers may become even more influential, enabling the presentation of highly divergent scenarios, as briefly explored for North Australia in Garnett et al. (2008). Recognising that there are ‘implacable uncertainties concerning drivers and futures’, the authors identified ten influential drivers and ‘consider how these drivers may interact to determine more or less plausible alternative futures (scenarios)’ (p. v). Major drivers considered are: demography; social function; land tenure and associated property rights; Commonwealth policy; globalised trade and the international economy; resource use; oil futures; global climate change; invasive organisms; and innovation and technology. They presented eight alternative, widely divergent scenarios for the North of variable plausibility. These scenarios are titled: chronic underdevelopment; degeneration; northern ricebowl; industrial powerhouse; environment first; Indigenous community Utopia; and creative urban engagement. This diverse set of scenarios serves to emphasise the socioeconomic and ecological fragility of this frontier zone and its sensitivity to unpredictable, mainly external influences.

This author has adopted a more limited focus in scrutinising alternative futures for the northern savanna zone, by considering only rural occupancy trajectories and the changing relativities between production, consumption and protection driving forces and outcomes (Holmes, 2010a, pp. 276-9). This more restricted focus reduces the range of plausible scenarios, while a further narrowing of the focus onto the three most peripheral regions, North Kimberley, Northern Territory Gulf Country and Cape York Peninsula further reduces the range of potential outcomes.

Only one scenario, showing trajectories, driving forces, power relations and decision processes, is summarised in Table 5. This scenario is simply a projection of the current regional trajectory tied to identifiable driving forces and reasonably predictable outcomes. The table comprises a variable mix of near-certainties and uncertainties. An informed scrutiny can yield a list of near-certainties. Highly probable outcomes include those acknowledging the peninsula’s inescapable geographic disabilities, also those recognising the momentum towards Indigenous primacy in land ownership, resource use and environmental protection, with this momentum being sustained by transitions in land tenure already in progress. Indigenous engagement may prove compatible with the momentum towards enhanced protection values, including support for national priorities in preservation of biodiversity and landscape values, in retention of streams and shorelines in near-pristine condition and in carbon sequestration, linked to preservation of Indigenous cultures and lifestyles. Successful outcomes will depend on overcoming current disabilities and dysfunctionality encountered in local Indigenous communities.

As with the 1970 and 1990 maps, the 2010 land tenure map can be seen as recording a transient moment in the chronology of ongoing land tenure change, yet to approach finality. The current land policy mechanisms, both judicial and legislative, contain elements involving substantial further changes. These include: judicial determinations on outstanding land claims; full implementation of the transfer of National Parks to Aboriginal freehold protected areas designated National Park (CYPAL) (currently only in its early stage); complex negotiations over future tenures/ownership of Resource Reserves, regarded as a provisional tenure instrument; comparable negotiations over any state-purchased pastoral leases, yet to be acquired for Indigenous and conservation purposes; continuing negotiations with pastoral lessees on property management plans, recognising Indigenous and conservation interests; resolution of existing conflicts on the four recent Wild Rivers declarations, also requiring ongoing negotiations on any development projects within declared zones; and negotiations with interested parties on further proposed Wild River declarations.

These further changes in land tenures and property rights are both predictable and influential, indicating a regional trajectory towards enhanced Indigenous and protection values. Less certain are the prospects for augmented production levels and for any substantial investment in the consumption sector, tied to tourism and recreation. In the production sector, mining will remain the only major activity capable of overcoming the heavy cost burdens imposed by extreme isolation, with the only alternatives being niche, high-value products in horticulture and aquaculture, requiring investments in capital and human skills not readily attracted to the peninsula. The same burdens of high cost and limited infrastructure will likely limit the expansion of tourism. In this sector, the peninsula is further handicapped by its cul-de-sac location far outside the now-entrenched transcontinental and circum-continental road- and air-travel circuits which incorporate many other Outback regions.

Regardless of future outcomes, the most predictable result will be enhanced Indigenous engagement in all three sectors. Indigenous leaders on the peninsula have been the most forceful and influential advocates for Indigenous engagement in the mainstream economy, so far with limited, if promising outcomes in education, health, communications, governance, employment and entrepreneurship (Balkanu, 2007; Pearson, 2009).

8. Multifunctional space as contested space

Transitions on Cape York Peninsula over the last four decades yield further evidence on intersections between three current discourses within rural research, namely: shifting place identities; contestability; and multifunctionality. As recognised by Marsden (1999, p. 504), emerging interrelationships require ‘...far more than the rigidly sectoralized forms of knowledge that have characterized rural research ... A synergy between previously discrete knowledge bases is now needed.’

Shifting place identities have captured research interest following Mormont’s influential insights:

In future, a local space will have to be understood not in terms of its constituent elements, but in terms of possible combinations of externally determined forces able to confer value on it, (Mormont, 1990, p. 32).

Constantly changing geographies of value have since been a recurrent theme in rural research, most comprehensively so in
a succession of publications by Marsden, perhaps first stated in this journal:

Within each of the differentiated rural spaces different local/non-local social configurations of networks and actors are developed, and these are aligned to the separate development spheres identified here. These configurations allow relative power to be distributed in different ways, such that the power geometry of each rural space creates different governance and regulatory issues and processes. (Marsden, 1998, p. 114).

More recently the ‘reconstitution of rural space’ has been linked to contemporary discourses on hybridity and globalization, with ‘a rural realm constituted by multiple shifting, tangled and dynamic networks...with a differential distribution of power, opportunity and wealth across rural space.’ (Woods, 2007, p. 491).

Implicit in these statements is the recognition of contestability, uncertainty and transience, a theme pursued more generally by Massey in her account of the continuing struggle over the delineation and characterization of space-time...it may be useful to think of places, not as areas on maps, but as constantly shifting articulations of social relations through time...the identity of places, indeed the identification of places as particular places, is always in that sense temporary, uncertain, and in process.’ (Massey, 1985, p. 188-190, cited in Perkins, 2006, p. 247). She presents a more fully articulated manifesto for re-imaging space in Massey (2005).

In Cape York Peninsula the transition towards multifunctional occupation has been accompanied by the emergence of multiple actors, agendas and decision processes engaged in complex, volatile contests about peninsula futures. Complexity and contestability can be seen as intrinsic to rural multifunctionality. In high-income countries, this is most evident at both the extensive and intensive margins in human occupation of rural space. At the intensive margin, most notably in peri-metropolitan and high-amenity zones, the multifunctional transition is driven by increasing dominance of consumption values in land markets, allied to a selective recognition of protection values. The links between multifunctionality and contestability at the inner margin of human occupance have been comprehensively researched in the prolific publications on counterurbanisation (Boyle and Halfacree, 1998) and on ‘consumption of the countryside’ as explicated, for example, in Cloke and Goodwin’s (1993, p. 27) ‘complex modality of power, contest and participation’ and Marsden’s (1998, p. 114) ‘new rural territories’ with ‘different local/non-local social configurations of actors and networks.’ In Australia, comparable research has been undertaken by Curry et al. (2001); Tonts and Grieve (2002); Barr (2005); and Argent (2011). Recent research into multifunctional occupation has been characterised by a more systematic exploration of the dynamics of landscape functionality and of decision-support methodologies towards optimising outcomes, including appraisals of positive and negative impacts between alternative uses/functions (Helming and Wiggering, 2003; de Groot, 2006).

At the extensive margin, links between multifunctionality and intense contestability have been most thoroughly explored in a succession of substantial publications which explore national contests over the multiple values of the federal lands in the American West, primarily lands held by the Bureau of Land Management. See Libecap (1981), Brubaker (1984), Foss (1987), Hess (1992) and Loomis (1993) among others.

On Australia’s most marginal lands, a fragile mode of productivist occupation provides expansive space for the recognition of consumption, protection and Indigenous values. Contested transitions in Australia’s rangelands are briefly discussed in Holmes (2002, 2006) and examined for Australia’s tropical savannas in Holmes (2010a,b). As in this article, major changes in land tenure, notably the emergence of conservation and Indigenous tenures, are recorded and mapped, providing the most conspicuous territorial expression of changing trajectories. In her nationwide overview of the status of Indigenous land titles, Davies (2003, p. 41) states that ‘traditional owners of country are shaping new geographies as they engage with the native title claim process.’ In turn, legal recognition of native title is generating a succession of prolonged contests about futures, particularly when entangled with development projects in mining, agriculture or infrastructure, or with conservation proposals, as with national parks and wild rivers on Cape York Peninsula.

In recognition of emerging multiple uses in Australia’s tropical savannas, Taylor and Braithwaite (1996) used a panel of experts to appraise the interactions between seven major land uses: pastoralism, Aboriginal use, protected areas, military use, tourism, cropping and mining. They presented two 7 x 7 matrix tables, with one showing positive interactions and one showing negative interactions, with interactions scaled according to degree of impact. Such exercises need to be extended into developing decision-support methodologies in land use planning.

At the extensive margin, multiple actors, agendas and decision processes are not inevitable. Mentioned above, following intense national-scale contests between conservation values and hydro-electric projects, the southwest Tasmanian wilderness has been dedicated to protection goals, with highly restricted, subordinated, low-impact consumption activities, usually non-market and rarely involving fixed investment. Of a different kind and at the opposite bounds of the nation, is the Arnhem Land bioregion, preserved as an Aboriginal homeland with its traditional owners still able to assert full ownership and shape the future directions of their country. Any market-oriented production or consumption activities will necessarily be modest and with any conflicts contained within the Indigenous ‘hybrid economy’, comprising a variable mix of state, market and customary inputs (Altman, 2005; Altman et al., 2009). As with southwest Tasmania, these modes of occupancy have been achieved by default, with both regions being found ill-suited to westernised productivist activities.

In contrast with open-ended explorations of rural place identities, contestability and multifunctionality, the copious research and publication on agricultural (not rural) multifunctionality are characterised by the near-universal focus, indeed emphasis, on the compatibility, even complementarity of multiple functions. See, for example, Van Huylenbroek and Durand (2003). This bias is unsurprising, given the restricted usage of the concept, tied solely to agriculture, where multiple functions are likely to be adopted only if beneficial and where the farm policies of the European Union give priority to identification of such outcomes (Potter and Burney, 2002). In liberating the multifunctionality concept from its Eurocentric preoccupation with agriculture, there is a parallel opportunity to question assumptions of near-universal functional complementarity which characterise appraisals of the multifunctional trend within farming systems. This provides a broader, richer canvas on which to interrogate the dynamics of contemporary rural change.

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