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Articulating the Heritage Tourism Resource in Coastal Towns: a Case Study of Noosa

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Abstract

Despite a wealth of coastal cultural heritage recorded in the registers of the National Trust, State heritage bodies and the Register of the National Estate, only a handful of coastal towns in Australia have capitalised on their heritage for economic purposes such as tourism. One of the key requirements, if the cultural heritage of places is to be drawn on for economic purposes, is for there to be a clearly articulated idea of what the place's heritage assets are. This paper draws from detailed case study research on the popular Queensland resort of Noosa, demonstrating how this place has articulated and successfully capitalised on its heritage tourism resource through a very public debate over several decades.

Introduction

There is a wealth of coastal cultural heritage recorded in the registers of the National Trust, State heritage bodies and the Register of the National Estate, yet only a handful of coastal towns in Australia have capitalised on their heritage for economic purposes such as tourism. Among the well-known examples are Goolwa and Robe (SA), Queenscliff and Port Fairy (Victoria), Broome and Fremantle (WA). Particular elements of the cultural heritage are highlighted in some towns, for example Tathra Wharf (NSW) and the historic port area of Townsville (Queensland). In other coastal places, the cultural heritage has been swept away to make way for tourism development, the most notorious example perhaps being the development of a casino in Cairns' Anzac Park in the mid-1990s.

This paper focuses on the community's articulation of heritage in the economically successful beach resort of Noosa on Queensland's Sunshine Coast. The focus is therefore oriented towards the heritage of a *tourism* landscape, in contrast to the working heritage of coastal hinterland towns such as Central Tilba in NSW. Noosa, like many small coastal settlements in Australia, owes much of its history of development to the growth of a beach holiday culture in Australia and internationally.^{xxxx} I have

argued elsewhere that Noosa is an exemplar in terms of how it has converted cultural capital into economic success as a tourist resort (see O'Hare 1997a, 1997b, 1998, 1999). Here, I will argue that Noosa's economic success is related to its success in defining what sort of place it is, and what sort of place it wants to be. In Noosa, this process has been conducted in a very public debate over several decades. Closer study of how tourism development conflicts have been resolved - or not - in such a place can be expected to provide insights for other small coastal settlements seeking to articulate and exploit their heritage for the economic purpose of tourism.

The case study combines data from tourist guides and brochures with conversational interviews and the more formal sources of documentary research, published literature and field survey. The combined methods interpret the tourism landscape by examining the interplay between individual experiences, the formal documented story of the place, popular and marketing images, and the physical landscape, over time.

The placename, Noosa, in this paper refers to a network of contiguous small coastal towns, including Tewantin (the original town on the Noosa River); Noosaville (established by the 1880s as a holiday area

^{xxxx} Noosa also has a 'working heritage', as its original settlement of Tewantin was established in the 1860s as the port for the Gympie goldfields, for

logging and milling of the local timbers and for the opening up of farming in the district. Noosa's reputation as a place for leisure dates from the same period (O'Hare 1997b).

on the Noosa River) and Noosa Heads (at the beach).

Broadening our understanding of heritage: the cultural landscape

This paper is based on a cultural landscape approach to the understanding of heritage (O'Hare 1999). The cultural landscape is the environment as modified and interpreted by humankind. A cultural landscape evolves from the interactions between the natural and built components of the environment over time. Places consist of a cultural overlay on the natural landscape, so that the local and regional heritage derives from the historical interactions between the natural and cultural components of the landscape. A cultural landscape approach to heritage conservation focuses on the social and historical meanings of the broader environment, rather than the special heritage building or precinct.^{xxxv} The concept is not just a way of viewing special or unique places, but extends to cover the everyday places where people live, work or travel.^{xxxvi} The cultural landscape approach acknowledges the continuity and dynamism of history, rather than segregating heritage as 'the past'.

The cultural landscape concept provides an integrating framework for valuing and constructing the environments we inhabit, a means of overcoming distinctions between heritage and new development, nature and culture, monuments and vernacular elements, built fabric and context. Mediation between these polarities occurs through everyday planning and development decisions, rather than being

restricted to specific heritage conservation activities.^{xxxvi}

The tourism landscape is a cultural landscape where tourism is both an element and an agent of change. This paper focuses on the coastal resort town as a tourism landscape.

The myths of tourism landscapes

An important set of myths underpins the construction and interpretation of Noosa as a distinctive cultural landscape of tourism. The term 'myth' has the primary definition in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* (Allen 1990:784) of 'a traditional narrative ... embodying popular ideas on natural or social phenomena....' In this paper, the term is used in the sense of 'an intellectual construction which embodies beliefs, values and information, and which can influence events, behaviour and perception' (Short 1990:xvi). The term 'myth', as used here, does not imply mistaken or misleading beliefs.

The Noosa narrative: articulating the myths of a living heritage

The Noosa narrative is a dialogue that regenerates the myths by which the cultural landscape is shaped and understood. The narrative, the Noosa story, is not told by a single narrator, although single narrators have played major roles, particularly Nancy Cato in her book of the same name (1979, 1982, 1989). The same key terms and ideas or conceptions of Noosa appear repeatedly in the documentary and interview sources researched in the case study. The catchcry that 'no buildings are taller than the trees' has overflowed from the community dialogue into planning instruments and on into the ephemeral tourism literature

^{xxxv} See J Russell 1990 The cultural dimensions of Australia's environment, *Historic Environment* 7(3&4):15-20; and J Russell 1997 Towards more inclusive, vital models of heritage: an Australian perspective, *IJHS* 3(2): 71-80. In the latter, Russell advocates a social and environmental relations model of heritage, rather than a "special things" heritage model.

^{xxxvi} JB Jackson 1984 *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape*. New Haven: Yale University Press; DW Meinig (ed) 1979 *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes*. New York: Oxford University Press.

^{xxxvi} Cultural landscape making as a continuous, ongoing, process is rarely acknowledged when cultural landscapes are seen primarily as "windows into the past" rather than as dynamic living landscapes - for example, refer to the otherwise excellent cultural landscape research reported in K Taylor and C Tallents 1996 Cultural landscape protection in Australia: the Wingecarribee Shire Study, *IJHS* 2(3) 133-144.

because of its appeal to tourists who share the myths.

Articulate, well connected (and, more recently, wealthy) people have been able to effectively envision and shape Noosa's cultural landscape. Their effectiveness has been assisted by the fact that many of these people came from the same places that the tourists came from during the period of most significant growth, that is from Melbourne and Sydney in the 1970s and 1980s. Because many influential people are well travelled, their knowledge of the places that international tourists come from might be expected to positively influence the resolution of the effects of tourism on the local tourism landscape. Original 'locals', on their own, may have lacked the perspective, know-how, and influence to avert detrimental changes to the local environment.

The choice of Noosa as a holiday place for state, national, and sometimes international politicians, senior bureaucrats, business and media personalities, has meant that these people have been directly influenced and motivated to influence others, in an effort to avoid fouling their own nest. One report even suggests that the then Federal Treasurer Paul Keating's 1988 Christmas holiday in a booming Noosa led to the sudden rise in interest rates that caused the severe recession Australia 'had to have' in the early 1990s (Kelly 1994:376).

Myths, and the construction and reconstruction of a narrative embodying these myths, have affected the shaping of the Noosa tourism landscape. In Noosa, the developing narrative of the place has been used for four decades to guide present and future tourism development and conservation decisions. Landscape myths, as part of Noosa's cultural capital, are maintained and renewed in a community story telling process. In this process, a dialogue has been maintained between several myths. The history of Noosa's transformation as a tourism landscape demonstrates that the narrative has formally and informally guided the form of development. When seemingly unconnected development proposals and

public space changes have been proposed, this narrative has provided a context for the conduct and resolution of the debate. The outcomes of this process have ranged from those that reinforce the Noosa narrative and its constituent myths, to those that modify the myths in ways that are nevertheless connected to the continuation of the main themes of the narrative.

The following sections explore the expression of Noosa's nature myth, through the heritage of community activism that extended the area's National Parks and led to a prohibition on high-rise development.

Origins of the National Park (1879-1962)

Noosa's national parks have developed, over many decades, as a major resource for nature conservation and for recreation for tourists and the residents of the region. Most of the information in this section comes from an unpublished book manuscript supplied by Dr Arthur Harrold (nd c1993), a co-founder of the Noosa Parks Association, together with a 1990s summary of the conflicts over national parks proposals (NPA nd), and interviews with community leaders and planners (O'Hare forthcoming).

The Noosa National Park occupies land reserved by State and local government in the early years of European settlement of the Noosa district. In 1879, an area of approximately 300 hectares near the Noosa headland was gazetted as the Noosa Town Reserve, at the time of the survey of the town of Noosa Heads. Within this Reserve, Noosa's first national parks were gazetted in 1930 as two small areas of 28 and 12 hectares respectively, covering the two main pockets of rainforest in the Reserve (Harrold nd).

In 1949, a Noosa National Park of approximately 245 hectares was opened, taking in most of the area of the Noosa Town Reserve, but excluding the foreshore, which was designated as an Esplanade. Public perception did not recognise the exclusion of the foreshore from the National Park, and tourist guidebooks from the period clearly imply that the National Park extends to the shoreline. In two of these, the

National Park is described as having a three-mile ocean frontage (Penrod 1955; QGTB 1958).

In 1952, six hectares of urban zoned land at the Hells Gates headland, acquired by Noosa Shire Council for non-payment of rates, were added to the National Park, bringing its area to approximately 250 hectares (Harrold nd). In 1962, the Council supported an attempt by the development company TM Burke Pty Ltd to acquire about 20 hectares of vacant Crown land at Alexandria Bay to develop a luxury hotel (Harrold nd). At the same time, the Council proposed that a foreshore road be built along the Esplanade. These proposals stimulated the formation of a significant community based conservation organisation in Noosa.

Formation of the Noosa Parks Association, 1962

The attempts to alienate the foreshore adjacent to the landlocked Noosa National Park in 1962 spurred a decision by Dr Arthur Harrold 'and a few friends' to form the Noosa Parks Association (Harrold nd:4). Their initial campaign was to lobby for the inclusion in the National Park of the areas most visited by tourists - that is, the foreshore and the Paradise Caves headland. The Association noted at its inaugural meeting that most visitors to Noosa were unaware that the coastal walking track was outside the Park boundaries (Harrold nd), a view supported by the tourist guides cited above. With the threats to the foreshore and adjacent areas, the Association's membership grew to 150 members by 1963, with members resident locally, elsewhere in Queensland, and interstate (Harrold nd). By the mid-1990s, membership numbers had reached 800 and the Association held a majority of seats on Noosa Shire Council, including the position of Mayor for the nine years to 1997.

The Association's success and longevity may be related to its acknowledgment of economic as well as environmental values. The President's Reports of the early 1970s describe the Association as being 'at the forefront of any movement aimed at keeping a balance between

this development and the conservation of those things that make Noosa ... green, beautiful and attractive to tourists because tourism cannot survive in a despoiled environment' (McNiven 1973). The Report for 1987 argues that the natural environment is the basis of Noosa's 'vulnerable tourist potential and lifestyle', and therefore of the area's future prosperity and welfare (Fearnley 1987). The campaign for the National Park, 1962-1980s

While the Parks Association argued that the proposed foreshore road would impair the tourism attractiveness of the only undeveloped headland between Brisbane and Noosa, the Council argued that tourists would be attracted by 'one of the best scenic drives in Australia'. In late 1964, the Council decided by a narrow vote to commence the roadworks. The Noosa Parks Association successfully lobbied the Minister for Lands, and State Cabinet decided to close the Esplanade and include the land in the National Park for its conservation values and tourism utility (Harrold nd). The legal expansion of the National Park formalised the public perception that the Park included the foreshore. The debate was kept alive in the mid-1970s by a further unsuccessful attempt by Council to have the Esplanade returned for the purpose of road building.

The small size of the local community in the 1960s and 1970s meant that everyone knew everyone else, and local people knew when celebrities and government leaders were holidaying in Noosa (interviews with tourists and local residents). This informality was exploited by the Noosa Parks Association in its campaign to expand and safeguard the National Park. Lobbying tactics included showing the land to visiting ministers and departmental directors during the intervening period. That Noosa was the holiday spot chosen by so many powerful people, meant that these people gained personal experience of, and affection for, the area's natural qualities. Through constant lobbying over many years, small but significant areas were added to the park.

The problem of 20 hectares of urban land owned by TM Burke, in the southern part of the current National Park, was resolved in

the period between 1972 and 1984. The Noosa Parks Association proposed a land swap, and in 1973 the State Government offered to exchange the land for a much larger area further south. (Harrold nd; Gloster 1997). This land was finally incorporated in the National Park in 1984 after numerous delays.

Expanding the Green Belt through Strategic Alliances, 1980s-1990s

From its inception in 1962, the Noosa Parks Association had a 'dream' of an extensive National Park 'green belt' surrounding Noosa (NPA nd c1993:i). At various times, other community environment groups supported the Association, including the Noosa River Protection Committee and the high profile Cooloola Committee. In 1986, a Noosa-Cooloolan Green Belt Committee was formed with the aim of promoting a recreational green belt stretching from Noosa to the coastal town of Cooloolan, just to the south of the Noosa Shire boundary (NPA nd c1993).

The National Park grew gradually, with sections often having an insecure interim legal status as Water Reserves or State Forestry Reserves or as Council Reserves and Environmental Parks. Each extension was fought for. In these efforts, the Noosa Parks Association was frequently in direct competition with mining companies, development companies (particularly TM Burke) and State Government departments.

The last section of the green link to the southern boundary of Noosa Shire - a 60 hectare area of wildflower heath on the Marcus High Dunes - was a controversial issue in 1993-94. An environmental assessment (NSC 1995) and a public rally involving over 2000 people in 1994 helped to persuade Noosa Shire Council and the Queensland Government to support the extension of the National Park. Noosa Shire Council's Marcus Development Control Plan (DCP) designates the area as National Park, and the State Government gazetted it as National Park in 1995 (NSC 1995; Summers 1995 interview). The preservation of the Marcus High Dunes is of regional and national significance because most similar

areas between Brisbane and Noosa are built on. The National Coastal Zone Inquiry, in 1991, expressed concern that 'an almost uninterrupted ribbon of urbanisation is fast developing from the south coast of New South Wales right up to Hervey Bay in Queensland' - a distance of approximately 2000 kilometres (Resource Assessment Commission 1991, cited in NSC 1995:2-5).

These incremental additions, hard-won over several decades, have increased the size of Noosa National Park from 245 hectares to approximately 2200 hectares (Gloster 1997). In the same period, the Association, together with other community environment organisations, has successfully lobbied for the creation and expansion of the nearby Cooloolan National Park to approximately 70000 hectares (see Gloster 1997 and O'Hare forthcoming).

The following sections examine the expression of Noosa's nature myth in the development of the urban areas as tourism landscapes.

No high-rise: Noosa as a village in the trees

Tourist brochures and published guides are quick to point out that there are no high-rise buildings at Noosa (Ogilvie 1991; Bowen 1992; and most brochures from the 1980s and 1990s). Some brochures attribute the lack of high-rise buildings to an 'edict that no building shall be higher than the trees' (for example Sunshine Coast Tourism Promotions 1984: 101; 1989). This point was also mentioned consistently by interviewees. This section of the paper demonstrates the pervasiveness of the anti-high-rise ethos that surrounds Noosa's image and identity. The lack of high-rise development is more complex than the 'enlightened planning edicts' claimed in the tourist guides. The absence of high-rise development at Noosa can be attributed to a complex interaction between a number of factors including community activism, the inherent instability of the Hastings Street sand spit, the severe subtropical cyclones of the early 1970s, and the economic boom and bust cycle.

Although the ban on high-rise has been formalised in local planning controls, the

move was led by community activism, and helped in fortuitous ways by the combination of the severe storms of the early 1970s and the arrival of the economic slump that ended the long post-War boom. The coincidence of the latter two factors helped to prevent the erection of a nine-storey beachfront tower approved in 1969, despite a 'deluge' of objections and a draft town plan prohibiting high-rise development (Cato 1979). Local residents formed the Noosa Planned Progress Committee and challenged the approval in the Court of Local Government Appeal (Cato 1979). The residents lost the court case and were ordered to pay substantial costs. The developers did not act on their approval immediately, and severe storms followed in the succeeding summers. The company then delayed construction due to the effects of the national property crash of 1973 (Gloster 1997). By the time the recession had ended, the approval had lapsed and the 1972 Town Plan restricted further applications for high-rise development.

With high-rise development no longer a threat, the Planned Progress Committee ceased to exist (Cato 1979). It had, however, provided a strong focus of community political support for the introduction of the ban on high-rise development. The case was important in clarifying local attitudes to high-rise development. The protests and court case, though legally unsuccessful, signalled to Noosa Shire Council, developers, and investors that development proposals would be closely scrutinised by an articulate and well organised community.

By 1991, the Planning Scheme was amended to prevent the approval of any building taller than four storeys (NSC 1991a). The Local Planning Policy on building height notes that "[t]he low rise building form on almost all development in Noosa has been seen through tourist surveys as being one of the major elements of attraction to the area" (NSC 1991a:1). Lack of high-rise development is now well accepted by Noosa's tourism development industry (Playford 1995 and Starkey 1996 interviews). Confirmation of this can be seen in the 1996 development of six \$2.8 million apartments

in a 3 storey building on the old Noosa Court motel site in Hastings Street. The height limit has not retarded property values and investment motivations.

The 'Noosa style': heritage as process rather than product

In architecture and urban design, the evolution of a Noosa style has been attributed to three nationally known local architects - Gabriel Poole, Lindsay Clare and John Mainwaring - and to two sympathetic local property developers (Poole, in Jarratt 1993/94: 15,16). Gabriel Poole describes the Noosa style as 'creating architecture which has been thought out for this climate, architecture that actually works', rather than the problem of 'people coming up from down south and building without thinking' (in Jarratt 1993/94: 15). Poole states that he and Mainwaring created the Noosa style, 'a concept that came from the ideas of developers like Brian Coutts and Ken Morrison who liked the *Mediterranean influence* that I found attractive at the time' (Poole, cited in Jarratt 1993/94: 16, emphasis added). The Hastings Street DCP study in 1983 supported the so-called Mediterranean design approach because of its appropriateness to 'the climate, the strength of the sunlight, the colour of the sea and the resort atmosphere' (NSC 1983: B49).

The Noosa style is not solely explained by the Mediterranean influence. John Mainwaring has helped to define the Noosa style through articles in the glossy *Noosa Blue* magazine and through his role as a co-editor of the regional domestic design magazine, *Casa*. Mainwaring acknowledges the lighter fibro and plywood external cladding used by fashionable Brisbane architects Froud and Job on houses at Noosa's Little Cove in the 1960s (Mainwaring 1992b: 41). Those houses reinterpreted the simple vernacular 'weekenders' that became common in Australian coastal towns during the twentieth century. Mainwaring's own house at Noosa Waters 'recognised the significant elements and materials of the past and has deliberately transformed this vernacular

archetype into a contemporary architectural form' (Wilson, in Boddy 1994: 18).

Halse Lodge, the former Hillcrest guest house, is one of the last examples of the early twentieth century Queenslander style of resort architecture remaining at Noosa Heads, while more humble examples survive along the river in Gympie Terrace, Noosaville. Mainwaring (1991; 1992a), in his role as local National Trust branch president, argued for the conservation of the remaining examples because of their contribution to the sense of place. These buildings are built from the locally available timber, with corrugated iron roofs (because this material was easy to freight to remote places, as Noosa was until recent decades). The buildings incorporate verandahs for outdoor living, and cross ventilation for the hot humid conditions. Mainwaring argues for using these buildings as a guide for designing in harmony with the local environment, climate and contemporary way of life. This would not mean building replicas - indeed, it is no longer economical or feasible to use quality timbers, and the extensive forests of the region are now depleted (Mainwaring 1991: 34). 'Clearly the future of the Queenslander lies not only in recycling and restoration, but in how architects, developers and councils meet the challenges of abstracting the ideas contained in these old wonders into new housing concepts' (Mainwaring 1991: 36).

The Noosa style as an expression of the nature myth

Casa is one of the few publications in which the Noosa style is defined. The philosophy of the magazine is closely related to Noosa's nature myth: 'We are for anything that preserves or complements the natural environment, against anything that threatens it or detracts from it.' (*Casa* 1:1 p1, emphasis added). The Noosa style is an important element of the nature myth, and vice versa. That the Noosa style incorporates a sensitivity to the natural environment, and the laid back lifestyle which that environment enables, is clear in another article in *Noosa Blue* (Jarratt 1992). This article, based on interviews with three

interior and landscape designers, summarises their design approach in terms of 'easy living, and creating a balance between living needs and the built environment' (Jarratt 1992: 37). The design outcomes of these attitudes are the creation of open spaces for air circulation, and north and north-easterly building orientation for optimal breeze and solar access. Building materials and finishes use the surrounding natural colours to capture 'the feeling of sun, sand, sea and light' (Hall, in Jarratt 1992: 37). The use of Indigenous plants, and the informality of built form are aimed at supporting 'a carefree, low maintenance lifestyle' (Mitchell and Hall, *ibid*).

'Lightness and shade' are key qualities of contemporary architect-designed buildings on the Sunshine Coast (Boddy 1994). 'Lightness and Shade' was the title of a Queensland University of Technology architectural photography exhibition held at the Queensland State Library in 1994. Seven of the sixteen featured buildings are in Noosa. The catalogue details how the aspect, form, and materials of these buildings relate to the local topography, climate and relaxed lifestyle. Mediation of the bright sunshine, shade, shelter from subtropical rain, airflow to control humidity, orientation to views and breezes, together with opportunities for outdoor living, are cited as determinants of form. The development of a regional architecture is attributed to 'respect for the natural environment' (Hurst, in Boddy 1994: 14). The noted Sydney architect Glenn Murcutt's adage of 'touching the ground lightly' is adopted as a continuation of the tradition of the elevated early Queensland house, while merging the buildings with nature (Teng, in Boddy 1994:24; Woolley 1996). Contemporary Sunshine Coast architecture touches the sky lightly, with curved roof forms echoing the local hills or the surf (Boddy 1994: 14,24), while being an effective means of meeting Noosa's height restrictions (Mainwaring 1993 interview).

Unlike the Mediterranean strand of 'Noosa style', the materials used in these buildings are lightweight, like the traditional Queensland 'timber and tin'. Corrugated

metal roofing is used in new ways, and the range of wall materials is broadened to include contemporary equivalents of 'weekender' fibro, such as plywood and cement sheeting. Metal and timber pergolas, timber slats and battens, louvred timber screens and lattices reinterpret traditional elements, while formalising the patterns and rhythms seen in the dappled shade of the Indigenous vegetation.

Heritage as a product: lessons from Noosa's hinterland

Part of Noosa's advertised tourist 'product' is its hinterland. In the early 20th century, the hinterland was a landscape to be looked at, passively, on the coach or car trip from the Cooroy Railway Station to the coastal landscape of leisure. The brochures of the time noted the visible carving of a productive landscape, via logging and farming, out of dense bushland (QGITB 1917). The hinterland is now an active day-trip destination for the coastal resorts.

Among the tourist attractions now promoted in the hinterland are craft and produce markets in Eumundi, scenic drives on the Blackall Range, and 'cottage towns', a neologism that refers to 'some of Australia's loveliest and most preserved little towns' (Tourism Noosa 1995:50).

The tourist brochures provide heritage signposts with little or no heritage interpretation. Visitors are directed to 'the historic Appollonian Pub' at Boreen Point, but they are not told that this 1870s goldrush pub was relocated from Gympie in 1990. The 'true village charm' of the mountain village of Montville consists of 'a pleasant blend of Tudor, Irish and English cottages, Swiss and Bavarian chalets, an old mill water-wheel, and old Queenslanders' (Tourism Noosa 1995:44). The brochure's enthusiasm for the eclectic overlay on a stunningly sited vernacular Queensland village, suggests that heritage is a standard tourist product to be applied in any setting. Although such shallow and misleading approaches to heritage marketing may offer economic benefits, they have very little to do with heritage.

Weaving the heritage of the past into the Noosa narrative

The belated local acknowledgment of heritage tourism has led to a new awareness of the heritage of the coastal towns. Now that it is sharing in the change brought by Noosa's development, Noosaville (on the river) is beginning to be promoted for 'the demure charm of yesteryear' (Tourism Noosa 1995:25), a reference to a nostalgic resort character noted in by several interviewees in the research behind this paper (O'Hare 1997b). Tewantin is represented as 'historic Tewantin [retaining] its original charm with its 'Old Queenslanders' and Memorials' (Tourism Noosa 1995:5). This is a revival of the tourist promotion of the Noosa area around the 1920s, when Tewantin was noted for the patina of half a century of development (QGITB 1917, 1927).

Conclusion: the value of articulating the myths of heritage places

The Noosa case provides evidence that community heritage values are articulated through informal narrative processes. These landscape narrative processes are an important part of a broader, longer-term, semi-formal process of urban design and planning. Professional urban design/planning workshops, heritage studies and the resultant statutory instruments and projects are not isolated, periodic, occurrences. Rather, they are part of an iterative process in which urban design both draws on and contributes to a landscape narrative. Environmental management becomes a process of identifying and mobilising myths, to assist in integrating tourism driven change. The informal is incorporated in the formal; the formal becomes taken up in the informal. The cultural landscape approach discussed here offers a means for heritage managers to access the everyday, and the extraordinary, informal narrative of places.

The cultural landscape narrative enables developments and changes to be tracked over long periods of time. The completion of a national park green belt in 1995 was a realisation of ideas sown by the Noosa Parks

Association, which fought for over thirty years to keep the nature myth alive in the public mind. The securing of a significant break in otherwise continuous suburban development from Noosa to the Gold Coast was an important achievement in relation to a growing national narrative on the importance of having 'natural' breaks in coastal development, rather than a continuously urbanised coastline. The prohibition on high-rise development in Noosa, only ruled out legally in 1991, formalised a strong informal sanction that had been 'in place' since the great high-rise battle of Hastings Street in 1969-70.

In planning practice and heritage management, the narrative of a tourism landscape must be sought out, interpreted, and engaged with, in devising 'appropriate' design and conservation guidance for managing its inevitable transformation. The examples in this paper reveal ways in which myths flow between formal and informal channels.

The Noosa example presents an alternative - or supplement - to expert heritage studies, as well as showing a way of accessing the heritage values held by the community. A cultural landscape approach to heritage interpretation and management avoids the creation of an artificial separation between past and present. It is therefore able to engage directly with contemporary influences such as changing economic pressures and opportunities.

The constant retelling of the narrative of the place strengthens an attitude of making choices rather than passively accepting all changes. The local history of development debate can be drawn on as the basis of a process for deciding heritage management for integrating anticipated or desired changes in areas coming under pressure - both before the changes become visible, and as change occurs. This approach could forestall conflict. Yet the Noosa case demonstrates that conflict can also be helpful, because it helps to articulate the qualities that are valued in a cultural landscape.

Areas for further research

There is a need for refinement of methodology for interpreting the narratives of cultural landscapes, and for demonstrating how this can be transformed directly into strategies for heritage management. It is likely that such work will draw on participatory community consultation methods. The scope for fully operationalising such methods needs further investigation.

One of the most urgent research needs is for comparative studies of how different places have dealt with their heritage for tourism purposes. For example, it would be useful to compare the effects of the subtle approach to heritage taken in Noosa, with the effects of a more explicit heritage marketing emphasis taken in places such as Maryborough (Queensland).

It would also be beneficial to compare the economic issues of heritage management in coastal resorts at different stages of tourism development - for example Surfers Paradise, Noosa and the Town of 1770.

Australia has many appropriate potential case studies to compare the heritage-economics relationship in places with weak development controls, with those with strong controls (including heritage conservation provisions).

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