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Kaneff, Deema

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DEEMA KANEFF

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Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, PO Box 110351,
06017 Halle/Saale, Phone: +49 (0)345 2927-0, Fax: +49 (0)345 2927-402,
<http://www.eth.mpg.de>, e-mail: workingpaper@eth.mpg.de

Resources and Their Re/valuation in Times of Political-Economic Reform¹

Deema Kaneff²

Abstract

Resources are essential building blocks of society. All societies need resources of a wide kind and have mechanisms for their allocation, distribution, management, use and exchange. Resources are also at the centre of social struggles and to this extent particularly instructive when exploring the theme of social change in the context of postsocialist Europe. In this paper my aim is to contribute to a conceptualisation of resources in two ways: first, by advocating a return to a pre-WW2 position that considers natural resources alongside social resources; and second, to explore the re/valuation of resources through use and exchange. My focus on these two themes is driven by a concern to explain on-going tensions in a rural community in Ukraine during the last two decades. This paper is not an ethnographic account of these processes (although examples are drawn from the ethnography); rather, it is an attempt to highlight the analytical importance of resource re/valuation in understanding social change. Further, such a focus enables a better understanding of aspects of the reforms, often masked under terminology of ‘privatisation’.

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² Deema Kaneff is a Reader in Social Anthropology, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, UK, d.kaneff@bham.ac.uk and an Associate at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle/Saale, Germany.

Introduction

“Previous to the emergence of man, the earth was replete with fertile soil, with trees and edible fruits, with rivers and waterfalls, with coal beds, oil pools and mineral deposits; the forces of gravitation, of electro-magnetism, of radio-activity were there; the sun sent forth his life-bringing rays, gathered the clouds, raised the winds; but there were no resources. A man-less universe is void of resources; for resources are inseparable from man and his wants.” (Zimmerman 1933: 3)

Resources are essential building blocks of society. All societies need resources of a wide kind and have mechanisms for the allocation of resources, although there is considerable variation in what is considered a resource, how it is controlled, managed, used and exchanged. This makes it all the more surprising that so little attention has been given in anthropology to the conceptualisation of ‘resources’. There are many studies that focus on particular *types* of resources – on land, water, oil and so on – although ‘resource’ itself, as a concept, is relatively untheorised.³ While there is a strong argument to be made, therefore, for the development of a conceptualisation of resources, my aim here is far more modest. Bearing in mind my primary interest in resources during times of political-economic reform, this paper has two aims: first, to suggest that a conceptualisation is best served by returning to a pre-WW2 tradition that considers both social and natural resources together; and second, to focus on the mobilisation and re/valuation of resources that take place under conditions of transformation, such as the case of postsocialist Europe in 1989/91, when incorporation into the capitalist world economy demanded a fundamental shift in the ownership of, and control over, a wide range of resources.

Resources are at the centre of processes of social transformation and social change.⁴ While this is true of any society in any given historical period, it is particularly relevant in the case of postsocialist Eurasia where radical projects that amounted to nothing less than the planned transformation of social, political and economic life, took place twice in the last century: with the establishment of socialist states, and then decades later, with their demise and a turn towards (neoliberal) capitalism. In both cases, resources were a – if not the – most important means through which social change was anticipated and implemented: centralised state ownership of, and control over, resources was an important way in which communism was engineered; postsocialist reforms reversed this arrangement so that resources were moved out of state control and into private hands. In both situations it is through the deliberate mobilisation of resources that social transformation was orchestrated. My focus on resources is thus a way to understand changes in the postsocialist community over the last two decades, as well as the new conflicts and inequalities that have emerged as a consequence.

In the case of rural regions land, as probably the most important resource, was at the centre of reform efforts. In the area of Ukraine where I worked, this involved the disestablishment of the agricultural collectives – the *kolkhoz* and *sovkhos* – and the division of the land equally between those who worked (or were pensioned from) the agricultural collectives at a cut-off date in May 1995. A range of other resources over which the Soviet collectives had control were similarly

³ However, see Ferry and Limbert 2008; Uchibori 2011; Richardson and Weszkalnys 2014; and Franquesa 2018.

⁴ A close connection is recognised between energy resources, ‘new regimes of accumulation’ and world order hierarchies (see Zimmerman 1933; Franquesa 2018). However, I believe the importance of resources in terms of social change is more fundamental and goes far beyond ‘just’ energy resources.

affected and moved out of the control/ownership of the collectives: livestock, housing, water, building materials, to name just a few.

This process, which has taken the better part of two decades has been nothing short of a ‘revolution’ – a major upheaval and transformation in the lives of ordinary rural inhabitants. Often it has not been a smooth process and the resulting and on-going contestations and conflicts which I have witnessed in one rural community in Odessa Oblast (province), Ukraine, where I have carried out fieldwork since 2000, are at the centre of my study.⁵ These conflicts have been played out over natural resources – such as land and water. They have also been played out in terms of social resources: battles for moral authority between the priest and mayor following the renovation of the church and the arrival of its representative in the village after a three decade absence; and renegotiations relating to local identity as the former Soviet citizens become – in the case of the community where I worked – a Bulgarian ethnic minority in a newly established independent Ukraine state. In short, it is through struggles over the ownership of, control over and access to, natural and social resources that have been mobilised as a consequence of wider processes of reform, that social change needs to be understood.

The ideas presented below have evolved from a larger book project (Kaneff forthcoming). The resources discussed in the book – land, water, moral authority and identity – are central sites of local tensions, as various community figures vie for control over, access to or ownership of, these resources. The making, remaking and unmaking of these resources are at the centre of community struggles. The ideas presented in this paper do not provide any of the detailed ethnography from the book, although they are informed and have evolved from it. Instead, I offer some theoretical thoughts on the conceptualisation of resources and the way they are valued and revalued as a result of political-economic reforms.

In the first section of this paper I make some brief introductory comments on resources and anthropology. I then go on to argue for a conceptualisation of resources that considers both social and natural resources, rather than the more separate way they have been usually dealt with in contemporary times. I also highlight some of the general ways in which resources – social or natural – can be characterised: as ‘useful’ and involving human labour. In this first part of the paper, the discussion is concerned with the general conceptualisation of ‘resources’. In the second part, the focus shifts and I look at resources as a means to understanding social change in post-Soviet Ukraine. In the first section of this second part of the paper my focus is on resources in terms of their use or exchange value. The movement of resources within and between these two forms of valuation is a source of the tensions evident in the rural Ukraine community where I have worked. It leads me, in the penultimate section, to focus on the re/valuation of resources, as a worthwhile way of providing greater depth to macro descriptions of neoliberal reforms such as ‘privatisation’ and as a movement between the ‘public’ and ‘private’ sectors.

⁵ The fieldwork was carried out in a village in the southern most district of the Oblast over a 13 month period between the years 2000 and 2004. I returned again in 2014 for a further month of fieldwork. Inbetween fieldwork trips I keep in touch through various means.

Part 1

Resources – Background

A general perusal of the literature tells us that a wide, indeed arguably infinite, range of phenomena can potentially be ‘resources’: from forms of technology, skills, the past, the future, and all forms of knowledge (cultural, scientific) as well as labour (human and animal), to organic (animals) and inorganic (soil, water) elements. Resources can be material or immaterial, natural or cultural, renewable and non-renewable, finite or apparently limitless. All societies use resources, but the making of resources, how they are allocated, managed, controlled and so on is always specific to time and place, and dependent on different technologies operating within different political-economic milieu. What is a resource in a hunter-gatherer society may not be a resource in an agricultural based society (in fact probably it is not). More than this, resources can be “different things to different people at the same time” (Richardson and Weszkalnys 2014: 16), as witnessed in postsocialist Europe where rural land has become an arena for contestation between different interest groups, for example, between those developing rural areas as holiday or tourist locations, while others use the same place for agricultural activities (see for example Sikor et al. 2017). Further, resources are transformed over time: some are exhausted (oil is a finite resource) or become replaced as new knowledges or technologies are developed (e.g. sustainable energies such as solar and wind energy are replacing nuclear energy as Germany makes a political decision to turn away from non-sustainable and potentially toxic forms of energy); some resources have a long lifetime and appear ‘permanent’ (e.g. air, land) although they may be transformed over time (due to, for example, pollution or desertification); others have relatively short cycles in history – a material example would be the canal system in Britain, which had a relatively brief lifespan of approximately 30 years as a transport infrastructure, before the new technology of steam-driven train engines took its place.⁶

In sum, all manner of things can potentially be resources. At the same time, a wide range of agents at various levels of organization are involved in the making of resources – from individuals, households and kin groups to the largest of collectivities: village communities, NGOs, transnational corporations, states and even supranational organisations, such as the EU. It is precisely the wide range and breadth of resources that indicates one of the main challenges when trying to build a suitable conceptualization: the fact that the concept needs to be broad enough in order to incorporate just about everything in existence, while at the same time flexible enough to take into account any particular ‘type’ of resource in any particular temporal and spatial context. The notion of resources lacks conceptual clarity because “(...) [i]t seems too inclusive at some times and too restrictive at others” (Uchibori 2011: 143).

Most often, when contemporary anthropologists explicitly discuss resources, it is ‘natural’ or material resources that they have in mind (e.g. Richardson and Weszkalnys 2014; Franquesa 2018). The exploration of natural resources in anthropology has a long tradition that can be linked back to neo-Marxist and political economy approaches of the 1970s, as well as to the cultural ecology school (see Richardson and Weszkalnys 2014: 17 and 9). In contemporary times, natural resources have been the concern of economic and environmental anthropologists. The focus has been, and often remains, on the ways in which people engage with resources, through, for example,

⁶ Today, canals have gained new resource importance, having been transformed into places of leisure. The connection between resources and temporality is explored by Ferry and Limbert (2008).

conservation activities or property relations (e.g. Hann 1998). Generally, resources are assumed to be givens in the ‘natural’ world – land, water, forests, oil – which are ‘exploited’ by humans⁷, although the ‘natural’ world is attributed a far less passive role than in previous decades.

Immaterial resources have not been ignored but rather confined to quite separate domains of the anthropological literature. So much of anthropology, across a range of theoretical approaches and research topics, could be seen as studies of ‘immaterial’ resources that it is difficult to place such work within particular subfields of the discipline. Various approaches such as symbolic anthropology, or topics of research on intellectual and cultural property, the study of identity, ritual and religion, amongst others, engage with immaterialities. Anything on the topic of the uses of culture could be about immaterial resources (even though the term ‘resource’ is rarely used in such contexts). For example, under particular circumstances identity might be discussed as an immaterial resource belonging to a particular group, while traditional embroidery might be a material resource of this same ethnic group. Yet identity is seldom or explicitly discussed as a ‘resource’. Bourdieu’s (1986) work on different forms of ‘capital’ – social, cultural and economic (a list that has been extended by Bourdieu and others, see Neveu 2018: 21, 23) – are a good example of what, for now, I call immaterial resources.⁸

While anthropologists research both immaterial and material resources, contemporary authors usually take a narrow view when using the term, focusing mainly on the latter, often referred to as ‘natural’ resources. A consideration of both immaterial and material resources is less common – although Ferry and Limbert (2008) and Uchibori (2011) take the discussion in this direction. In advocating the consideration of immaterial, alongside material, resources I am returning to, and building on, a pre-WW2 tradition that acknowledged and tried to account for a wide range of resources (Zimmermann 1933). It is from the juxtaposition between such different resources – a conceptualization that exists at a level of abstraction higher than the consideration of either material or immaterial resources separately – that we can gain a further insight into the nature of resources (and thus take into account the many varied sites of struggle and tensions taking place in daily life in postsocialist contexts).

From ‘Sources’ to (Social and Natural) ‘Resources’

Human involvement is always implicated in the making of a resource although the mode of intervention may vary. Resources are a result of an interdependency between “agents and environments” (Uchibori 2011: 144). People convert sources into resources. The process of resource making thus involves transformation and human intervention (in many cases exploitation might be a more appropriate term). Resources don’t just exist ‘out there’, waiting to be ‘discovered’, they are made, unmade and remade through human activity, produced through the

⁷ Literature from other disciplines – economics, development studies, and the interdisciplinary fields of political ecology and environmental studies – similarly gives considerable attention to ‘natural’ resources (although my explorations in these fields are not exhaustive or thorough). Uchibori confirms (2011: 144) that contemporary economic approaches tend to focus on material resources. This is not to say, however, that economists are not aware that immaterial resources are worthy of consideration. Indeed even the most traditional economists consider forms of human capital – knowledge, skills etc. – as resources. (Personal communication, R. Hillebrand.)

⁸ While a lack of clarity in the ‘capital’ concept (see Neveu 2018: 2) makes it hard to draw close comparisons with ‘resources’, my reading of Bourdieu (1986) suggests that his forms of capital are what I label immaterial resources (later I state a preference for the term ‘social resources’). This is suggested, for example, in the quote that grounds all his capitals, in the end, in the social world “(...) the structure of the distribution of the different types and subtypes of capital (...) represents the immanent structure of the social world” (Bourdieu 1986: 242). This includes Bourdieu’s ‘economic capital’, which applies to resources developed from the social environment (e.g. money, property rights) rather than from the physical world (Neveu 2018: 13).

interplay of both mental and material practices (Franquesa 2018: 4). This characteristic is frequently applied to resources from the ‘natural’ environment, but it works equally well for the ‘social’ environment (see below).

Two important implications follow: that resources are characterized by their usefulness and also necessitate human labour. I briefly discuss both points.

Convertibility of a raw material, a source, into a resource presupposes a human ‘appraisal’ (Zimmermann 1933: 3). Resources satisfy a desire, need or want, and thus have a perceived use. Resources are therefore understood in the broad sense of ‘provisioning’; they fulfill the needs and wants of a wide set of actors and a wider range of collectivities, and in different political-economies (Polyani 1957: 248). Since the particular forms that ‘wants’ and ‘needs’ take are always culturally defined and specific to particular groups at particular locations in time and space, the use value is seen as inextricably linked to the properties of the resource, that is, to the use to which the resource can be put. Thus “[t]he utility of a thing makes it a use value” and “[u]se value becomes a reality only by use or consumption” (Marx 2015 [1887]: 27). A resource can have use value without being part of any circuit of exchange. Indeed all resources have use value independent of any potential, or actual, value they may have in terms of exchangeability. Further, while there are different ways in which any particular resource can be utilized, use value itself is common to all resources.

Although some resources have only use value and lie outside any circuits of exchange, others also have value in some socially mediated form that enables comparison (partly derived from the labour needed to produce the resource) and conversion. In other words, they are tradable and have value as exchangeable items (Marx 2015 [1887]: 34). There are various forms of exchange, which include market transactions or personal transfers. Anthropologists have highlighted that in any society the circulation of items occurs through a range of distinct kinds of exchange (Davis 1992: 30). Circuits/spheres of exchange, where things seen of equal value can be exchanged, are always embedded in wider political and cultural forces – including in property rights, legal regulations, religious sanctions and so on (Davis 1992: 44).⁹ Capitalist market exchanges are seen as a dominant form of exchange in many places, where an ever increasing number of objects are given value as commodities and made exchangeable through the universal standard of money. The use of money also introduces the element of scarcity¹⁰ in an exchange system, and scarcity in turn, creates the conditions for new forms of social tensions and conflicts, such as between buyers and sellers, or producers and users (Zimmermann 1933: 22). Thus the introduction of money has a ‘revolutionary’ impact on resource appraisal (on human needs and wants), revaluing resources and the environment

⁹ It is beyond the scope of this paper to look at the difference between resources on the one hand, and ‘capital’, ‘assets’ and ‘property’ on the other, although such a comparison would provide a further fruitful exploration and greater clarification of resources as a concept. Uchibori notes (2011: 144) that resources are distinct from ‘capital’ and ‘assets’ in that the latter are ‘taken away’ from the environment. This, at least for me, requires further elaboration and clarification, especially given my wish to extend the definition of resources to include those resources in the social environment with little direct connection to the physical/natural world. I view ‘capital’, ‘assets’ and ‘property’, as social resources. Unlike other resources, they are more likely to have ‘exchange’ value or a potential for exchange in the market (or in some other circuit of exchange?). In some cases they may not even have use value (see also Ferry and Limbert (2008: 20–23) who hint at a similar difference in a footnote with respect to property). However, such contentions require further investigation.

Another interesting and potentially fruitful direction for further investigation that also lies outside the scope of this paper is the consideration of the resources concept in terms of anthropological debates concerning gifts and commodities (see Gregory 2015).

¹⁰ In such an economy, resources are not judged simply on their use value, but through the medium of market price (itself dependent on supply and demand). “This brings in the factor of scarcity and materially changes or warps the method of appraisal” (Zimmermann 1933: 93).

(ibid). There are, of course, many other circuits of exchange that have been discussed by anthropologists. The classic work by Bohannon (1955), revealed how three separate spheres of exchange operated in a hierarchical arrangement within Tiv society before the introduction of general purpose money that eventually undermined the previous system. Recent work on the ‘economy of favours’ points to another distinct form of non-monetary exchange that has been observed across a wide range of postsocialist states (Ledeneva 1998; Henig and Makovsky 2017). As a form of exchange that relies on (personalized) socially-entrenched economic relations, it creates social relatedness while at the same time has economic consequences (Henig and Makovsky 2017: 4). An economy of favours is “(...) a distinct mode of action which has economic consequences, without being fully explicable in terms of transactional cost-benefit analysis” (ibid). It operates outside a monetary exchange system, nor can it be explained by it.

Resources do not only have some sort of identifiable usefulness – and sometimes also exchange value – but also human effort is required in the making of resources. In their edited volume Ferry and Limbert (2008: 8) identify the importance of human labour in the process of resource formation (see also Franquesa 2018: 16). Citing both John Locke’s classic work on the importance of human labour in the creation of property and Karl Marx’s refinement of the concept of labour “as appropriation”, they argue that resources bring together the basic elements of nature and labour (Ferry and Limbert 2008: 8). Labour transforms something from its original, ‘untouched’ state into a resource. Labour is a necessary ingredient – along with a perceived use – in the production of resources. Labour can of course take different forms: besides the traditional physical effort necessary in the harnessing of material resources, Ferry and Limbert (2008: 17) propose that the activity of discovering a new species – scientific work – or the “labour of documenting” or “preserving, archiving and manufacturing significant documents” can all be forms of labour. I concur, and add that in the case of many immaterial resources, labour might even be the ‘work’ of human thought. It was something Marx was well aware of when he wrote that “(...) productive expenditure of human brains, nerves, and muscles” are all part of human labour (Marx 2015 [1887]: 32). In all cases it is human effort that is needed to transform a source into a resource: be this physical labour, the mental activity of human thought, or some combination thereof, including communication or forms of documentation (writing etc.).

It follows that resources are both dynamic and also transformative (that is, they transform and are transformed), as evidenced in the term’s etymology which is traced back to the 1600s, from the French verb *ressourdre* – ‘to raise again’ or to ‘recover’ (Uchibori 2011: 143) – which is itself from the Latin word *resurgere* meaning ‘to rise again, to be restored’ (see online Etymology dictionary: <http://www.etymonline.com>). Dynamism is incorporated within the very origins of the term (Ferry and Limbert 2008). Such dynamism becomes clearer when we contrast ‘resource’ with ‘source’. The beginning, the virgin state, is always the source, which “precedes (...) human activity” (Uchibori 2011: 143), while ‘resource’ is the drawing of the source into the human world, as the quote at the top of this paper, by the economist Zimmerman, makes clear. Uchibori’s (2011: 144) definition of resources as: “(...) something that, being activated dynamically by human action, gives in its turn dynamic power to human life” emphasizes the interactive qualities associated with resources. Human activity both shapes and transforms resources and in so doing environments are transformed, new wants and needs evolve, and this in turn results in the making of new resources and the unmaking of others, as well as the shaping and reshaping of environments. Resources are “always in flux and open-ended” (Richardson and Weszkalnys 2014: 16). Further, diverse human

activity brings together the interaction of various resources, not in any unilineal form but in a far more complicated manner, interweaving and creating various hierarchical dependencies in such a way so that “(...) the entire structure of resource chains forms highly complex ones” (Uchibori 2011: 145; see also Zimmermann 1933: 9).¹¹

Since resources are created through human intervention, and something that we ‘harness’ or ‘mine’ from our surroundings, I see no reason why resources cannot also be considered to come from the socially constituted world that remains many orders removed from ‘nature’. In so doing I am analytically separating the resource environment (a term I borrow from Richardson and Weszkalnys (2014)) into a ‘natural’ and ‘social’ one, recognizing, at the same time, that doing so comes with certain problems. The relationship between humans and environment is complicated and entangled; any attempt to make clear where the influence of the ‘natural’ environment ends and a ‘cultural’ one begins, and vice versa is near impossible. Further, Richardson and Weszkalnys (2014: 6) are correct in reminding us that such nature-culture delineations are a modernist legacy (see also Franquesa 2018: 9). Their call for a more relational approach to resources – that focusses on the “examination of the matters, knowledges, infrastructures, and experiences that come together in the appreciation, extraction, processing, and consumption of natural resources” (Richardson and Weszkalnys 2014: 8) – thus moving away from the treatment of resources as distinct physical/chemical entities that are assumed to exist ‘in nature’, is well noted and appreciated (Richardson and Weszkalnys 2014: 7).

Despite the recognized problems of conceptualizing the resource environment as both social and natural, there are important advantages in doing so. Richardson and Weszkalnys (2014: 15) focus exclusively on ‘natural’ or ‘material’ resources, while acknowledging that resources are “always informed by the historical, social and material environs within which resource matters are constituted”. Their position, it seems to me, still implies a duality, through the absence of any consideration of ‘immaterial’ resources.¹² The exclusive focus on material resources avoids engagement with, or consideration of, resources that are of an immaterial or intangible kind, such as history, identity or moral authority, all of which are potential resources under particular circumstances. If one wishes to add immaterial resources to the equation – as I do – then it becomes difficult to examine these resources together, without falling back into a terminology that includes nature-culture distinctions in some manifestation. Such a conceptualization may be less problematic than we think, as long as we do not lose site of the fact that the nature-culture division is relational, and under constant negotiation and transformation, as “resource extraction generates a constant reworking of the boundaries” (Richardson and Weszkalnys 2014: 8).¹³ It is, further, a dichotomy that has (arguably) universal emic value. Any disadvantages in using such a terminology are outweighed by the advantage of being able to identify not only different sources (natural and social) from which resources arise, but also more importantly, examine societal struggles over meaning and value more broadly, rather than only within the narrower confines of natural resources.

¹¹ See also Richardson and Weszkalnys (2014) who argue that viewing resources as simply ‘nature turned into culture’ or as primarily ‘social constructs’ is a reductive view that does not take into account the truly transformative power of resources.

¹² Apart from a passing acknowledgement of the existence of other (immaterial) resources, see endnote 2, their focus is restricted to material/natural resources (Richardson and Weszkalnys 2014: 24).

¹³ See also Franquesa (2018: 4), who notes that (natural) resources “are not complete or finished, they do not have stable boundaries (...)” and are always in the making (i.e. a process) and have purpose. This position he develops, in turn, from Ingold’s objects/materials distinction (2012). There are different ways of theorising this relationship between nature and culture, a task that lies outside my immediate concern, but see Ferry and Limbert (2008: 9–10).

Indeed if Richardson and Weszkalnys (2014: 6, 22) are correct that resources inscribe “the boundaries between nature and culture”, then it makes perfect sense that a relational framework of resources requires the consideration of both natural and social resources. My position, however, moves beyond that of Zimmermann (1993) and Uchiboro (2011), both of whom advocate a broad conception that includes natural and social resources. While much of Zimmermann’s focus lies in the natural resources relating to energy production (which he views as the basis of understanding any civilization), he does not lose sight of the fact that ‘cultural’ resources – scientific knowledge, the arts – are “included in our resource concept” (Zimmermann 1933: 799) and views the relationship between, in his terms, ‘cultural’ and ‘natural’ resources as inseparable (ibid: 111). For Zimmermann, however, the natural environment is untransformed aspects of nature – inorganic (soil, climate) and organic (animals) – while the social environment is broken up into two ‘orders’: the first order being tangible changes to the natural environment (such as tools, roads, churches, domesticated animals) which he calls ‘artifacts’, the second order intangible cultural changes to the natural environment (such as knowledge and acquired skills) which he calls the ‘arts’ (Zimmermann 1933: 24, also 112).¹⁴ I go further, in suggesting that social engagement is about more than the modification of the natural environment, or giving meaning to natural resources, it can also provide a source for resources.

Initially my position may not seem vastly different from the one taken in more contemporary times by Uchibori (2011) who also acknowledges the importance of considering resources from the social environment. However, there is a subtle yet important difference. Uchibori (2011: 146), in his inspirational but all too brief synopsis paper, categorises resources as belonging to two main spheres: ‘ecological’ (including nature, body, space and subsistence) and ‘symbolic’ (culture, knowledge, money, products), with the former providing the raw materials while the symbolic sphere gives meaning to them.¹⁵ Uchibori (2011: 148) believes that social resources (in his terms ‘symbolic resources’) can control/transform natural resources (in his terms ‘ecological’ resources), as well as control forms of distribution and the management of environments. He is clear that symbolic resources give meaning to ecological resources (Uchibori 2011: 146). However, this is not quite the same thing as arguing that the social world is also a *source* for the creation and harnessing of resources, which is the position I take. While Uchibori acknowledges the complexity of the interactive relationship between ecology and symbolism – and once or twice hints that symbolic resources may also come from social sources (2011: 148) – his focus is on the granting of meaning to ecological resources through symbolic resources and vice versa, rather than viewing the social world, as a source for resources. My position thus differs from Uchibori because I view the social world as a source for resources, not ‘only’ as a filter for giving meaning to the ‘ecological’ sphere.¹⁶

Social resources can be analytically distinguished from natural resources, in terms of their respective sources. In the case of social resources, the source is also a product of human intervention, of human labour in some form. However, a social resource would be a resource which

¹⁴ Zimmermann’s (1933) delineations do not always seem internally consistent, and like any analytical categorization have limited value in explaining the much more complex ‘real’ world for which it tries to account.

¹⁵ He reminds us his distinction is always analytical and many resources “have both symbolic and ecological aspects” (Uchibori 2011: 147).

¹⁶ While Ferry and Limbert’s understanding of resources includes a wide range of resources – from those more conventionally discussed (e.g. oil) to more immaterial forms, such as knowledge and historical documents – their conceptualization is largely focused on natural resources, while their discussion of ‘immaterial’ resources is rather restricted and seems in the end to ‘reduce’ such resources to their material form (e.g. 2008:15, where they talk about a tendency of resources, including ‘incorporeal’ resources, to be objectified and ‘made tangible’).

has a human (not ‘physical’) *source*, that is, its source is an element from the social world and a product of the interaction between two (or more) people. A ‘natural’ resource necessitates engagement of humanity with the ‘natural’ world and does not necessitate (although admittedly does usually involve) social connectedness with other humans. In theory at least, the natural resource can be produced by only one person engaging in the physical world, while social resources are created out of the interaction between at least two people. The question may arise as to how a social ‘source’ could be conceptualised, given that ‘sources’ have been defined as ‘preceding human intervention’. My response is that human sources are those aspects in the social world that remain ‘unharnessed’ or ‘unmined’ as is also the case for natural resources. Social relationships, or ideas or knowledge that are harnessed for a purpose become a resource. Thus friendship is a source until it gains some utilitarian value when the friend migrates and becomes a useful contact and part of a network that can be exploited for accommodation or other assistance in the migratory course. The potential for the friendship to become a resource may always be ‘there’, although it will not always be ‘harnessed’. Or information/data is a source until it is mined or harvested by Facebook and Google for particular purposes. An older example is a library, where banks of information are made available as a resource to users.¹⁷ In other words, social resources – as is true of natural resources – are defined through both their requirement of human labour and their use value. Social resources are any social source that is utilized (for a purpose); they are driven by human intentionality, interests and appraisal.¹⁸ Bourdieu’s different forms of ‘capital’ – cultural, social etc. – are precisely this: sources from the human/symbolic world that are harvested or mined as social resources.¹⁹

I prefer to use the terms ‘social’ and ‘natural’ resources (despite possible accusations of reproducing a modernist dichotomy), for this terminology reminds us of the different sources from which resources can emerge – natural or social. ‘Material’ and ‘immaterial’, while useful in revealing something about the make-up of the resources, provides no definitive indication as to the resources’ source (since natural/social resources can be material or immaterial – although more often than not, natural resources have a material form). A focus on natural and social resources becomes particularly useful when we examine the nature of change in postsocialist contexts, for struggles take place over a wide range of resources, both natural and social. An exclusive interest in natural resources does not provide a sufficient picture of the total impact of reform policies on the community – on particular forms of contestation and arenas for new power struggles – or on the way in which the communities are shaped and transformed by resources and their re/valuation.

¹⁷ The mining of the social world for resources may be a characteristic particularly associated with a neoliberal form of capitalism although it is by no means exclusive to it. Forms of knowledge (sacred and secular) and social networks, just to take two examples, can be resources in many other political-economies.

¹⁸ We may also make a distinction between social resources and humans *as* resources. Examples of the latter would be human slavery.

¹⁹ Thus, for example, Bourdieu states with respect to social capital that: “(...) the network of relationships is the product of investment *strategies*, individual or collective (...) aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are *directly useable* in the short or long term” (1986: 249, the emphasis in both places is my own).

Part 2

The Use and Exchange Value of Resources

In the above, my concern has been with the concept of resources in a general sense: I noted two basic features of (natural and social) resources: they are created through human labour (understood in a broad sense) and have some identifiable purpose or usefulness. Some resources also may have exchange value. In this second part of the paper my exploration of the resources concept continues, but through a discussion that is focused on the specific context of the site that is the focus of my research in Odessa Oblast, post-Soviet Ukraine. Given the breadth of the resources conceptualization provided above, any number of ways to further organize or classify resources could be valid – and indeed different forms of classification may prove a valuable analytical tool, depending on the particular theme relating to resources that is being explored.

The importance of value in terms of resources has been discussed, at least with respect to natural resources (Franquesa 2018: 7–8). I believe it is equally important in the consideration of social resources. My concern here is to focus on the revaluation of resources, that is, their changing status (mobility) under conditions of political-economic reform. For my purposes, ‘modes of use/exchange’ is a particularly suitable way of talking about the revaluation of resources. In so doing I build on Uchibori’s (2011: 151) idea that it is important to distinguish between resources for ‘basic existence’ and ‘general economic activity and commercial transaction in particular’. Since not all resources enter exchange circuits, let alone become part of commercial transactions, I prefer to make use of the more ‘neutral’ terms: use and exchange value.

It is through the mobilization and revaluation of resources that we can explore the impact on communities following the dismantling of socialist political-economies and adoption of capitalist ones. The shifting of resources between use and exchange values, or within systems of use or circuits of exchange, were a crucial feature of postsocialist reforms. Many of the basic resources that in capitalist countries have both use and exchange value were, at least during socialist times, resources with use but little or no exchange value (at least not via the market). If resources had exchange value, then their circuit of exchange was often important. In the Soviet case, exchange might have been through the market, but it was by no means the only or arguably the most important arena for exchange. *Blat*/favours – personal connections between family, friends, colleagues etc. – were often a vital and non-monetary way of attaining goods and services (Ledeneva 1998). That is, while resources were embedded in a circuit of exchange, the form of exchange was an ‘economy of favours’ (see Henig and Makovicky 2017) rather than, or alongside, a monetary exchange system. While I cannot go into any depth into these processes here or discuss in any detail the resulting tensions and conflicts, below I briefly present a few examples in order to highlight the different forms of possible resource mobilization and revaluation (for more, see Kaneff forthcoming).

The first example is the shifting of resources within what I call ‘systems of use’. Collectively worked land serves as an example of how resources have shifted from one form of use value to another. In Soviet times, *kolkhoz* and *sovkhos* land was controlled and/or owned by the state and worked collectively. Clearly it had huge significance as a resource – the community’s livelihood depended on it, as it still does. However, while this land did have and still has exchange

importance, it is not this aspect that is my concern here.²⁰ Rather, my focus is on the use value that the land had for individual village householders, who were, and to some extent still are, provisioned by the land. Land maintains its use value, although the form of use for provisioning purposes has shifted over time. During Soviet times the use value of the collectivised land was expressed through a variety of entitlements and rights: e.g. at the community level the *kolkhoz* and *sovkhos* supported a wide number of village services, from the water supply and communal baths to school breakfasts for all children etc.; at the household level, individuals gained, apart from employment, or rather through their employment, guaranteed access to subsidized food, a range of services, health care, education and so on. The entitlements and rights that villagers enjoyed during Soviet times, based on their membership in an agricultural collective, were non-transferable and non-tradable. They were primarily a means of provisioning the household and its members, in the broadest sense. Such an arrangement between collective land use/ownership lay outside any (monetary) exchange circuit. Produce from the land and associated entitlements were transferred directly from the collective to the household for its own consumption. Household provisioning made possible through (indirect) land ownership is an example of land's use value.

The newly established agricultural enterprises that replaced the Soviet collectives after 1991 no longer provide such a range of entitlements. They provide relatively little support for the community, although individual householders, now as private land owners and members of an enterprise, gain 'rental' from their land. Importantly, rental is non-monetary, instead it is in the form of tonnes of grain with which householders feed animals for household consumption and from which they make bread for their own personal consumption. Thus, much as in previous Soviet times, the use value of the land is still in terms of household survival and reproduction, although the extent of the benefits have been vastly reduced. While the land is now privately owned and worked by a smaller number of workers, rental is paid to landowners through the direct transference of produce/crops to households that enables their survival and maintenance. The land remains outside any exchange circuit (including a land market), and the resource offers a dramatically reduced and different 'use' value from Soviet times.

A second trend is of shifts of resources from one exchange circuit to another. Water provides an example. As the water supply system does not reach individual households, families have water storage tanks in their home yards. During Soviet times water was delivered – for free – to households, whose use for this resource was minimal and largely for domestic purposes, that is, washing and drinking. Water was not needed for the growing of household fruit and vegetables because the collectives provided villagers with a wide range of subsidised foods. Since the water was managed by the *kolkhoz* and *sovkhos* and since the vast majority of villagers belonged to one or the other, this free resource was effectively an entitlement to all. However, the delivery of water to individual households was not a full time job and the delivery personnel were expected to make water deliveries inbetween other responsibilities. Inevitably deliveries ran behind schedule and connections to the delivery man were useful in fast tracking an individual through the official

²⁰ I do not wish to imply that collective land does not have exchange value. The land had – and still has – both use and exchange value. With respect to its exchange value: while the land itself had little monetary exchange value during the Soviet period or indeed in present day Ukraine (a market for land exists although rarely engaged in) a rental market, that remains largely outside a monetary exchange circuit, is practiced in contemporary times. More often than not, however, it is the produce from the land – rather than the land itself – that has exchange value. A significant proportion of the produce from the land that fulfilled the state plan was traded within the Soviet market. The present agricultural enterprises (former *kolkhoz* and *sovkhos*) sell their produce on the Ukraine market, either to the government or private buyers from outside the region. Thus in both periods, the produce from this land (if not the land itself) had exchange value.

queue. Such connections were particularly important to social sphere workers – school teachers for example – who were amongst the minority who did not belong to either the *kolkhoz* and *sovkhos* and therefore were generally given less priority than collective members. Thus access to water belonged to a circuit of exchange that operated in part at least through an economy of favours.

With the disestablishment of the Soviet agricultural collectives subsidized foods and other services previously provided by the collectives were gradually phased out, while at the same time the majority of villagers found themselves unemployed. This resulted in a dramatically increased demand for water as villagers were forced into a more intensive working of their own household land in order to produce foods for their survival. In the early 2000s, as water passed from the jurisdiction of the former collectives to the village council, who were expected to commodify the resource (and thereby gain an income), the resource shifted from one circuit of exchange – economy of favours – to another, a (money based) market economy.

A third example – the social resource of ‘identity’ – provides evidence of the shifting of resources most commonly associated with entry into a capitalist economy; from use to exchange value. During Soviet times the villagers with whom I worked were denoted in their passports as ethnic Bulgarians. This had some use value in the sense that it located them in a particular way as Soviet citizens in terms of their ethnicity. After 1991, however, villagers became a ‘minority’ in a Ukraine state, and connections with their ancestral homeland were developed on this basis. It was only at this time that the ethnic identity of the rural community has gained exchange value. Bulgarians from the Republic of Bulgaria come to buy local handicrafts from (ethnic Bulgarian) Ukraine villagers in order to display in museums in Bulgaria. These handicrafts are valued in Bulgaria, not only because the skills needed to produce such items are no longer practiced and at the same time highly valued as signifiers of Bulgarian heritage, but also more importantly because they provide material evidence of a Bulgarian diaspora and as such are part of the nation building project. Being ‘Bulgarian’ was a dimension of community identity which could be commodified and which took on a new exchange value.

The above serve as examples of the various ways in which resources have been mobilized following the collapse of the socialist system and integration into a capitalist economy. The revaluation of resources takes place in a number of different ways: some resources move from one system of usage (a wide range of entitlements and rights, including access to subsidized food) to another (a more direct but reduced transference of produce from the land, i.e. annual tonnes of various grains) for the maintenance of the household; other resources are shifting their exchange value between circuits of exchange, such as from an economy of favours to a market economy. At the same time, some resources with previously only use value are being given exchange value and a particular type of exchange – i.e. one associated with the market economy.

These shifts in how resources are valued, within and between use and exchange, provide an arena for claims and counterclaims over ownership, access and control, between different individuals in the community and beyond. Such processes, in turn, are fundamental to understanding contemporary conflicts and tensions evident in the post-Soviet community.

The Making of Neoliberal Resources

Conceptualizing resource revaluation in terms of use and exchange provides us with an insight into the intricacies of postsocialist reforms, when the more typical description of these processes in terms of ‘privatization’ and ‘public to private’ appear inadequate.

Neoliberalism, it has been argued, is characterized by its tendency “(...) to *redistribute*, rather than to generate, wealth and income” through a process of “accumulation by dispossession” (Harvey 2005: 159, my emphasis). ‘Accumulation by dispossession’ includes a wide range of processes but the ones most relevant for my discussion are privatization and commodification. At the macro level at which Harvey (2005) describes these processes, privatization is about the selling off of public assets – land, public utilities, social welfare services, public institutions of various forms – into private ownership. It is also about converting various forms of property rights held in a common/collective/state form, into exclusively private property rights. Sometimes a transference of ownership does not actually take place, the handing over of control and management to private hands is sufficient and amounts to the same thing. The monetization of exchange – commodification – is a further aspect of the privatization process and opens up “new fields for capital accumulation” (Harvey 2005: 160–161, Harvey 2004: 75). The process goes beyond just the ‘wholesale’ commodification of nature, as the commodification of ‘cultural forms’ (and here he seems to mean ‘culture’ in the specific sense of various traditions/handicrafts/food/music, as well as histories, and intellectual creativities) is also taking place. In this respect, neoliberalism differs from previous forms of capitalism, since “(...) it embraces the production of social life itself, seeking to commoditize the most intimate of human relations and production of identity and personhood” (Gledhill 2004: 340).

Such a way of describing the overall effects of neoliberalism – as the distribution of resources through privatisation, that is, a shifting of resources/assets from ‘public’ to ‘private’ domains – while very useful as an indicator of a general trend, seems inadequate when applied to particular contexts in that it masks the many complexities that are evident on the ground. Re-considering neoliberal redistribution through a more detailed discussion of resources and their use and exchange value, I suggest, provides greater insight into the complexity of the process. An example highlights the advantages. Rural land has been privatised in a formal, legal sense, transferred to the ownership of individual villagers who now hold titles for particular land plots. A macro overview confirms that the resource of land has shifted from public to private ownership. However the land is still being worked in the main, cooperatively, and remains largely outside any exchange circuit: there is no significant land market and for individual owners, at least, the ‘rental’ received from the enterprises has use rather than exchange value – its value is in terms of reproducing the household, through providing feed for animals and grain for bread for household members. So the shift in this case, while in a formal legal sense from public to private, is actually little changed in practice from Soviet times when the collectively worked land provisioned individual households through a wide range of subsidised foods and services.²¹

Complexities of the privatisation process are unmasked if we reconceptualise the process as a re/valuation of resources in terms of use and exchange. There are three general shifts or movements

²¹ This situation is similar to many other sites in eastern Europe, where the cooperative working of the land largely continues, despite land legally being in private ownership.

I wish to highlight as significant in understanding the re/valuation of resources in postsocialist contexts:

1. The neoliberalisation of resources takes place through shifting resources within the same value sphere; either from one use value system to another, or within different circuits of exchange. An example of the first case is the sort of provisioning provided by collectively worked land where privatisation has taken place in a formal/legal sense (providing the land with a potential exchange value), although in practice, the land continues to remain within a system of use value. As far as householders are concerned, land moves within different systems of use and remains largely outside any exchange circuit despite being privatised. An example of the second case is water: access was once embedded in an economy of favours, and is now being commodified and entering a different exchange circuit of a monetary form (though this is by no means a smooth process or without its problems).
2. An increased number of resources with use value are being given additional value as exchange items, and in a particular type of exchange – monetary. For example, as the boundaries of the new Ukraine nation-state are made concrete, and resources become territorialised in new ways, a minority group's identity becomes a new social resource that is commodified and materialised through cultural forms of property (embroidery, etc.). A Bulgarian identity is being commodified, made into an exchangeable resource for economic gains, through the sale of the cultural property to Bulgarians from the Republic of Bulgaria.
3. A shifting or mobilisation of resources as described in points 1 and 2 above, can also have a knock on effect of creating new resources, through the creation of new needs and wants. For example, a new demand for water by the households – as a direct consequence of the collapse of the Soviet agricultural collectives that ended the provision of subsidised food, thus forcing individuals to be more reliant on their own household land – has turned water into a far more important resource than in Soviet or pre-Soviet times. In this case, the dismantling of the agricultural collectives has given a new importance to other resources (household land) and created new resources (water). Thus apart from the direct re/valuation of resources instigated through the passing of new laws and implementation of related policies, resources can also be changed more indirectly by the creation of new wants and needs, or changing existing needs/wants, which transforms the value of resources to satisfy these new or altered situations.

Incorporation into the capitalist global economy is a process that in part has taken place through the mobilisation and re/valuation of resources, resulting in the making of new resources, remaking of others and the unmaking of yet others. Market expansion is still through the creation of new resources (as has always been the case) but it is also through the mobilisation of already established resources that are revalued *within* as well as *between* circuits of use and exchange. Many of these processes cannot be adequately discussed as a transference from the public to private sector, or as an unequivocal process of 'privatisation'. The situation is more complicated, a complexity that can be better appreciated if we focus on resources and their use and exchange value.

Conclusion

Access to resources, as well as issues relating to their ownership, control, distribution and re/valuation is central not only to the organisation of a society, but also its reorganisation. Resources are particularly prominent in periods such as we witnessed post 1989/91, when entry into a new capitalist system and the dismantling of state socialism was carried out, at least in part, through a process of the re/valuation of resources.

This paper has concentrated on two areas of significance in exploring this process.

Firstly, I have argued that a conceptualisation needs to consider both social and natural resources. While such terms may suggest undesirable modernist dualities, they need not reproduce such binary oppositions as long as we hold onto the idea that ‘natural’ and ‘social’ resources and the boundaries between them are not neat or essential phenomena, but culturally and temporally specific, being constantly made and remade through everyday social practices. The advantage of such a broader consideration of resources (natural and social) is that it provides a wider platform from which to explore social change, that goes well beyond the narrow sphere of ‘natural’ resources.

The second theme of the paper was to highlight the significance of the revaluation of resources, through a focus on their use and exchange value. Such a framework provides a useful way for examining the changing status of resources, as they move within and between systems of use and circuits of exchange. Resource mobility provides a worthwhile way of exploring the impact of political-economic reforms during periods of intense social change. This perspective gives ethnographic substance to the macro processes identified by Harvey (2005), amongst others, who view neoliberalism as a particular form of capitalist expansion – i.e. through redistribution, and the shifting of resources and assets from the public to the private sphere. If we explore such processes in terms of the revaluation of resources, we see the greater intricacies involved in these macro trends. Such a resources approach is a useful addition to (rather than a replacement of) the macro perspectives.

Resources are at the centre of processes of social change, processes often accompanied by struggles that are played out daily at all levels of social life – from community to national and international. They “are intimately connected to changing regimes of accumulation” and also with the re-ordering of global hierarchies (Franquesa 2018: 13; see also Zimmermann 1933). The study of resource re/valuation is therefore a fruitful means by which questions of rising tensions and inequalities, not only at the global level, but also more locally can be studied. The tensions and struggles I have witnessed over almost two decades in a community in Odessa Oblast are grounded in access to, and control over, resources. Such tensions and divisions far outweigh any new solidarities, although some new alliances may also be evidenced (for example, through the new importance of household land, another resource, kinship is given an additional importance). Community conflicts over resources create new hierarchies and inequalities: both within the village – for example, between a new ‘class’ of elite running the present day agricultural enterprises and the land owners (ordinary members of the enterprise) – and between the village and other larger institutions, such as the Ukraine state (which attributes a new status to the villagers as an ethnic ‘minority’) or the ancestral homeland of the Republic of Bulgaria (where Bulgarian Ukrainians have a new prominence).

In the post-Soviet and postsocialist context, changes in the ownership, control and management of resources was part of a deliberate drive to revalue a wide range of resources as a means of achieving reform goals and the ultimate transformation of society. However, such processes are by no means limited to this region. The tensions resulting from struggles over resource re/valuation, and the inequalities generated as a result, are evident across communities far beyond postsocialist Eurasia, as resources take on new value and meaning in the global neoliberal capitalist project.

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