Identity and Community: A union campaign around place and development in North West Tasmania

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Where is North West Tasmania?
An Old Economy Deindustrialising

- Remote
- Older industries leaving
- Disadvantaged
  - High levels of unemployment
  - Low levels of educational attainment
Unions, Mobilisation and Place

• As unions have declined renewed interest in mobilisation eg Kelly (1998)

• Lévesque and Murray (2010, 2013)
  – Power resources
    – Network embeddedness
    – Narrative resources
  – Capabilities
    – Framing

• Community unionism

• But what if there are not any groups/collectivities or discernable interests?
Place Identity and Community

• Harvey (1993, 2000)
  – Place as socially constructed
  – Place has strong associations with memory and identity
  – Memory connected with landscape.
  – Collective memory forms an “imaginary of belonging”
  – Place linked to community through “imagined community”

• Hay (2012)
  – Capital’s obliteration of place
  – Place has become empowering
The Tarkine, Wilderness and the AWU

• Concept of wilderness is contested
• Environmental groups saw the landscape as unique
• AWU’s members at Rosebery and Savage River proposed a campaign
• Our Tarkine, Our Future launched
A Button Grass Plain
The AWU’s Campaign Themes

• Advertising campaign
• Tarkine’s long history of mining
• Mining and conservation could coexist
• This is our home, this is our future
• The robust outdoors
• http://www.awu.net.au/videos/our-tarkine-our-future
The Campaign

- Rallies on NW and West coasts
- AWU National Secretary involvement
- Petitions
- Ministerial lobbying
What Does This All Mean?

• A traditional union campaign?
• Focus on place rather than workplace
• Construction of identity that was place rather than occupationally based.
• Celebration of embeddedness of work and virtues associated with that work
• Community of individuals (Imagined community) rather than community group
• Challenges theorisation of union mobilisation and about how union’s conceptualise identity