Contested cultural heritage as an element of Social Impact Assessment. The case of mining operation

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A large-scale mining operation causes a huge turmoil not only ecologically but into the sociocultural structure of a community living around the site. It may prevent people’s opportunities from practicing their traditional livelihood or experiencing emotionally important sites of memory. Furthermore, such a turning point easily causes new sociocultural divisions depending on who benefits from the investment and who does not. This paper contemplates the contested roles of cultural heritage in public initiatives heading at local capacity building or corporate social responsibility in respect of mining. A wider question is what are the broader prospects and challenges of increasing the cultural accountability of local stakeholders in the altered circumstances. Typically the concept of culture in Social Impact Assessment refers to the indigenous people and their tradition and heritage. Often cultural analyses stop at a welcoming ceremony or the established history cementing the prevalent cultural hierarchy of a community. Here culture is understood in a broader sense. Culture is powerful media through which the hopes, expectations, fears and frustration of local people concerning for example an industrial initiative are expressed. Interest conflicts about local environmental issues often trace deep into collective identities of various groups of people. It means that cultural heritage and, consequently, the need for cultural sustainability, have different meanings for different people. Furthermore, these meanings may contrast with other aspects of sustainability, namely economic, ecological and social sustainability.

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