

Social Consequences of Rural Events: Developing Knowledge, Aiding Planning

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ABSTRACT

Events have a range of consequences for host communities. While a number of researchers have focussed upon impact assessment there are some fundamental issues which require addressing. Firstly, most research investigating the social impacts of events use predefined quantitative assessment techniques or tools. These tools limit the ability of respondents to indicate the diversity of social consequences that they may experience. Secondly, the labelling of social consequences as positive or negative fails to acknowledge the 'shades of grey' which may exist. Thirdly, there is a lack of research specifically investigating the social consequences of events within rural communities. Therefore, there is a need to identify a range of social consequences that occur as a result of hosting events. This is best achieved from the perspective of those experiencing the phenomena, thus qualitatively. This paper aims to address these gaps by examining the social consequences of rural events from an event stakeholder perspective within three rural communities of southwest Queensland, Australia.

Keywords: *Social Consequences, Rural Events*

INTRODUCTION

Events have the ability to draw outside investment and financial resources into local communities, which can lead to positive economic benefits that may sustain rural communities undergoing difficult economic periods. In today's society events also play an important social role. An event provides the opportunity to bring people together within a social environment to celebrate their and others achievements, thus are integral for individuals as well as communities as a whole. Therefore, events have a range of impacts upon host communities. However, much of the event research has been predominately focused on the economic impacts of events (Dwyer, Forsyth & Spurr, 2005; Jackson, Houghton, Russell & Triandos, 2005; Tyrrell & Ismail, 2005; Tyrrell & Johnston, 2001; Burgan & Mules, 2000; Anderson & Solberg, 1999; Ryan, 1998; Mules & Faulkner, 1996). It has only been in recent years that a shift in focus of this research has occurred with greater recognition being attributed to the social consequences of events (Fredline, Deery & Jago, 2005; Small, Edwards & Sheridan, 2005; Wood, 2005; Reid, 2004; Fredline, Jago & Deery, 2003; Fredline & Faulkner, 2002a, 2002b; Delamere, 2001; Delamere, Wankel & Hinch, 2001; Delamere, 1997; Hall & Hodges, 1996). Additionally, much of this research has focused on urban and large scale events at the peril of smaller or rural based events. This paper aims to contribute to a greater understanding of the social consequences of events. This is achieved by examining the social consequences experienced as a result of hosting rural events by those subjected to the phenomena, the event stakeholders.

SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF EVENTS

Social consequences refers to the quality of life issues, such as social stratification, attitudes, beliefs, values and lifestyles of host communities (Glasson, Godfrey & Goodey, 1995; Milman & Pizam, 1988; Var, Kendell & Tarakciogiu, 1985). Social consequences are the outcome of perceived changes in value systems, individual behaviour, family relations, collective lifestyles, safety levels, moral conduct and community organisations (Fox, 1977; as cited in Ap, 1990). These changes may occur as the result of the introduction of foreign cultures, morals and values that may conflict with long established host community cultures. Table 1 details the range of social consequences of events identified within the literature.

Table 1 Existing Identified Social Consequences of Events

Positive Social Consequences	Negative Social Consequences
<i>Showcase Effect</i> Dwyer, Mellor, Mistilis & Mules, 2000; Fredline, 2000; Smith & Jenner, 1998; Jeong & Faulkner, 1996; Kang & Perdue, 1994; Ritchie & Smith, 1991; Getz, 1991	<i>Environmental Damage And Litter</i> Jones, 2001; Fredline & Faulkner, 2000; Ritchie, 1984
<i>Tool For Urban Regeneration</i> Hiller, 2000; Gratton & Dobson, 1999; Hall & Hodges, 1996; Jeong & Faulkner, 1996; Faulkner, 1994; Soutar & McLeod, 1993; Hall, 1992; Ritchie, 1984	<i>Loss Of Amenities</i> Delamere, 1997; Hall, 1989
<i>Encourages Tourism</i> Smith & Jenner, 1998; Faulkner, 1994; Hinch & Delamere, 1993; Hall, 1992; Getz, 1991; Ritchie, 1984; Ritchie & Beliveau, 1974	<i>Causes Very Few Job Opportunities</i> Getz, 1994; Chacko & Schaffer, 1993; Janiskee, 1991
<i>Enhances Community Spirit And Improves Quality Of Life</i> De Bres & Davis, 2001; Fredline, 2000; Boyle, 1997; Delamere, 1997; Gorney & Busser, 1996; Huang & Stewart, 1996; Hall, 1992; Janiskee, 1991; Getz & Frisby, 1990	<i>Exploitation And Manipulation Of Event Themes For Commercialisation</i> Fredline, 2000; Graburn & Moore, 1994; Hinch & Delamere, 1993; Jafari, 1982
<i>Provide Leisure And Recreational Opportunities</i> De Bres & Davis, 2001; Aldskogius, 1993; Janiskee, 1991; Ritchie, 1984	<i>Degradation Of Positive Tourism And Promotional Imagery</i> Fredline, 2000; Olds, 1998; Ritchie, 1984
<i>Promotes Civic Boosterism</i> Boyle, 1997	<i>Causes Social Dislocation And Increases In Housing Costs</i> Jones, 2001; Hiller, 1998; Shapcott, 1998; Hall & Hodges, 1996; Cox, Darcy & Bounds, 1994; Wilkinson, 1994; Udjar, 1993; Olds, 1998
<i>Provides Educational And Cultural Understanding</i> Delamere, Wankel & Hinch, 2001; Hinch & Delamere, 1993	<i>Financial Burdens</i> Jones, 2001
<i>Encourages Participation In Sporting Activities</i> Crockett, 1994; as cited in Jones, 2001	<i>Changes In Community Values And Patterns</i> Delamere, 1997; McCool & Martin, 1994; Soutar & McLeod, 1993; Hall, 1992; Getz, 1991

Social impacts of events have primarily been studied utilising an adaptation of the residents' perceptions of tourism themes and measured using tools such as a social impact assessment or evaluation survey (Small, Edwards & Sheridan, 2005; Fredline, Jago & Deery, 2003; Delamere, 2001; Delamere, Wankel & Hinch, 2001; Fredline, 2000; Delamere, 1997). This approach attempts to quantify the social consequences of events within communities from the perspective

of residents. Another characteristic of much of the research into the social consequences of events has been the concentration on large-scale events within urban areas, overlooking the fact that events are diverse and widespread throughout communities.

CAVEATS OF SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF EVENTS RESEARCH

A number of caveats of social impacts research have been identified. First, the subjective nature of tourism and events research (Faulkner & Tideswell, 1997; Ap, 1990; Mathieson & Wall, 1982). Researchers apply value laden judgments in defining impacts as positive and negative. This fails to recognize that 'shades of grey' exist and diversity of opinion amongst residents' perception of these impacts occurs. The term 'impact' also implies negative connotations. This paper argues that the use of social consequences may be a more appropriate term to remove the subjective, value laden nature that current studies adopt. Second, the assessment of social impacts is also very difficult as there is no way of quantifying the social impacts and subtracting the costs from the benefits, as is the case in economic cost benefit analysis (Crandall, 1994). Third, validation of previous studies findings conflict, as do the social impacts evidenced.

In a study, for the Queensland Department of Tourism, Sport and Racing, Bell Planning Associates (1994) noted that negative impacts tended to be people's perceptions rather than measurable against objective indices. Van Doorn (1989) concluded that many of the social impact studies reporting negative impacts did not base their conclusions on solid empirical analysis because much of the research suffered from methodological flaws. There was a tendency to produce biased generalisations reflecting the researcher's preconceptions about negative socio-cultural consequences (Van Doorn, 1989). Many of these studies also assess the social consequences of tourism against predefined themes, therefore limiting opportunity for residents to report alternative themes that they perceive impact upon them.

Impact labeling tourism impacts by predefined value laden categories, such as negative and positive, does not allow for residents to explore the intricacies of each individual consequence. For example, what is positive to one set of stakeholders might be negative to another, the assessment of this will only be derived from an aggregate of the results and not reflect this diversity in opinions. There is a need to initially identify all the social consequences that residents perceive from their perspective. These consequences should be derived from an individual's perspective, therefore from their own understanding and construction of the phenomena, not from the researcher's predefined value laden perspective.

The adoption of tourism impacts to develop social impact measurement tools relating to events has further facilitated this. The utilisation of a predefined social impact scale, however, limits the ability of residents to identify additional or deviate from these predefined themes. It does not allow for residents to expand upon certain issues that they perceive as resulting from an event. The scale also limits the responses to those developed from social consequences relating to tourism predominantly, rather than identifying and validating these impacts. Evidently, there is a need to identify what the social consequences of events are from the perspective of those impacted upon, without adopting a predefined value laden approach.

As a consequence, a criticism of the social impact of events research relates to the quantifiable and positivistic approach that eliminates the values and independent feelings of those affected the most by events (Hall, 1989). This is directed by governments' tendency to require quantifiable assessments of the impacts that arise. There has been an avoidance of support from governments for social consequence studies due to the intangible nature of their

effects and because longer term studies that measure consequences well after the event has finished are not forthcoming. Social impacts tend to be treated as externalities to the more quantifiable and politically popular economic impact studies (Delamere, 1997). Therefore, it is timely that this research occurs.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research methodology was used to collect data. Fifty-four (54) in-depth interviews with event stakeholders in three rural communities within the south-west Queensland region of the Southern Downs, Australia were conducted over a six month period in 2003. Stakeholders were identified using an event stakeholder typology (Reid & Arcodia, 2002) and a snowball sampling technique. The event stakeholder typology identifies 27 potential groups/individuals that are or could be impacted by the hosting of an event within a community. However, the context specific nature of events within communities ensures that organising committees have to respond to varying stakeholders. Additionally, within rural communities many individuals may fulfil multiple and congruent event stakeholder roles. Therefore, the event stakeholder typology was used as an initial sampling strategy to identify respondents. These respondents were then asked to provide additional contacts of individuals who were or could be affected by the event's existence. In total 16, 17 and 21 respondents were interviewed from communities A, I and G.

The interviews utilised a semi-structured approach and varied in length from 60 minutes to 180 minutes and were audio tape recorded. The interviews were transcribed and returned to respondents for member cross checking, to ensure that the transcripts were a true and reflective account of the interview. The results reported in this paper were obtained from an iterative thematic analysis of the interview transcripts. As Holstein and Gubrium (1995) acknowledge, the analysis of qualitative data requires the systematic grouping and summarising of descriptions and providing an organising framework that encapsulates and explains the respondents' perceptions of the phenomena. Within this research the themes which emerged were shaped by the coding of the data, rather than a pre-defined matrix derived from the review of the literature.

FINDINGS

Respondents identified a number of social consequences, on both a community and an individual level, which result from hosting rural events. These social consequences were subsequently grouped into five domains for ease of analysis. The domains were grouped due to commonalities in the constructs. The five grouped domains include the networks and interactions, affective, learning and developing, socio-economic and physical as outlined in Table 2. These domains were further categorised into community and individual level consequences, in line with existing research (Small, Edwards & Sheridan, 2005; Fredline, Jago & Deery, 2003; Delamere, 2001; Fredline, 2000).

These findings identified a range of social consequence themes not previously identified within the literature, this paper will report on these consequences. These social consequences included themes such as; trust and respect, breaking down social barriers, releasing stress and tension, forgetting hard times, being affiliated with success, a resistance to change, costs associated with attending, expectation of government assistance, and greed.

Table 2 Grouped Themes of Social Consequences

	Networks & Interactions Domain	Affective Domain	Learning & Developing Domain	Socio-Economic Domain	Physical Domain
Community Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Participation/ Involvement -Unity/ Belonging/ Sense Of Community -Relationships - Trust/ Respect -Communication/ Gossip -Community Development/ Enticing People To Stay/ Move Here -Social Barriers -Socialising Opportunity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Entertainment / Atmosphere/ Sense Of Occasion -Motivation -Community Spirit/Pride -Traditions/ Values -Morale Boost -Community Support/ Ownership -Identity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Awareness Of/ Utilising Community Skills & Resources -Leadership -Change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Spinoff Economic Effects/ Development -Generates Tourism/ Showcases Region -Expectation Of Government Assistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Anti-Social Behaviour/ Crime -Improving Recreational Facilities/ Resources -Congestion/ Noise/ Litter -Safe Environment
Individual Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Opportunity To Socialise/ Interact With Others -Relationships/ Trust/ Respect -Breaking Down Barriers/ Accepting Of Others -Unity/ Belonging -Involvement -Enticing People To Stay 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Releasing Stress And Tension/ Forget Hard Times -Motivation -Pride -Being Affiliated With Success -Ownership -Morale Boost -Identity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Education/ Learn New Skills -Sense Of Achievement/ Confidence -Leadership -Changing Attitudes -Awareness Of/ Utilising Skills & Resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Employment -Costs Associated With Attending -Greed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Dislocation

Trust and respect (20 or 37%) were included within the networks and interactions domain (54 or 100%) as relationships are dependent upon trust. Community participation and networks also are dependent upon trust, therefore opportunities of bringing people together to facilitate this is important for a community. Respect was a consequence of an individual being perceived to be doing a good job. Therefore, trust enabled people to work together and to develop relationships and networks, with respect occurring if an individual was perceived to be doing their assigned role competently.

Another social consequence included within this domain which had not previously been acknowledged within the literature was social barriers. The social divides or barriers (26 or 48.1%) that exist within rural communities are often deeply entrenched, in spite of this a neutral ground between these social groups may be achieved through organising and planning rural events. Often this divide is based upon whether an individual is a 'local' (born within the community) or a 'non local' (moved to the community). A challenge for rural events is ensuring that the event is not overly representative of one of these social groupings, otherwise the event risks losing the support of community members from the other group.

Rural communities are heterogeneous and there are significant differences between these communities, therefore social divides are dependent upon the nature of individual communities.

The affective domain (54 or 100%) consisted of social consequences which were intrinsic or feeling based. The social nature of events contributes to a positive atmosphere and sense of occasion to be evident within a community. This is important for all communities, especially rural ones, to allow the opportunity for residents to forget some of the hard times that they may be experiencing, allowing for a releasing of stress and tension (23 or 42.6%). It is particularly important for the psychological wellbeing of the community and may provide the impetus for the community to keep going in the face of adversity, particularly within rural communities.

Also included within the affective domain was a desire to be affiliated with success (7 or 12.9%). The conservative nature of rural communities ensures that individuals are wary of new activities or individuals until they have proven their worth or success. This also relates to rural events, with people wanting to be affiliated with success and distancing themselves from failure. Therefore, it may be difficult to establish new events within rural communities unless the support for and local community involvement is actively sought.

Within the learning and developing domain (51 or 94.4%) change (18 or 35.3%) was identified as a social consequence. Change related to the propensity of the community to cope with change and the role of events in facilitating this. The ability of a community to cope with change varied and was dependent upon the individual contexts and situations of the community. A traditional mindset of 'resistance to change' was stagnating and impeding rural communities from reinvigorating their current positions. Events provide a catalyst for introducing and facilitating change. In this research, the rural events have provided the opportunity of 'locals' and 'others' working together to break down social barriers and the introduction of and acceptance of new industries to a region.

The socio-economic domain (49 or 90.7%) was comprised of themes which were linked with the economic situation of individuals and the community. These themes are often associated with the economic consequences of hosting events, however they were perceived by respondents as also having social consequences due to the economic situation informing the quality of life, and accordingly the social environment of individuals and the community. There were three social consequences identified by this research which had not previously been reported: costs of attending (18 or 36.7%), expectation of government assistance (4 or 8.1%) and greed (3 or 6.1%).

Local individuals and families may be disadvantaged by the costs associated with attending and participating in rural events. While entry fees to local events is minimal, or none existent, the cost of goods, services and products within the event such as rides and food may cause economic hardship and social stratification. The timing of the event, throughout the calendar year, may also affect issues relating to cost. If events are located too close to the other events, Christmas, New Year and the start of school year then the effects may be felt more strongly by the community.

There was also an expectation amongst some respondents that the government should become involved or assist through financial aid. Rural communities have been provided with government assistance to overcome drought and to improve lifestyles within rural regions, however there may be a continual expectation that the government will provide assistance to rural communities. The question arises as to the role and responsibilities of governments in providing assistance to rural communities. However, a smaller number of respondents acknowledged that the community has to take control and responsibility for community development as financial assistance from the government is not sustainable. To achieve this ongoing education and individual development is required. Events provide the 'breeding

ground' for creating skills and knowledge amongst the community, which can be used to facilitate and foster future community development opportunities.

An interesting finding of this research related to greed. The potential of power and the exchange of money associated with events can result in incidences of greed occurring. Greed has the potential of creating distrust amongst the community, therefore weakening the networks and relationships which exist. Without trust the connectedness of these networks and relationships is diminished, thus not enabling social capital to be utilised or developed. Issues and effects of greed can be overcome through transparency of event organizers, effective planning and communication, as well as reporting mechanisms.

CONCLUSION

The research found that social consequences of rural events could be grouped into five domains. These domains include; networks and interactions, affective, learning and developing, socio-economic, and physical. One, the networks and interactions domain referred to themes such as relationships and facilitators of networks within the community. Two, the affective domain involved emotive and intrinsic characteristics that arise from rural events, such as community spirit and pride, sense of unity and motivation. Three, the learning and developing domain incorporated themes such as education, skill development and community capacity building characteristics. Four, the socio-economic domain discussed themes that would generally be included as economic impacts, although have an affect upon the ability of individuals and community to secure and achieve a quality of life. Five, the physical domain refers to themes affecting the physical aspects of the community which have consequences for quality of life of residents.

These domains are in contrast with existing research that differentiated social consequences based on the level of impact, for example highly negative or highly positive, perceived by host communities (Small, Edwards & Sheridan, 2005; Fredline, 2000). This paper has consistently argued that the use of negative or positive categorisations does not allow for differing social constructions of those impacts or the 'shades of grey' to emerge. The findings from this research indicates that while respondent's perceptions of social consequences may be negative or positive it is necessary to explore the intricacies and varying social constructions of these themes.

The findings have identified a number of social consequences which had not previously been recognized within existing literature. These social consequences included themes such as; trust and respect, breaking down social barriers, releasing stress and tension, forgetting hard times, being affiliated with success, a resistance to change, the affects of costs associated with attending, expectation of government assistance, and greed. As this research has highlighted a shortcoming of existing social impact assessment measurement tools or techniques is the lack of a comprehensive list of social consequence themes/items included. It is important to determine the social consequences of rural events from the perspectives of those who are most affected or influenced by the existence of the event.

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