PATHS TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY:

SOCIAL CULTURAL EVALUATION OF FESTIVALS IN RURAL AND NON-URBAN AREAS, AN ANALYSIS OF MEDIA INTERPRETATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The economic and social composition of rural society has changed irrevocably. The role of the market town as economic epicentre of rural wealth has all but completely evaporated (Courtney & Errington, 2003). Rural areas, inclusive of mountainous ones, are witnessing, after many years of isolation, new regenerative activities. Within this environment alternative forms of economic support have grown. One growing element of that is tourism, of which events and festivals are seen as significant factors (Robertson & Darby, 2007). Events have the ability to draw positive effects for rural environments but the demand for these to be social cultural ones has received little attention (Reid, 2007).

As Getz (2008) indicates, the current research focus looks to explain the outcomes of events. He further points to the role that media content analysis can play in that. The research here uses a media framing technique (Entman, 1993; Van Gorp, 2007; Peel & Steen, 2007) to analyse the media coverage of the impacts of festivals and events. The results clarify that there is a marked change in the relationship between the community and their perception of the potential impacts of festivals on the rural area. These indicate the significance of – and the call for public and private sectors to ensure – event and festival plans based on socio-cultural factors as well as economic development.

Keywords

Festival and Events; Rural; Triple Bottom Line; Social-Cultural Benefits and Disbenefits; Media Content Analysis, Media Framing.

INTRODUCTION

Changing rural-urban relations in Europe

Since the latter half of the 20th century onwards in Europe, the need for agriculture and, by association, market towns has diminished and seen the future of rural areas based on agriculture change irrevocably. While traditional farming and food production roles have depleted and a good deal of the rural community has moved to an urban existence, so technological development and the lowering of travels costs has encouraged the relocation of new business and

residents from the urban to the rural (Courtney & Errington, 2003; Antrop, 2004). The meaning found in, and the usage sought, of the rural and urban environment by an increasingly mobile population with access to ever more technology, information and experience, is likely to have changed profoundly (McEldowney, 2005; Overbeek, 2002; Antrop, 2004).

The modern concept of the small town as an economically significant component of the surrounding rural area is not new. In Europe the role of market towns over many centuries as epicentres of rural economic activity is well mapped (Courtney & Errington, 2003). From the latter half of the 20th century onwards, the future of rural areas based on agriculture changed irrevocably in Europe. The diminishing needs for agriculture and, by association, the activity of market towns affected the economic dynamics irrevocably. The changes in the European Union Agriculture Policy, the pronouncement in Article 39 of the Treaty of Rome of the need for alternative employment skills and, finally, the call in 1997 by the Commission of the European Communities stating the need for rural areas to become more competitive (Courtney & Errington, 2003) brought a 21st century rural Europe which is incomparable to its predecessors.

While it is often the case that development initiatives are focused on towns, the European Union rural development policy strives to affect development on a regional basis. Any economic developments in a town will transfer employment and income to the whole rural region in which it is set and thus initiate and engage further fiscal activity.

RURAL AREAS AND THE SOCIAL IMPACTS OF FESTIVALS AND EVENTS
Within this environment, in which the limitations of 'remoteness, social isolation, skills and access to support' (Pickernell & O'Sullivan, 2007, p4) reside, alternative forms of economic support have grown. One growing element of that is tourism, of which events and festivals are seen as significant factors (Robertson & Darby, 2007). Despite the fact that the prevailing focus of festival and event research literature is on either their micro management requirement or their economic value (Quinn, 2006; Reid, 2007) the lexicon of 'triple bottom line' approaches has recently filtered into festivals research (Fredline, Jago & Deery, 2003; Fredline et al, 2004; Hede, 2007). Even here however the emphasis is less on social than it is environmental impact.

This is strange as there is much evidence to suggest other outcomes, including increases in 'social capital and social inclusion within the community and positive local impacts of article and culture and quality of life for the residents' (Ferres & Adair, 2005 in Pickernell & O'Sullivan, 2007, p4). Despite conceptual advances in impact appraisal such as the Festival Social Impact Attitude Scale (Delamere, Wankel & Hinch, 2001), Social Impact Assessment (Barrow, 2002) and, more recently, Social Impact Perception [SIP] scales (Small & Edwards, 2003; Small, 2007) and evaluation of social networks and business capacity building (O'Sullivan & Jackson, 2002; Pickernell & O'Sullivan, 2007), socio-cultural impacts remain significantly under-represented and under-applied in evaluative terms. At the same time, there is growing pressure on public authorities and cultural festival organisers to account for the social and cultural benefits (and disbenefits) of funding and staging them, both in terms of social policy and the public purse (Carlsen, Ali-Knight & Robertson, 2007). For rural areas in particular, events have the ability to draw positive social effects (Pickernell & O'Sullivan, 2007; Small, 2007; Reid, 2007) and thus the pursuit of appropriate and easily applied evaluation is pertinent.

The assessment of the media and its interpretation (and thus reflection of cultural norms) of the impacts of festivals and their correlation to the rural environment is, here, part of a larger framework of research which looks to further develop the basis for evaluating the socio-cultural benefits and disbenefits (Carlsen, Ali-Knight & Robertson, 2007) of festivals and events.

EVENTS AND THE MEDIA

Getz and Fairley (2004) addressed the fact that analysis of the relationship between the coverage of events by the media and any induced effect for the destination was sorely limited. Falkheimer (2007, p82) describes the analysis of events and media coverage as 'a blind spot of research'. In a similar vein, Getz (2008) indicates that media content analysis is a clear area of application to emergent research questions borne of the current need to understand (and manage) the outcomes of festivals.

In the assessment of the media influences at the 2005 America pregatta in Malmö, Sweden, Falkheimer (2007) indicates that the role of the media is subject to political as well as

commercial imperatives and has varying resonance depending upon the size and market of the event, whether this be local, national or international. Falkheimer concludes that the identity of events as represented in the media is significant and contested. This is echoed by Brennan-Horley, Connell and Gibson (2007).

Their analysis of a festival in rural New South Wales, Australia noted the significance (and success) of national newspaper coverage in affecting a staged identity exceptionally attractive for those outside the area and, by contrast, the contested (lack of) support of the event by local people and local newspaper coverage. Both papers state the significance of the printed newspaper over other media in affecting the attitude towards - and attendance at - any given festival. Shanka and Taylor (2004), in their study of the information sources of the 522 visitors surveyed at a major wine festival in Western Australia, found that newspapers were the second single most significant source of information that motivated them to come after 'word of mouth', at 33.3% and 15.1% of respondents respectively. These results run counter to the results extrapolated from the cluster analysis of motivation factors of attendees at the 2000 Kyongju World Culture Expo by Lee, Lee and Wicks (2004), in which television and the radio were found to the most significant source of information, and published news less so. Nonetheless there is enough data in all these articles to suggest that newspapers are, at the very least, very significant information sources.

METHODOLOGY

A media framing methodology (Entman, 1993) has been used to understand the relationship between the coverage of the festival impacts in the media and the growing public perception of what festivals can do (beyond entertain) in the UK. At this root of the framing methodology is the belief that it is possible to promote 'certain opinions over others by selecting and increasing the saliency of some aspects of a perceived reality' (Hansen, 2007, p379). The frame can be seen as the central organising element that creates meaning (Simon & Jerit, 2007). Put simply, the media can be seen as providing the public not only with information about any given thing but also on how it should be interpreted (Van Gorp, 2007). Thus the framing technique of news media allows observation of knowledge (how things are understood) by

evaluating linkage between the production of news and how it is consumed (Van Gorp, 2007). Peel and Steen (2007) use media framing to understand and evaluate this communication relationship between perceptions of international backpackers by people in Australia. In their analysis of the print media of Australia, they reflect that this media framing, semiotic technique has grown in significance and value. Falkheimer (2007) states that there are three methodological standpoints prevalent within the wider area of media and communication investigation addressing the research area of media effects: first, agenda setting, second, framing theory developed from the principles of agenda setting and, thirdly, a framing theory harmonised with cultural theory 'that nuances the media effects discourse' (p84). This discourse, applied to the perception by people of the effects of festivals is one significant measure of a changing cultural milieu. Moreover it may be seen to support what Quinn (2006) describes as festivals' role (potential and current) as 'socially sustaining devices' (p290), encouraging more sustainable approaches to long-term planning.

To discover and describe patterns of coverage of festival impacts, a content analysis approach was taken. A systematic process of searches of UK publications, using the archived media search engine Nexis, set within the two year frame 2006-2008 was undertaken to discover framing patterns. Following an initial inventory of words and themes, the following range of key words: 'impact', 'social impact', 'communities', 'impact on local communities' and 'impact on locals' were used. Each proved to be successful matches with the common word 'festivals'. Other key words showed limited relevance. Coding of words and themes accurately is clearly at risk when dealing with issues as contentious as those relating to social and cultural issues. To address any variation only one person coded the articles. The codes were based on set phrases and stakeholder reference to allow clear categories. Where articles covered more than one category reference the most significant factors (based on the number of references within the article) were identified.

The content analysis had been categorised under six main themes:
1. **Environmental-general** - stories concerning the wider environmental impacts of festivals such as the carbon footprint and organisers' efforts to reduce it;

2. **Socio-environmental (annoyance)** - covering the impacts on local people in terms of environmental issues like parking, disturbance and anti-social behaviour;
3. **Economic** - the financial benefits to local, regional and national economies of hosting festivals;
4. **Socio-economic** - the wider economic and social benefits for an area;
5. **Social, cultural and community** - positive social impacts like regeneration, local identity and cultural development;
6. **Mixed coverage** - stories covering a range of issues or those not contained in the above themes.

A second level of framing was undertaken in relation to the location of the festivals. These were, Rural, Town, City and non-specific. These definitions were extrapolated from the key words within the text that described them.

A third level of framing was undertaken in relation to the typology of the event.
1. **Popular music:** festivals with popular music as their main focus, including rock, pop, dance and jazz
2. **Lifestyle:** events with an ethical (eg environmental), political or lifestyle focus (eg surfing and gay)
3. **Cultural:** events focusing on an area's history or cultural development; includes folk music festivals
4. **Community / education:** community events or those with a schools or wider educational aim
5. **Mixed arts:** events featured a range of artistic output, including comedy, theatre, film and classical music
6. **Special interest:** events with a specific theme, such as food and drink, sport, maritime, air and military.

Finally, the frames are divided in respect of the reference to the focus of the article, i.e. whether it is addressing the impacts at a local, regional or national level. This was not based on newspaper readership figures nor preconceptions of the newspaper readership.
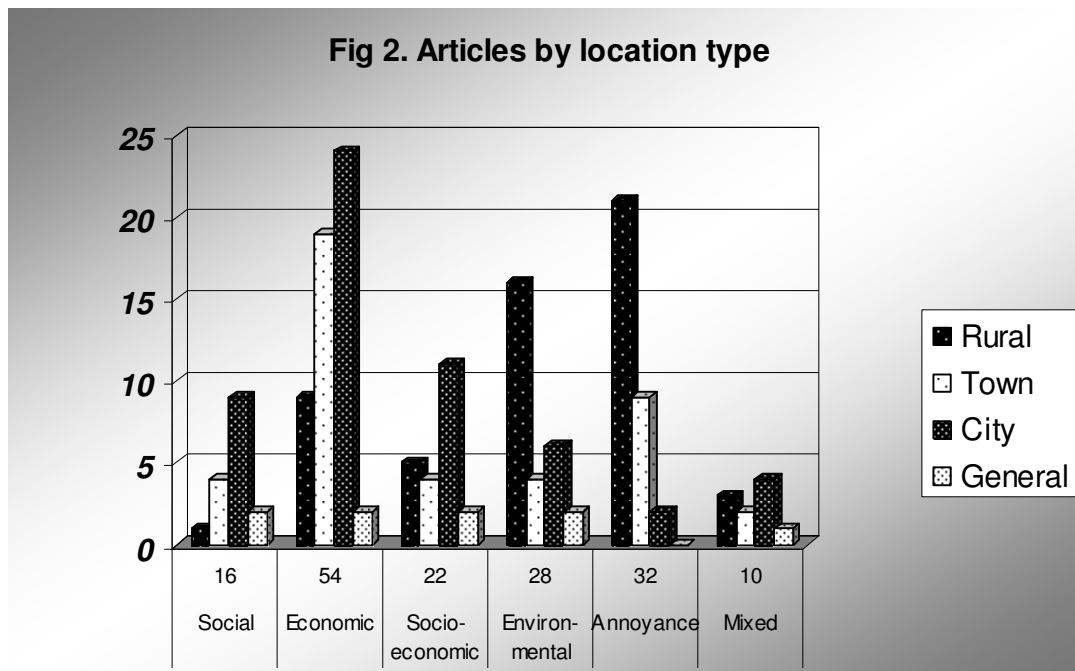
FINDINGS

The content analysis drew out a number of significant results. First, the number of newspapers articles covering the impacts of festivals and events is limited, but does, nevertheless, represent a significant proportion of all articles relating to festivals and public events found in the first round of searches. Of this, 33% of the newspaper coverage of the impacts of festivals relates solely to economics, 24% addresses wider social issues, while issues of traffic congestion and local annoyance represent 20%. The effects on the environment represent 17% of coverage. These are shown in Fig 1.

Fig 1. Media evaluation - as percentage of articles
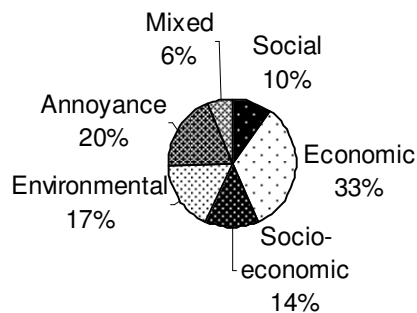
Clearly, economic impacts capture the single most significant media interest and may represent wider social perceptions of the potential impacts of festivals. However it is also clear that articles with clear inference to social impacts represent 24% of news articles, while physical environmental impacts represent 17% of all coverage. Outside of economic influence, thus, the social affect is the next most significant area of interest. Moreover, if the socio-environmental (annoyance) factors are added, this becomes even more significant.

In analysis of the impacts recorded by event location typology, 81% of those articles which looked at social affects were looking at festivals in either towns or cities. By contrast 57% of articles which addressed the issue of environmental impacts were related to festivals and events in rural locations. Local annoyance clearly represented a vital area of media coverage, with 32 articles making clear reference to this. Of these, 65% were in reference to festivals in rural locations. These results are displayed graphically in Fig 2.

Fig 2. Articles by location type

Summary of the key findings relating to economic and socio-cultural categories in the rural environment

Economic impacts – rural festivals (Table 1.)

In total, the main media focus of the impacts of festivals has been on economic, with particular focus on increased visitor numbers and the positive effect on tourism. The greatest number of these related to the urban environment (see Fig 2). Within the limitations of a small number of articles looking at the economic impacts of festivals in rural locations, the focus of the articles corroborated with the national or local nature of the market focus of these events (see Table 1.) This is to say smaller, localized events focused on the more immediate economic

implications while the national focused on the larger national economic value. As example, the impact of the successful music festival *T in the Park* was highlighted not just in terms of its £7.3m boost to the Scottish economy but as "an emblem for a cultural revolution in Scotland" (Bowditch, 2006).

Table 1.

Economic impacts

Rural festivals

1/3/06	The Sentinel (Stoke)	V (Staffordshire)	Popular music	Local	Bumper weekend for retailers and tourism businesses as £5.5 million is attracted to the county, but music stores lose out
6/6/06	The Sun	T in the Park	Popular music	National	Study says impact on Scottish economy has grown to £18m, but tourism bodies should work to extend lengths of stay
6/6/06	Daily Record	T in the Park	Popular music	National	Study highlights £7.3m boost to Perthshire economy
6/6/06	Aberdeen Press and Journal	T in the Park	Popular music	Regional	£7.3m generated for local economy in 2005 - up nearly 600% since last study in 1999
15/8/07	M2 Presswire	Glastonbury	Popular music	National	Mendip district council carrying out economic impact assessment; survey of local businesses about impact on employment, trading and turnover
2/11/06	Daily Post (Liverpool)	Creamfields	Popular music	Local	Visitors spent £6.7m, around 80% of which stayed in the local area
22/6/06	North Devon Journal	Oceanfest/North Devon Festival	Mixed arts	Local	Economic benefits to village reduced as people made use of festival facilities
23/3/06	Argus (Brighton)	Goodwood's Festival of Speed / Revival	Special interest	Local	Uni to study whether economic effect on Sussex economy is as great as Grand Prix
20/7/06	Aberdeen Press and Journal	Drovers' Tryst	Special interest	Local	Rural businesses benefit from community-run events

Socio-environmental impact on locals – rural festivals (Table 2.)

Newspapers tend to bracket environmental impacts like traffic and parking problems together with issues like drunkenness and anti-social behaviour as areas of concern to local communities. This was most marked in festivals in rural locations (see Fig 2. and Table 2.).

Table 2

Socio-environmental impacts on locals

Rural festivals

8/1/08	Gloucestershire Echo	New rock festival near Cirencester	Popular music	Regional	Local council calls for environmental and social impact study
20/6/07	Western Daily Press + Western Morning News	Glastonbury	Popular music	Regional	Police, organisers and council working to minimise impact on Pilton villagers
6/6/07	Western Mail	1st Festival, Vale of Glamorgan	Popular music	Regional	Farmer worried about impact on his pregnant mares
9/8/07	The Sun (England)	T in the Park	Popular music	Regional	Organisers apologise for traffic problems and festival goers' behaviour
21/4/07	South Wales Evening Post (letter)	Fflam	Popular music	Local	Letter highlighting anti-social behaviour, noise and congestion
1/3/07	Eastbourne Herald	Marshmellow Music, nr Brighton	Popular music	Local	Noise impact study needed ahead of event
11/2/06	Evening Chronicle	Hi-fi North	Popular music	Local	Organisers to meet residents over fears about traffic, noise and impact on wildlife
26/4/06	Evening Chronicle	Hi-fi South	Popular music	Local	Given go-ahead despite police concerns
5/6/06	Daily Post (Liverpool)	Creamfields	Popular music	Local	Concerns over noise, congestion, litter, damage and anti-social behaviour
31/3/06	Newsquest - This is Cheshire	Creamfields	Popular music	Local	Local concerns about security, traffic, noise, behaviour, litter, damage. Organisers looking to inform them about impact.
7/6/07	Andover Advertiser	Echo Festival	Popular music	Local	Policing to ensure minimal impact on local community
19/4/07	Yeovil Express	Pre-Glastonbury raves	Popular music	Local	Police issue advice about minimising local impact
9/3/07	Kent and Sussex Courier	Earth Spirit	Lifestyle	Local	Go ahead given for new concerts despite complaints about festival
18/9/07	Express and Echo (Exeter)	Waveform	Lifestyle	Local	Noise disturbs residents and wildlife; organisers admit poor consultation
26/11/07	Express and Echo (Exeter),	Waveform	Lifestyle	Local	Organisers stop night-long events after complaints about noise
29/11/07	Western Morning News (Plymouth)	Waveform	Lifestyle	Local	As above
23/8/07	The West Briton	Surfstock 2007	Lifestyle	Local	Organisers and police to minimise impact on locals
8/2/07	Western Daily Press	WOMAD, North Wiltshire	Cultural	Local	Villagers meet to hear about impact of 20,000 visitors. Locals receive cheap tickets
24/7/07	Western Daily Press	WOMAD, North Wiltshire	Cultural	Local	Criticism of scaremongering over crime
26/5/06	Western Daily Press	Foundation	Mixed arts	Local	Locals concerned about impact during Glastonbury's year off
26/5/06	Bristol Evening Post	Foundation	Mixed arts	Local	As above

Social, cultural and community impacts – rural festivals

There is a limited range of newspaper articles about the positive social impacts of festivals and the coverage is predominantly related to city or town areas (see Fig 2.) Issues covered in this included volunteering and social change, the difficulties of measuring the social impacts of community festivals and the influence on people's interest in the arts and culture, science, and schools generally. Reference to events as a regional cultural showcase is made.

Socio-economic impacts – rural festivals (Table 3.)

Socio-economic impacts

Rural festivals

26/6/07	Redhill And Reigate Life	Redhill Park Music Festival	Popular music	Local	New event given go-ahead despite fears over impact on commercial airfield
18/6/06	Sunday Times (London)	T in the Park	Popular music	National	"Emblem for a cultural revolution in Scotland". Commercial success whereas establishment events need subsidies. Brings £7.3m to Scottish economy
12/7/07	South Wales Evening Post	Fflam	Popular music	Local	Cancelled festival damages Swansea's reputation after it had led to 'real buzz' and increased bookings
30/1/06	Western Mail	North Wales International Music	Mixed arts	Local	Study highlights £26,000 direct spend by visitors and positive image for the area
30/1/06	Daily Post (Liverpool)	North Wales International Music	Mixed arts	Local	As above

In a number of news stories, the social and economic benefits are brought together in terms of developing a place's image. These were predominantly related to large festivals in an urban context. T in the Park is the only notable exception to this.

CONCLUSION

Economic impact studies have been covered in great detail by UK media outlets over the past two years, mainly showing the positive effect festivals have on local businesses and increased tourism as a whole. The link between immediate economic gains and the wider development of a town or region's image is a recurring theme.

Environmental impacts have also been given prominent coverage, as festivals highlight their green credentials with a range of initiatives. Socio-environmental impacts are discussed as part of local concerns about traffic, parking and inconvenience, along with fears over the noise and drunken behaviour associated with music events in particular.

Although fewer in number, there are stories about how festivals impact on social regeneration, community spirit and local identity. It is clear that the social impact of festivals is given less prominence in the UK media than economic and environmental effects, which are more measurable and can be used to demonstrate the benefits or otherwise of an event. They are, however, recorded at a high enough frequency to suggest a cultural awareness and social concern that supports further research and processing of evaluative models to more appropriately regulate social impacts and make provision for calculated social and cultural benefit. Indeed when social impacts are looked at more inclusively to include social economic effects (see previous) then social impacts are given precedence over environmental impacts. Moreover, festivals held in the rural environment are clearly seen as significant development platforms (Pickernell & O'Sullivan, 2007; Reid, 2007). This awareness necessitates evaluation to support development (as required by local and national government, entrepreneurs and the residents) and thus ensure negation of the environmental disbenefits and issues of local annoyance which are clearly significant in the media and, in turn, the mind of the public.

IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The research base is spread over a publication span of two years and thus cannot be seen to offer a substantial record of variation in interest. Similarly, no extensive sub-categorisation of the six themes' evidence here has been drawn. However, while the media research has not been an exhaustive one it must be seen within the context of a larger analysis of processes of social cultural evaluation. The significance of the media in assessing propensity to visit is still unclear (Jones 2001; Getz & Fairley, 2004) but clearly it is significant (Getz, 2008). The work here extends and advances the methodologies and knowledge base of socio-cultural festival evaluation.

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