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Sports events and tourism: Effects of motor car rallying on rural communities in mid Wales

*Paul Blakey, Martin Metcalfe,
John Mitchell and Peter Weatherhead*

Warrington Collegiate Institute, UK

Introduction

The purpose of this research is to examine the effects of motor car rallying on rural communities, using Mid Wales as a case-study region. It is intended that ultimately this will take an holistic approach, considering economic, cultural, social and environmental effects of the sport. The research presented in this paper represents only a part of this larger (and on-going) project. It focuses on the social effects of motor car rallying, in particular concentrating on attitudes of residents in the study area towards those who visit the area both to participate in, and watch, car rallying. Impetus for such research comes from an interest in the sport of motor car rallying, a realisation of the growing prominence of sports tourism – the context within which the research is set – as an emerging academic discipline and an understanding that sports events, whatever their scale, may equally have advantages and disadvantages for rural as well as urban areas.

Motor sport, including car rallying, has a high profile in the UK due to media coverage, political controversy and sponsorship legislation. Recent incidents such as the death of a young spectator at a rally in Northumberland serve only to heighten this profile. Approximately fifteen car rallies of differing size and status are held in the study area alone each year, from locally organised club rallies to the Network Q Rally of Great Britain. Each of these events attracts varying numbers of participants and spectators. The paper identifies and discusses issues regarding the social effects of the sport on the residents of the area, particularly examining the attitudes of residents to rally in the community of Llanidloes in Mid Wales.

The confluence of sport and tourism

As a background to the study, and to set the context in which the research has been carried out, the nature of sports tourism will be discussed. Tourism and sport are now firmly

established in British society, both as industries and phenomena, and also regarding their study and research in higher education. There are obvious links between the two areas - it has long been appreciated that the tourism impacts, in economic, social, cultural and environmental terms, of 'blue-ribbon' events (e.g. Olympic Games, Football World Cup) can have long term effects on specific localities (Law, 1993; Standeven and De Knop, 1999). However, it is only recently that the interest in the field of sports tourism has developed and dramatically increased. Despite a general lack of text book material, increasingly more journal articles are being produced on sports tourism, and from a growing range of academic backgrounds (Gammon and Robinson, 1998). Initiatives such as the internet-based Journal of Sports Tourism have aided the development of sports tourism, yet it is important to acknowledge that as an area of academic study it is still very much in its infancy. Much of the research into sports tourism published to date has concentrated upon either an historical appreciation of sports tourism (see early issues of the Journal of Sports Tourism) or a discussion of the conceptual nature of sports tourism and the characteristics of the sports tourist (see, for example, Gammon and Robinson, 1997; Delpy, 1998; Gibson, 1998a). Additionally, regional studies have more often than not provided broad overviews of sports tourism at a national scale. Articles in the Journal of Sports Tourism have focused upon India (Ko Sasi, 1995), Spain (Miranda and Andueza, 1997) and the Dominican Republic (Coniston, 1999), amongst others.

Studies regarding the impact of sports tourism have tended to come from outside the UK and have in the main concentrated on the economic effects of individual sports on host regions in terms of income generation and tourism potential (Turco, 1998; Sofield and Sivan, 1994). More specifically reports published by UK Sport outline the importance of sports events in the UK, especially as income generators through tourism expenditure (UK Sport, 1998 a, b). This is supported by their own research into the benefits of hosting sporting events. In this research, an analysis is presented of the economic impacts of events such as the 1997 European Junior Swimming Championships, the 1997 World Badminton Championships and the 1997 Weetabix Women's British Open Golf Championships, amongst others (UK Sport, 1999). They conclude by stating:

"The decision to invest in major events - particularly by local authorities through strategies aimed at achieving economic development and its attendant benefits - is often perceived as being controversial. Sport, leisure and tourism are some of the few industries which are on long-term growth patterns and there are rewards to be had by investing in events as part of local development of these sectors" (UK Sport, 1999, p.16)

There appear to be clear economic benefits, then, from the attraction of sports events that have tourism potential. It is also clear that in most sports it is not only the spectators that may be classed as tourists but the competitors also. In the context of rallying, this can be seen to include drivers, support teams, mechanics, marshals and so on. As Gibson suggests, there are three major types of sport tourism: nostalgia sport tourism, active sport tourism and event sport tourism (Gibson, 1998b), and car rallying may be seen as a sport where this model is appropriate. However, some of the reluctance of local authorities and other agencies to attract sporting events, as expressed in the quote above, may be more associated with the hidden social and environmental costs, rather than the visible economic benefits. It is for this reason that this research seeks to present a more balanced perspective by

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considering an holistic view. This paper considers social aspects of sports tourism events, in particular examining the attitudes of the residents to the rally when it is 'in town'. Further 'instalments' will consider economic, cultural and environmental aspects.

Motor sport and car rallying

The Royal Automobile Club (RAC) was founded in 1903 and is technically the governing body for all motor sport in the United Kingdom. The Royal Automobile Club Motor Sports Association Limited (RAC MSA) has been a separate body from the RAC since the late 1970's and is responsible for the administration and control of motor sport rules. With the Motor Sports Council, who make the rules, the RAC MSA govern most forms of four-wheeled motor sport in the United Kingdom, including car rallying (RAC MSA, 1993). Rallies vary in scale from small locally organised club rallies through to major events such as the Network Q Rally of Great Britain. UK Sport (1998b, p.2) suggest three defining features of a major event:

- The event involves competition between teams and/or individuals representing a number of nations;
- The event attracts significant public interest, both at home and overseas, through spectator attendances and media coverage;
- The event is of international significance to the sport(s) concerned, and features prominently on their international calendar.

Clearly the Network Q Rally, formerly known as the Network Q RAC Rally and the British stage of the FIA World Rally Championship, fulfils the criteria stated above. As a special stage rally, it has far more emphasis placed on car preparation, speed and driver ability when compared to other forms of rallying (RAC MSA, 1993). A special stage rally can be defined as:

"A rally consisting of a number of special, competitive (timed) stages (sections) to which competitors have exclusive access, each being over half a mile in length, on off road sites (though these can be either sealed or unsealed), joined by non competitive sections, which may or may not use the public highway".
(Elson, Buller and Stanley, 1986, p28)

The Network Q Rally of Great Britain 1999 covered a total of 1155.7 miles and included 239.2 miles of competition over 22 timed special stages. It claims to be the biggest sporting event of any kind in the UK with over 1 million 'live' spectators and almost 11,000 volunteer officials. These numbers alone indicate a huge tourism potential. Moreover, media coverage is substantial; over 3 million viewers watched a single broadcast of the 1998 rally on BBC 2's 'Top Gear' programme. Additional coverage is provided by the terrestrial channels in both sports and news programming, and cable and satellite channels such as Eurosport and Sky Sports (The Western Mail, 20/11/99). A full day of competition, the middle day of the three day rally, occurs in Wales and the Welsh forests. In Mid Wales, Myherin and Sweet Lamb are each used for two stages of the competition.

The study region: Llanidloes and the forests of mid-Wales

As the highways of England, Scotland and Wales may not be closed for special stages of rallies they tend to be run over private, Ministry Of Defence and Forestry Commission land, with disused airfields, stately homes, parks, water company and local authority land also being used, though to a lesser extent (Elson et al, 1986). As Colin Wilson of the RACMSA explains:

"Many British rallies use Forestry Commission gravel roads through some of Britain's most beautiful countryside but the drivers pay to maintain these roads".
(1996, p. 9)

The Forestry Commission was established under the 1919 Forestry Act to make good timber depletion from the First World War and since 1992 has formally been ascribed a dual role. Firstly, as the national Forestry Authority, it advises on and implements the policies of the government of the day and promotes the interests of forestry in general (Forestry Commission, 1992). Secondly, Forest Enterprise manages 40% of Great Britain's forests (1.1 million hectares) and is responsible for timber production amounting to 4.7 million cubic metres per year (Forestry Commission, 1997). Forest Enterprise is also responsible for the provision of recreational opportunities and conservation, and is committed to a policy of public access allowing the freedom to roam throughout its' woodlands subject to safety, conservation and legal constraints. In excess of 1700 recreational facilities are provided by Forest Enterprise, who also encourage the development of specialised sports and recreational activities which aim to act in harmony with the forest environment (Forestry Commission, 1992). Sites in England, Wales and Scotland owned by the Forestry Commission are used on a regular basis for stage rallying contributing around £750,000 per annum which, after timber production, is the Forestry Commission's second highest source of income (Wilson, 1996).

Forest Enterprise manages a number of large forest areas in Mid Wales. Hafren Forest is located on the eastern slopes of Plynlimon. The forest covers 40 square kilometres between the summit of Plynlimon and the market town of Llanidloes. Myherin forest is situated to the south of the A44 which runs between Aberystwyth and Llangurig. Both forests are used regularly for rallying and between the two is situated the Sweet Lamb sheep farm which is used for rally car testing, as a rally stage and as a popular spectator point. Both forests are well known as difficult stages for a number of rallies, including the Network Q competition (Weatherhead, 1999). Llanidloes was chosen as a focus for the research because it is the closest settlement of suitable size to these forest areas. It is a small market town with a population of around 4,000. A report produced by local planners in Montgomeryshire, and reported in the Cambrian News newspaper suggests that this population is characterised by an older population and a relatively small family size. The town is situated in a very rural area, yet with significant employment in the manufacturing industry. In comparison with the national average for Wales, it has higher than average percentages of older workers and retired people and correspondingly less in the 25 to 35 age group. The town is also characterised by higher than average levels of both car availability and home ownership together with a low recorded level of unemployment. Recent figures suggest that this runs at just 1.7% in the town, compared with the Powys average of 3.5% and the Wales average of 5% (Cambrian News, 18/11/99).

Methodology

The method employed to examine the attitudes of rallying on the residents of these communities was a questionnaire survey. This was designed with a range of both open and closed questions in order to elicit suitable responses (Veal, 1992; Cohen and Manion 1997,). The questionnaire was piloted in neighbourhoods surrounding The Three Sisters Motor Racing Park, near Wigan, to check comprehensibility and to check whether responses would provide the required information. In the light of the pilot survey, minor amendments were made to the instructions to respondents, and the order of questions. A map-based dwellings count of Llandiloes was carried out from a 1:25,000 Ordnance Survey map in order to estimate the number of questionnaires needed. As a result, 1,000 questionnaires were distributed by hand to almost every household in the study area during the weekend of November 20th 1999, when the Network Q Rally was held. In accordance with the guidelines of Cohen and Manion (1997), a first class envelope, addressed to a named individual, was attached to the questionnaire to encourage completion and return. Additionally, each questionnaire included an invitation to return the document and enter a free prize draw to win a £30 gift voucher as a further incentive.

It was clear towards the end of questionnaires distribution that the number needed had been underestimated. As a result, although all 1,000 questionnaires were distributed, roughly 100 dwellings did not receive a copy; these dwellings were located in the eastern part of the town. Decisions were taken at the time to distribute to every other dwelling in this part of the town, rather than each dwelling, which had been done previously. Given this, future studies will seek to develop a more precise method of estimation of units needed.

Initial findings

The 178 useable questionnaires returned equates to a response rate of 17.8%. This sample consisted of 62% males, 38% females. A further breakdown into age revealed 60% of respondents to be over 45 years of age, with the largest single category being over 65 (29.1%) and the smallest being 19-24 years (4.6%).

Almost all respondents (99.4%) stated that they were aware of rallying taking place in the local area. However, more than half (53%) never go to watch the sport. Of those who do watch, the forest is the most popular viewing point. Local residents were asked to state any direct contact they had with rally visitors (for example, spectators, mechanics, drivers, marshals). 81% reported no contact and 19% reported contact, predominantly through working in a local shop/garage or some other form of contact e.g. friends/relatives who participate in the sport.

Frequency data revealed a favourable attitude towards rally participants (marshals, drivers, car crew, other officials), with 46.4% responding positively and 16.2% responding negatively. The attitude towards rally spectators revealed a similarly weighted but opposite response, with 48.4% stating a negative attitude and 24.2% a positive attitude. Respondents stated their reasons for such attitudes towards rally participants and spectators and these revealed a number of common elements (see Table 1).

The research group categorised the stated reasons into clusters giving each one an appropriate label. These labels were selected wherever possible using words or phrases taken from the questionnaire responses. In some instances this process proved to be straightforward (e.g. bringing *trade* to the area) and in other cases the process was more open to interpretation (e.g. rally spectators were considered to be a *nuisance*; represented by "locals avoid driving", "locals find driving dangerous", traffic", "difficult to get to work").

The most emotive was expressed in the 'negative to spectators' quadrant. This consisted of a large number of respondents making statements such as "speeding on our narrow lanes", "doing handbrake turns" (*driving recklessly*); "think they are Colin McCrae", "treat road as racetrack" (*imitate rally drivers*); "leave rubbish", "park where they like", "use forest as a toilet", "upset community" (*lack of respect for locals*). Such strong feeling is somewhat countered by the 'positive to participants' quadrant. Here statements such as "events well marshalled", "drive sensibly and safely", "are professional" (*act responsibly*); "cause minimum inconvenience", "issue resident's pass", (*considerate*) were reported. Considerably fewer responses were received for the 'negative to participants' and the 'positive to spectators' quadrants. Within the former category, "ignorant", "don't consider locals" (*inconsiderate*) were views expressed and within the latter, "loyalty in all weather", "shows people interested in the sport" (*enjoy motor sport*).

Table 1 Clusters of attitudes towards rally participants and spectators (n = responses)

Spectators (positive attitudes) • Enjoy motor sports (n=2) • Bring trade to area (n=5) • Freedom of choice (n=3) • Well behaved (n=2)	Participants (positive attitudes) • Act responsibly (n=17) • Bring trade to area (n=15) • Support motor sports (n=9) • Friendly (n=6) • Considerate (n=11)
Spectators (negative attitudes) • Drive recklessly (n=41) • Imitate rally drivers (n=19) • Lack of respect for locals (n=21) • Minority spoil it for majority (n=11) • Nuisance (n=10) • Noisy (n=4)	Participants (negative attitudes) • Nuisance (n=6) • Inconsiderate (n=11) • Noisy (n=3) • Disturb rural life (n=4)

To provide further interpretation of results, selected cross-tabulations were implemented from which several main effects were observed. A relationship was found between the hosts level of contact and attitude to rally spectators ($p < .01$). Where there was direct contact with visitors more positive than expected attitudes to spectators and less negative attitudes than expected were expressed. Conversely, where there was no direct contact with visitors, a

more negative than expected attitude towards spectators and a less positive than expected attitude was evident. In addition, a relationship was found between level of contact and attitude to rally participants ($p < .01$). Where direct contact with rally visitors existed, a more positive than expected attitude and a less negative than expected attitude to rally participants was expressed. Where there was no direct contact with rally visitors lower than expected positive attitudes and higher than expected negative attitudes to participants were found.

Thus, the results show that host's attitudes towards sports tourists, both spectators and participants, is significantly influenced by the level of contact. The hosts attitude to rally spectators and participants is positively affected by direct contact. No contact with rally spectators and participants negatively affects the hosts perceptions/attitudes. A relationship was also found to exist between gender and attitudes to rally sports tourists (spectators ($p < 0.2$) and participants ($p < 0.1$)). Males were more positive and less negative in their attitudes towards participants. Females were less positive and more negative towards participants. Similarly, in their attitude to spectators, males were more positive and less negative and females were less positive and more negative. Thus the results show that males are more likely to display a positive attitude towards the sport and females more likely to show a negative attitude.

It was evident that a relationship existed between the age of the host and their attitude to rally participants ($p < 0.1$) and spectators ($p < 0.01$). Those in the 0-34 year age group showed a more positive and less negative attitude to participants than expected. Those over 55 years old showed a more negative and less positive attitude to participants. Similarly, the 35-54 year olds showed a more positive and less negative attitude towards spectators, however, it was the 35-54 year age group who expressed a less positive and more negative attitude towards rally spectators. Therefore, younger members of the Llanidloes area are more tolerant of rally participants than other age groups and the middle aged group were less tolerant of rally spectators than other ages.

Furthermore, a highly significant difference ($p < 0.001$) was found in the attitude of local residents towards rally spectators and rally participants. Where a positive attitude to participants was expressed respondents displayed a more positive and less negative attitude towards spectators. Where a negative attitude to participants was evident, a less positive and more negative view of participants was expressed. Therefore, hosts who have a positive attitude to spectators also have a positive attitude to participants. Conversely, hosts who have a negative attitude to spectators also view participants unfavourably. Thus, it would appear that members of the host community do not discriminate between rally participants and rally spectators. They perceive the two to be the same. However, as indicated in the cluster attitude quadrants, there is some evidence that distinctions are made between participants and spectators.

Attitudes to rally visitors in Llanidloes: Preliminary thoughts

The social relationship between sports tourists, as represented by rally participants and spectators, and their hosts can be discussed with reference to Butler's (1974) theorised model of host attitudinal/behavioural responses to tourist activity (adapted in Mathieson and Wall, 1992). Hosts with a passive attitude / behaviour are represented in the current research by

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the 822 non-respondents. Without further research it is difficult to determine whether this large group has a positive, negative or neutral view towards rally visitors. This represents the 'silent majority', who, according to Mathieson and Wall (1992) "accept tourism and its impacts because of the benefits it brings or because they can see no way of reversing the trend" (p.139-140).

The 178 residents of Llanidloes who responded to the questionnaire represent the active hosts of Butler's (1974) model, expressing a positive, negative or neutral attitude/behaviour towards rally visitors. Favourable support of sports tourist activity is represented primarily by the participants "behave responsibly" and "bring trade to the area" clusters. Opposition to sports tourist activity is represented primarily by the spectators "driving recklessly", "imitating rally drivers", and "lacking respect for locals" clusters. Within this quadrant extreme examples of negative opinion were expressed such as "a bunch of w***k*rs", "petrol heads", "hand brake turns", "litter", "use forest as toilet", "treat road like racetrack" and "shop broken into". Such aggressive opposition to sports tourist activity corresponds to the concept of xenophobia proposed by Mathieson and Wall (1992), who contend that with continued expansion of facilities to satisfy tourist demands hosts attitudes may become increasingly antagonistic and eventually reach "xenophobic proportions". Although the level of facility expansion in Llanidloes is not an issue it is suggested that the resident's attitudes have, in some cases, reached this extreme level, and exceeded a threshold of tolerance. This is in part due to the behaviour of rally sports tourists. As indicated in the figures presented above the negative attitudes of hosts are directed towards rally spectators specifically rather than the participants.

At the opposite end of their scale, Mathieson and Wall (1992) refer to host's feelings of euphoria at the prospect of tourism development and associated benefits to the area. Although sports tourism development has been minimal in Llanidloes the positive attitudes expressed by the host community reflect an awareness of the benefits of rallying to the area as evident in responses such as "good for an otherwise subdued local economy", "brings trade to the area" and "winter visitors". However, in a small number of cases the impact of the rally caused members of the host community to alter their usual behaviour, for example "keep kids off school" and "don't go out when rally in progress" were mentioned. The negative responses of the host community towards rally spectators suggests that a cultural difference exists between the hosts and some sports tourists. However, further research needs to be carried out to verify this because the modes of behaviour implied by respondents may be different to their actual behaviour.

Results indicate that direct contact with rally visitors gives a more positive attitude of the host community towards the rally spectators and participants. Where there is no direct contact, it may be inferred that negative attitudes expressed are based upon indirect contact, such as observing reckless driving or seeing indiscriminate parking or other potential sources such as the media or local gossip. Based upon the assumption that rally events will continue to be staged in the Llanidloes area, there are crucial implications for the MSA. Contact, in addition to current PR activity, between event officials and the host community needs to be maximised. The positive aspects of the sport need to be further emphasised and steps taken to minimise the inconsiderate conduct of spectators. Perhaps the organisers could, through specific rally and other media, and official programmes, convey key messages of 'good conduct' to potential spectators, and thereby limit conflict between the host community and

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he sports tourists. However, it is recognised that, unlike many organised sports, the control of much spectator behaviour lies outside the authority of the MSA, and therefore many spectators may be difficult to reach. This is all the more significant because spectator behaviour has the potential to be the greatest influence on host attitudes towards the sport.

Finally, with regard to age, it is not a simple matter of older hosts being less tolerant of car rallying than younger hosts. Whilst younger members of the host community do express a more positive attitude to both rally participants and spectators negative attitudes are split between middle and older age groups. Also gender has a clear influence on attitudes towards car rallying. It is unclear as to the basis of females' attitudes towards the sport. Sport generally is perceived more to be an area of male activity (Messner and Sabo, 1990; Hargreaves, 1994) and car rallying would seem to fit this pattern. Furthermore, if host's attitudes are based upon media representations of car rallying, local gossip or indirect contacts with the sport e.g. witnessing reckless driving, then females may be more 'influenced' by exposure to such occurrences.

Conclusion

The findings presented here go some way to identifying the intangible effects of motor car rallying on the rural community of Llanidloes. Based on a relatively small number of respondents clearly the sport, and in particular the sports tourists, create both positive and negative feelings within the host community. It is evident that increased interaction between individuals in the host community and sports tourists would probably assist in the process of fostering greater harmony at particular times of the year. Additionally it is quite possible that attitudes to rally visitors may be different if tested at times other than when the rally is 'in town'.

Further research is also suggested regarding the clarification of the concept of 'contact' when examining interaction between visitors and the host community. Also, research is required to determine the range of attitudes towards different types of visitor (e.g. tourists visiting for a short summer break), and so provide greater insight into the socio-cultural effects of tourism in general and sports tourism in particular.

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