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Event stakeholder management: developing sustainable rural event practices

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Abstract

Purpose – Changes to the economic and social fabric of rural communities in Australia have resulted in an outmigration of residents, shifting economies and disenfranchisement with rural life styles. As a result, events provide important social and recreational opportunities for residents. However, rural communities are constrained by limited resources, such as the number of individuals who are willing and able to participate in event organizations; therefore, it is essential for the sustainable organization of events that stakeholders are attracted and retained. This paper aims to apply a stakeholder theoretical approach to the organizing and planning of rural events to identify event stakeholders, monitor satisfaction and ensure stakeholder retention within rural events.

Design/methodology/approach – A qualitative research design using a multiple case study approach examined event stakeholders in three rural communities of Southwest Queensland, Australia. In total, 54 in-depth interviews were undertaken with event stakeholders and analyzed using an iterative thematic content analysis.

Findings – The findings reveal that rural-event stakeholders fulfill multiple roles, differentiated by risk, and fraught with competing or conflicting agendas. The paper identifies strategies that event organizers utilize to manage relationships, and that facilitate stakeholder satisfaction and continued involvement.

Originality/value – There is limited understanding of event stakeholders, particularly in rural communities. Involving rural residents in organizing and planning events develops individual skills, knowledge and capacity. Rural communities benefit from an ability to deal with adverse conditions based on improvements in capacity of individuals and the community.

Keywords Rural areas, Stakeholder analysis, Australia, Event management

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Rural communities, in Australia, have undergone significant social, demographic and economic changes in response to harsh climatic conditions, declining agricultural commodities and producers' terms of trade, outmigration and reduced servicing (Budge, 1996; Cawley, 1994; Cloke, 1996; Fraser *et al.*, 2005; McKenzie, 1994; Productivity Commission, 1999). As a consequence, rural residents are struggling, emotionally and psychologically. In this context, events within rural communities provide important social and recreational opportunities for the community to come together. However, the planning and organization of events relies increasingly on the involvement of multiple stakeholders with differing agendas.

Rural communities are pressured to be self-sufficient in event planning and organization. However, event organization processes are hindered by an availability to recruit and retain individuals. Many rural residents supplement farm incomes



by working off the farm, reducing the amount of time available for other activities (Reid, 2008). Long distances and the cost of transport further inhibit residents engaging in the event-planning process.

The purpose of this paper is to apply a stakeholder theoretical management framework to identify event stakeholders, monitor satisfaction and ensure retention within rural events. Developing sustainable organizational approaches to event planning assists event organizers in identifying stakeholder groups, understanding their needs and satisfaction. Event organizers are able to monitor, and if necessary, improve stakeholder relationships to develop events reflective of heterogeneous nature of rural communities, resulting in greater social benefits for residents. Facilitating positive stakeholder relationships retains event participation, which is beneficial for rural communities constrained by limited numbers. Importantly, individual and community capacity building assists rural towns developing their own opportunities rather than relying on external support and funding. Furthermore, events showcase the community to others who may be encouraged to relocate.

2. Literature review

Population declines have been focused around inland and rural Australia, which has experienced consecutive years of drought (ABS, 2010). Declining populations lead to, amongst other things: reduced demand for goods and services and their subsequent removal; decreased employment opportunities; further outmigration; and stagnating or falling property prices causing “entrapment” for residents seeking funds needed to relocate (Budge, 1996; Fraser *et al.*, 2005; Smailes, 2000).

Rural outmigrants are dominated by the 15-35 age group (Productivity Commission, 1999). Contributing to a “[...] loss of motivated individuals who often are important for maintaining the social fabric of a small community through, for example, involvement in sporting clubs” (Productivity Commission, 1999, p. 10), affecting community leadership and voluntarism. Loss of amenities, services and inhabitants also has a psychological impact upon remaining rural residents (Argent and Rolley, 2000; Fraser *et al.*, 2005; Smailes, 2000; Witten *et al.*, 2001). As a consequence, celebratory atmospheres that events and other social occasions provide are important for the social and emotional wellbeing of rural residents.

2.1 Stakeholder theory

Stakeholder theory proposes in a competitive business environment an organization’s success is dependent upon more than just the attainment of profits (Freeman, 1984). Satisfying and retaining relationships with those groups or individuals which the organization affects or has the potential to affect are important. Based upon this premise, organizations should deal ethically with not only shareholders, who derive a financial gain from the organization, but all the groups and individuals that affect and are affected by their business (Freeman, 1984; Gibson, 2000). For example, Campbell (1997) suggests that giving a “good deal” to all suppliers, customers and the community will ensure loyalty and lead to the long-term success of a business. In this sense, the organization focuses not only on value creation and profitability but also ensures that managers think of the full range of communities for whom they should and need to be loyal (Campbell, 1997; Clarkson, 1995; Freeman, 1984).

Stakeholder theory also argues organizational success and survival is dependent upon the ability of its managers to create sufficient wealth, value or satisfaction to those

belonging in each of the stakeholder groups (Argenti, 1997; Campbell, 1997). Satisfying the goals and objectives of stakeholders ensures that all the stakeholder groups continue to be part of the organizational system. Clarkson (1995) explains that an organization is a system of primary stakeholder groups and a failure to retain their participation results in the breakdown of the organizational system and the ability to distribute sufficient wealth and value to these primary stakeholders. Managerial adoption of a stakeholder theory approach provides a framework to assess satisfaction among primary stakeholder groups and enables the organization to monitor and improve the relationships with all stakeholders (Fassin, 2009).

Stakeholders are identified by one or all of the following attributes: legitimacy, power and urgency (Mitchell *et al.*, 1997). Legitimacy identifies stakeholders for managerial attention, and is derived from a perception or assumption that an organization's actions are appropriate or desired (Suchman, 1995). Power enables a stakeholder to influence an organization, based on the degree of authority and resource available to them (Larson and Wikström, 2001). An individual or group with a relationship to an organization has power; based on coercive power (physical force), utilitarian power (resource ownership) and normative power (symbolic resources) (Etzioni, 1964). Urgency allows stakeholder claims to gain managerial attention (Heenan, 1978; Medeiros de Araujo and Bramwell, 1999). Power gains authority through legitimacy, which gains managerial attention through urgency (Mitchell *et al.*, 1997). As a dynamic model, key attributes of stakeholders are fixed in time. Therefore, as Magness, 2008, p. 179 states:

[...] a person or group who possesses only one (or two) attributes and whose concerns are of low (or moderate) priority, can rise to a status of moderate (or high) priority by acquiring the missing attribute(s).

2.2 Event stakeholders

Event strategic-management processes are not dissimilar to an organization, thus the way in which event managers engage their stakeholders contain many of the same characteristics that are evident in other organizations. Stakeholder theory provides a management approach to identifying event stakeholders, monitoring satisfaction levels with their involvement and ensuring improvements to stakeholder relationships can be implemented prior to their withdrawal from involvement. Engaging stakeholders throughout the event planning process provides a stronger likelihood that the community is satisfied with and will support the event, providing competitive advantage to event organizers. Therefore, the identification of all stakeholders and a review of their agendas will assist event managers in balancing the competing needs, tensions and expectations of all stakeholders. However, there has been limited application of stakeholder theory in event-management contexts.

Research has sought to classify different categories of stakeholders (Getz *et al.*, 2007; Hede, 2008; Merrilees *et al.*, 2005; Reid, 2004). Reid (2006) developed a typology of event stakeholders utilizing stakeholder theory. Reid's (2006) model categorized a range of event stakeholders and differentiated between primary (e.g. employees, volunteers, sponsors, suppliers, spectators, attendees and participants) and secondary (e.g. government, host community, emergency services, general business, media and tourism organizations) stakeholders based upon perceptions of risk. Refinement and further identification of event stakeholder roles and responsibilities has built upon the secondary stakeholder groups to include beneficiaries, environmentalists, event associations and competitors

(Hede, 2008; Reid, 2004). Getz *et al.*'s (2007) research provides an alternative model differentiating between internal and external event stakeholders. Internal event stakeholders are those directly involved in event organizing (e.g. owners or investors, directors, employees, volunteers, members and advisors), whereas external stakeholders formed a number of sub-groups: "allies and collaborators" (e.g. tourism agencies and professional associations), "regulators" (e.g. local authorities and government agencies), "co-producers" (other organizations that participate in the festival), "facilitators" (non-participating resource providers), "suppliers and venues" and "the audience and the impacted" (including the community).

Interactions amongst event stakeholder relationships have also been examined utilizing attributes such as interest, conflict/consensus, cooperation, commitment, trust, negotiation or conversation (Larson and Wikström, 2001). Larson and Wikström's (2001) findings suggest that consensus and conflict are not mutually exclusive, rather that one tended to dominate depending on legitimacy and time. Consensus led to stability in relationship networks, whereas conflict generally resulted in change or innovation. Event stakeholder dependency and management strategies also established that as events grew in size and developed along their lifecycle the event became more dependent on local authorities for financial and logistical support, leading to a loss of independence for event managers (Andersson and Getz, 2008). Economic conditions, resulting in tightening of corporate and government sponsorship, have further necessitated that event organizations are increasingly reliant and dependent upon stakeholder involvement. Event organizers had to adopt a variety of strategies to manage the dynamic event stakeholder relationships that existed. Management strategies included developing collaboration links, greater degree of stakeholder involvement, lobbying, implementing conflict avoidance strategies, marketing initiatives and financial arrangements (Andersson and Getz, 2008).

Event competition has led to higher dependency upon stakeholder involvement in organizing events. Event managers must meet the needs of audiences whilst responding to stakeholder expectations to retain their involvement (Coughlan and Mules, 2001; Roche, 1994). Development of an event stakeholder model (Reid and Arcodia, 2002) and the triple-bottom line special event stakeholder maps (Hede, 2008) provides event managers with strategic management tools to identify, determine the stake and the effects an event will have upon these individuals or groups. This paper explores the literature gap in applying a stakeholder approach to organizing and planning events, particularly within rural communities which has been overlooked in previous research. Pertinent for rural communities is the need to retain willing and capable stakeholder involvement in organizing and planning events. Significantly, should event stakeholder participation deteriorate rural events would cease to exist resulting in diminished social and recreational opportunities for residents already affected by social isolation, reduced agricultural yields and drought.

3. Methods

A qualitative research methodology was adopted for this research using a case study design. The purpose of this study was to generate theory inductively, so it was important for the cases and the event stakeholders to emerge from the reality of multiple contexts. As Yin (1984, p. 53) stated the selection of multiple cases "either (a) predicts

similar results (a *literal replication*) or (b) produces contrary results but for predictable reasons (a *theoretical replication*)”.

A two-stage sampling strategy was implemented. First, identifying rural event cases and second, identifying event stakeholders for each event. In stage one, an event matrix of all events across the Southern Downs region, a rural region of Southwest Queensland in Australia, was developed to select the cases. The process identified events by name, theme, entry cost, location, organizational structure, development stage, length of event and size. Three event cases were selected based on the following key criteria: geographically dispersed across the Southern Downs region, occurring at different times of the year, primarily organized using a local committee, had minimal entry fees, and easily accessible for participants (evidenced in Table I).

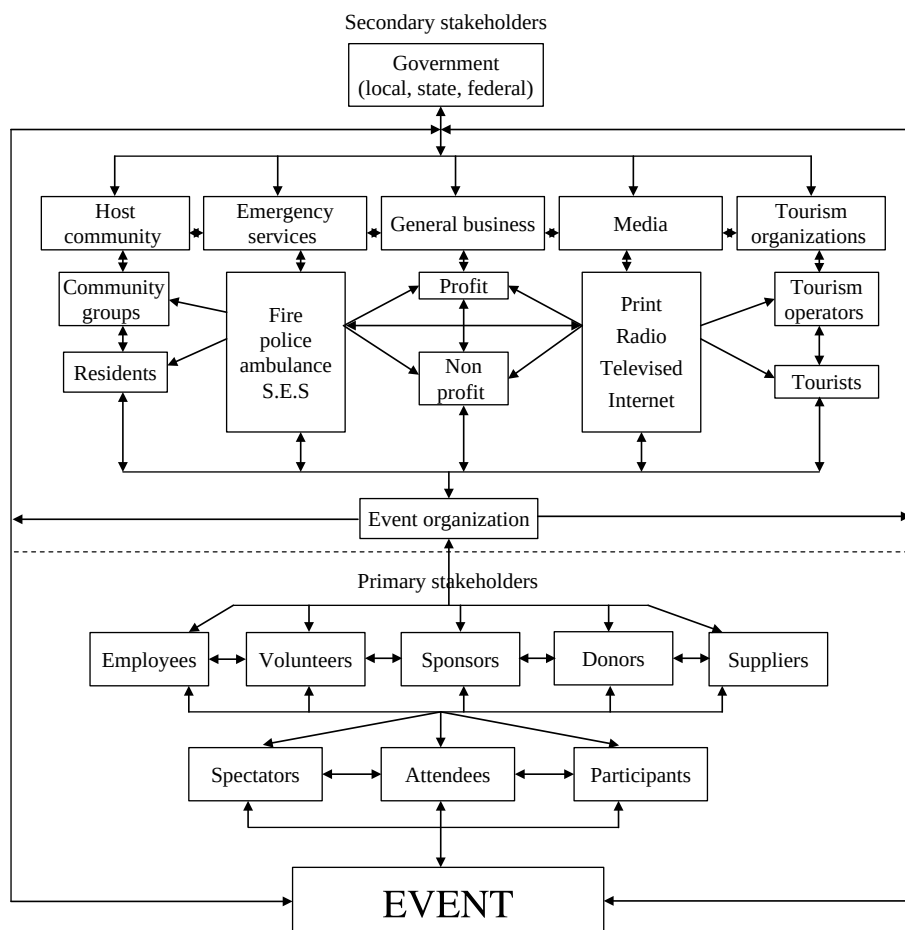
In stage two, Reid's (2006) typology was utilized as the basis for the interviewee sampling framework as it identified the largest range of diverse event stakeholder types, allowing for broader stakeholder representation. Reid's (2006) event stakeholder typology is shown in Figure 1. Furthermore, respondents were also identified through a snowball sampling strategy allowing for the inclusion of additional stakeholder categorizations.

In-depth interviews with 54 event stakeholders in the three rural communities of Allora, Inglewood and Goondiwindi were undertaken. Of the 54 respondents, 22 respondents were categorized as primary stakeholders and 32 respondents were secondary stakeholders. Equal distribution of respondents across the stakeholder types was achieved in each of the case studies, ensuring a respondent from each of the stakeholder groups were included for all cases. In total, 17 in-depth interviews were conducted in Inglewood, 21 interviews in Goondiwindi and 16 interviews in Allora. The rural nature of the communities meant that respondents often performed multiple roles in relation to the event stakeholder typology. Interviews were undertaken with respondents in a location of convenience within each of the communities, ensuring that respondents were comfortable within their natural settings allowing for more accurate representations of the phenomena to emerge (Guba and Lincoln, 1989).

These interviews utilized a semi-structured approach and varied in length from 40 to 150 minutes. The initial questions within the semi-structured interview schedule were derived from a review of the literature which created a matrix of key discussion points. During the interviews, respondents were asked: (1) to explain their understanding of event stakeholders. Respondents were then required; (2) to identify event stakeholders through a mapping process, highlighting the range of individuals or groups who could affect or were affected by the event's existence. Respondents were also asked (3) a series

Event name	Originated	Theme	Organizational structure	Entry cost	Length (days)	Time of year	Crowd size
Goondiwindi Spring Festival	Late 1970s	Spring	Community organizations	Free	1	September	2,000
Allora Blue Cow Country Music Festival	Early 1990s	Music	Local individual	Gold coin donation	2	November	1,000
Inglewood Olive Festival	Late 1990s	Harvest	Local council	Gold coin donation	2	April	3,000

Table I.
Profile of rural event cases



Source: Reid (2006)

Figure 1.
Reid's (2006) event
stakeholder typology
model

of questions relating to stakeholder involvement and relationships, particularly how conflicting stakeholders utilized power to influence or achieve their goals.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed, with respondents being involved in a member cross-check process prior to analysis (Arksey and Knight, 1999; Neumann, 2003). Transcripts were analyzed using an iterative three-stage thematic content analysis. First, the data were labelled, compared and categorized in an open-coding process. Second, relationships between the categories and subcategories were identified through an axial coding process (Neumann, 2003). Third, the analysis underwent a selective coding process to identify core themes and their relationship to the categories. Files were grouped as codes in terms of themes (4) and associated sub-themes (14), evidenced in Table II. Throughout, and as a consequence of this research approach, there was constant comparison between emerging categories and consequent respondents for trustworthiness and theoretical saturation (Decrop, 2004).

Theme code	Sub-theme code	Examples	
Event stakeholders	Sub-theme 1	Definitions	Defining event stakeholders
	Sub-theme 2	Levels of stakeholders	Primary vs secondary stakeholders
Power Management	Sub-theme 3	Forms of power	Types of power, i.e. financial
	Sub-theme 4	Strategies to manage stakeholders	Management of stakeholders, i.e. delegation
	Sub-theme 5	Balancing stakeholder interests	Balancing competing stakeholder interest
	Sub-theme 6	Strategies to overcome negative social consequences	Mitigation strategies
Involvement	Sub-theme 7	Stakeholder involvement	Identification of event stakeholders
	Sub-theme 8	Strategies to encourage involvement	Recruitment strategies
	Sub-theme 9	Impediments to involvement	Factors affection involvement, i.e. individualistic society
	Sub-theme 10	Identification with community and involvement	Alignment with community identity
	Sub-theme 11	Size of community and involvement	Size of community
	Sub-theme 12	Event lifecycle and involvement	Length of event and increases/decreases in involvement
	Sub-theme 13	Trust and involvement	Existence of trust in/within community
	Sub-theme 14	Created event/imposed event and involvement	Event from within community on involvement

Table II.
Taxonomy of themes

4. Results

Rural events have a range of stakeholders to whom they are accountable. Respondents acknowledge that stakeholders are continually changing due to the dynamic nature of events, society and other factors that are occurring. Therefore, it is essential event managers engage in a regular monitoring of stakeholder relationships.

Respondents defined “event stakeholders” by their: interest and input into the event, financial contributions, benefits derived from an event and the community in general. Event stakeholders do not have to fulfill all these requirements, rather respondents perceived that they need only exhibit one of these characteristics. Operationally, this provides challenges compartmentalizing roles, especially in rural areas where stakeholders fulfill multiple roles. Stakeholder’s ability to influence event decision making also differs dependent upon attributes and use of power.

4.1 Event stakeholder power

Attributes of power were examined amongst event stakeholders. Respondents indicated that power accrues to or is exerted by event stakeholders who: as a group are the largest in size; have been involved over an extended period of time; are dependent upon organizing committee structure; and, is affected by personalities. Larger stakeholder groups can be more united in their response, having a louder “voice” than smaller groups or individuals. As one respondent noted “[...] there are obviously

power issues because obviously the bigger stakeholders believe that they have more right to push their agenda" [A14].

Respondents acknowledged that power is exerted in three ways: financial, resource ownership and influence. Stakeholders who contributed financially were considered to have the right to exert their power by "[...] becoming more involved in terms of having a delegate on the committee or something like that" [G6]. However, one respondent acknowledged this was related to protection of reputations as:

[...] a sponsor needs to know what is happening is obviously going to work for them, even if it doesn't work to the fullest extent of what they hoped, that it isn't going to backfire on them and embarrass them [I1].

Determining how resources were used was a form of power exerted by owners. The Inglewood Olive Festival "[...] is held in the golf club on the grounds, so they would have to lay certain rules and regulations down" [I14]. Significant increases in public liability and other insurances has impacted upon the use of facilities and perceived power of owners. "Insurance companies, and that type of thing, have a right to know that they [the resources/facilities] are being used appropriately" [I7]. Legally, event organizers have a duty of care to ensure that resources are used in an appropriate and responsible manner, to not cause harm to others and to provide a safe environment.

Influential power, that is the power to influence decisions or planning of an event, was the third form of power utilized by event stakeholders. As one respondent noted "[...] there are always power brokers of some description within the community" [I11], people who believe they have the power to assume priority over others' decision making or influence proceedings. Respondents indicate that influence is a form of power used by individuals and groups, and as such has the ability to affect the organization, necessitating the need for influencers to be considered a stakeholder due to the power they have on the event.

4.2 Event stakeholders

In total, 18 individual or groups of stakeholders were identified by respondents across the three events. Figure 2 shows that the organizing committees are the central node within a stakeholder map. Rural event organizing committees are voluntary in nature and derived from residents and or community organization groups within the community. However, rural communities are constrained by the number and availability of individuals willing to become involved in organizing community activities and events. The research identified that many of the voluntary community organizations and groups are relying on the same pool of individuals, therefore competition for an individual's involvement is heightened. Increasing pressure to perform and participate in multiple community activities places pressure upon those individuals, potentially leading to "volunteer burn out" and a loss of participation. Respondents discussed in-depth the composition of organizing committee membership with a strong emphasis being placed on ensuring community representativeness and trustworthiness.

However, respondents perceived that not all stakeholders were equal and that an event organizer/committee differentiates between stakeholders. Respondents' perceived primary stakeholders as those carrying the most risk, whether the risk is in ensuring the event occurs or the risk is a personal one incurred as a result of the event.

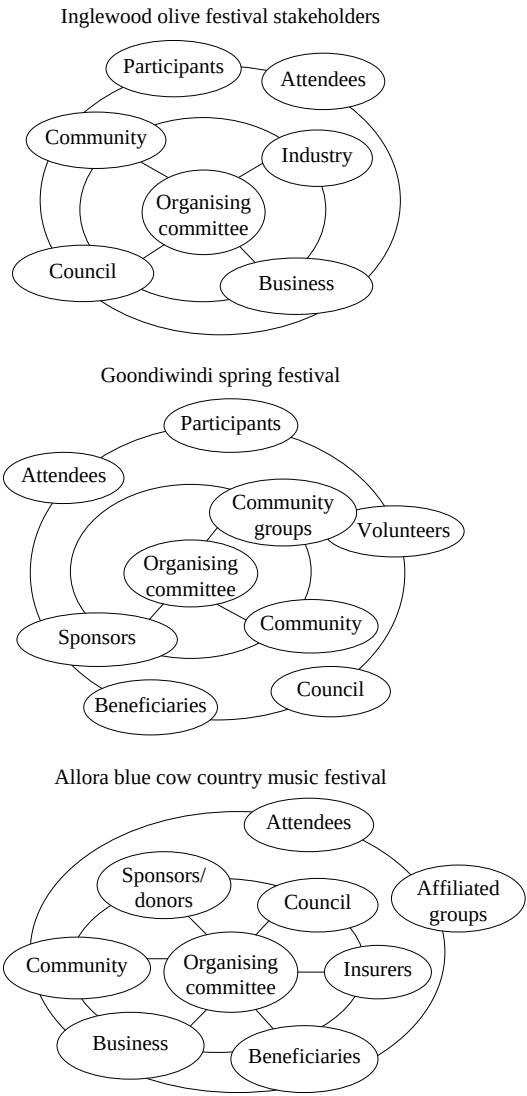


Figure 2.
Event stakeholder maps

4.2.1 Primary stakeholders. Primary stakeholder groups differed between the three cases, depicted in Table III, further indicating the context-specific nature of events. Common amongst all three events was the inclusion of the community as a primary stakeholder group. The events were held within the community, for the community’s entertainment, therefore there was a risk to the community from negative or unplanned consequences. Inglewood and Allora respondents also acknowledged the local council and businesses as primary stakeholders due to their regulatory role, resource provision and risk. Similarly, Goondiwindi and Allora included sponsors and private donors

Inglewood Olive Festival	Goondiwindi Spring Festival	Allora Blue Cow Country Music Festival
<i>Primary stakeholders</i>		
Community	Community	Community
Local council	Community groups	Local council
Business	Sponsors	Business
Industry	Donors	Sponsors
		Donors
		Beneficiaries
		Insurers
<i>Secondary stakeholders</i>		
Attendees	Attendees	Attendees
Participants	Participants	Media
Media	Volunteers	Affiliated groups
Tourism organizations	Beneficiaries	Tourists
Sponsors	Media	Tourism organizations
	Tourism organizations	Volunteers
	Tourists	Emergency services
	Emergency services	

Table III.
Identified stakeholder
groups

to the event as a primary stakeholder due to the financial or resource provision and reputational risk of involvement. Sponsors and private donors categories differed based upon an expectation of a return from investment. Sponsors obtain a return in the form of advertising, publicity or as a sole service provider, whilst donors have no expectation of a return. Respondents highlighted that due to the community nature of rural events many of the sponsors also had objectives that aligned with the philanthropic altruistic approach adopted by donors.

Significant overlap between rural event stakeholder types was identified. For example, Goondiwindi Spring Festival has consistently received event funding from the local council with respondents categorized them as a sponsor rather than using the separate category of local council as did the other events. Allora was the only case that categorized insurers as primary stakeholders, in spite of all the events requiring insurance and higher rates for the Inglewood and Goondiwindi events due to inclusion of horses and other livestock. Transactional nature of insurance, within a management function, may be a factor in the former two events not including insurers as a stakeholder group.

4.2.2 Secondary stakeholders. All three events included attendees as a secondary stakeholder group, with two of the festivals also acknowledging participants. Differentiation between attendees and participants relates to their level of involvement from attendance and engagement with the event to participating in production of the event (e.g. artists and performers). Although integral to the event's existence, respondents perceived them to have less of a stake in the event than primary stakeholders. One respondent noted "I am not saying [that the event is] less important to them, I just suppose they haven't got as much to lose or they haven't as big a stake" [G9].

Rural events provide an opportunity to showcase the town and what it has to offer, which may encourage others to move to the region due to lifestyle considerations and to develop auxiliary industries. Attracting new residents is pertinent for rural communities who have suffered from outmigration as economic hardship and drought have impacted upon rural Australia. Exploitation of media attention is a challenge for event organizers

as many rural communities are unable to compete or develop stories that garner media attention. As a consequence, respondents identified media and tourism organizations as secondary stakeholder groups. Importance of the touristic aspects of events is dependent of event objectives. Inglewood Olive Festival was able to receive widespread media attention as the sponsors were integral in inviting and presenting media with stories about the event. Goondiwindi and Allora focused on local media sources as is reflected in their primarily local attendance.

Emergency services, particularly police and ambulance services, were considered secondary stakeholders by respondents of Goondiwindi and Allora. Liquor licensing of events ensure that police are briefed about the strategies to control anti-social behavior. These stakeholder groups have the ability to change an event should shortcomings in planning be identified. However, respondents considered that these stakeholders were more responsive than actively engaged in the events planning and operation.

Volunteers were acknowledged as secondary stakeholder groups by Goondiwindi and Allora respondents. Volunteers are individuals who give of their time to contribute to an event, with many rural events relying almost entirely upon volunteer labor. Politics of rural communities can be a contributor as well as inhibitor for volunteer labor, as one respondent stated:

[. . .] there were certain people that put in a mountain of work and effort and had a hell of a lot of motivation and they didn't have any direct interest in olives, but they had a very strong feeling about Inglewood and community spirit, which is why they put the effort in [19].

Unfortunately, poor financial management and local exclusion from organizing the Inglewood Olive Festival resulted in a culture where individuals were unwilling to "place themselves in the firing line" [15] for criticism and ridicule. Distrust and a reluctance to volunteer would perpetuate until the event had to prove itself financially and was considered a community asset. Allora respondents also discussed distrust for new developments, new residents and change. Respondents identified that rural events require the support of a well established and respected locals from within the community to be involved in organizing and planning, utilizing their established networks and trust relationships to overcome this sense of distrust. Furthermore, management strategies implemented need to encourage and engage stakeholders to retain their satisfaction and consequent involvement in the event.

4.3 Stakeholder management

Dependent on leadership and composition of event organizations, a number of strategies to manage stakeholders were discussed by respondents. For example, Inglewood Olive Festival and Goondiwindi Spring Festival's event organizing committees comprised local individuals and representatives from community organizations, whereas Allora Blue Cow Country Music Festival was split between local and external community representatives. Key management strategies were categorized by external and internal processes. External processes involved event organizations looking beyond the committee to engage stakeholders in organizing and planning processes, stakeholder consultation and involvement. Internal processes sought to limit stakeholder involvement in decision-making processes.

4.3.1 External stakeholder management processes. Communicating and consulting stakeholders through meetings, discussions, consultations and listening to opinions

and concerns was a strategy discussed by respondents to manage relationships and assist in the event-planning process. Transparency in decision-making processes and allowing stakeholders to be heard are important facilitators for this process. One respondent noted:

It's about listening and it's about being in a position to have the ability and the acceptance to make a rather evaluated decision based on the information that has been given to you by all involved [A10].

However, the voluntary nature of most rural event organizing committees limits available time for thorough, democratic consultation processes.

Involving and delegating responsibility was another strategy which encourages stakeholder ownership of an issue, providing impetus to develop strategies and solutions to rectifying problems. One respondent explained how this strategy was implemented within their event organization:

[...] personally how I handle that is, that you delegate them specific responsibilities. Firstly, they have to make an obligation that there are set objectives that we wish to achieve and then they have to come up with constructive criticism, which is good stuff as to how it is going to be achieved. And they have to participate in achieving those objectives, otherwise they won't be noted as being a force on the committee [I13].

The effectiveness of involving stakeholders is reliant on a strong organizing committee and clearly defined event goals and objectives, to ensure stakeholder's goals do not supersede or conflict those of the event.

4.3.2 Internal stakeholder management processes. Internalizing process of ignoring stakeholder's claims is the antithesis of a stakeholder theoretical management approach. However, respondents indicated at times it is necessary to ignore stakeholder claims:

I am generally diplomatic in how I approach this. I just say, "Okay, oh yeah, well that is worth thinking about", thinking in the back of my mind "No way am I going to do that" [G1].

Management of these stakeholders requires sensitivity. One respondent noted:

[...] you can sort of manage it in a way that they get to realize that this is now bigger and beyond them so to speak, but you have to try and do it in a way that they don't feel wronged, that they feel supported through the process [G5].

In this example, a key leadership position was held for an extended time period and the individual was reassigned the vice president's role, thus relocating the individual sideways without removing their knowledge and experience from the organization.

Rural events can be cohesive or controversial, depending on event success. Respondents noted the need for event organizers to have "broad shoulders" to deal with the criticism and tension. Challenges arise in balancing conflicting stakeholder needs and wants, creating sufficient satisfaction amongst stakeholders to retain their involvement, whilst dealing with emotions.

5. Discussion

Stakeholder theory provides an important theoretical and management contribution to the events sector. This article has applied stakeholder theory to the planning and

organizing of rural events. A stakeholder approach can assist in identifying event stakeholders, assessing their needs and wants as well as stake in an organization. Furthermore, an understanding of event stakeholders will assist organizers in monitoring satisfaction levels and relationships.

A number of issues have emerged from the research. First, rural events draw upon the skills, knowledge and resources of individuals and groups within the community to achieve event organization goals and objectives. This research has identified through a stakeholder mapping process the broad range of rural event stakeholders. Stakeholder groups and individuals are not consistent across the three events, reflecting the unique circumstances of events and communities. In total, 18 rural event stakeholders were identified, including; the community, community groups, local council, business, industry, sponsors, donors, beneficiaries, insurers, attendees, participants, volunteers, media, tourism organizations, tourists, emergency services and affiliated groups. Interestingly, this research identified event stakeholders who had not previously been classified, such as insurers and donors. Population size and opportunity constraints within rural communities mean that numerous event stakeholders fulfill multiple roles. Multiplicity of event stakeholder roles was also evident in Getz *et al.* (2007) and Karlsen and Stenbacka Nordström's (2009) research.

Second, the findings identified that respondents perceived differing levels of stakeholders depending upon risk. The classification of risk defining event stakeholders supports Reid's (2006) conceptual event typology. These findings also align with Clarkson's (1995, p. 5) delineated approach to categorizing voluntary and involuntary stakeholders, who stated "[...] without the element of risk there is no stake". Specifically, an "event stakeholders" definition emerged:

Event stakeholders are groups or individuals who are affected or could be affected by an event's existence. Primary event stakeholders are those individuals or groups who incur risk and without whose support and/or involvement the event would cease to exist. Secondary event stakeholders are those groups or individuals who may or may not be involved, yet can seriously impede the event's success.

Third, stakeholders' ability to influence organizing committee decision making varies considerably dependent on attributes of power. The tradition of long-established and singularly powerful stakeholders limits innovation and creativity. Positive or negative effects result, similar to Larson and Wikström's (2001) findings that consensus breeds stability and conflict creates innovation or change. Compounding this issue, many rural communities are resistant, even distrusting, of change.

The findings contradict with Donaldson and Preston's (1995) research which identified a differentiation between influencers who have power over an organization irrespective of whether they are a stakeholder. Respondents considered stakeholders utilize influence to exert power on event organizers, thus, needed to be categorized as a stakeholder group. The findings demonstrated that were a number of differences in how power was exerted by event stakeholders. Power exertion based on financial contributions and resource ownership aligned with Etzioni's (1964) utilitarian power. Getz *et al.*'s (2007) research also identified that committee involvement was one method financial stakeholders utilized in exerting power. Etzioni's (1964) assertion that stakeholders exhibit coercive power was not evident amongst rural event stakeholders.

Fourth, rural event organizing committees are primarily comprised of volunteers. Adoption of a stakeholder management approach is dependent upon this group (Campbell, 1997; Freeman, 1984). The findings recognized that an important function of organizing committees is identifying stakeholders, bringing them together and fostering an environment that enables all the stakeholder views to be heard. External management strategies emphasising transparency, collaborating and involving stakeholders facilitate this approach. However, internal management processes of ignoring stakeholder claims reflects a lack of stakeholder legitimacy, supporting the findings of Mitchell *et al.* (1997) and Suchman (1995).

6. Conclusion

This article makes an important contribution in developing knowledge of rural event stakeholders, from a theoretical and managerial perspective. Theoretically, this research builds knowledge of who constitutes rural event stakeholders. This research identified 18 stakeholders, a significant advancement in understanding event stakeholder roles. The findings demonstrated that risk is a determining characteristic in differentiating levels of stakeholder involvement and managerial responses. These results have also identified that rural event stakeholders exert power through financial, resource ownership and influence.

Managerially, identifying stakeholders who are impacted or can affect an events success will enable organizers to monitor these relationships. Identification provides a tool for managers to assess stakeholder's needs and wants, and develop strategies to respond. It is essential that rural event managers are aware and monitor relationships to ensure stakeholder satisfaction with the organization. Rural event organizations are constrained by community size and availability of individuals wanting to engage in community activities. A decrease in stakeholder participation within rural areas affects the sustainability of such events, further limiting social and recreational opportunities in these communities. Therefore, retaining existing stakeholder satisfaction is integral to sustainable event organization practice in rural areas.

Limitations exist as the research focused upon one rural region of Southwest Queensland. Further research is required to investigate culture-specific characteristics, domestically and internationally, to aid transferability and generalizability of findings. Moreover, this research relates to rural events, rather than events generally. Research exploring the similarities or differences between urban and rural events requires exploration. Furthermore, research is required to examine and compare stakeholder management in urban and rural areas to highlight similarities and differences in approaches and styles. Additional research would also benefit from network-agency methods to map the networks of event stakeholders to examine the depth, structure and extent of these relationships. Research of this type would determine the influence that external organizational fields have upon event stakeholders, and consequently the event.

Rural communities in Australia, and throughout the world, have endured significant shifts in economic and social conditions. A challenge facing small rural communities is identification of individuals willing and able to become involved in community activities, such as events. Stakeholder theory provides a management framework for identification, monitoring and managing of relationships organizers have with individuals or groups to whom they affect or are affected by.

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