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Together we will go our way: The development of a stakeholder framework for rural gay pride events.

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Together we will go our way: The development of a stakeholder framework for rural gay pride events.

Introduction

It is largely accepted that non-heterosexual people migrate from rural towns to the city (Annes & Redlin, 2012). This departure is explained because many members of the LGBTIQ+ community feel there is no place for them in the country with rural towns being defined as having a “scary” heterosexual attitude (Pini, Mayes, & Boyer, 2013, p. 168). Social contact with others who are gender and sexually diverse is a key part of building a healthy identity (McKenna & Barg, 1998) and such opportunities may be limited in rural areas where non-heterosexuals remain invisible creating an illusion of absence (Kuhar & Švab, 2014). Swank, Frost, and Fahs (2012) found non-heterosexuals in rural communities were more likely to suffer from minority stress due to disassociation from social groups and a lack of exposure to similar others. Such isolation has a significant impact on the individual’s mental health (Kirkey & Forsyth, 2001), particularly within a rural context where access to appropriate support can be limited (D’Augelli & Hart, 1987). By collecting like-minded people, such events also help pressure the government into changing policies in favour of equality (Ong and Goh, 2018).

In general, events can help people feel connected to their community by providing an opportunity to come together for a common purpose. Events reflect the values of society or may serve to disrupt the status quo and challenge predispositions. For instance, in the context of the LGBTIQ+ community, events such as ChillOut in Daylesford started as a picnic for the local non-heterosexual community and is the outcome of social inclusion (Gorman-Murray & Waitt, 2009). On the other hand, the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras commenced as a protest to challenge heteronormative biases (Markwell, 2002), thus transforming negative perceptions by creating visibility and educating the general public. Disruptive pride events contribute to enhancing the social good within the community by providing the general public with a safe way to experience what has traditionally been considered taboo, while at the same time, providing LGBTIQ+ individuals with a safe space to publically demonstrate their identity (Hughes, 2006). Such events within a rural setting could help change the social narrative by triggering conversations around tolerance and acceptance (Johnston, 2005), and enhance support for local LGBTIQ+ communities.

This paper was motivated by the recent referendum on the same-sex marriage vote in Australia where 61.6% supported same-sex marriage voting ‘yes’ (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017). Stated differently, two-in-five of those who voted, voted against same-sex marriage. Yet, at the same time, there has been a surge in rural communities hosting gay pride events with towns such as Hay (population 2,406) hosting its inaugural event in 2018, and Wagga Wagga (population 54,411) in 2019. Rural communities have used pride events to reposition themselves as ally destinations, changing the social discourse towards acceptance and celebration of different orientations. One explanation of this shift is that the referendum transformed the debate of homosexuality from its former position within the private sphere into the public domain forcing reflection and resulting in greater public display.

Objective

Given the socio-economic value of tourism to rural destinations, the value of pride events in promoting equality within a rural context, and shifting social attitudes, research is required to assist with the development of gay pride events at rural destinations. Due to the influence of stakeholders on the development and implementation of events (Getz, 1997), it is proposed that an examination of the stakeholders that are likely to be involved would help develop events that are more closely aligned with the value(s) they seek. This is particularly relevant in the context of rural gay pride events which may be socially contentious and lack the funds and support required for successful execution (Mundy, 2013). The aim of this paper is to examine the development of LGBTIQ+ events in rural and regional areas. This paper accordingly positions LGBTIQ+ events as a social good within rural locations, and takes the first step in developing a stakeholder framework to understand such events.

Literature Review

Although events embody core community values, they interrupt routines and enable members and visitors to engage in rituals that are in sharp contrast to everyday life (Quinn & Wilks, 2017). The value of events to rural destinations has been well documented in the literature (Getz, 1997; Hankinson, 2005). Economically, events help attract tourist income, stimulate employment, encourage spending, and contribute to public infrastructure development (Getz, 1997). In doing so, events provide the opportunity to revitalise communities and foster economic development (Black, 2016). Events can help build brand awareness, position a destination as fashionable and reposition the destination's brand image (Lewis, Kerr, & Burgess, 2013). Within a rural context, events build social and cultural bonds (Frost & Laing, 2015), and form part of a package which provides a greater value experience for visitors (Wilson, Fesenmaier, Fesenmaier, & Van Es, 2001). Rural events support communities with overcoming the adversity of difficult times, relieving social tensions, boosting psychological well-being, and reinventing themselves (Black, 2016; Reid, 2007).

Rural pride events can help members of the LGBTIQ+ community to feel supported and accepted by creating visibility about different sexual orientations. Derrett (2003) for instance argues festivals can help reduce isolation. However, the literature on festivals and gay events is largely skewed to an urban context (Gorman-Murray & Waitt, 2009; Quinn & Wilks, 2017). There is also a tendency to examine such events from a sociological (e.g. Ammaturo, 2016) or a geographic standpoint (e.g. Gorman-Murray & Waitt, 2009) with limited research being done from a business and social marketing perspective. By taking a business perspective, key influencers can be identified, and strategies can be developed to satisfy their needs, create value, and change attitudes and behaviours. Ultimately, such a perspective will help provide organisers with a business case for developing similar events within other rural communities.

Gay pride events

Originating in 1969 at Stonewall Inn in New York, pride events have been defined as a celebration of otherness (Lamond, 2018). Such events have morphed from being gay liberation marches into a street parties (Laughland, 2012) and cultural festivals (Markwell, 2002), making them entertaining and accessible to the general population who may otherwise not engage. Literature has, however, increasingly noted a sense of disenchantment with urban pride events. For instance,

Waitt and Stapel (2011) found members of the LGBTIQ+ community saw the Sydney Mardi Gras more as a tourist attraction. Similarly, other researchers have noted the over-commercialisation and sponsorship of urban mardi gras events have reduced their sense of authenticity. Tanford and Jung (2017) argued that authenticity has a positive relationship with the participants' satisfaction. Given their small-scale and community-driven motivation, pride participants may be more likely to experience authenticity because of the rural nature of the event (Wienke & Hill, 2013). However, because of the personal and contentious nature of pride events, their creation and management within a rural setting can be complex. It is argued that pride events can only be successfully developed within small communities if diverse community perspectives are understood. Accordingly, a framework is required to help navigate their development and understand the perspective of key groups. This paper adopts a stakeholder perspective to achieve this objective.

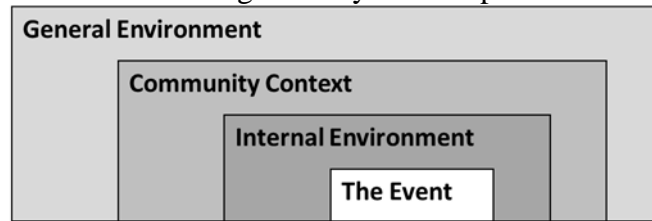
Stakeholder analysis

Stakeholders are those who are affected by and/or influence the creation and implementation of an event (see Laplume, Sonpar, and Litz (2008) for a historical overview of stakeholder theory). Stakeholders can be defined by key characteristics such as: their level of risk; interest in the event; level of involvement; financial and non-financial contributions; benefits that they received; and/or the impact they feel because of the location of the event itself (Reid, 2007).

In tourism, Forga and Cànoves (2015) identify three types of stakeholders: the community, the visitor, and those involved in building a tourism offer. Different groups of stakeholders may exert different levels of influence depending on their power, legitimacy, and urgency as perceived by other stakeholders (Adongo & Kim, 2018). Previous research has aligned stakeholders on a continuum from those with a narrow frame of reference - that is purely financial, to broader perspectives that include moral and societal values (Harrison, Freeman, & Abreu, 2015; Sheehan & Ritchie, 2005). Although stakeholder groups may have differing agendas, overlaps may also be observed in their motives (Todd, Leask, & Ensor, 2017). Stakeholders may therefore share the same overall aim and concurrently have diverse, and potentially conflicting, tactics and strategies to reach the overall goal. Stakeholder theory provides a relevant perspective when examining events because of co-existence of mixed industry which creates a need to balance the perspective of, public, private and not-for-profit interests (Andersson & Getz, 2009). By understanding the stakeholders involved, strategies can be developed to enhance the value proposition of the event for each entity so as to maximise participation.

Successful development and enactment of an event requires the management of several components. Getz (1997) classifies these components into four interdependent and interacting groups based on their degree of separation from the event. These components are: the event, the internal environment of the organiser, the community context, and the general environment. Being a management system, it serves to the point that there would be stakeholders associated with each component. Getz's (1997) model is illustrated in Figure 1 and was accordingly used to classify stakeholders in this paper. The different components are now discussed, and the relevant stakeholders within each are identified.

Figure 1: The event management system adapted from Getz (1997)



The Event

By their very nature, pride events and the meanings they hold are co-created by those in attendance. Pride events allow staging of identity for the entertainment of onlookers, thus blurring the boundaries between those who gaze and those being gazed upon (Ammaturo, 2016). Attendants in this respect can take two forms: spectators who watch the event at the destination, and participants those who march and design floats. Motivations to participate may be related to supporting family and friends, seeking new experiences, and exploring the otherness culture (Adongo, Kim, & Elliot, 2019).

The attendees represent the most significant stakeholder group in terms of impacting the event and being impacted by the event. The event cannot proceed without attendees as was discovered by Roy Tan in 2010 when organising a gay pride event in Singapore (Tan, 2015). At the same time, pride events help build a bond with others in the community and construct a healthy self-identity. Waitt and Stapel (2011) when studying the Sydney Mardi Gras found the notion of pride was used to describe the bond felt amongst participants. By incorporating signs and symbols associated with the subculture, such events arguably create a symbolic servicescape of acceptance and permit non-heterosexual participants to freely express their identity and connect with similar others (Ammaturo, 2016). In doing so, gay events help non-heterosexuals feel like less of a minority and appreciate the significance of the gay community and its allies (Krane, Barber, & McClung, 2002). Such events could help individuals living in heteronormative environments to explore other sexualities (Barrientos, Silva, Catalan, Gómez, & Longueira, 2010) and realise their own identities. This is essential within a rural context due to the micro-minority of non-heterosexuals and the lack of positive discourse that could result in a poor understanding of one's predisposition. By creating a collective sense of identity and emotional connection, pride events can cause a social change and provide an environment conducive to self-actualisation and strengthening one's resolve to come out (Hahm, Ro, & Olson, 2018; Krane et al., 2002).

Internal Environment

The internal environment represents the working structures that are required to create and deliver an event (Getz, 1997). At its core, it comprises of those who have conceived the event and those necessary to transform the event idea into reality. Accordingly, the following key stakeholders are identified:

1. Event organisers and volunteers who conceive the event and coordinate its management.
2. Public sector entities including local and state governmental bodies who provide financial and in-kind support such as traffic management, regulation, and other administrative assistance.

3. Local private sector entities or larger national corporations who may provide sponsorship.

Support from the stakeholders that function in the internal environment is essential to the up-scaling of the event (Frost & Laing, 2015). Drivers for participation may differ based on the type of stakeholder. For instance, event organisers may be motivated to host a positive event, while volunteers may be motivated to use their skills, meet people and be altruistic (Adongo & Kim, 2018; Adongo et al., 2019). Similarly, public sector entities may be motivated by the social or political benefit the event creates, while private sector entities may participate to enhance their reputation and brand image by being associated with a good cause (Adongo et al., 2019). The motives of these stakeholders may result in a dilution of the pride experience. Lamond (2018) found a profit motive could lead to commercialisation, and a dampening of the role of the pride event as a form of protest – departing from its purpose and authenticity. Given that event attendees find it difficult to dissociate the commodification of an event with their emotional lived experience (de Jong, 2017), some degree of commercialisation may be necessary within this context. Similarly, Novello and Fernandez (2016) argue authentic objects and products that are meaningful, add to commodification, as well as provide positive memorabilia that sparks nostalgia and satisfaction. Buying souvenirs at a pride event, for instance, while contributing to the commodification of the concept of pride could provide an emotional reminder of the experience and become a talking point with non-attendees.

Community Context

The community context includes the nuances of the host location that could impact the event. The peculiarities of a rural town community need to be considered from the perspective of two key groups:

1. Local resident community.
2. Business community who provide essential and tourism services.

Events enable the host to put their community on display and demonstrate the value and worth of their culture (Black, 2016). The local community is impacted by the disruptions caused by the event; such as the placement of signage, barricades, and road closures (Quinn & Wilks, 2017). Their contribution through making the town presentable and welcoming visitors is essential to the continued staging of the event (Pappas, 2016). The local community represents a key target market in terms of attendees; and suppliers of the support services required to stage the event (Gibson, Waitt, Walmsley, & Connell, 2010).

From a visitor perspective, Kerr and Lewis (2010) note the tourism outcome for an individual is based on the sum of the different components of the experience from the moment the individual leaves their home environment to when they return. This includes interactions with local residents and business services an individual may consume at a host destination. Dissatisfaction with any component could be particularly critical for a start-up destination event and could result in negative word-of-mouth. Keeping in mind, rural towns have been defined as exotic spaces of hyper-masculinity (Annes & Redlin, 2012), the challenge in organising gay pride events is obvious.

General Environment

The general environment encompasses the overall context within which the event is staged. As such, it comprises of stakeholders within the broader environment who observe the event; and can

include society and the LGBTIQ+ community at large. Though passive observers, they are in a position to be influenced and impacted by the event. Krane et al. (2002) similarly note the impact of pride events may reverberate through society informing perceptions of other sexualities. Such festivals may help generate and maintain collective social consciousness (Gorman-Murray, Waitt, & Gibson, 2008) impacting social discourse and acceptance.

Additional considerations

In urban areas, the stakeholder groups may consist of a unique set of people, whose perspectives need to be considered through collaborative discussions (Todd et al., 2017). However, in rural towns with smaller populations, it is common for one person to belong to multiple stakeholder groups. This duality of roles may affect the process of co-creation and collaboration as an individual may have multiple and potentially conflicting stakes in the event. For instance, in rural communities, prominent shop owners also tend to hold positions on local government councils. A councillor while evaluating an event proposal would consider the health and safety of the community and may require barricades to be placed to ensure the safety of pedestrians. However, the same individual in their position as a shop owner in the local community would prefer if these barricades were not erected due to its potential to reduce foot traffic.

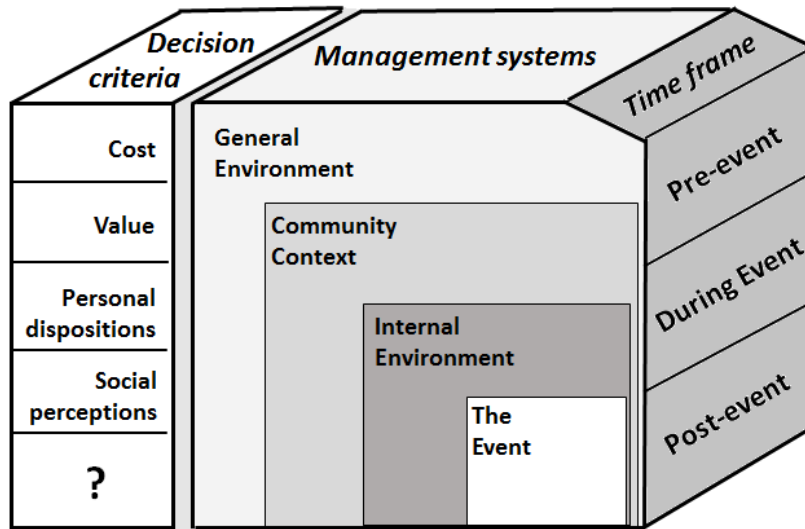
Stakeholders groups would use different criteria to judge their participation in the event. However, due to the duality of roles, different criteria may also be applied by the same individual depending on the stakeholder perspective they take. Using previous research like the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), common decision criteria would include consideration of social perceptions about gay pride events, personal attitudes, and others unique factors related to the cost-benefit equation of participation for individual stakeholder groups. For example, a participant's decision to attend may depend on the cost of accessing the event venue, personal acceptance of their sexual identity, and perceived potential social backlash of participation.

Finally, the time-frame (pre, during, or post event) would impact the decision criteria and the role of the stakeholders. Runyan (2015) when studying injury prevention notes that the time-frame potentially changes the decision criteria used by stakeholders when managing an accident event as different decisions need to be made at different points in time. Similarly, it is proposed that the importance of stakeholders may vary based on time-frame as some stakeholder may be essential in the pre-event and have less influence post-event.

The stakeholder framework

This paper puts forward a stakeholder framework (illustrated below) to understanding rural pride events by integrating Getz's (1997) event management system, with the Haddon Matrix as applied by Runyan (2015). Although this framework has been developed within the context of rural pride events, it may be adapted to suit cultural events regardless of their focus and location. It is essential, however, to note the fluidity of time and space as important variables in implementing the stakeholder framework as the importance and role of stakeholder groups in the event may change based on the social climate at that time, and the local community within which the event is staged.

Figure 2: The stakeholder framework for rural pride events



Future work

The framework provides a systematic agenda for future research within the business and social marketing disciplines. Empirical research could identify all the relevant stakeholders required to successfully create such events and examine their importance and decision criteria across time frames.

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