World Rally Championship 2009: assessing the community impacts on a rural town in Australia

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Abstract

Large scale motorsport events have the potential to impact upon the communities in which they are held both from the event operations as well as from the visitors. This paper examines the perceived social impacts of the 2009 World Rally Championships on the small community of Kyogle, during the event's Australian stage. The results suggest that while the event was predominantly perceived to have benefited the community, negative impacts were identified to residents along the Rally route. Community division was also identified as a significant issue which provided negative publicity and management issues for the event organiser and the host government, and affected the continued management of the event.

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Introduction

Large scale sports events require careful management to negate the impact which visitors can inflict on small communities and the environments in which they reside[1]. These impacts can be both direct and indirect and can permeate the relations within the community. Large scale events, such as those found in motorsports, are well renowned to be imposed upon communities to achieve a 'greater good' [2], whereby the perceived wider economic and promotional benefits outweigh the negative effects on parts of a community.

The aim of this study is to explore the social impacts of the 2009 World Rally Championships (WRC) in one of its worldwide locations – the Kyogle Shire, in the state of New South Wales (NSW), Australia. The study of the social impacts is an important aspect which forms part of the triple bottom line approach desirable in the assessment of sporting events[3]. Once these specific impacts are known, event managers, government planners and community groups can better minimise the future negative impacts of the event, and leverage the positive benefits that events of this size and scale can bring to rural communities.

The study provides an examination of the perceived socio/cultural costs and benefits to one rural community along the WRC global route and suggests that future social research may be warranted in other countries of the event, given the differing socio/cultural contexts and physical environments in which the event is staged[4.]

Background

The World Rally Championships

The World Rally Championships is an international motorsport event, staged in 12 countries each year. The event attracts between 80,000 and 210,000 spectators to each event and creates intense media activity, with broadcasts in 228 different countries, in multiple languages, reaching an estimated cumulative viewing audience of 633 million[5.] Yet despite its

international popularity, there is a lack of empirical research to examine the event or its impacts on the communities in which it is held. In the only published study of the WRC event, Hassan and Connor [6] examined the visitor profile and economic benefits of the 2007 WRC event across 6 countries. The lack of comparable data made this task difficult, restricting the assessment of the event as a whole, or even to make accurate comparisons between countries or stages of the event.

The World Rally Championships have been staged in their current format since 1973 and are regulated by the Federation Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA), the governing body for worldwide motorsport. As the name suggests, the attraction of the event is to challenge the world's top Rally drivers to race in different road and race conditions around the world including Portugal, Finland, Greece, Ireland and Australia.

Each Rally consists of between 15 and 25 'special stages' which are run on public roads temporarily closed to normal traffic; where the aim is for drivers to complete each stage in the shortest time. In between stages, the competitors drive to and from stage locations on normal roads, observing normal traffic regulations[7]. In this sense the event is different to many other motorsports which are run on designated motorsport tracks and speedways.

As with other forms of international motorsport, the logistics of the event are complex. In 2009 there were 21 cars, drivers, crews and equipment transported from one event location to the next either by air or by sea. They are closely followed by an international media crew who covered the event stages as well as producing a lifestyle entertainment programme called WRC All Access.

The selection of regions and race stages for the event is made through negotiations between the WRC and the governments in each country. There is no official bidding process to host the event, but rather a series of negotiations between the WRC, motorsport authorities and

government agencies. The negotiation process for the 2009 Australian stage is described by Dredge: 'The State Government, through its privately owned corporation, Events NSW, was a key agency in attracting and securing the AWRC event. Being a privately owned corporation, it was free to operate outside normal codes of conduct and reporting expected of state government agencies, securing a commercial-in-confidence agreement free of public scrutiny with the event organiser'[8]. During the negotiations, there was no consultation with the local host communities, and little consultation with the local public sector agencies in government, tourism or recreation. In effect the local government Councils were informed by the state government that they would be hosting the event, and some opportunities for consultation with the Australian event manager would be provided to community groups after the decision was made. To further ensure the event would proceed, the NSW Government enacted the Motor Sports (World Rally Championship) Bill 2009 [9] which would 'facilitate the conduct of the motor sport known as the World Rally Championship' and allow the construction of temporary works in areas of national parks, crown lands and forests and 'may do that thing despite the fact that the doing of it is not authorised (when required to be) or is not permitted by or under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*'. Other existing regulations were also suspended for the period of the Rally including road and noise and nuisance legislations.

The event planning process resulted in significant unrest between local community groups, local and State government as to their right to impose the event into a region, which included areas of National Parks and known koala colonies. Significant protests were made before and during the Rally by local environmentalists, including an alleged rock throwing incident toward a competitor's car which attracted national media attention[10].

The study location

The municipal shire of Kyogle has a population of 6,780 residents[11] in a range of distinctive and diverse communities, residing in farms and towns, as well as on lifestyle properties and hobby farms. The shire includes the World Heritage listed rainforests of the Central Eastern Rainforest Reserves of Australia (CERRA) as well as other national parks and state forests. The main industries are derived from its surrounding environment and include forestry, agriculture and tourism, and in this sense the environment surrounding the town supplies much of its economic wealth, either as a primary resource or as a destination for visitors. The recent introduction of an Eco-tourism Strategy by the Kyogle Shire Council reflected this fact, and emphasized the environment's importance to the local area, and to the community.

However in recent years the town had suffered a spate of economic and social setbacks including floods, a timber mill fire and forestry industry shutdowns. As with many rural areas in Australia, economic and industrial setbacks have a significant effect on the social structure of the community with many residents leaving the town for other employment opportunities, or being unemployed. Consequently, the introduction of the Rally to the area was seen as an economic and social boost to the town in the face of these negative events, however to others the Rally was an environmental paradox and should not have been held in this location.

Despite the controversy, the WRC event was held in September 2009 in the towns of Kyogle, Murwillumbah and Kingscliff. Using data collected by Events NSW, a review of the event by the Homebush Racing Authority found the event to be successful and that the event:

- Generated between $A14 million to $A16.9 million for the Northern Rivers area of NSW.
- Attracted 19,000 unique visitors, 2,145 from overseas, 12,388 from interstate.
- Engaged a televised audience of 54 million with a tourism media value of $2.3 million.
- Had little environmental impact and created no obvious increase in traffic offences.[12]

Given the controversial introduction of the event to the community, the Chamber of Commerce in one host region of Kyogle initiated a study into the perceived social costs and benefits of the Rally to the local region so that the implications of the event could be better understood.

Literature review

The literature relevant to the study comes from an examination of the social impacts of sports events and specifically motorsport. Research into the social impacts of mega sporting events is derived from examinations of the social impacts of tourism - an area of extensive research in recent times. The varying social impacts of motorsport however are not as well understood across the various forms of the sport such as Nascar, Rallysport, Indy car, and Formula One.

The social impacts of sports events

Over the past decade there has been significant work in examining various social impacts of sporting and cultural events, much of which has stemmed from the significant work in assessing the social impacts of tourism. As noted by Ohmann, Jones, and Wilkes[13] 'there is a strong tendency to draw from the field of tourism studies, which is not surprising, given that events are generally perceived as tourist attractions'. A comprehensive review of the social impacts of tourism has been recently undertaken by Deery, Jago and Fredline [14], providing an extensive list of over 40 impacts which may potentially impact upon the social wellbeing of resident communities. The impacts range from personal impacts such as inconvenience and crowding, to community impacts such as impacts on the local character of the community, or the region's identity. However the literature also shares the view that the severity, or even the existence of these impacts is dependent upon the location and contexts in which the tourism occurs[15]. In regards to tourism this may depend on the economic dependence of tourism, distance of place of residence from areas of high tourist activity, level of contact with tourists, use of common facilities, tourist/resident ratio, community attachment and social,

political and environmental values[16]. In terms of events, this may also include the length of the event, the size of its infrastructure and the extent of its urban regeneration programme [17]. Site specific variables may also determine the types and levels of impact where variables such as community attachment may affect the strength of feeling (resentment or support) toward large scale events as it has been shown to do in tourism [18]. Physical proximity of residents to the event may also affect the impacts, as well as the size, location, type and scale of the events [19]. As described by Deery et al. [20] relationships between local residents may also affect the social impacts from one location to the next, 'different groups of locals within a community can have different engagements with and attitudes towards tourists, there can be frictions between groups in the local community'. These frictions or conflicts are of particular interest to tourism studies in smaller rural communities, where Moscardo [21] has found variations in tourism knowledge and false expectations of tourism benefits can cause friction.

Assessments of the social impacts of specific sports events such as the Football World Cup[22] and the Tour de France [23] also rely on these studies as the basis of examining the impacts of sports and sport tourism events. However as Ohmann et al. [24] suggest, the short term and large scale nature of sporting events also are likely to impose extra impacts as a result of fan behaviour, crime, nationalism or town pride, and collective sharing of experience and excitement.

To the extent that these items of social impact of events are commonly accepted, frameworks and generic scales have also been proposed attempting to provide a generic method from which the social impacts of events can be assessed [25]. However consideration of these frameworks immediately present issues related to the context of the event. Major inherent issues such as increased road dust are more likely to occur from a Rally than a Writers Festival. Impacts to environmentally sensitive areas are also more likely in rural areas than in cities. So too, the duration of the event can affect the perceptions and tolerance of residents to

an event. For an event like the WRC, no permanent buildings were needed, but certain dirt roads were upgraded. Furthermore, the distinct differences between cultural and sporting events will render many items in the 'cultural impacts' category less applicable, but may introduce other 'sporting impacts' such as 'increased or introduced participation' and 'introduced new interest'. Still it may be possible to develop a category based framework, using a bank of items from which researchers can consider appropriate items that is relevant to other Rallysport events including the WRC.

The social impact of motorsport

While there is a plethora of material on the social impact of events, there is a distinct lack of international academic research in the field of motorsport. With the exception of the work in Australian motorsport [26], there are few other international studies in the area. While it is common for governments to commission consultants to assess the economic impact, it is less common to assess the social impact – a trend familiar in other sports event analysis [27]. Existing social studies are almost solely focused on the Grand Prix style of motorsport including the 1991 Gold Coast Indy [28], the 1986 Adelaide Grand Prix [29], the Formula One Australian Grand Prix [30], and the Singapore [31] and Macao Grand Prix [32] . These Grand Prix style events also use public roads and amenities such as parks, pathways, toilets and public spaces as opposed to fixed raceways found in Speedway racing. Commonly, these studies find the most significant negative social impacts to the general population to be related to inconvenience, and concerns around maintenance of public facilities, however they also suggest that these Grand Prix style events are perceived very positively by residents in terms of promoting tourism, pride in their city and economic stimulus. As with other social impact research they also found that the impacts may vary in different segments of the community. Interestingly, Zhou [33] found that the protests and differences in opinion identified in Australian studies was not prevalent in the Macau event; owing to the traditional Confucian

culture to 'follow the mainstream and consensus viewpoint, as well as maintain respect for authority and not to challenge or show too much opposition'. This again highlights the importance of considering the cultural context of sports events.

Method

The research used a mixed method approach as proposed by Creswell [34] and Tashakori and Teddlie [35] as suitable for social research. The mixed method design used quantitative survey data as a basis for evaluating the impacts of the Rally on the community and the scope of support for the Rally, as well as qualitative methods to gather information relevant to the context of the study [36] and to specifically examine the phenomena in more detail. The use of mixed methods assisted in understanding the unique social environment of the event by collecting data in-situ and observing the social environment. Furthermore the mixed method assisted in the triangulation of results, between survey data, onsite observation and stakeholder interviews.

Participant observation and analysis

While the researcher does not reside in the community, opportunities to gather data *in-situ* strengthened the understanding of local issues and the strength of feeling in the community. Before the event was staged, participant observation was undertaken at a public meeting organized by the Chamber of Commerce, to allow the community to 'have their say' about the Rally. Attendance at the meeting was important to identify the key issues for the community (both positive and negative), and to find out how and why these were important in this specific community context. The researcher took a position of 'passive observer' [37] making field notes and noting potential contacts for later interviews. Participant observation was also used at the event stages to explore the reactions of spectators at the event, and to see the Rally route firsthand. Descriptive observations were transcribed into field notes whilst on-site, to provide an immediate condensed account of what had occurred, for later analysis.

After the event, a total of 12 semi-structured interviews were undertaken with representatives from key stakeholder groups including the tourism marketing agency, local government, chamber of commerce, indigenous community, wildlife rescue groups as well as individual residents and business owners.

Initial notes from the observations, community meeting and stakeholder interviews were later analysed to discover cultural patterns displayed in the social situation of the study. Following the sequential process described by Spradley the data was analysed and organised into key themes which assisted in the development of the telephone survey, as well as in the analysis of the interview and open-ended data.

Phone Survey

The resident survey was designed to provide a representative study of the views of the population of Kyogle Shire. Random phone polling was considered the most reliable method to reach a sample of the whole population and was conducted within 3 days of the event, from a private research facility outside the resident area. Using a systematic sampling approach described by Creswell [32] every 9th person on the phone list was contacted, utilising a list of randomly selected telephone numbers generated from official telephone records and a computer-aided telephone interviewing system. The participation rate – i.e. percentage of valid respondents who agreed to complete a survey – was 52.1 per cent providing a total of 351 surveys from respondents who were aged 18+, living within the Kyogle Shire boundaries. The survey length varied from 5 to 22 minutes, with an average length of 9.3 minutes and included a mixture of closed and open-response questions. The responses to the open-response questions were recorded verbatim, as reported in the results below.

The survey instrument

The survey was developed primarily using the items from a summary of social impacts generated from the literature, as well as from items identified in the community meeting,

resulting in a total of 67 items relevant to the study. That list was re-grouped to a list of 23 items to reduce duplication of ideas, and remove items outside the scope of the study. The remaining items were also grouped into relevant sections of the survey including demographic, event attendance, and social impact sections. To identify those who were closest to the Rally route residents were asked directly 'Is your property on any of the Rally stages?' Many of the closed response questions were developed into a three point scale (yes/no/unsure) to directly assess whether respondents felt an issue had impacted them [38]. Inclusion of the category of "unsure" was informed by the observations in the community, to provide an option for respondents who were still considering, or weighing up, the impacts of the event. Other open-ended questions were designed to allow residents to fully describe the impacts of the event and were included in the qualitative data analysis.

Results

The research examined the costs and benefits of personal and community impacts that had occurred as a result of the Rally. Personal impacts were identified as those that related to instances where the event affected resident's everyday lives, as well as the social relations residents had between each other, and between visitors to the area. They did not include personal impacts of a psychological nature. Community impacts included items which related to the image, wellbeing and social cohesion of the community where these had been impacted by the staging of the event, or thereafter.

Overall perceptions

The results suggest that the majority of residents perceived the event quite positively both in terms of its impact upon them personally and on the community as a whole. When asked, 'Overall did the rally have a positive or negative impact on you personally?' 71.2% of respondents believed that the event had a positive social impact, 10.5% of the general population suggested they were 'negatively impacted' and a further 18% were unsure. A

similarly positive result was found when residents were asked, 'Has the community benefited from interaction as a result of the rally?' where 84.5% believed the community as a whole had benefitted from the event, and a similar ratio agreeing that the benefits outweighed the costs of the event 83.4%. Interestingly, even those who had been negatively affected wanted the rally to return in the future with 87.3% suggesting they would like to see the Rally return to the area. This indicates that some residents were willing to forego their own negative experiences for the betterment of the community.

Perceptions of positive impacts

In identifying the positive impacts of the event, respondents perceived the main community benefits were related to 'economic contributions' for the town and the increased 'visitation and tourism' or what may be seen as the 'greater good' as discussed by Hall[39]. In fact the 'economic boost' for the town may not be perceived as a social impact at all, but rather an economic one. Within this theme, responses also included 'brought money into town', 'increased cashflow' and 'helped small business'. These direct impacts which are provided by the event are substantial in this context to a small rural town, where they may not be as proportionally substantial in other wealthier regions on the WRC global circuit. In this community the event has in part offset some of the losses from the recent fires, floods and industry closures, which have had a negative impact on the town, and its feeling of prosperity. However while 37.2% of survey respondents perceived economic contributions to the town as a primary community benefit, responses were often given across multiple dimensions which included other internal community benefits such as 'increased communication', 'cohesion' and 'togetherness'. The multiplicity of the responses is best illustrated by this resident comment:

The Rally has given our town a big sense of pride. Communication has been a big benefit to the whole town, we have had a bad few years and it has brought the community back together after a bad run of floods, fires and deaths it has been such a wonderful positive experience.

Results from the key stakeholder interviews suggest that, from their perspective, the main success of the event was that it provided a focus for *community action and interaction*, between the community themselves and the new visitors. Benefits were gained by voluntary community groups such as the State Emergency Service, Rotary, Apex or the Lions Club who provided key services including food service, visitor parking, ticket collecting and first aid. In return the groups receive opportunities for fundraising. Interview respondents spoke positively of the opportunities the Rally had provided, for example facilitating over $A6,000 to be raised for the local hospital. Further they indicated that this type of fundraising opportunity is unique for the town, offering opportunities to gather funds from large numbers of new visitors. These opportunities for interaction were also considered important by the Chamber of Commerce to developing the social capital of the town, in strengthening social networks and enhancing the trust within them.

Key stakeholders and residents mostly agreed that the Rally had some impact on the image of the town with 56.9% of survey respondents indicating the image of Kyogle had been altered. Further questioning of those respondents indicated that 93.5% thought that the image had been altered in a positive way; suggesting an increased awareness, publicity and exposure that Kyogle received as a result of the Rally, with many feeling the event had '*put Kyogle on the map*' (paper forthcoming).

Other positive impacts were felt on a personal level, with the event providing a sense of excitement, described by one respondent as a '*fantastic vibe*' and '*finally something exciting for this quiet area*'. Some residents held Rally parties on their properties, or invited family and friends into town creating social experiences. The event also offered opportunities for

recreational participation with approximately half of survey respondents being involved ether as a spectator (40%) a volunteer (6%) or as a paid worker (0.5%).

Negative impacts – dust, noise and access to property

While the event clearly had a positive impact for most residents in the community, others suffered personal negative impacts to their properties and to the social constructs of their community. In the resident survey respondents were asked for their perception of the impact of the event on their personal lives (on you or others in your household). The survey used items from previous studies to include 'access to their home/property', 'dust and/or noise', 'inconvenience' and 'loss or damage' to property, as well as probing further for other unidentified impacts. The results suggest that a small percentage of the overall population were affected by these items, however 'residents on the Rally Route' where affected to a far greater extent. As shown in Table 1, the ratio of those affected by dust/noise, access or inconvenience was significantly higher than that of the overall population. Furthermore, other specific impacts were also identified by these residents including helicopter noise, wildlife disturbance, traffic accidents, livestock disturbance and police presence.

Insert table 1 here

Previous studies by Fredline and Faulkner [19] had suggested that residents in contact with the event would be more greatly impacted by the event, either positively or negatively and may be less ambivalent in their response. The results from this research concurs with this suggestion, where some residents on the Rally Route had a positive experience from the event, using their properties as vantage points to host their families and friends and create unique social experiences, while others had a negative impact, scrambling to save wildlife and feeling trapped on their properties.

These aspects were explored further in the qualitative interviews, to understand how and why the impacts occurred. It was found that the Rally route was primarily staged on single lane country roads, regularly used by a small number of residents as a main access road to work and town services. The preparations of the road surface and the staging of the Rally meant that some residents were denied access to their homes at times during and around the event. The results suggest that this affected 10.5% of the general population and 42% of those on the Rally route. For some this had a personal effect, as described by these residents, '*I was cut off to get out of my property because of the traffic; I was also blocked off by police at a different location*,' and '*I was locked into my property not able to go freely - I felt like I was captive*' and '*I couldn't get out of the house, and weren't given any consultation*'.

A similar proportion of the overall population were impacted by dust and noise from the Rally cars, as well as from the officials and fans, with 10.5% of the general population and 27% of those on the Rally route affected with reports of dust coating houses. In these cases, the Rally organizers offered to provide water trucks and cleaners to remove the dust, and yet only 38% were satisfied with these measures taken by the Rally organizers. One respondent suggested, '*It took 4 days for a water truck to come to rectify the dust issue*'.

The closure of public roads by police caused 'inconvenience' to 8.5% of the respondents in the general population and 19% of those on the Rally route. This included extra time to get to and from work or other duties, for example, '*I had to drive from home to work, and did not have sufficient time, what's usually a short walk, was made into a 2 hour drive*' and '*Cars on the Summerland Way [main highway] were stopped by police to let Rally cars through*'.

For some, the cumulative effect of these negative impacts was evident, where some residents on the Rally route were clearly impacted on a number of levels. Again the unique context of the event was also noted, where some residents had moved in to this region for a peaceful existence. Their comments reflect their multiple concerns.

1) *'I was inconvenienced by suspension of nuisance legislations during the course of the event. Police denied access to my home during certain stages, helicopters were offensive, heavy traffic, division within the community, social impact, environmental issues'.*

2) *'I moved to the country to escape the noise and such, I'm not very happy with the whole process, ruined the road access to my home'.*

3) *'I was impacted by movements, noise, numbers of people, distressed wildlife took refuge in my yard'.*

The research thus identified a small section of the community who had been affected quite deeply by the event, especially those who lived on the Rally route, and who had established a quiet haven for themselves and the local native wildlife.

Conflict or division

The mixed reactions and experiences from the event, between those who suffered from dust, noise, loss and damage, and those who enjoyed a new entertaining experience, or economic boost resulted in a large degree of conflict and division in the town. Almost a third of telephone survey respondents (29.3%) agreed that 'the community had suffered from conflict or division'. Interviews with residents revealed that for some, the event had a severe impact on their personal lives and on their feelings for their community. Interviews also uncovered stories of heated and physical conflict between those who were for and those who were against the Rally. Community conflict and division arose in response to both the event itself and the planning processes of government, where it was felt that the state government failed to foresee the potential for divisions and conflict in the community between the supporters and the protestors. Research in Australia has previously identified the sense of injustice felt over the imposition of motorsport events into communities [40]. Motorsport events staged in public spaces are known to cause angst in some sections of the community resulting in

protests and disruptive action. The results here support the evidence that some individuals will resent such actions by governments especially where there is little consultation with host communities. During interviews, several residents expressed this as a sense of 'powerlessness' over the NSW State government's planning processes. The comments from the surveys demonstrate this further;

1) *'The state government stepped in and stopped public input and consultation',*

2) *'I didn't like people driving onto my property getting me to sign papers and such',*

3) *'Furious with Repco and Kyogle Council for lack of transparency in organizing for Stage X, it felt like a corporate takeover. Also, the disrespectful actions towards certain Bundjalung Elders',*

4) *The privacy and conditions of the people have been disrupted, we have not had a say as to whether or not it goes on. The rally is here for 5 minutes and they leave and I am left with a road that is no good.*

Beyond this key issue a wide variety of responses were received when survey participants were asked in an open question – 'What do you believe are the main community costs that have occurred as a result of the Rally?' As shown in Table 2, categorisation of the responses into themes suggests that approximately one quarter of respondents thought there were minimal or no costs associated with the event (26.2%), while others had concerns about roads, council expenses and the actions of protestors. A further 7.7% felt there would be costs but were unsure what they would be until there was a full review of the event by the government.

Insert Table 2 here

As shown in Table 2, residents were primarily concerned with the costs related to road upgrades and maintenance, and a further 13.6% with council expenses such as town beautification, set up and clean-up costs. Again the context of this result is important. In regional Australian towns, Councils are often under-resourced to provide roads, and other infrastructure [41]. The imposition of this event to some residents was seen as yet another drain on Council resources which would provide fewer funds for local projects. It was unclear to residents whether the costs relating to roads would be reimbursed to the Council from the event organisation.

Discussion

The results demonstrate the range of impacts both positive and negative that are experienced during a WRC rally. As a whole the community of Kyogle showed a positive perception of the Rally, with 87.3% suggesting they would like to see the Rally return to the area, and 83% agreeing that the benefits outweighed the costs of the event. This indicates, that the community is willing to overlook the negative impacts, including the conflict and division, and focus upon the perceived positive impacts the event may bring - for the 'greater good' of the town. It also indicates willingness from the community to leverage benefits from the event in terms of community fundraising, and visitor promotions which could further improve the financial benefits from the event.

When planning to host the event, the State government failed to foresee the potential for divisions and conflict in the community between the supporters and the protestors. This provided negative publicity and management issues for the event organizer and the host government, and contributed to the decision to move the event to Coffs Harbour in 2011. In many ways these could have been avoided with greater consultation throughout the development and staging of the event, and as suggested by Weed[42] residents perceptions and experiences could be incorporated into the strategic planning process.

The results also align with previous studies of event tourism impact [43] which suggest that the severity of the impact may be related to:

1) *the economic dependence on tourism - and in this case, the economic prosperity generally of the town, as needing an economic boost,*

2) *distance of place of residence from areas of high tourist activity- those on the rally route were more highly impacted,*

3) *use of common facilities - in this case the use of public roads,*

4) *social, political and environmental value – all of which were disputed in this event.*

The research demonstrates that an international sports event of this scale can have significant impact on a minority section of the community, and yet these impacts are negated and forgotten by the wider community in the overall assessment of the event as a success. These divisions are perhaps more noticeable in small rural communities such as Kyogle, than they are in metropolitan areas which hold large sporting events regularly. The division in the community however is a significant aspect that may have longer lasting consequences, and requires more investigation.

Further research may explore the lasting consequences of these divisions to individual residents, as well as to the sustainability of the event in the host region, further exploring whether certain impacts are more likely to be problematic for smaller rural towns than larger urban areas. Specifically future research of Rallysport events should consider the personal values and circumstances which influence the local issues causing community conflict, as well as the physical impacts of dust, noise and road works on residents' wellbeing. As suggested by Deery et al. innovative research inclusive of more qualitative data 'will help explain rather than simply describe the social impacts of tourism and should help underpin the development of strategies for more effectively managing tourism'.[44]

Conclusion

This research has assessed the perceived social impacts of the World Rally Championships on a small community in Australia, finding that the community was predominantly in favour of the event, despite the impacts on the community in terms of conflict and division. In so doing the study has highlighted the influence of the social, political and environmental context surrounding an event that will have an effect upon the severity of its impacts. In particular the political context of the event, and the specific lack of community consultation, led to negative perceptions toward the organisers and the state government.

Empirical studies conducted on the WRC are scant, and have relied solely on quantitative survey data to establish a visitor profile. While these studies are useful to improving our understanding of sports spectator demographics and motivations, other mixed methods including stakeholder interviews and observation *in-situ* will contribute to a greater understanding of the impact of this international sports event in the 12 countries in which it is held. While the impacts of grand prix style motor-sport events in urban areas are adequately documented, differences lie in rural areas, where the environmental conditions are more sensitive, and residents are more aware of a single mega-event activity. The vastly different socio/cultural, environmental and political context in each country also suggests the need for further research to be undertaken in these communities. The implications of this knowledge may inform the future development of the event, but also the development of responsible government policy in community consultation and engagement.

Notes
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14. Deery, Jago, and Fredline, 'Rethinking Social Impacts of Tourism Research: A New Research Agenda', 69.
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17. Hall, 'Sports Tourism and Urban Regeneration';
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