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Why do regional community cultural festivals survive?

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Why do regional community cultural festivals survive?

Ros Derrett, Southern Cross University, NSW
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Abstract

This paper is concerned with research into the shifting positions that exist in destinations hosting community cultural festivals focuses on four Northern Rivers (NSW) annual festivals. The investigation explores the diverse factors at play in each festival. Each festival fills an important role in its community’s annual portfolio of leisure activities. The case study festivals have been conducted for between 10 to 70 years. Why? The nature of festival lifecycles, issues of succession management and the distinctive features of host communities are examined.

The investigation into the discrete elements of each festival through their origins, development and management demonstrates how residents and visitors become involved with creating their own culture. An examination of sustainability factors of each festival provides a better understanding of its potential longevity. The paper discusses what community cultural festivals are and the roles they play in the lives of key stakeholders.

Such factors as communal memory, willingness to work collaboratively, organizational traditions and experience influence resource availability to conduct successful festivals year in year out. Acceptance by the residents of the host community and buy-in by local and regional stakeholders enhance the potential for the festival to sustain itself and become accessible to visitors.

The nuances of stakeholder relationships are exposed through a multiple perspective approach. By identifying the patterns, structures and meanings of the situations that festivals represent we are better informed of the porous boundaries that exist, the distinctive values, interests and aspirations held by residents when they host festivals. The descriptive case studies show themselves to be full and complex entities of human experience.

What emerges is that the longer established festival organizations amongst the case study festivals demonstrate a better chance of survival because of their consistent delivery of an event that encourages others to partner, share resources or invest in its management. Organisers are obliged to renegotiate partnerships annually. In two communities the fragile relationships between some groups becomes a sticking point. Another looks within the organization to source required personnel and networks informally with individuals, while a fourth has inconsistent support of the Council sponsored volunteer community committee who generally use the media for a call to action by individual residents and service clubs. The host communities of the first two festivals expect them to survive because of the formal structures in place.
Introduction

The collaboration that occurs when festivals such as the Beef Week Festival in Casino, the Jacaranda Festival in Grafton, the Mardi Grass Cannabis Law Reform Rally in Nimbin and Byron Bay’s New Year’s Eve celebrations are hosted clearly demonstrates the nature and value of regional community cultural festivals. This collaboration suggests that social and cultural patterns emerge from highly localised decision-making processes. Festivals offer an opportunity for such decisions to be made, be accumulated and become embodied for local and shared consumption (Blau, 1994:16). The paper picks up this key theme of active participation by regional community stakeholders and networks and what they contribute to the survival of community cultural festivals.

The Northern Rivers of New South Wales (NSW), Australia has a robust tradition of festivals. The Northern Rivers (NR) region of NSW is comprised of individuals, communities and institutions representing diverse sub-cultures of geographic, demographic and psychographic significance. The region has a layered human heritage reflecting the waves of migration to the coast and its hinterland. The individuals and groups who have sought to stay since the indigenous settlement have contributed to the diverse regional cultures that includes festivals.

Background

There are a number of significant influences on the choices made in the management each of the four case studies. These include not only the personal or the intra-personal described by Richins and Pearce (2000:211) where the process is affected by the beliefs, attitudes and values brought to a situation by participants, but also by the external circumstantial influences that apply. The four case study festivals are situated at different locations on a survival continuum. The evolution and development of each can be examined for (a) festival organiser’s strategic objectives, (b) meeting target community’s needs with a marketing orientation, (c) the duration location and infrastructure resources available, (d) the festival’s program and product development, and (e) partnerships and regional engagement. This paper focuses on the analysis of point (e) to gain a greater understanding of how festivals may prolong their lifecycle and provide benefits to regional stakeholders.

It recognizes the nature of participation in regional communities in formal and informal ways by individuals and groups and how this contributes to festival survival. Personal and shared aspects of a sense of community identity (Puddifoot, 2003) are amply demonstrated in concrete community festival settings as a variegated landscape rather than a uniform one (Blau, 1994:16). It acknowledges that festival organisers have finite and fragile resources, hence their dependence...
on effective relationships with other individuals and groups. Case study organisers are mindful that ideas lose their currency or credibility and that the power exerted by individuals and sub-groups can easily begin to work independently of the dominant culture. There is recognition amongst all stakeholders that they are part audience and part supplier and the shared experience needs to be positive for ongoing collaboration. This study emphasises the dynamic human environment in which festivals operate, recognizing the population ecology framework of Getz (2002:214) by focusing on the wider community and festival stakeholders. Culture and leisure support and feed off one another (Trewin, 2001:273) allowing festivals to add meaning, memories and tradition to the locals’ way of life. What emerges is that the longer established festival organizations amongst the case study festivals (Casino and Grafton) demonstrate a better chance of survival because of their consistent delivery of an event that encourages others to partner, share resources or invest in its management.

The broader study investigates the optimum conditions required for community cultural festival survival. Survival and longevity are regarded as key festival success factors by Lade and Jackson (2004) especially if they demonstrate organisers’ met objectives. While there are instances in the host communities of special events and festivals that have faced serious problems and failed to sustain their position in the community’s social and recreational life, the case studies chosen offer researchers substantial opportunities to ascertain the causes for longevity in delivering significant events. Success or failure isn’t measured here. However a five-year study of the case study festivals identifies key factors contributing to each festival’s survival.

Literature Review

Getz (2002) identifies limited attention paid in the literature to the risk of failure and critical success factors that influence the longevity and sustainability of an individual’s involvement with organisations that conduct such festivals. He suggests that research into the collaboration and risk sharing amongst festivals deserves greater attention. His study (2002:217) recognises the nature of the non-profit sector with particular forces and issues at play. He acknowledges the inherent lifecycle factors that can be analysed in the preparation and delivery of such festivals (Frisby & Getz, 1989: Getz & Frisby, 1988).

The study notes that over time each festival has had to deal with significant internal challenges in terms of marketing and planning, human resource and financial management, organizational culture tensions and the impact of external forces. It is evident that during the lifecycle of each festival organizers have undertaken little research to inform management decisions, relying on the accumulation of corporate memory, traditions, individual and collective enthusiasm and

Impact of Events 2005
Why do regional community cultural festivals survive?
experience. Festival organizers recognize potential areas of concern to be content and programming, venue and infrastructure support, promotional effectiveness, government investment and volunteer turnover. No festival organiser expressed concern for competition locally or within the region.

A growing interest in understanding the cultural identities of host communities in tourist destinations (Gilbert, 1989; Keogh, 1990; Ritchie, 1991; Ap & Crompton, 1993; Prentice, 1993; Ritchie, 1993; Robinson, 2000:v; Lade & Jackson, 2004; Mules, 2004) is shared by study stakeholders (see Figure 1.). Culture, identity and meaning are complex terms and are open to competing and complementary interpretations and definitions. The starting point is the notion that there has been a substantial transformation in the lives of residents in regional and rural Australia. Historians and social commentators (McGregor, 1981, 1999, 2003; Ryan, 1979; 1984; Ryan & Smith, 2001; Rogers, 1998; Mackay, 1993; Chigwidden, 2001) document the shift from homogenous conservative agricultural communities in the Northern Rovers region to diverse service orientated communities and suggest residents are having to deal with new challenges in their pursuit of an acceptable quality of life.

The value to society of a festival culture can be whether it enriches lives; is excellent (and who judges this?); enhances the cultural identity of the group, community, nation; is a mode of expression; is an employment provider; is an industry sector; has market viability; and represents the pluralism/diversity of society. The mixed economy in which cultural organisations operate in Australia raises issues of government intervention in policy, planning and financial support. The evolution and development of all Australian culture has a political dimension. The choices made by the management of each of four case study festival organisations provide guidance for other cultural organisations and present their experience in a global context. The contributions these groups make to the richness and diversity of the Australian community cultural product; the provision of opportunities for access and equity in employment and entertainment; the sharing of skills; the enrichment of society and international profile raising are substantial and significant.

Tourism is one of the structured environments in which culture is embedded. Festivals are situated as attractions in the tourism literature. Cultural products and institutions generally are like other consumer goods, regardless of the meanings that people attach to them. Blau (1994:2) suggests that tourism itself is a cultural phenomenon and that culture appears to have no shape to it because it is such a personal affair. As a cultural phenomenon tourism is not the same for everyone who may be traveling, ‘as a temporarily leisured person who voluntarily visits a place away from home for the purpose of experiencing a change’ (Smith, 1989:1). The personal and collective responses of tourists, as well as residents to the case study festivals over time, make a marked contribution to their success and longevity.
Methodology

The case study approach utilizing interviews, participant observation, media analysis, audience surveys and input from festival organizers serves this regional investigation well. The role of key stakeholders in community festival development and management and how different voices in a community are accommodated and how communities share festivals with visitors can be effectively revealed through case study network analysis. Interviews with festival organizers, tourism operators, local government and visitors Community is a political concept and the role of the power dynamics between the stakeholders is not well documented. It is important to acknowledge who is involved in festivals and who is not in communities and how this influences the capacity of the festival to be sustained.

There appears to be no single quantitative index to satisfactorily answer this paper’s question. Festivals and their longevity have escaped below the traditional radar of triple bottom line accounting. Greater sense is drawn from both quantitative and qualitative data sources to establish how the festival in turn reflects its community roots and determines its future. By just asking stakeholders ‘why?’ allows for the new conclusions to be drawn. For example, the demonstrable value of networks and partnerships demands that earlier emphasis on organization building requires rethinking.

Four regional Community Cultural Festivals

Jacaranda Festival, Grafton,

The Jacaranda Festival was the first floral festival organised in Australia and was based upon spontaneous revelry, music, dance and a celebration for the beauty with which the City of Grafton and district is endowed. The first festival commenced on October 29, 1935. In 2004 the Jacaranda Festival celebrated its 70th birthday.

Hinde & Deefholts (1996) describe how the community and the business sectors contribute to the Jacaranda Festival. They indicate that Jacaranda Thursday allows the staff in the central business district to dress up in themed costumes, shops be decorated, and staff perform shows and attract the general public to the shopping precinct. A Queen Crowning Ceremony opens the week-long festival and the following Saturday night a procession along the main street comprising 130 entries ends the festival in the city’s Market Square.

Impact of Events 2005

Why do regional community cultural festivals survive?
Observers note that minimal changes have occurred over the years in terms of the content of the program. The lilac blossoms’ appearance of the Jacaranda signals the special time in Grafton. There are day trippers in bus packages to special events like a market, river based activities, a floral display at the cathedral, displays in various city venues, champion gardens, concerts, a car speedway, an aircraft muster, dog agility trials, the Grafton City Council’s fireworks display, greyhound races, the Jacaranda Baby Competition and a vintage car meet.

The volunteer organising committee is reliant on support from individuals, businesses and local government. The non-profit, community based organisation that has sustained the Grafton event simply solicits active individuals who have a vested interest in specific events under the Jacaranda Festival banner. It encourages personal links within the community and succession management has been undertaken on a ‘turn-about’ model. Numerous office holders have held other community and local government leadership positions. There has been considerable kudos invested in positions of management of the event now steeped in tradition.

**Mardi Grass, Nimbin**

The Nimbin Mardi Grass promotes itself as the biggest hemp harvest festival in the Western world. It regularly attracts over 10,000 people to the village of Nimbin (population 600) in the first weekend in May to celebrate all things hemp, like medicine, fibre, fuel and food. The setting for the festival’s Parade is the main street of the village, with associated activities staged in adjacent parkland.

The event was originally conceived as a drug law reform protest. Powerful emotional views are held within the host community about the festival. The volunteer management of the event annually deals with the tensions generated, while visitors are oblivious to the community development implications. Volunteers are the backbone of the event. There is a determination to keep the organisation locally based and structurally uncomplicated. The police, local government, the Chamber of Commerce, tourism agencies and regional media are all significant players in how the image of the village is projected beyond the three-day festival.

There are seminars, markets, a hemp trade fair, hemp fashion shows, a pot art exhibition, street theatre and street music during Mardi Grass. There are seed swaps, a semi covert judging of the Cannabis Growers Cup, debates about the virtues and the hazards cannabis users. The big crowd event is the Mardi Grass Parade.

Mardi Grass offers considerable cultural and tourism capital to the region. Backpacker tourism to Nimbin is growing mostly due to the media it generates. The HEMP (Help End Marijuana
Impact of Events 2005

Why do regional community cultural festivals survive?

Prohibition) Embassy manages the festival through a major shopfront business and tourist attraction in Nimbin’s main street. It is part museum, part drug education centre, part hemp merchandising outlet and part meeting place with internet cafe and organising office for hemp activists. Individual community activists have played significant leadership roles over time.

New Year’s Eve, Byron Bay

The annual New Year’s Eve community celebrations held in Byron Bay are a result of the establishment of a community safety committee by the Shire Council. It sought to redress the image generated by ‘chaos’ and ‘mayhem’ resulting during the New Year’s Eve street activity in 1993/4. The negative national media coverage spurred volunteers to seek local solutions through strategic partnerships, rebranding the town and the annual street celebrations. Extensive work has been undertaken to reorientate the target market, encourage families to return, provide participative opportunities for locals and holiday makers through workshops to prepare floats for a parade and harmonisation strategies in relation to consumption of alcohol and drugs and innovative waste management to deal with up to 30,000 people.

Organisers sought to capture the lifestyle of residents, through engaging celebrations. Byron Bay is a tourism destination. The volume of summer holiday visitors and day-trippers from South East Queensland influenced the strategies employed to diminish pressure on infrastructure in the town’s CBD.

The efforts of two particular residents were instrumental in getting Council to convene the Safety Committee to investigate ways in which a greater community voice into planning, management and promotion of New Year’s Eve celebrations. The community champions galvanized considerable local support to solve the challenges of staging a safe event for locals and visitors. Their determined advocacy was based on personal experience and attributes in the area of organising, negotiating, networking and documenting local input.

Beef Week, Casino

Casino Beef Week commenced in 1981 as an event linked to a specific local economic driver, the beef industry. What started as a 12 week of activity targeting locals and visitors has recently been downsized to better suit local human resources and program elements. The annual program includes a dinner dance and crowning of the Beef Week Queen with each of the up to 10 candidates representing a specific beef cattle breed is staged. Each day there is broadly based community entertainment with a cattle theme. The highlight is a parade of cattle, horse drawn vehicles and commercial floats. A roundabout in the mainstreet is converted into a judging ring.
where 120+ live steers compete. In recent years programming has embraced aspects of the timber industry, local arts and crafts and shop displays.

A community-based committee manages the festival with strong support from Richmond Valley Council. It enjoys sound business and media support and increasing attention in the tourist market place. It is held in May and attracts substantial interest from the drive market including caravan and motor home owners who base themselves in the town. Service club barbecues like Breakfast with the Butchers are no longer enough for the increasingly sophisticated festival attendee, and so a new element in the festival is Beef on Barker (Street). Local enterprises value adding to the beef sector with olives, nuts, vegetables, wine and dairy are now showcased in a sit down coupon-based foodfest.

Festival Partners

Community cultural festivals are collaborative phenomena. This study recognises that partnerships are essential for their sustainability. Prosperity principles of respect, relationships, responsibility and renewal applied by Desticorp (www.desticorp.com) in their analysis of the future of tourism highlight the encounters between host and guests relevant to the festival context. Trusting relationships between multiple enterprises that generally exist independently of one another come into play for a festival. The mutual interdependency places substantial responsibility on each of the players involved in the collaboration. The process of evolution and change is observed in the case study festivals being driven by individuals and agencies being mindful of the financial, human resources and ‘in-kind’ commitments being made.

Key partners or stakeholders (see Figure 1) identified in the case study festivals include local government, strategic alliances with regional and state government agencies, the local business community, special interest groups in destination communities, regional and local media, individual community champions, festival organisers, residents and visitors. The emphasis and level of participation by each partner in each community varies at different times. The interaction is influenced by the individuals involved, the organisational structures in place, traditions inherent in each community’s socio-cultural exchange, the history of public engagement by public authorities and the appeal of the region to potential visitors.

Figure 1: Key stakeholders identified in the study
Each festival's program represents a sum of the interactions between the partners. Each of the players influences the process as well as being affected by the finished product. It is noted that festivals support community social and economic enterprise. This can be through volunteer self-help groups, public or private commercial activities that are encouraged during the preparation of the festival or as a result of its placement in the annual calendar within each destination. These festivals generally support existing businesses; though a case can be made that creating new or more business is worthy of further investigation. Festival organisers speak of opportunities for local business development (Humphrys, 2003; Balderstone, 2003; de Graaf 2001) through value adding food production, arts and craft production and sale.

Partnerships that support the host community's sense of itself and its place through festival investment either in-kind, by sponsorship deals, by sharing resources or offering media promotion help build confidence in the life of the festival. The diverse inputs identified in the Table 1 summary amongst the four case studies demonstrate the influence of the relationships and how they enrich the efforts of organisers and encourage local support for each festival. The formal and informal links become known to the potential audience for each event and help consolidate the impression of widespread awareness, satisfaction and value derived from the relationship for each contributing partner.

**Table 1: Stakeholder roles in festival survival**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder</th>
<th>Role in Partnership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Host community</strong></td>
<td>• Produce and consume festival • Act as host for visitors • Free access to most of festival as audience • Contribute and celebrate cultural diversity • Traditional and new settler exchange of rituals, volunteer support and &gt;75% of participants • Interest in creating a legacy • Target market supporting image of festival and identity for its promotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community Champions</strong></td>
<td>• Individuals providing vision &amp; leadership, generating enthusiasm, delivering advocacy and attracting respect and loyalty from organization members and wider community • Bringing goodwill and external recognition to festival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Volunteer co-workers</strong></td>
<td>• Demonstrate active participation in community life • Establish and consolidate networks • Local problem solving • Personal skills development and empowerment • Greater understanding of local beliefs, attitudes and values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Festival Organisation</strong></td>
<td>• Formal structure emphasizes identity and connection to host community • Offers safety and security for participants • Membership comprised of local community • Succession strategies • Community profile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Local Government</strong></td>
<td>• Policy and planning frameworks • Events officers and project management personnel and infrastructure support • ‘In-kind’ and financial investment • Improve amenities for residents and visitors • Facilitate regional and government alliances and investment • Support tourism marketing initiatives • Reflect community traditions and interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>State and Federal government</strong></td>
<td>• Provide funding to supports elements of festival programs and value-add to economic initiatives and harmonisation challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Regional Alliances (agencies and</strong></td>
<td>• Desire to respond to locally agreed agendas • Offer financial support and advice • Encourage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Impact of Events 2005*  
Why do regional community cultural festivals survive?
| Organizations representing sectoral interests | initiatives with regional outcomes, e.g. collaborative tourism promotion, arts development, regional cuisine, entrepreneurial initiatives • Some e-technology support |
| Business community (local and regional) | • Be open during festival! • Provide feedback to organizers on economic impacts • Provide sponsorship – ‘in-kind’ or financial • Collaborate in packages and promotion • Active involvement during event highlighting local products and services |
| Sponsors | • Demonstrate local corporate goodwill • Share target markets • Establish links to host destination • Share brand • Naming rights |
| Supplier, performers | • Provide entertainment reflecting local cultural objectives • Offer educational workshops, knowledge sharing and demonstrations • Repeat contributions builds loyalty |
| Special Interest Groups (local, regional, (inter)national) | • Festival acts as umbrella for diverse but themed pursuits • Consistent involvement brings repeat visitation & builds momentum • Encourages engagement in social action • Provide connection to community issues, concerns and interests • Attracts visitors from further afield • Offers broad network distribution of promotional material |
| Media (local, regional (inter)national – print, audio-visual, web-based) | • Significant coverage by regional print and a/v media, before, during and after festivals • Document and editorialise image and identity, generate archive • Promotion of regional lifestyle • International market reached through web casting, internet, documentaries • Stimulate debate and controversy • Encourage community responses • Sponsorship |
| University (Southern Cross University) | • Provide research and evaluation services to assist with planning and management • Provide an audience for festivals • Provide entertainment for festivals • Provides industry training in event management |
Visitors

- Interest in doing what the locals do
- Curiosity to learn, discover and interpret local traditions
- Repeat visitation substantial because of connection with host community (VFR or reunion) or event
- Substantial visitation from SEQ Queensland
- Word of mouth value

Source: original Derrett, 2005

Each festival initially had strong links with their respective communities, but the growing number of visitors brings stress on infrastructure, pressure on internal relationships and resentment about the influx of outsiders. Again, the spectrum across the four festivals reveals differing levels of response to these issues. A number of interviewees comment on the way the festivals contributed to a social multiplier through increased understanding of organisational activity and skills development in project management, leadership, public and private collaboration (Dunstan, 1999; Roberts, 1999). Organising a major festival takes a lot of individual and collective effort. To get the job done the organisers have to be able to give a lot of time personally and be able to call in a lot of favours and/or inspire volunteerism. Celebration can bind a community and it can also be the instrument that keeps community a fresh and constantly renewing experience, an elixir that keeps community relevant and responsive to the needs of the times. Annual festivals create a community of witness that marks the passage of time and notes the changing of the guard as new power relations arise and old ones change.

The festivals provide service clubs, community special interest groups, local government and businesses with opportunities to raise funds. Some fundraising involves new money visitors contribute to the common good. This facilitates investment in infrastructure for residents. Some investment in the promotion of the destination using the festival themes adds to the image and identity developed in each community. The destination-marketing dollar increases at times connected to the festivals. The economic implications include greater visitation and increased expenditure by visitors, visiting friends and relatives (VFRs), hosts and local business anticipating the influx which is seen positively and encourages support for the festivals.

Community-based festivals appear to be generated for ‘the common good’. There is an emphasis on festivals providing a mechanism to bring diverse factions of the communities into a shared experience. Craik (1997:135) suggests that partnerships work better in theory than in practice. This study confirms Craik’s assertion. What emerges is a series of collaborations that satisfy personal or group agendas, but rarely committing to a strategic approach for community
development. However, these outcomes help prolong the life of the organisations committed to convening the festivals. Potential problems that can generate festival failure (Getz, 2002) are worked through by ensuring specific needs in areas such as planning and marketing, human and financial resources, external pressures and internal organisational culture that may be ameliorated through the networks identified in Figure 1.

Discussion

Issues arising from the commitment for key stakeholders to festivals are discussed. Councils in the Northern Rivers region generally see the planning and promotion of events in terms of creating employment, providing economic benefits to the local community and satisfying statutory rather than discretionary obligations. Festival organizers recognize the complex range of approvals, bureaucratic processes, and public safety implications and consent procedures that link them to Councils. The four case studies are located within different Council jurisdictions that are developing not only festival policies but also cultural policies in line with state government obligations. There are resource implications for funding from state government to local council festival initiatives, thus providing leverage for increased external investment. Effective community festivals, in the long haul, result from local government strategic plans, specific festival strategies and support for organizers in the development of their festival. The employment of event co-ordinators by only one Council (Lismore City Council) allows policy and practice to be tackled in a transparent and equitable manner.

At the heart of this investment by local government in the festival marketplace is a tension between what is regarded as a community cultural development role, notions of the public good and an eagerness to invest in cultural infrastructure for material, electoral and symbolic gain (Stevenson, 2000:93). Councils’ Cultural Policy (Lismore Events Strategy, 1998; Byron Shire Cultural Policy, 2002)) reflect the values held by its constituency.

Regional Strategic Alliances for the community cultural festivals recognize opportunities for partnerships that have ensured the festivals’ longevity. The Northern Rivers Regional Cultural Tourism Organisation (NRRCTO), a cluster of tourism, local government and cultural interests in ‘Australia’s creative edge’ sought to assist organizers with collaboration and communication. The Cultural Tourism Plan (Derrett, Wynn-Moylan & Ballantyne, 1995) recognised the importance and the impact of festivals and events on the annual calendars of residents and visitors through a vision to promote ‘the diverse and unique culture of the region capable of setting a national example for artistic excellence and cultural authenticity while recognising the opportunities for economic growth and development’.
The regional tourism organization is Northern Rivers Tourism (NRT). It has sought effective ways to create positive images of destinations within the region though little has been done to raise the awareness of visitors specifically to festivals. This has been left to individual event organizers and, in recent times, Arts Northern Rivers (the regional arts network). In 2002 NRT included a commitment to festivals as a substantial element of the attractions sector in its Tourism Action Plan.

Festivals and events are encouraged in regional economies for their capacity to showcase the region, promote future tourism and business activity (Ritchie, 1984, cited Fredline and Faulkner, 2002:103). Commonly suggested advantages for the business sector (Getz, 1997) to be supportive of festivals and events include the prospect of increased business income, potential public and private investment in the destination, tax revenues and an improved standard of living for residents. The Northern Rivers Regional Development Board (NRRDB), the state government Department of State and Regional Development and business communities in each of the case study destinations have been beneficiaries of collaboration that identifies opportunities for direct and indirect employment, new money in the economy and chances for specific businesses to increase trade as a result of the event.

The media in all its guises does much to celebrate the sense of community and place, promote particular images and regional identity and to highlight elements of the cultural tourism agenda. Editorials, news items and advertising each contribute to the key factors pursued in this study. Regularly Editorials respond overtly to the dilemma facing communities as they search for ways to best address their aspirations.

The prevailing pragmatism of the tourism sector towards cultural products, along with government agencies’ lack of data on the value of socio-cultural products to quality of life, the knowledge base, the economy and emergent labour-intensive cultural industries make it difficult to make a case for events sometimes. An emerging concern in the region is whether there are in fact too many events altogether. The ‘events-led recovery’ is a subset of the regional tourism dilemma to find the panacea for regional economic development.

Individual community champions within the four festival organizations demonstrate social entrepreneurship; provide valuable insights, experience and skills in understanding the needs of the festival. Their personal attributes are placed in the service of the festival’s longevity. Some garner local and external support and interest that encourages ongoing investment.
‘I think community champions are essential. I can’t even conceive there being any social change or any cultural movement without someone who stands up and says, let’s go in this direction folks, and they work on a vision, they work with goodwill, they collect volunteers around them’ (pers com. Dunstan, 1999).

There are challenges for community champions involved with festival organizations including the difficulty of dealing with burned out champions. And there are seasons of them as well. Such leaders should be recognised as seasonal, so that people do it for a while and withdraw. One champion recognises another champion, someone who knows what you went through and had difficulty with and offers to support existing champion. People with spirit, sustaining the spirit (pers.com, Dunstan, 1999).

**Festival Organisers** conducting the case study festivals demonstrate traits identified in the literature in terms of their evolution, management and leadership styles and their connections to the host communities. These festivals feature a dependence on word of mouth, attendee loyalty and repeat business in terms of marketing this content. Non-traditional approaches to marketing is evident e.g. use of publicity to their host community particularly rather than the production of glossy brochures is evident.

Each organization is involved at a grassroots level to provide what they see as non-exploitative experiences. Community-based activity teaches the skills necessary to become leaders, coordinators and analysts (Gunn and Gunn, 1991; Dunstan 1994). Skills learned in one area of activity, such as organizing a community cultural festival, can be translated into other community orientated activities as well as developing new businesses or alternative financial institutions.

Organizers are obliged to renegotiate partnerships annually. In two communities the fragile relationships between some groups becomes a sticking point. Nimbin Mardi Grass looks within the organization to source required personnel and networks informally with individuals, while in Byron Bay Council has not been consistent in its support of the volunteer community committee who generally use the media for a call to action by individual residents and service clubs. The host community’s expect the Casino and Grafton festival organization to survive because of the formal structures in place.

**Volunteer participants** in festivals organisations demonstrate an understanding their contribution of unpaid time to something they believe is of benefit to others. The demographic mix amongst the volunteer based committees varies. Grafton and Casino management committees are comprised of people who have been involved for considerable periods of time. Executive
positions are often shuffled amongst a small number of individuals who are dedicated to the long haul of participation. The saving on wages is seen positively in terms of sustaining the organization and festival.

Festivals and events offer an integrated approach to creating the vibrant resident communities to which people aspire (Getz, 1997; Hall, 1992; Dunstan, 1994). Residents are the foremost target market of each festival. The ‘buzz’ generated by each festival encourages locals to attend at least one aspect of the event and they are most likely to be a repeat audience. Festivals serve the needs of residents. By providing a local focus they can satisfy specific industry niches. Through volunteerism they offer lifelong learning opportunities and civic partnerships that can be transferred to other aspects of community life. Festivals can be a long-term investment in the aggregate value and principles that underpin that elusive sense of community.

It is significant that visitors feature as an event stakeholder in terms of potential audience for what the local community has developed by way of celebration and recreation. It is the visitor relationship with festivals that organizers and local governments particularly see as opportunities for longevity. Increasing visitor numbers is important to the Casino and Grafton festivals, while Nimbin hosts a festival over a Queensland long weekend. It seems there is a strong case for believing that the thirst for live performance that is authentic and may be a bit risky, unrepeatable and even unpredictable, will be stronger than ever in the 21st century (Morrison, 2000). It is important to note that while visitors are attracted to each of the specific festivals, there are functional attributes of each event and its location that play important roles in the decision making of the attendee ((Jenkins, 1999). The less tangible elements that make up the whole reason for visitors to travel to each destination and participate in each festival are complex.

Figure 2 Visitation mix at study festivals
Visitor satisfaction can depend on the individual’s perception of carrying capacity of festival sites. The scale and size of events elicit positive relationships between the host community and tourism development. Respondents note the tolerance of host communities to tourism. Young people attending festivals in Byron Bay and Nimbin particularly find the crush from large numbers of participants an attractor which has them return annually. Byron Bay’s New Year’s Eve celebrations are now actively de-marketed to reduce the demand for such entertainments amongst outsiders and allow the streets to be reclaimed by residents. The region’s close proximity to the substantial conurbation of South East Queensland impacts significantly on attendance numbers.

**Conclusion**

The active participation by individuals, groups and formal institutions of differing types and levels in community cultural festivals such as the four case studies manifestly informs the longevity of such festivals. The people factor looms overwhelmingly large in these festivals. By allowing key stakeholders significant opportunities to be involved, to collaborate and feel empowered ensures the survival of these events. The outcomes and benefits for those engaged in the preparation, delivery and consumption of the festivals demonstrates that satisfaction with specific relationships has influenced the longevity of each festival. Some partnerships are bi-lateral, others multi-lateral, given the umbrella nature of the annual programs.

The critical factors ensuring successful collaboration include the need for partners to establish an effective communication process ensuring that organisations develop a shared vision and objectives for the festival with which they are engaged. Thorough ongoing monitoring and shared reflection of how the partnership is working by all parties is critical to strengthening and sustaining the relationships between organisations and achieving effective outcomes for each and sustaining the festival to meet the target market’s needs.

The significant features of festival survival evident in the four case studies cluster in three major areas of human endeavour:

Table 2. Features of Festival survival

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent/Community</th>
<th>Festival Organisation</th>
<th>Partnerships</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An initial good idea that finds resonance with the host community;</td>
<td>Consistent delivery of a creative program that allows residents, visiting friends and</td>
<td>Satisfaction by stakeholders who believe they receive a sound return on their</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relations guests and repeat visitors to provide positive word of mouth promotion;</td>
<td>Investment of finance, market access, time, energy, social outcomes;</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>---</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteerism is appreciated and nurtured;</td>
<td>Local infrastructure satisfactorily delivers accessible comfort/security fun for participants and organizers;</td>
<td>A demonstration that the image and identity of the target market is one the existing audience wishes to perpetuate, and new subsets allow for diversification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People with passion involved at all levels;</td>
<td>Organisational structure accommodates new members and develops succession management strategies;</td>
<td>Few barriers exist in terms of regular, informed community communication;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual’s experience, influence as resource offered and tested</td>
<td>Consolidation of organisers’ experience through documented corporate history, garnering of community respect and understanding of values held by residents;</td>
<td>Substantial partnership with local government, through effective communication, offers to leverage external funds, management and promotional support;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear connection of festival with landscape, lifestyle, heritage and economy</td>
<td>Willingness to take risks, respond to new ideas, sustain popular core elements;</td>
<td>Provision of effective links with regional media for editorial, corporate goodwill, sponsorship opportunities, advertising and controversy;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared leadership skills of some individuals;</td>
<td>Provision of an umbrella forum for special interest groups;</td>
<td>Provision of fundraising opportunities;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communal memory generated and consolidated</td>
<td>Interest of organizers to up-skill themselves through training in business and event organising;</td>
<td>Encourage greater visitation and prolong stay in region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation’s objectives met annually</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Derrett, 2005

It is evident that for community cultural festivals to survive attention needs to be paid to the collective political and public will to ensure appropriate resources are mobilised, that risk taking is credible and the partners stay the course. The community’s vision needs to resonate with its
particular circumstances and possibilities, including local assets and constraints while connections among appropriate individuals and organizations are nurtured and consolidated. This can be achieved through the deployment of adequate resources including money; people with available time, expertise, skills, knowledge/information; and social relationships and spaces for networking. For festivals to survive they need time to demonstrate that they are addressing issues over long periods which may mean speeding up processes as opportunities arise, or delaying to a more acceptable timeframe.

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