A tale of two cities: Local government, community events and social capital building

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Abstract

This research project investigates the approaches to investment in the staging of community events, supporting strategies and availability of event management resources by two neighbouring local council authorities in the North Island of New Zealand. The perceived impacts of events on the host community and capacity of events to build social capital is also explored, primarily through data collected from interviews with council event organisers, councillors and non-council event organisers.

The findings of this study indicate that both council authorities are supportive of the delivery of events by council and non-council event organisers, providing human, financial and physical capital to enable the output of events despite their being no explicit legal obligation for local government authorities to do so. Event impacts were considered to be positive in nature, falling into the areas of promotional, social and economic impacts. Social impacts were of primary interest, including community engagement and participation, celebrating community, building and fostering community spirit, giving back to the community and attracting new people to the area.

For both councils, there is scope for greater strategic planning around event delivery both as individual authorities and collaboratively, including the establishment of formal monitoring and evaluation to assess the effectiveness of their events investments in meeting set objectives. There are opportunities to capture meaningful data on the impacts of events in the host communities, as well as the building and maintenance of social capital. Event organisers are primarily interested in providing a community asset through their events; motivated by how their events can enhance

local well-being and contribute to social capital building. Understanding how and if social capital building occurs and is maintained as a result of community events can be further explored together by council and non-council event organisers.

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