



Measuring the economic and social impacts of local authority events

Impacts of local authority events

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Abstract

Purpose – Local authorities use events and festivals within their region to help achieve a diverse range of economic and social objectives. However, the success of these events, which can take up a substantial amount of the tourism, leisure or arts and cultural budget is rarely assessed in a systematic and objective manner. This article describes the importance of measuring the impacts of such events

Design/methodology/approach – The methods for assessing the success of local authority events are trialled through the use of a case study involving two events organised by Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council.

Findings – An evaluation of the methods, after conducting the case study, indicates that the techniques produced robust data that was valuable in planning future events and in securing funding. The relative simplicity of the methods used will help to ensure that similar evaluations can be carried out in-house for little cost for future public events.

Originality/value – This article sets out practical guidelines for undertaking the measurement and evaluation of some of the major impacts of local authority events. Similar methods can be used by other public sector organisations involved in hosting public events.

Keywords Market research, Local authorities, Project evaluation, Leisure activities, Entertainment, Arts

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

This paper considers the use of events by local authorities in non-tourism-based regions and focuses on the post-industrial town of Blackburn in Lancashire. Current literature on event evaluation and impact analysis is reviewed and used to develop a comprehensive bank of survey instruments. The field research undertaken used marketing research survey techniques to evaluate the economic and social impacts of two large events taking place in the summer. Both were largely non-ticketed free events taking place at outdoor locations in and around the town centre.

It is intended that the survey instruments developed and tested in this research serve as a basis for adaptation and use in evaluating other local authority events. By simplifying the process of evaluation and encouraging its use it is hoped to improve current practice and to aid the general understanding of the levels of economic and social impacts of such events.

Local authorities and events

The importance of “place marketing” in post-industrial towns is well documented (Kotler *et al.*, 1999; Morgan, 1996; Getz, 1997) and the role of events within a place marketing strategy has been recognised (Getz, 1997; Harcup, 2000; Hughes, 1999). The



use of events has also been suggested as one of the three main components, along with infrastructure and marketing images, of the local authorities' Unitary Development Plan (Dodds and Joppe, 2001). However, if events are to be used strategically by local government then it is vital that information is gathered during and after each event in a systematic and objective way. Only through thorough evaluation can it be ascertained whether or not the event or events programme is meeting its strategic objectives. These objectives are likely to be a combination of economic and social change.

A recent survey of UK local authorities found that objectives were often stated simply in attendance figures and that evaluation methods were *ad hoc*, unsystematic and often subjective (Thomas and Wood, 2003).

It is accepted, of course, that such events will not always create benefits. There are cases where net economic benefits have resulted from hosting certain events (Jones, 2001) but evidence of economic or social gain for others is often limited (Morpeh, 2002).

Social objectives have become more acceptable since the 1980s when local government began to accept "marketing and the reconstruction of the notion of citizenship or belonging" (Hughes, 1999, p. 121) and in the 1990s an "attitudinal change admitted the inclusion of pleasure as a formal objective of public sector intervention" (Hughes, 1999, p. 123)

However, it is still easier to justify expenditure on civic events through economic data but this can and should be enhanced by quantifiable social benefits or hard facts.

Despite the growing interest in events as a place marketing tool, the provision of entertainment, culture and the arts has traditionally been a non-mandatory requirement for local authorities, (Borrett, 1991), and therefore, may be one of the first expenditure items to be cut in times of tight budgetary control. This implies that some civic events may only be used when there is "spare cash" as a treat for the local people rather than as part of a strategic plan designed to meet clear objectives. This is a missed opportunity to add an important component to urban regeneration and place marketing strategies (Nykiel and Jascott, 1998; Hughes, 1999; Van Gessel, 2000).

This *ad hoc*, non-strategic use of events suggests that local authorities are unlikely to utilise marketing information systems to gather information on the effectiveness of their events and therefore fail to justify the event programme in terms of the positive impact on the local economy, civic pride and quality of life.

Evaluating the impacts of events

The necessity of measuring the impact of events for monitoring, control and evaluation purposes is agreed upon by the majority of authors (Jones, 2001; Bowdin *et al.*, 2001; Getz, 1997; Gnoth and Anwar, 2000; Breen *et al.*, 2001; Dwyer *et al.*, 2000a) but a review of recent literature shows that the methods used and the aspects of the event being measured vary considerably (Thomas and Wood, 2003).

The tendency to focus on economic impacts appears to be an extension of tourism impact research. Economic benefits have been the subject of much discussion and a variety of measurement frameworks have been devised. The measurement of simple visitor expenditure data has been extended by taking into account "destination switching" (Jones, 2001), "net-economic-benefit analysis" (Gnoth and Anwar, 2000), "inscope" expenditure (Burns and Mules, 1986) and the affects of diary or interview recall on expenditure reporting (Breen *et al.*, 2001).

However, it is also recognised that economic measurement alone is not sufficient to evaluate the intangible benefits or impacts of an event (Dwyer *et al.*, 2000b; Bowdin *et al.*, 2001). Jones (2001) suggests that a focus on direct expenditure benefits will produce an incomplete picture, even if “switching” and other negative effects are incorporated.

A comprehensive list of the intangible costs and benefits of events are incorporated into the Dwyer *et al.* framework and are shown in Table I.

Once the impacts to be measured have been identified, a research methodology is required which will gather the information. There are a variety of methods available which need to be selected and combined to produce a complete picture. These range from surveys, focus groups and observation (Watt, 1998; Bowdin *et al.*, 2001; Getz, 1997) to aerial photography to gain attendance figures (Raybould *et al.*, 2000). They also involve a number of stakeholder groups including non-attendees (Getz, 1997). In order to gain robust reliable data, a sampling method which ensures representation of all sub-groups and minimum bias is required (Bearden *et al.*, 1993).

O’Neill *et al.* (1999) suggest that marketing research techniques can be effectively used to understand spectator perceptions of event quality and success and they suggest a combination of skilled participant observers using a systematic framework and more quantitative visitor surveys (O’Neill *et al.*, 1999). Blackburn local authority already had in place a local resident research panel and observers at the event. It was necessary, therefore, to develop the quantitative survey instruments to complement these qualitative techniques.

Dwyer *et al.* (2000b) highlight the essential role of survey instruments in event/convention assessment and forecasting and suggest that these methods have been neglected. However, Fredline and Faulkner (2000) successfully used a three-part survey instrument which included a multi-item attitude Likert scale. This measured the positive and negative impacts of the event being studied and was combined with further survey data to give a fuller picture of the local community’s reactions to the event.

One of the most frequent applications of economic tools to arts, culture, and events has been economic impact analysis. The focus of such studies has been to convince

Benefits	Costs
<p><i>Social benefits:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community development Civic pride Event product extension 	<p><i>Social costs:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disruption to residents’ lifestyles Traffic congestion Noise Vandalism Crowding Crime Property damage
<p><i>Economic benefits:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Long-term promotional benefits Induced development and construction expenditures Additional trade and business development Increased property values 	<p><i>Economic costs:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resident exodus Interruption of normal business Under-utilised infrastructure

Source: Adapted from Dwyer *et al.* (2000a p. 179)

Table I.
Costs and benefits for event evaluation

policy makers and the general public that the arts should be supported not only for their artistic value but also for their economic contributions (McHone and Rungeling, 2000). Dwyer *et al.* (2000b) also suggests that the evaluation “framework” could be used to inform government of the “deservedness” of different events in receiving public funding. These driving forces behind impact analysis – although worthy – understate the importance of social benefits. When evaluated objectively they are not only useful in justifying expenditure on the event but also help in “selling” the area and the event organiser (the local authority) to the community.

Impact studies undertaken by local authorities are usually carried out before the event, and, as policy focus quickly moves on after the event it is rare to find a thoroughgoing *post hoc* cost-benefit evaluation of an event’s success, (Jones, 2001). The importance of studying the longer-term effects of the events is recognised and that these effects will be felt by local people (whether or not they attended) and also community groups and local businesses (Ritchie and Smith, 1991). This would therefore require a system of “follow up” research undertaken at set time intervals.

Although there has been significant research into the economic impact of events and some studies have developed frameworks for measuring more intangible effects (i.e. Fredline and Faulkner, 2000) there has been little published discussion of methods for measuring the intangible social constructs such as civic pride, quality of life and social belonging related to events. These were therefore incorporated into the field research after considering related methods discussed in social science literature (Barnes *et al.*, 2003; Chalmers, 2003; Sirgy and Cornwell, 2001; Thurston and Potvin, 2003).

Development of the survey instrument

The objectives of the survey undertaken were to provide data which could be combined with other information to evaluate two events in terms of net economic gain to the area and the effect, if any, on local people’s attitude to the region. The local authority had processes in place to gather attendance figures, attendee perceptions of the event (face-to-face interviews) and focus group/resident panel qualitative data. However, these tended to be done in an *ad hoc* manner to provide anecdotal evidence for the success of the events. It was, however, suspected that these free civic events did not produce sizable economic benefits to the region but were of value for their social benefits. These benefits needed to be identified, proven and if possible quantified, in order to justify the continuation of the events budget and in order to satisfy the requirements of the Best Value Review framework.

It was determined that a number of survey instruments would be required in order to include all stakeholders and that for ease of analysis these should consist largely of closed questions which could be numerically coded.

Six different questionnaires were developed:

- (1) Pre-event survey of attitudes to the region.
- (2) Survey of event attendees and participants (characteristics, expenditure, motivation, opinions on benefits and problems associated with the event).
- (3) Survey of non-attendees (characteristics, reasons for not attending, opinions on benefits and problems of the event).
- (4) Survey of local businesses (characteristics, effect of event on short and long-term turnover, opinions on benefits and problems of the event).

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- (5) Survey of sponsors, community groups (characteristics, effect of event on future involvement, opinions on benefits and problems of the event).
 - (6) Post-event survey of attitudes to the region.

These required minimal adaptation for each of the two events, with the major difference being the duration of the event.

The development of the main question areas of the survey instrument is detailed below.

Economic impact

Information from attendees, participants, non-attendees and local businesses was used to assess economic impact. These focused on the expenditure of the attendees and participants (how much and on what) and the change in turnover of the businesses in the short and long term. Information was also obtained on “switching” for attendees and non-attendees in the form of how much would they have spent in the area if the event had not been on. This would allow for a net expenditure gain or loss to be calculated. The questions used are shown in Figure 1.

The recall method of obtaining expenditure data was chosen, even though previous research comparing diary and recall methods concluded that, despite low response rates, diary methods were more accurate (Faulkner and Raybould, 1995; Breen *et al.*, 2001). This method was thought suitable as expenditure for these surveys was being gathered on the day of the event by an interviewer. Therefore, the inability to remember details of expenditure was unlikely to cause a significant problem and also ensured a complete sample.

Benefits and problems associated with the event

In order to assess the public’s perceptions of the impacts of the events, lists of possible benefits and problems associated with events generally were developed using the findings of a number of previous studies (Dwyer *et al.*, 2000a, b; Mihalik and Simonetta, 1998; Jones, 2001) and discussion with the local authority. These were scrutinised by event practitioners and tested on a small sample and after some modifications the lists satisfactorily represented likely perceived advantages and disadvantages. An “other” category was included in case there were any omissions.

These lists were adapted for the different groups being questioned (Table II) and were presented as statements with a five-point Likert response scale.

Motivations

In order to assess the reasons for attending the event or not, the research utilised the findings of Backman *et al.*’s (1995) study into event tourism motivations. These were added to and modified after discussion with the local authority and event practitioners and again an “other” category was included in case there were any omissions.

The attendees were asked to rank the reasons in order of importance and the non-attendees were asked to select one main reason only. The choices are shown in Table III.

Attitudes to the Blackburn region

Lee *et al.*’s (1997) discussion of attitudes to event sponsorship can be adapted to reflect the relationship between the local authority definition of the event and

Attendees and Participants

Please can you estimate how much your group/family spent on the following items during your outing to Arts in the Park.
(include all expenditure related to attending the event e.g. staying in Blackburn for a meal/drink afterwards etc.)

Items	Spent on Saturday £	Spent on Sunday £
A. Food (restaurants, take-aways, snacks etc.)		
B. Drink (soft drinks, alcohol, tea/coffee etc.)		
C. Transport (bus fare, taxi, train, petrol, parking etc.)		
D. Gifts/Souvenirs (toys, crafts, programmes etc.)		
E. Other items (please specify)		
F. <i>Estimated total cost of day out</i>		

Please can you estimate how much your group/family would spend in Blackburn on a *normal weekend* ?

Saturday	£
Sunday	£

Local businesses

How did ‘Arts in the Park’ affect your turnover on the days of the event?
(tick one box only)

Saturday	Large increase <input type="checkbox"/>	Increase <input type="checkbox"/>	No change <input type="checkbox"/>	Decrease <input type="checkbox"/>	Large decrease <input type="checkbox"/>
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Sunday	Large increase <input type="checkbox"/>	Increase <input type="checkbox"/>	No change <input type="checkbox"/>	Decrease <input type="checkbox"/>	Large decrease <input type="checkbox"/>
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How do you foresee the longer term effects of ‘Arts in the Park’ on your turnover?

Large increase <input type="checkbox"/>	Increase <input type="checkbox"/>	No change <input type="checkbox"/>	Decrease <input type="checkbox"/>	Large decrease <input type="checkbox"/>
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Non-attendees

Did the ‘Arts in the Park’ festival have any affect on how you spent your weekend?

Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
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If yes please explain why.

Figure 1.
Main questions relating to economic expenditure

Benefits	Problems	Impacts of local authority events
<i>Local residents</i>		
Money to the town	Crowds	
New visitors to the town	Strangers	
Opportunity for family fun	Traffic	
Good image for Blackburn	Parking	
Bringing community together	Safety on streets	
Pride in the area	Litter	
Opportunity for new experiences	Vandalism	
Something to look forward to	Other crime	
Investment in the local area		
<i>Local businesses</i>		
Money to the town	Demand business can't meet	
New visitors to the town	Traffic congestion	
Good image for Blackburn	Parking problems	
Bringing community together	Litter	
Pride in the area	Vandalism	
New customers for your business	Other crime	
Non-local customers for your business	Putting-off regular customers	
Greater awareness of your business		
Investment in the local area		
<i>Community groups</i>		
Community development	Funding	
Good image for Blackburn	Traffic congestion	
Bringing community together	Parking problems	
Pride in the area	Litter	
Good publicity for your organisation	Vandalism	
Funding for your organisation	Other crime	
More involvement in your organisation	Cost of involvement	
Awareness of your organisation		
Investment in the local area		
Something to look forward to		

Table II.
Statements used in assessing perception of the impacts of the event

Attendees	Non-attendees	
Relaxing entertainment	Didn't know about it	
Do something special	Didn't interest me	
Be part of community	Other commitments that day	
Support local events	Too busy	
Meeting people	Waste of money	
Spending time as a family	Transport/parking problems	
Friendly atmosphere		
Have fun		
Eating & drinking		
Active involvement in the event		
Cultural improvement		

Table III.
Motivation response choices for attending/not attending

consumer-related attitudinal constructs. This then helps to identify the areas of attitude which need to be measured in order to assess the event's impact. The three main constructs which could be measured are the attitudes towards the event itself, the attitudes to the local authority as provider/sponsor of the event and the effect of the event on attitudes towards the region.

The local authority were evaluating attitudes towards the event using the resident panel and qualitative interviews, therefore the survey only included a short section to provide quantitative data to enhance the other methods (Figure 2).

The second attitudinal construct, "attitude towards the local authority", would only have been worthy of research if one of the main objectives had been to improve residents' perceptions of the local authority and if they had therefore clearly branded the event. This was not the case and was therefore omitted from the survey.

From discussions with the regeneration department in the local authority it became clear that an important objective for local government generally, and therefore for the events, was improving local people's (and the wider community's) perceptions of the Blackburn region. From existing literature (Harcup, 2000; De Bres and Davis, 2001; Hughes, 1999) and further discussion with the local authority, it was decided that these attitudes could best be measured by the construct of "civic pride".

Once the construct of civic pride had been defined, an item pool was generated using previous research (mainly qualitative) conducted by the local authority. The items were based on adjectives describing the Blackburn region and put in the form of a simple statement. A five-point Likert scale was then selected for ease of response and analysis. This initial item pool consisted of 29 statements which were evaluated by an expert panel (local authority personnel and academics) resulting in seven positive and seven negative statements (Figure 3).

The scale was tested for validity and reliability and found to be a robust measurement instrument (Wood, 2002).

Sampling method and survey administration

Sample sizes for each part of the survey were determined by a number of factors. Initially it was hoped to undertake a probability sample using a 95 per cent confidence level with a 5 per cent margin of error calculated assuming a "worst case" proportional split of $p = 0.5$. This gave a total sample size of 384. However, as there were a number of subgroups (attendees, local businesses, non-attendees, sponsors) valid samples would require a similar number of each, which was not achievable with the resources available.

The sample for local businesses, community groups and sponsors could be reduced using a "finite population correction factor" as the calculated sample size was more than 5 per cent of the total population (McDaniel and Gates, 1998). This gave revised samples of 50 local businesses and 25 community groups (to include all sponsors).

Have you enjoyed the 'Arts in the Park' festival ?
(please tick one box only)

Very much	5	To some extent	4	Don't know	3	Not much	2	Not at all	1
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Why ? Please give reasons for your answer to Q1.

Figure 2.
Attitude towards the event

For each of the following statements about Blackburn please state whether you strongly agree, agree, have no opinion, disagree or strongly disagree.
(Tick one box only for each statement.)

Blackburn	I strongly agree	I agree	I'm not sure/no opinion	I disagree	I strongly disagree
<i>..is a good place to live</i>	5	4	3	2	1
<i>..is thriving</i>	5	4	3	2	1
<i>..is ordinary</i>	1	2	3	4	5
<i>..is poor</i>	1	2	3	4	5
<i>..is improving</i>	5	4	3	2	1
<i>..is prosperous</i>	5	4	3	2	1
<i>..is declining</i>	1	2	3	4	5
<i>..is exciting</i>	5	4	3	2	1
<i>..is unwelcoming</i>	1	2	3	4	5
<i>..is depressing</i>	1	2	3	4	5
<i>..has a strong sense of community</i>	5	4	3	2	1
<i>..is unattractive</i>	1	2	3	4	5
<i>..is supportive</i>	5	4	3	2	1
<i>..is unfriendly</i>	1	2	3	4	5

Figure 3.
Multi-item scale to measure civic pride

These were to be selected at random using local business directories and community group listings.

The sample size for the attitude surveys, non-attendees and attendees were set as large as possible given the resources available. These were 150 for each attitude survey, 100 attendees/participants and 50 non-attendees. As the resulting samples were no longer large enough to produce a representative sample if chosen at random, the sampling method was adapted to include quotas based on the age, gender and ethnicity characteristics of the Blackburn region.

The four attitude surveys were undertaken by telephone interview before and after each event. Numbers were randomly selected from telephone directories and the

householder screened on the quota characteristics. The interviewers continued this process until the quota was filled.

Non-attendees were surveyed immediately after the event by again using random telephone calls combined with a quota and the initial screening question of whether or not they had attended.

The survey of attendees/participants was undertaken at the event with face-to-face interviews. Interviewers were again asked to select respondents based on a quota of characteristics.

These sample sizes and methods, although not ideal, were made as valid as possible within the given constraints and therefore provided a practicable process for any local authority to follow.

The response options on the questionnaires were all numerically pre-coded to allow for easier data entry onto pre-prepared spreadsheets. The few open questions were entered verbatim and coded by the researcher where necessary.

Complete samples were obtained for all the questionnaires except the survey of sponsors/community groups. These organisations proved difficult to contact within the time allocated and did not therefore provide a large enough sample to be suitable for analysis.

Results of the event impact survey

The results of the data analysis from the five usable sets of questionnaires were presented to the local authority mainly in tabular and graphical format with brief explanations. This information could then be incorporated into the event evaluation report. The main results from these reports are given below, to demonstrate the usefulness of the data gathered.

Economic impact

Event 1: Arts in the Park. At the event, 60 per cent of attendees spent less than £10 per person. However, 32 per cent spent more than £20; 67 per cent of expenditure was on food and drink which will have had an impact on local and temporary businesses providing these services.

The total expenditure on each day of the event did not differ significantly, with only slightly more being spent on day one than on day two. However, more people spent nothing on the first day than on the second day.

If not at the event, 72 per cent of respondents would have been at home and 20 per cent would have been outside the Blackburn area. Therefore 92 per cent of people attending the event would not normally have been in Blackburn on those days.

The information above was used to calculate the difference in expenditure for those people who would normally have spent in Blackburn if not attending the event. This could possibly be a loss in revenue to the town if attendees would have spent more on a normal shopping trip to Blackburn and needs to be taken into account to gain an accurate description of the economic impact of the event.

On average, those people attending the event spent £4.50 more than they would have spent in Blackburn and those who would not normally have been spending in Blackburn brought in an additional average spend of £13.27 per person.

Putting these two together and weighting them using 8 per cent and 92 per cent gives the total gain in expenditure to Blackburn due to the event, per person. This

figure, £12.57, can be multiplied by the estimated attendance figures to give an overall value for the increase in money spent in Blackburn during the event.

All the non-attendees questioned stated that Arts in the Park had not had an effect on how they spent their weekend and did not therefore prevent them from undertaking their normal activities. There was, therefore, no need to adjust for this potential loss of spending in the area.

Businesses in the area stated that the event had a negligible effect on turnover despite the increased spending reported by attendees.

Event 2: The Fiesta. The majority of people (78 per cent) spent less than £5, with 21 per cent of people enjoying a free day out with no expenditure.

Most of the expenditure went on food, however, a relatively high percentage (21 per cent) was on gifts. Spending tailed off over the four days with 46 per cent occurring on day one.

Although 51 per cent of attendees would have been at home if the event were not taking place, 22 per cent would have been spending on shopping or other entertainment in the Blackburn area.

On average, each attendee who would normally have been spending in Blackburn would have spent £5.84 more than they did at the Fiesta. However, this was only 22 per cent of the total number of attendees. The attendees who would not have spent in Blackburn if not at the Fiesta spent an average of £4.80 per person.

Using the weightings of 22 per cent and 78 per cent, the net loss or gain in expenditure per person can be calculated. This figure, a net gain of £2.46, can be multiplied by the estimated attendance figures to give an overall value for the increase in money spent in Blackburn during the event.

All the non-attendees questioned stated that the Fiesta had not had an effect on how they spent their weekend and did not therefore prevent them from undertaking their normal activities.

Although the majority of businesses stated that the Fiesta had not had an effect on turnover, a significant percentage reported a decrease in turnover on the first three days of the event. However, this needs to be offset by the number who reported an increase and the net gain in spending in Blackburn reported by the event attendees.

Both events, therefore, had a positive net impact on expenditure in the Blackburn area. However, the impact was more substantial for the two-day Arts in the Park festival despite this being the shorter duration event (the Fiesta was over four days).

The lesser spending levels at the Fiesta may reflect the income levels of those attending and therefore have provided the benefit of access to arts and entertainment for those social groups who would not normally have had the opportunity.

Benefits and problems

Arts in the Park. The Arts in the Park attendees agreed with all the benefits listed. The benefits which scored highest were “good image for Blackburn” (85 per cent agreed), “something to look forward to” (80 per cent) and “pride in the area” (76 per cent). Those scoring least were “money to the town” and “investment in the area”. There was very little agreement with the problems caused, with the exception of “litter” (30 per cent agreed this was a problem).

The majority of non-attendees agreed that the event brought all the benefits listed, with 82 per cent of people agreeing or agreeing strongly that the event promoted “a

good image for Blackburn". The majority of respondents disagreed that the event added to the problems listed. The one exception to this was litter, where 40 per cent agreed this was a problem.

Most businesses agree with the benefits brought by Arts in the Park except for the direct benefits to the business. The most benefit was seen as improving the image of Blackburn and developing community and pride. Most businesses disagreed that the problems listed were associated with the event

The Fiesta. The Fiesta attendees agreed with all the benefits listed. The benefits which scored highest were "good image for Blackburn" (81 per cent agreed), "community together" (72 per cent) and "pride in the area" (71 per cent). Those scoring least were "money to the town" and "investment in the area". There was very little agreement with the problems caused, with the exception of "litter" (37 per cent agreed this was a problem) and traffic (32 per cent).

The majority of non-attendees agree with all benefits listed, with 72 per cent agreeing the Fiesta was good for the image of Blackburn and 76 per cent agreeing that it provided an opportunity for family fun. Most agreed that the Fiesta added to some of the problems listed, particularly traffic, parking and litter. They disagreed that the Fiesta added to less safety on the streets and other crime.

Most businesses agree with the benefits brought by the Fiesta except for the direct benefits to the business. Most benefit is seen as the image of Blackburn and new visitors to the area but all other non-direct benefits also score highly. New customers and non-local customers show 36 per cent and 40 per cent agreement.

Most businesses disagree that the problems listed were associated with the event. Litter, parking and traffic were, however, seen as the most problematic.

Therefore, the benefits perceived by the attendees, non-attendees and businesses tend to be social rather than economic.

Motivation for attendance

Arts in the Park. Doing "something special" was most often ranked as the most important reason for attending (24 per cent of attendees) followed by "relaxing entertainment". "Support local events" was ranked most important by 16 per cent of attendees and also least important by another 16 per cent of attendees, perhaps suggesting two distinct audience segments. "Being with the family" was ranked least important by 16 per cent and most important by no one.

In terms of audience satisfaction the event was a success, with 100 per cent of respondents stating that they enjoyed the event "very much" and no negative comments or complaints recorded in the survey.

Of the non-attendees, 52 per cent of respondents did not attend due to being busy or other commitments. Only 10 per cent had not heard about the event and only 2 per cent thought it would be a waste of money. However, 31 per cent did not attend as it did not interest them.

Only 40 per cent of the non-attendees stated that they would not attend again next year; 29 per cent said they would go and 31 per cent were undecided

These perceptions of the event have implications for the way in which the event is promoted in future years and for the social inclusion objective.

The Fiesta. The reason for attending ranked most important by 21 per cent of respondents was "being with the family" although this was also ranked least important

by 15 per cent of respondents. This suggests two distinct segments. "Relaxing entertainment" also ranked highly, with 18 per cent of attendees stating this as their most important reason for attending. "Culture" was ranked least important by 23 per cent of attendees.

Only 2 per cent of respondents did not enjoy the event, with 56 per cent enjoying it "very much" and 37 per cent "to some extent". However, the written comments on the event were overwhelmingly positive (95 per cent).

Of the non-attendees only 8 per cent of respondents did not know about the event and only 16 per cent did not attend because it did not interest them. The majority of non-attendance (62 per cent) was due to other commitments and being too busy. No one saw the event as a waste of money. Only 38 per cent of non-attendees stated that they would not attend again next year; 34 per cent said they would go and 31 per cent were undecided.

The non-attendance reasons have implications for the timing of the event. Many people were out of the area on holiday, as the Fiesta took place during traditional industry shutdown weeks.

Civic pride

This research used one questionnaire administered at four different times to gauge changes in attitudes to the Blackburn area. Although some of the reported changes can be accounted for by the two events it is recognised that many other factors such as weather, media coverage etc. may also have affected the findings.

The multi-item scale was coded numerically and summated for each respondent to give an overall score for civic pride level. These scores were then grouped into three categories and plotted over the four time periods.

These findings suggest that Arts in the Park may have had a significant effect on attitudes to the area as negative feelings decreased after the event and positive feelings increased. Unfortunately the strength of attitude change was not mirrored by the Fiesta. However, the positive effect of the combined events may have prevented a return to the pre-event more negative attitudes. This could suggest that a sustained programme of events may maintain positive changes in attitude.

In order to check for validity in the civic pride measurement, the survey also asked for open comments on feelings about the area. These comments were then coded into the categories shown below.

These findings again show a positive change in attitude after each event and also suggest that the effect is short term. The difference between the effect of Arts in the Park and the Fiesta are minimal.

The two measures show similar patterns of increased numbers of residents with positive attitudes and decreased numbers with negative attitudes after each event. Unfortunately this tends to be reversed a month after the event. Although the overall trend appears to be for a positive change in attitude as pre-both event levels are not regained. The responses to feelings about Blackburn are generally more negative than those recorded using the civic pride scale, although the events swing these from an overwhelmingly negative majority to a slight positive majority.

The findings from the application of the multi-item scale support the case for a sustained programme of events in order to build and maintain higher levels of civic pride and perhaps, in the long term, produce an attitude change in local residents and

the wider community. These findings complement those of Mihalik and Simonetta (1998) whose longitudinal study found growing support for repeated events and Fredline and Faulkner (2000) who found that residents reactions became less negative to recurring events over time.

Conclusions

The research was undertaken to provide a conceptual and practical framework for identifying and quantifying the economic and social impacts of community focused events organised by local authorities. The case study application of the research monitored the perceived quality of the events, the effect, if any, on civic pride and attitude to the area and the change in expenditure during the events and in the longer term. It is anticipated that the framework presented will be used to complement the quality control procedures laid down in the Best Value Framework and that the methods used will become part of a systematic and consistent procedure for ensuring the effectiveness of public sector led events in the future.

The practical application of the framework was tested through application to two events within Blackburn. The findings of these surveys were used as a basis for strengthening the support for the events programme within the Council, for securing future funding and for improving the quality of the events offered.

The usefulness of this type of evaluation is demonstrated through comments made by the marketing and regeneration manager for Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council (2001):

The research was needed to demonstrate that the events programme contributed to the regeneration of the borough and demonstrated real social inclusion and economic benefits as well as "value for money". A key objective was also to secure funding for future years. The events were funded from the Council's core budget, which is under ever increasing pressure to cut costs and make efficiencies. Expenditure on this type of activity is naturally seen as luxury, therefore, real and tangible benefits needed to be shown and measured.

Although this was the second year a major programme of events was delivered, no research had been previously undertaken either to demonstrate a demand or to measure impacts. However, in their favour, the events were now fairly well established in the town's diary and there would be an expectation from residents that these would happen again next year.

Although staff, management and politicians involved in the delivery and championing of them were convinced of their positive impact on the regeneration of the borough, data was not available to back this up.

The benefits are and will be numerous but essentially it gives us a starting point for future research and a good basis to support the events programme short term/long term. It has also made us analyse in greater depth the true reasons and benefits for delivering the programme and given them a validity. The research is also helpful for putting bids together for external finding.

We are keen to use these methods again to build up a picture of what we're doing and along with the comments from people attending the events and hope to extend the research to the other events within the area.

Limitations and further research

This paper has presented a proposed framework for assessing the benefits and negative impacts of local authority events. In developing this framework a number of

limitations were recognised. First, the social impact of changing attitudes towards the area is only one of many. The research does not assess other aspects such as levels of community cohesion and social belonging although similar scales could be developed for these if identified as key objectives for the event. Second, it is recognised that any attempt to quantify intangible social effects will be prone to some error. Although this can be minimised by reliability and validity testing there will always be non-controllable factors influencing the results. Third, although this paper encourages objective, unbiased evaluation of the impacts of local authority events it can be foreseen that political agendas could drive the focus of such measurement and the use of the findings.

Although the case study local authority used the results to justify future funding of events, it is likely that application in other areas will show largely negative economic impacts leading to the cessation of that event. Indeed, further application of the methods presented have shown that in some cases economic gain for local business communities leads to social loss for residents and that a focus on social objectives may mean that economic opportunities cannot be capitalised on (Wood and Thomas, 2004).

This demonstrates the need to further refine the methods presented here to ensure that economic and social impacts are measured and that both qualitative and quantitative evidence is provided. The application of the framework to a variety of types of local authority event in differing regions should provide an insight into the determinants of levels and types of impact.

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