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Article *in* Journal of Planning Education and Research · March 2009

DOI: 10.1177/0739456X09354382

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Journal of Planning Education and Research 2010 29: 280 originally published online 21 December 2009
DOI: 10.1177/0739456X09354382

Journal of Planning Education and Research
29(3) 280–293

DOI: 10.1177/0739456X09354382
http://jpe.sagepub.com

Cultural Festivals and Economic Development in Nonmetropolitan Australia

Chris Gibson,[1] Gordon Waitt,[2] Jim Walmsley,[3] and John Connell[4]

Abstract

Examining a database of 2,856 festivals in Australia and survey results from 480 festival organizers, we consider how nonmetropolitan cultural festivals provide constraints as well as opportunities for economic planners. Cultural festivals are ubiquitous, impressively diverse, and strongly connected to local communities through employment, volunteerism, and participation. Despite cultural festivals being mostly small-scale, economically modest affairs, geared around community goals, the regional proliferation of cultural festivals produces enormous direct and indirect economic benefits. Amidst debates over cultural and political issues (such as identity, exclusion, and elitism), links between cultural festivals and economic development planning are explored.

Keywords

cultural festivals, economic development, regional Australia, planning, the arts, music

Introduction

Following the worldwide popularity of "creative city" ideas (and their "star" authors such as Richard Florida and Charles Landry), art and culture are increasingly—if belatedly—appealing to local planners and regional economic development policy makers (Evans 2001; Gibson and Klocker 2004; Gibson 2008). Accompanying ever-accumulating studies of the institutional and spatial economic character of the arts and cultural industries (e.g., Dahlström and Hermelin [2007]) are more polemic critiques of overblown or inaccurate claims of culture-led development (Peck 2005; Miles 2005); the manner in which culture and creativity have been commodified and neoliberalized (Zukin 1995; Gibson and Klocker 2005; Hetherington 2007; Christophers 2008), the linking of art and culture to place boosterism (e.g., Boyle [1997]; Dovey and Sandercock [2002]); problematic transformations in places, including gentrification (e.g., MacLeod [2002]) and the homogenization or "Disneyification" of built landscapes (McGuirk, Winchester, and Dunn 1998). Critics ask related questions about what elements of "culture," or which individuals within local "artistic" scenes, are favored by policy makers and planners (Luckman, Gibson, and Lea 2008). The danger exists of incorporating only those elements of art and culture deemed "safe" for wider consumption, that were profitable elsewhere (ignoring local assets, conditions, and limitations), or seen to "positively" reflect on a place's "brand" image. Against this tension, a tempting and understandable reaction from some in the arts community is to argue that culture ought to be protected from commercial incursions, or promoted for its intrinsic, human values—irrespective of economic considerations.

In this article, we discuss one example of the link between culture and economic development—cultural festivals in nonmetropolitan Australia—in light of the above debates. Cultural festivals are a vibrant part of societies everywhere—from traditional Aboriginal societies to London's Notting Hill Carnival; from Santa Clarita, California's annual cowboy festival (held on the film set to HBO's hit series, *Deadwood*) to Sydney's Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras (Jackson 1988; Neuenfeldt 1995; Quinn 2005). With sometimes lengthy heritages, cultural festivals have become increasingly popular and more numerous since the 1960s (Picard and Robinson 2006). Especially large festivals have become cornerstones of economic development campaigns framed around tourism, especially when seeking to attract particular demographic groups with high disposable incomes (Gibson and Connell 2005); and in contexts as diverse as Florida in summer and Edinburgh, Scotland in winter, festivals have been connected

Initial submission, June 2008; revised submissions, April and October 2009; final acceptance, October 2009

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to attempts to generate economic activity in otherwise quiet "off seasons" (Lynch et al. 2003; Wardrop and Robertson 2004).

Cultural festivals are also increasingly regarded by arts policy makers as important to the incubation and sustenance of vernacular arts industries. They often arise from nascent cultural scenes, with modest beginnings, and provide early opportunities for musicians, dancers, actors, and comedians moving from amateur to professional status (Gibson 2007). This is particularly the case in smaller towns outside major metropolitan cities where infrastructure for performance may be absent and audiences tiny or sparse. In rural, coastal, and small towns outside major cities in Australia (much like in the United States and in parts of Western Europe), wider debates have emerged over the geographically uneven distribution of investment, impacts of economic restructuring, and who wins and loses from spatial differentials in government funding (Pritchard and McManus 2000; Beer, Maude, and Pritchard 2003). Into this mix, cultural festivals appear a positive, organically generated activity with potential to reverse urban–rural polarization (Gibson and Davidson 2004).

Of course, as with the literature on creative industries, critiques can be equally leveled at cultural festivals: since the original World Fairs in the nineteenth century, festivals have fed civic tendencies toward boosterism (e.g., Jarvis [1994]; Waitt [2001, 2008]); have served the interests of the elite and tend toward "safe" culture (Waterman 1998); or enabled the commodification or "packaging" of local culture for tourists naïve to the potential for mutations or fabrications (Robinson and Connell 2008). More generally, as an officially endorsed event, festivals always have the capacity to selectively seek and represent some elements of local cultures and identities, while evicting others, intensifying social exclusion—inadvertently or otherwise (Atkinson and Laurier 1998). In various ways, local social tensions may be refracted through festivals (Gibson and Davidson 2004). Furthermore, as part of the broader entrepreneurial, neoliberalization of contemporary government, festivals are also used as justification for large building projects, and changes in planning laws (Hall 1997, 2006; Muňoz 2006), even when the actual extent of monetary benefits gained is questionable.

Festivals as Cultural-Economic Phenomena

Against this backdrop of opportunity and critique, this article explores cultural festivals in nonmetropolitan Australia. The concern here is neither to unproblematically suggest that cultural festivals are panacea to all manner of economic woes, nor to write off cultural festivals as mere "pastiche," commercialism, or avenue for elitism. Festivals capture many of the broader contradictions and tensions that emerge when the arts and culture are more fully imagined within economic spheres. They are *always* open to be critiqued in political economic and cultural terms. Yet as discussed in more detail below, cultural festivals are an underacknowledged and yet potentially significant component of strategies to develop grassroots economies. Cultural festivals may be more or less lucrative in terms of total monetary gains; but cumulatively—from their sheer ubiquity and proliferation—they diversify local economies, insure against market fluctuations (because they are mostly nonprofit and involve nonmonetary transactions and resource-sharing), and improve local networks, connecting volunteers, diverse paid workers, and local institutions. They also frequently advance laudable goals of inclusion, community, and celebration.

Indeed, that these purportedly "noneconomic" goals often shape employment policies, management philosophies, and the nature of local networks generated, means that cultural festivals foreground ethical decision making as part of their very "economic" constitution. Irrespective of their immediate fiscal returns, cultural festivals by their nature invite local stakeholders to consider and debate the qualitative nature of local economic transactions and exchanges, and in doing so open up opportunities for communities to wrest control of how economic narratives are articulated in their localities (Cameron and Gerrard 2008). This is particularly pertinent in nonmetropolitan areas, where dominant narratives about the economy frequently portray small communities as vulnerable, or at the whim of metropolitan decision makers (Gibson et al. 2008). Involvement by many local people in the staging, management, and entertainment at cultural festivals produces opportunities for counternarratives that position local actors as central to economic activities, rather than marginal or ignored.

Rather than conceptualizing "culture" and "economy" as intrinsically separate realms, cultural festivals are discussed here as always simultaneously "cultural" and "economic" phenomena (cf. Gibson and Kong [2005]; McCann [2002]). Even when not regarded by arts practitioners as "commercial," cultural festivals are economic in the broadest sense because they have audiences; use buildings, facilities, and equipment; and entail some kind of service or entertainment provision. Conversely, the entire viability of cultural festivals is jeopardized when those with purely mercenary interests downplay or ignore debates about social impact, elitism, inclusiveness, or cultural appropriateness (Burr 2006). The case of cultural festivals shows the problems of ideals to "protect" art and culture from commercial incursions, to ignore logistical and management issues; but also to ignore social and cultural goals (or critiques therein).

While a extensive literature on the various social, cultural and economic elements of festivals does now exist (see Hall [1992]; Getz [1997]; Waitt [2008] for comprehensive reviews), the research from which this article stems was motivated by the perception of key shortfalls (some quite basic) in the academic work on cultural festivals to date. The first was the preference in the literature for mega-events such as Olympic Games and other hallmark events (Hall 1997; Waitt 2001). Underexplored in the literature, small

community cultural events require theorization cognizant of their challenges and circumstances (De Bres and Davis 2001). The second concern was the specific conditions faced by festivals in nonmetropolitan Australia, outside the state capital cities where most people live. An urban bias infuses festivals research (Waitt 2008), circumscribing the applicability of insights for festivals in rural and regional areas (though see Whitford [2009]). Place matters enormously when examining links between culture and economic development (Gibson 2008). The context here is that rural Australia is much maligned in the domestic media as in "economic crisis" and facing environmental hardships such as drought and climate change (Gorman-Murray, Darian-Smith, and Gibson 2008). While rural and nonmetropolitan festivals have gained some attention academically (e.g., Long and Perdue 1990; De Bres and Davis 2001; Higham and Ritchie 2001; Chhabra, Sills, and Cubbage 2003; Brennan-Horley, Connell, and Gibson 2007; Gorman-Murray, Waitt, and Gibson 2008), their treatment pales in comparison to that lavished on urban festivals.

Lastly, although in Australia there is plenty of anecdotal knowledge that festivals are increasingly important for rural and nonmetropolitan communities, beyond scholarly examination of economic impacts or cultural meanings at individual events, surprisingly little is known (if at all) about (a) their geographical and numerical extent; (b) their cumulative (rather than individual) significance; and (c) crucially, whether or not (and how) cultural festivals are being incorporated into formal regional development and planning strategies outside Australia's major cities. While the "science" of event impact assessment is now well developed (Getz 2005), prior emphasis has overwhelmingly been on understanding the monetary balance sheet of festivals as the indicator of economic "success" (or otherwise) *par excellence*. In this article (and the wider project from which it stemmed), what constitutes "the economic" is purposefully broadened to reflect contemporary debates in planning and economic geography about *qualitative* shits in the nature of economic transactions (Gibson-Graham 2008). The importance of cooperative, unpaid, and volunteer labor is increasingly recognized, as is the emergence of systems of exchange including the informal sector, the "gift economy," local trading and barter schemes. Rather than seeing all people as *homo economicus*, working to machinic rule as profit-seeking individuals in an entity called "the Economy," qualitative economic research traces a "single phenomenological plane" (Amin and Thrift 2007, 145)—in other words, begins empirically with economic phenomena and traces through cultural research the relationships that unfold in situ between actors, nonhuman agents, and institutions. Adopting this perspective,

> . . . the economy in all its spheres, from production and consumption to distribution, regulation and circulation, has to be seen as an act of many goals, from meeting material needs and making a profit or earning a living, through to seeking symbolic satisfaction, pleasure and power. (Amin and Thrift 2007, 145)

Prior to our research, literatures on festivals were yet to reconsider their economic development potential using this kind of qualitative epistemological framework.

Responding to these perceived shortcomings in literatures on festivals, the aims of an Australian Federal Government's Australian Research Council (ARC)–funded project were: (1) to profile the extent of nonmetropolitan festivals; (2) to assess if festivals acts as a mechanism to encourage regional economic revitalization (with "the economic" interpreted more broadly as suggested above); and (3) to examine the social role of festivals in helping attendees make senses of place. To address the special issue theme, this article discusses the first two aims. The first enables a better picture of the extent, type, and diversity of cultural festivals in nonmetropolitan Australia. The second gauges if and how festivals have become part of the fields of planning and local economic development policy making. The conclusion to this article reflects on what these observed trends might mean for wider debates about the links between culture and the economy.

Method

This research project was undertaken in three phases: the first was the compilation of a database of festivals, for three Australian states—Tasmania, Victoria, and New South Wales—including information on the festival's name, aims, organizers, location, marketing material, date, and frequency. Only three states were chosen for this study because limitations of research funding meant that a full national study could not be mounted. Nonetheless, inter-state comparison was deemed preferable to gauge whether differences in cultural and arts policy, tourism promotion, and event regulation affected the extent of festivals. The three states were selected given their differences in size and population, and proximity to each other—constituting the southeastern states of Australia.

Festivals were located mainly by using Internet search engines, and running detailed queries by keyword for every local government area (LGA) in the three states (in Australia, LGAs are the local level of government spanning all areas—equivalent to "counties" in England and the United States). Official local council calendars of events were located for every LGA where one was available, and festivals from them included where appropriate. Also, tailored keyword searches were run for niches in all states (e.g., for particular styles of music), for common festival types (e.g., food and wine festivals) and for more specific activities associated with demographic groups, subcultures, and other leisure activities (e.g., "hot rod" car shows, seniors festivals, gay and lesbian festivals, goth festivals, a long list of specific sports festivals by type of sport). In addition to these methods, festivals were

also located via print media (including regular scanning of metropolitan broadsheets), regional tourism brochures, and festival-specific flyers.

Much debate ensued amongst the research team over what constituted a "festival." A clear demarcation was made between infrequent, usually annual events, which could be included (pending other criteria), and regular, recurrent events held often through a calendar year (such as weekly sports meets), which were not included. Conferences, conventions, and trade exhibitions were excluded. Events that were likely to have taken place anyway, irrespective of their being branded as a "special event," were generally not included (examples of this were live music nights held at regular live music venues, but billed as "special" in some way purely for marketing purposes). To qualify for inclusion as a festival, an event had to meet at least one (and preferably more than one) of the following criteria: use of the word "festival" in the event name; it being an irregular, one-off, annual, or biannual event; emphasis on celebrating, promoting, or exploring some aspect of local culture, or being an unusual point of convergence for people with a given cultural activity, or of a specific subcultural identification.

A total of 2,856 cultural festivals were identified by this methodology (211 for Tasmania, 1,189 for Victoria, 1,456 for New South Wales [NSW]), and were thus included in the database. Subsequent to this, database entries for each festival were geocoded—enabling results to be mapped visually in a Geographic Information System (GIS). This latter manipulation of the database enabled observation of the spatial extent and patterns of festivals in nonmetropolitan Australia (figure 1), and comparative analysis with geographical variables such as distance from capital cities, and local population density. This provided important added-value to the database—enabling analysis of the extent of festivals to be interrogated at different geographical scales.

From the records of 2,856 festivals, the second phase of the project ensued. This was a detailed survey, sent to festival organizers where an identifiable organization or individual's name, postal or email address was publicly available (and thus included in our database). The total number of festivals satisfying these conditions was 1,718 (table 1). The eight-page survey sought to inform all three of the project's main aims, and specifically the extent to which festivals have been incorporated into economic development and regeneration strategies. It asked organizers a range of questions on their event's aims, history, crowd size, stalls and stages, the geography of attendees and inputs, target markets, organizational structure, employment, volunteerism, sponsorship and advertising, community attitudes, and estimated economic impacts. Where postal addresses were available (in 1,027 cases), organizers were sent a paper-copy of the survey, with explanation cover sheet and a return prepaid envelope. Where only email addresses were available for organizers (691 cases), they were sent an email explanation letter, requesting that the survey be completed online (with identical questions and format). Reminder letters were sent via both means to festival organizers after four weeks. A total of 480 completed surveys were received from festival organizers (table 1). This represented a 28 percent response rate overall (38 percent for paper surveys sent, versus 13 percent for email requests).

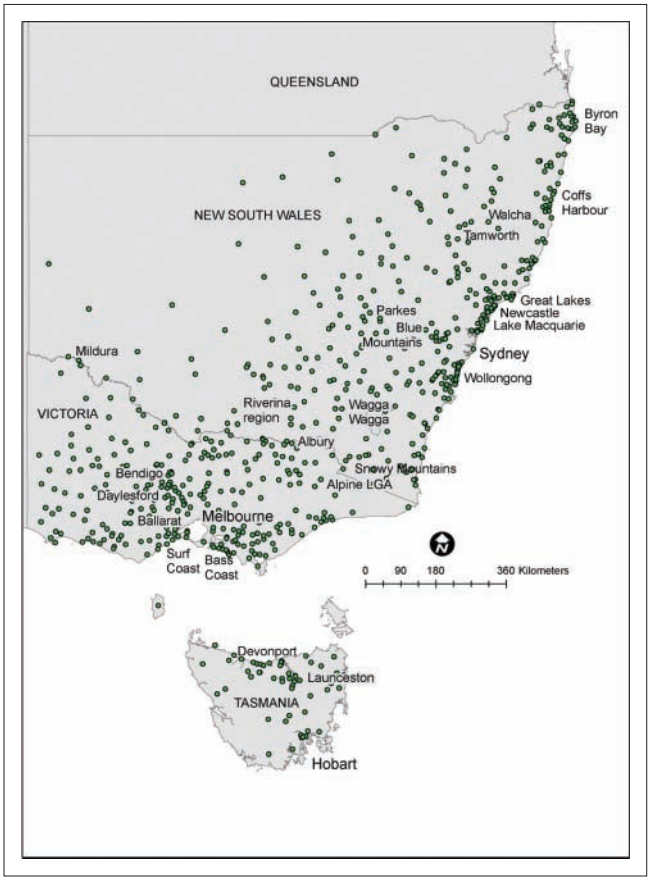

Figure 1. Geographical distribution of festivals in nonmetropolitan New South Wales, Victoria, and Tasmania, 2007
Source: ARC Festivals Database. Map: C. Gibson.

The third phase of the project was the examination of a series of in-depth case studies across two states (NSW and Victoria). Case studies involved close analysis of economic impacts via visitor and business surveys at the Elvis Revival Festival in Parkes, in inland NSW and at ChillOut, Australia's largest rural gay and lesbian festival, held in Daylesford, Victoria. At these two case studies, issues of social and cultural complexity were also investigated via interviews with organizers, community representatives and local politicians, archival searches, media analysis, and participant observation. Additional case studies were pursued elsewhere based on theme (for example, issues of environmental sustainability were investigated at the Splendour in the Grass music festival in Byron Bay, NSW) or region (qualitative, semi-structured interviews with organizers were held for multiple festivals in both the New England and Far South Coast regions

Table 1. Survey of Festival Organizers—Sample, Returned Survey Numbers

	Paper Surveys Posted	Paper Surveys Returned	Email Requests Sent	Online Surveys Returned	Total Sent	Total Returned
Tasmania	93	38	83	12	176	50
Victoria	359	152	294	35	653	187
NSW	575	202	314	41	889	243
Total	1027	392	691	88	1718	480

Source: ARC Festivals Project survey, 2007.

of NSW). Detailed analysis of case studies is beyond the scope of this article (see Brennan-Horley, Connell, and Gibson [2007]; Gorman-Murray, Waitt, and Gibson [2008]). Instead, the remainder of this article focuses on key findings regarding the extent of cultural festivals, and their links to economic development and planning.

Results

Database of Festivals

Results from our database demonstrate that cultural festivals are both numerous and kaleidoscopically diverse throughout nonmetropolitan Australia (table 2). The most common were sporting, community, agricultural, and music festivals—which combined made up three-quarters of all cultural festivals in nonmetropolitan areas. Even though these festival types dominated, within these there was further diversity: "community" festivals covered everything from Grafton's historic Jacaranda Festival (named after the town's signature tree) to Kurrajong's Scarecrow Festival; Nimbin's Mardi Grass (a marijuana prolegalization festival); Ballarat's Stuffest Youth Festival (which presumably is, "you know, like, about stuff . . ."); Ettalong's Psychic Festival; Tumut's Festival of the Falling Leaf; Myrtleford's curiously amalgamated Tobacco, Hops, and Timber Festival; and Benalla's equally bizarre Wheelie Bin Latin American Festival. Similarly varied were sports festivals, covering everything from fishing to billy carts, cycling, pigeon-racing, hang gliding, dragon boat racing, and camp drafting, an Australian sport involving mounted horse riders demonstrating droving skills by navigating individual cattle through gates and obstacles.

Of particular interest for this special issue are the attributes of music and arts festivals. Although there was some diversity, certain festival types dominated (table 3): in music, country, jazz, folk and blues festivals counted for over half of all music festivals (Gibson 2007)—far outweighing styles such as rock that are more commercial or lucrative in the wider retail market for recorded music; while in the sphere of the arts, film festivals, generic "arts festivals," visual arts (usually painting, occasionally photography, and only once, sculpture) and art-and-craft festivals dominated. Overall, music and arts festivals could be considered more "vernacular" than "elite" with regard to class stereotypes: sewing and quilting festivals were as common as opera festivals; country music was more prevalent than jazz (although the latter is remarkably widespread, given that it is otherwise a niche of the recorded music market); and also present were other "roots" music styles such as bluegrass and folk. Indeed, in numbers of attendees, music festivals were amongst the largest of all festivals, including Tamworth's annual country music festival, Tweed Heads' "Wintersun" Rock and Roll/1950s nostalgia festival, Goulburn's Blues Festival, Lorne's "indie" Falls Music Festival, Byron Bay's East Coast Blues and Roots Festival and Splendour in the Grass. Audience sizes at these were in the range of fifteen thousand to one hundred thousand people. Though cultural festivals may well serve the interests of the elite in some of these places and some no doubt promote sanitized, "safe" versions of local culture (cf.

Table 2. Numbers of Festivals, by Type, Tasmania, Victoria, and NSW, 2007

Type of Festival	TAS	VIC	NSW	TOTAL[b]	% of total
Sport	86	485	488	1,059	36.5
Community	45	216	175	436	15.0
Agriculture	19	146	215	380	13.1
Music	13	116	159	288	9.9
Arts	12	73	82	167	5.8
Other[a]	7	87	71	165	5.7
Food	10	53	67	130	4.5
Wine	7	49	32	88	3.0
Gardening	20	43	14	77	2.7
Culture	2	21	11	34	1.2
Environment	1	8	12	21	0.7
Heritage/historic	4	8	7	19	0.7
Children/youth	0	10	5	15	0.5
Christmas/New Year	0	10	2	12	0.4
Total	226	1325	1340	2891	100

Source: ARC Festivals database, 2007.
a. The other category includes small numbers of the following festival types: Lifestyle, Outdoor, Science, Religious, Seniors, Innovation, Education, Animals and Pets, Beer, Cars, Collectables, Craft, Air Shows, Dance, Theatre, Gay and Lesbian, Indigenous, and New Age.
b. The total for this table is slightly more than the total number of festivals in the database, because of counting of some festivals in more than one category. This occurred when separating categories proved impossible (for example, for "food and wine festivals").

Table 3. Arts and Music Festivals, by Type, Tasmania, Victoria, and New South Wales, 2007

Type of Music Festival	Total Number[a]	% of All Music Festivals[a]	Type of Arts Festival	Total Number	% of All Arts Festivals
General music/not specified	90	31.3	Film	45	26.9
Country	56	19.4	General arts	43	25.7
Jazz	50	17.4	Visual art	30	18
Folk	31	10.8	Art and craft	10	6
Blues	20	6.9	Drama	9	5.4
Rock and/or pop	11	3.8	Sewing/quilting	7	4.2
Other[b]	11	3.8	Writers	5	3
Classical	9	3.1	Dance	3	1.8
Opera	8	2.8	Performing arts	3	1.8
Bluegrass	4	1.4	Poetry	3	1.8
Rock 'n' roll	4	1.4	Youth arts	3	1.8
Scottish	4	1.4	Comedy	2	1.2
Alternative rock	3	1.0	Literature	2	1.2
Indigenous	2	0.7	Children's literature	1	0.6
Irish	2	0.7	Puppetry	1	0.6
Rhythm and blues	2	0.7			
World music	2	0.7			
Total	298	—	Total	167	100

Source: ARC Festivals Project database, 2007.

a. The total number of music festival numbers across the various categories in this table is greater than the actual number of festivals in the database because of about 10 percent of festivals listing multiple genres (e.g., jazz and blues, folk and country). In such cases genres were counted separately. Hence figures in the "Percentage of All Music Festivals" column equal more than 100 percent.

b. The "Other" category includes single music festivals of the following types: metal, reggae, dance music, rockabilly, Celtic, Christian, German, hip hop, Indian, contemporary, and Latin.

Atkinson and Laurier [1998]), given the diverse, "earthy" and sometimes outright bizarre mix of festivals captured in the database, such criticisms are far from universally applicable.

Geographical patterns were also revealed (see table 4 and figure 1). LGAs with the most festivals tended to be large regional towns outside capital cities (Ballarat, Newcastle, Geelong, Wollongong, Mildura, Wagga Wagga, Launceston, Bendigo, Devonport), regions reliant on tourism industries (Snowy River, Alpine, Coffs Harbour, Surf Coast), or coastal "lifestyle" regions with mixes of tourism and retiree in-migration (Lake Macquarie, Bass Coast, Great Lakes). Several of these are within "day tripper" driving distance of Sydney and Melbourne (e.g., Blue Mountains). A different pattern emerged when comparing the number of festivals in a town or region with its residential population. This measure reveals "per capita"–type trends—useful for understanding which localities and regions host more than the typical number of festivals given their population base. Many of the places with highest festival-per-population scores were in inland areas, not necessarily known for tourism, or proximate to capital cities. Several towns and villages in the Riverina region (surrounding the Murray River in NSW and Vic) made the list, including Wakool, Narrandera, Holbrook, Jerilderie; while settlements in and around the Snowy Mountains also featured (Snowy River, Towong, Tumbarumba). Other festival-rich regions included the eastern goldfields of Victoria and southern coastal NSW. Whether such patterns are a function of available transportation, extent of orientation to the tourism industry, regional "contagion" effects (where neighboring towns gain inspiration or steal ideas from each other) is another subject worthy of exploration (but beyond the scope of this article—see Gibson, Brennan-Horley, and Walmsley [2009]).

Survey of Festival Organizers

The 480 surveys returned by festival organizers were broadly representative in terms of the spectrum of festival types. Using the database (above) as a population against which to compare (table 5), across all types of festivals, predicted numbers of surveys were returned—with the exceptions of sport (fewer returned than expected) and arts and music festivals (more returned than expected). The diversity evident in our database was reflected in returned surveys. The average attendance at festivals was 7,020, but actual results were quite variable. Two festivals in Geelong—the Pako Festa and the Geelong Show—both claimed audiences of one hundred thousand people and the Victorian Seniors Festival, actually held in many locations at different times throughout the state, claimed an attendance of four hundred thousand. By contrast, the tiny Summit to the Sea endurance cycling festival had a mere fifteen participants. One hundred and thirty-eight festivals (29 percent) had audiences of fewer than one thousand people; two-thirds had fewer than five thousand. Only

Table 4. Festival Capitals: Top 20 LGAs by Number of Festivals, and Festivals per 10,000 Population, Tasmania, Victoria, and New South Wales, 2007 (Based on 2006 Census Data Population Counts)

Top 20 by Number of Festivals				Top 20 by Festivals per 10,000 Population			
LGA	Population	Festivals	Festivals per 10,000 Population	LGA	Population	Festivals	Festivals per 10,000 Population
Ballarat (Vic)	80,045	73	9.12	Wakool (NSW)	4807	22	45.77
Snowy River (NSW)	18,737	62	33.09	Towong (Vic)	5972	23	38.51
Alpine (Vic)	17,806	60	33.70	Buloke (Vic)	6982	26	37.24
Greater Taree (NSW)	42,943	55	12.81	Narrandera (NSW)	6485	22	33.92
Lake Macquarie (NSW)	177,619	54	3.04	Tumbarumba (NSW)	3551	12	33.79
Greater Geelong (Vic)	184,331	52	2.82	Alpine (Vic)	17806	60	33.70
Wollongong (NSW)	181,612	50	2.75	Snowy River (NSW)	18737	62	33.09
Hobart (Tas)	47,321	48	10.14	Barraba (NSW)	2138	7	32.74
Mildura (Vic)	48,386	44	9.09	Queenscliff (Vic)	3078	10	32.49
Warrnambool (Vic)	28,754	43	14.95	Bombala (NSW)	2469	8	32.40
Greater Bendigo (Vic)	86,066	43	5.00	Holbrook (NSW)	2340	7	29.91
Delatite (Vic)	21,833	42	19.24	King Island (Tas)	1688	5	29.62
Shoalhaven (NSW)	83,546	40	4.79	Nundle (NSW)	1351	4	29.61
Wagga Wagga (NSW)	55,058	36	6.54	Strathbogie (Vic)	9171	24	26.17
Surf Coast (Vic)	19,628	36	18.34	Merriwa (NSW)	2337	6	25.67
Greater Shepparton (Vic)	55,210	35	6.34	Pyrenees (Vic)	6360	16	25.16
Bass Coast (Vic)	24,076	34	14.12	Tallaganda (NSW)	2637	6	22.75
Great Lakes (NSW)	31,388	33	10.51	Jerilderie (NSW)	1786	4	22.40
East Gippsland (Vic)	38,028	33	8.68	Coolah (NSW)	3682	8	21.73
Mount Alexander (Vic)	16,174	31	19.17	Ararat (Vic)	11102	24	21.62

Note: LGA = local government area.
Source: ARC Festivals Project database, 2007.

Table 5. Returned Surveys—Numbers by Type of Festival (and Comparison to Database Distribution of Festivals by Type)

Type of Festival	NSW	Vic	Tas	Total*	% of Total Returned Surveys	% of Database Total
Sport	63	52	13	128	17.8	36.5
Community	66	50	12	128	17.8	15.0
Agriculture	71	35	5	111	15.5	13.1
Music	54	31	7	92	12.8	9.9
Arts	44	25	14	83	11.6	5.8
Food	19	19	6	44	6.1	4.5
Other	15	18	3	36	5.0	5.7
Gardening	12	16	5	33	4.6	2.7
Wine	14	13	4	31	4.3	3.0
Environment	8	3	1	12	1.7	0.7
Heritage/historic	3	4	2	9	1.3	0.7
Culture/ethnicity	4	2	0	6	0.8	1.2
Children/youth	0	3	0	3	0.4	0.5
Christmas/New Years	0	2	0	2	0.3	0.4

Source: ARC Festivals Project database and survey, 2007.
*The total number of festivals by type is greater than the total number of surveys received. Festivals that recorded more than one type are counted for each of these records.

eleven festivals (just over 2 percent) had audiences of more than fifty thousand. Festivals surveyed were held for an average duration of 3.3 days and had an average of sixty-seven stalls (including food, clothing, and merchandise).

Festivals with a wide range of histories returned surveys. Sixty-seven festivals (14 percent) had been running since before 1900. These were mostly agricultural shows, a particular archetype of festival in Australian country towns,

traditionally focused around harvest, produce, livestock, and new farming technologies and techniques (and with some forms of rural entertainment like boxing tents and rodeos). In the postwar period, agricultural shows became much larger cultural festivals featuring live music (often country music), entertainment, fairground rides, showbags (bags of toys and sweets usually bought by or for young children), and commercial stalls (see Darian-Smith and Wills [1999]). Many agricultural shows have closed down or amalgamated with those in neighboring towns; those that survive are either very large (generally the largest single event in the year of the town) or have found other ways to remain relevant, including niche marketing and imposing stricter controls on stallholders and showbags (to "protect" their traditional feel). In contrast to agricultural shows, most other festivals had their genesis in the past thirty years. Only 22 percent of surveyed festivals began between 1900 and 1980. By contrast, 57 percent began after 1980, and over a third of these began after 2000.

Most festivals were quite local in orientation—on average, 58 percent of attendees across the festivals surveyed were from the immediate locality; 10.5 percent were from the state capital (Sydney, Melbourne, or Hobart); 20.9 percent were from elsewhere in the state (notably double the result for capital cities); 8.3 percent from interstate; and a tiny 1 percent on average were international visitors. In total, ninety-one festivals reported that 90 percent or more of their audiences came from their immediate vicinity. In comparison, only one festival reported that 90 percent or more of their audience were from capital cities, and only six festivals reported that 90 percent or more of their audience came from elsewhere in their state.

Particularly relevant for this article is detail on the organization, management structure, and aims of festivals, and links between festivals and local authorities and their economic development strategies. The vast majority (75 percent) of festivals were run by nonprofit organizations, usually tiny in size (table 6). Only 3.3 percent of the festivals surveyed were run by private sector/profit-seeking companies (a trend that may have been particularly heightened because of the nonmetropolitan focus of our research). Reflecting this, the stated aims of festivals were more often than not linked to the pastimes, passions, or pursuits of the individuals on organizing committees, or to socially or culturally orientated ends such as building community, rather than as income-generating ventures (table 7). Indeed, of all categories of festival aims, "to make money" and "to increase regional income" were the two rarest responses (recorded in only 5 percent of cases, combined). It came as little surprise, then, when festivals on the whole recorded small funding bases, limited turnovers, and frequently only just broke even or made very modest profits (table 8).

This explains why, despite three-quarters of the surveyed festivals being supported or promoted by their local council, only 116—(24.2 percent) were part of formal local economic

Table 6. Organizational/Management Structure of Surveyed Festivals

Management Structure/Organizational Type	No. of Festivals	% of Festivals Surveyed
Nonprofit organization	354	75
Local council (or a committee thereof)	42	8.9
Committee of local business leaders	30	6.3
Other (including churches, incorporated societies, public-private partnerships)	30	6.3
Private company	16	3.3

Source: ARC Festivals Project survey, 2007.

Table 7. Aims of Surveyed Festivals

Aim	No. of Festivals[a]	% of Festivals Surveyed
To promote a place/ theme/ activity	137	28.5
To show(case) a place/ theme/ activity	86	17.9
To build community	75	15.6
To compete	75	15.6
To entertain	65	13.5
To foster/encourage	63	13.1
To celebrate	44	9.2
To fundraise	41	8.5
To educate	21	4.4
To make money	12	2.5
To increase regional income	12	2.5

Source: ARC Festivals Project survey, 2007.

a. The total number of festivals by aim is greater than the total number of surveys received. Festivals that recorded more than one aim are counted for each of these records.

Table 8. Funding Support, Turnover, and Profit or Loss, Surveyed Festivals

	Turnover		Funding Support	
A$[a]	No.	%	No.	%
0-50,000	302	66	392	86.5
50,000-100,000	64	13.8	31	6.8
100,000-250,000	49	10.6	20	4.4
250,000-500,000	21	4.6	9	1.9
500,000-1 million	10	2.1	0	0
1 million-5 million	10	2.1	1	0.2
Greater than 5 million	5	1	0	0

Profit or Loss	No. Festivals	% Festivals
Loss	49	10.6
Break even	128	27.7
A$0-10,000	200	43.3
A$10,000-20,000	35	7.5
A$20,000-50,000	29	6.2
A$50,000-100,000	9	1.9
Greater than A$100,000	12	2.6

Source: ARC Festivals Project survey.

a. As of October 2009, the Australian dollar was worth 85 U.S. cents.

development strategies. Appropriate Council support seems to constitute providing free, or low-cost, access to facilities. Equated as "community" events, Councils also list festivals on their Web sites. Rarely are festivals positioned by Councils in economic terms or factored into regional economic development strategies and plans. Evidence from our festivals survey suggests that this ought to be otherwise.

Tindall (2007) argues that cultural festivals are lively cells of activity, particularly so in small local economies where their relative monetary impact is greater than in urban areas. Our survey results provide some depth to this assertion, but they also show how seemingly insignificant festivals (when judged in monetary terms) can cumulatively generate notable amounts of employment, and catalyze other *qualitative* benefits for a local economy. Select questions addressed the amount of employment directly generated by cultural festivals. Unfortunately, there was no way for the researchers to validate survey responses to these questions, other than through undertaking extensive detailed field work at every festival—a logistical impossibility. This is of course the case for all survey questions—but there was a particular risk with these questions that organizers would exaggerate employment impacts to self-promote their festivals. However, it should be noted that questions relating to employment were quite specifically worded to attempt to limit this—asking for the breakdown of full-time versus part-time and fixed-term versus year-long work both for organizers themselves, and for other associated staff. Very clear wording asked organizers to estimate directly created full-time and part-time jobs created solely for planning the festival, for running the festival on its days of operation, and then separately, how many extra positions were created in related activities in the wider community. To avoid confusion, no questions were asked about estimating multiplier employment benefits on the demand side—through circulation of visitor spending in the town. Only supply-side employment impacts based on actual job creation for planning and operation of the festival were interrogated. Inferring the cumulative demand-side impacts of cultural festivals remains unanswered by this study (for discussion of visitor spending impacts, see Long and Perdue [1990]; Chhabra, Sills, and Cubbage [2003]).

Despite these limitations, survey results illuminated the quantity and character of employment generated cumulatively by cultural festivals—an important component of the links between culture and economy. Overall, using actual employment results from our survey, and extrapolating this for our full database of 2,856 festivals across the three states, it is estimated that 176,560 jobs are created directly in the planning and operation of cultural festivals in non-metropolitan Australia. Breaking the results down, on average 4.1 full-time jobs were directly created in each festival in the planning stage, and 5.1 part-time jobs directly created in the planning stage; thirteen full-time jobs and 12.6 part-time jobs were on average created at the time of operation (table 9). In other words, across all festivals in the three states included in the study, 99,448 jobs were directly created in planning and running the festival. The most common were event managers/directors/coordinators (25 percent of jobs created); administration and accounting positions (24 percent); groundskeepers, grounds staff, and facilities managers (12 percent); public relations, promotions, and marketing positions (9 percent); and artistic services (including artists, artistic and musical directors—8.5 percent). Other paid positions created by festivals included retail staff, cleaners, security, catering, judging, stage crew, announcers, and tourism and community development planners. In addition to these figures, organizers claimed that on average another twenty-seven directly related jobs (over 77,000 in total) were created by their festivals in the wider community (i.e., not employed by the festival itself). Using this evidence to calculate direct employment (in total), cultural festivals appear to produce around forty thousand more jobs in nonmetropolitan parts of New South Wales, Victoria, and Tasmania than agriculture (in 2006, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, all forms of farming combined employed just over 136,000 people in those states). Actual conditions and length of employment generated by festivals obviously vary enormously and need to be taken seriously by economic planners. But in overall terms, festivals are deceptively effective creators of local jobs. While individual festivals would have generated intermittent jobs at the time of the festival, practically all surveyed funded some form of full-time, year-round planning work; while cumulatively, and across the full calendar year in locations with numerous festivals (such as Ballarat, with more than seventy festivals staged annually) it is safe to assume that because of their proliferation, cultural festivals sustain year-round employment across a diverse range of support services. In addition, evidence was present that for some labor categories that might seem contingent only on the running of individual festivals—security, sideshow attendants, catering, judging, stage crew, announcers—the actual nature of employment undertaken was more stable and year-round, because those working in these jobs travel from town-to-town in a circuit of related festivals on a longer-term, seasonal basis. This reflects the often deeply subcultural or specialized nature of many festivals (cf. Mackellar [2008, 2009]).

In addition to paid employment, the survey was able to reveal insights into the extent of volunteer support festivals require—an important reflection of their community-building role, particularly in nonmetropolitan areas. Actual numbers of volunteers working on each festival were not recorded in the survey because of inherent problems and inaccuracies estimating the numbers of people providing even small amounts of "free help" during festivals. Questions were instead deliberately structured in terms of days' worth of volunteer help provided. Festival organizers estimated that 19.2 days were spent by an average volunteer assisting their festival during its planning phase, and 5.7

Table 9. Employment Dimensions of Surveyed Festivals

Time period	Type of work	Average	Minimum	Maximum	Extrapolation of Total Employment for Total Festivals Database (n = 2,856)
Planning the festival (pre-operation)	Full-time	4.1	1	40	11,709
	Part-time	5.1	1	65	14,565
Running the festival (time of operation)	Full-time	13	1	400	37,128
	Part-time	12.6	1	200	35,986

Source: ARC Festivals Project survey.

days by an average volunteer assisting during the running of the event at time of operation. Across the 480 surveys this constituted the equivalent of over 8,600 days (or twenty-three years' worth of labor) when adding up the average amount of work done cumulatively, *by a single volunteer at each festival* in that given calendar year. As with above paid-employment estimates, this method is less accurate than measuring volunteerism *en situ* at every festival. While that was not feasible, it was possible to extrapolate out from survey figures approximate amounts of volunteer input into the organization and running of festivals for all nonmetropolitan festivals across the three states. Using the above average days-per-festival data, 71,114 days' worth of volunteer labor (equivalent to 195 years' worth of labor) was provided when adding up the average amount of work done cumulatively, *by a single volunteer at each festival* for the 2,856 festivals in our database. The magnitude of this can then be multiplied by the factor of number of volunteers actually contributing at each festival. Because this is not known from the survey, it can only be estimated. However, if even modest estimates are made about the numbers of volunteers working on each festival, the resulting numbers on the extent of volunteerism are massive: if the average festival was assumed to have five volunteer workers, then 355,570 days' worth of labor (equivalent to 975 years) was provided in total across all 2,856 festivals in the three states; if each had twenty volunteers, the figure was more like 1,422,280 days' worth of labor (or 3,900 years). Cultural festivals are thus deeply embedded in local economies in a nonmonetary sense, through volunteerism. Along with the fact that they are predominantly organized by nonprofit organizations, they are in many respects a classic example of the community/social economy at work (Cameron and Gibson 2005; Gibson-Graham 2008).

Given the nonmetropolitan focus, an important component of the survey was a question on the economic geography of cultural festivals. The geography of economic links between festivals and places was able to be traced by asking organizers about the supply-side inputs to their festivals, and where these were sourced (cf. Long and Perdue [1990]). Although not as fine-grained as multiplier/input-output analysis conducted on individual festivals (again, a logistical impossibility for this research team given the hundreds of festivals involved), survey results were able to reveal the contours of festivals' economic geography (table 10). For certain types of inputs, such as staffing, catering, and staging and PA equipment, reliance on the local economy was very high; only very small fractions of these inputs were sourced from outside the local economy—meaning likely multiplier effects of festivals were quite high. The story was somewhat different for stallholders and "talent" (musicians, performers, contestants, etc.): although the locality/surrounding region was still the most common contributor of these inputs to festivals (64 and 57 percent of total inputs in those categories, respectively), they were somewhat "less local" than for other inputs. This corroborated with interviews with festival organizers undertaken for this project, where a well-established network of itinerant stallholders was revealed. In Australia, itinerant stallholders travel from festival to festival in an annual circuit, earning a living selling food, clothing, or other items (to some extent an echo of earlier travelling shows, rodeos, boxing circuits, and side-shows). Some festivals, such as the Walcha Show in the New England region of NSW, have made decisions to deliberately exclude such stallholders, for reasons of protecting local businesses and charities (who run the cake stall and merchandise sales) or to exert greater control over what food and merchandise items are offered for sale (such as attempts by wine festivals in Tenterfield, NSW to limit participation to "classy" stallholders whose wares suit the image and marketing direction of the event). In these examples, issues of cultural politics (outsiders versus insiders, perceptions of itinerant stallholders as "tacky") infuse decisions of a commercial nature. Again, this was likely to be particularly the case because of the nonmetropolitan location of the festivals surveyed—where "keeping money local" becomes an important public discourse about economic transactions (cf. Gibson et al. [2008]).

The geography of talent sourced for festivals was less "local" than for other inputs (table 10). In part this is inevitable—music and art festivals, for instance, are often about importing metropolitan or international "headline" bands, exhibiting travelling works or showing foreign films, especially when local, rather than tourist audiences are the main priority. These results do, however, have relevance for policy attempts to

Table 10. Geography of Inputs for Cultural Festivals, Tasmania, NSW, and Victoria, 2007, by Geographical Scale (Percent of Total Inputs—Average Across All Festivals)

	Local (<50 kms)	Capital City in That State	Elsewhere in the Same State	Interstate	International
Staff (for organizing and running the festival)	90.6	4.4	3.2	1.5	0.1
Catering (food and drink)	90.6	2.4	6.6	1.1	0
Staging (e.g., PA systems, tents, seating)	84.3	5.7	7.6	2.3	0
Stallholders (e.g., souvenirs, merchandise)	64.0	6.1	23.9	6.0	0.3
Talent (e.g., bands, competitors, performers, artists)	56.6	11.6	20.2	9.6	2.0

Source: ARC Festivals Project survey.

see festivals as a catalyst for generating vernacular cultural industries in localities. While some opportunities exist at cultural festivals for local artists, musicians, and performers to gain exposure and employment (Gibson 2007), touring and travelling appear to be a central part of the job. Inter-regional networks (and flows and exchanges through them) are just as important as circuits of local vernacular events.

Conclusions

Even with modest employment and profits at the scale of individual events, cultural festivals—albeit small and mostly not commercial in outlook—have a significant cumulative impact on nonmetropolitan places and a definite, if more subtle, link to economic development. Cultural festivals are ubiquitous, impressively diverse, and strongly interconnected to nonmetropolitan communities through employment, volunteerism, networks, and participation. Although some cultural festivals can be economically lucrative (particularly large music festivals), most are small-scale, modest affairs geared around the possibility for a group of people to express, celebrate, and or promote their love for a particular activity, place, past, or event. This appeared magnified in the nonmetropolitan context, where notions of bonding community in the face of deteriorating macro-economic circumstances are particularly pronounced.

Reflecting the noncommercial nature of most cultural festivals, those participating in our survey were very rarely incorporated into formal regional economic development planning. Being small individually, temporary, and not particularly commercial in intent, festivals seem to be ignored by local planners and regional economic development policy makers. Yet, the evidence here suggests that cultural festivals cumulatively create substantial employment (although scattered and often impermanent), and catalyze community activities. Furthermore, cultural festivals develop local skills in leadership, organization, management, and cultural performance. Festivals qualitatively improve local economies and encourage cooperation. Doubt over the ability of individual festivals to produce enormous benefits for nonmetropolitan economies masks far greater cumulative benefits.

Likewise, criticisms of their identity politics, normative values, cultural elitism, or contributions to social exclusion, while salient and instructive, are context-dependent. Such critiques do not in themselves exclude the possibility of other readings and interpretations that incorporate the institutional and strategic politics surrounding events, and alternative conceptions of local cultural politics (Boyle 1997; De Bres and Davis 2001). As well as suggesting that debates over festivals' intrinsic social and cultural goals be taken seriously for what they are, this research also supports the argument for further exploring the links between cultural festivals and how "the economic" is framed within localities. Too often, it could be argued, debates about festivals "selling out" or as "elitist" ensue without appropriate acknowledgement of the ethical decisions festival organizers are forced to confront (with contradictions sometimes irresolvable), and with little regard to the unheralded benefits—often seemingly mundane—that festivals can generate, particularly for nonmetropolitan communities. We have sought to bring to light here at least some of these benefits.

Indeed, academic debates regarding festivals, the arts, and culture have for too long been bifurcated: on the one hand, economic analysts debate the real direct and multiplier benefits of the arts, cultural industries, festivals, or events; on the other, social scientists debate the various aspects of empowerment, identity, exclusion, and belonging. All the while, when regional economic development plans and strategies are hatched they rarely, if ever, acknowledge cultural festivals (Whitford 2009). Our research concurs with Whitford's (2005) findings that rhetoric of event-led recover rarely

infuses regional development policy: even in Parkes, where its Elvis festival has "put the town on the map" in national media coverage, regional development plans ignore it, and focus instead on more "sober" industries like logistics and transport (see Brennan-Horley, Connell, and Gibson [2007]). Where culture does inform regional development planning, it is supposedly more "glamorous" cultural industries such as film, design, and architecture that are often favored (Edensor et al. 2009).

This research has showed how the staging of festivals is a hybrid affair, where culture and economics combine. That this is so ought not to prevent economic development planners from taken festivals seriously, particularly in nonmetropolitan areas where traditional industries face great challenges. Although "touchy-feely" social and cultural aims and values might (rightly) underpin festivals, even the most radical, avant-garde, or noncommercial festivals invariably require audiences, support services, and staging and audio equipment (all things reliant on some element of planning, and part of a broader festival economy). They too have both demand and supply-side economic impacts on localities (even if inadvertently so). Where noneconomic goals such as belonging and community inform how festivals are operated and managed, they also bring about a qualitative improvement in "economic" affairs by encouraging stakeholders to debate how monetary transactions, contracts, business relationships, and *qui-pro-quo* deals are organized—and who benefits from them.

Similarly, while "hard-nosed" modeling of multiplier impacts might rightfully be undertaken as a "reality check" to measure the fiscal "success" of individual festivals, economic development planners interested in nonmetropolitan areas ought to be reminded that "the economic" is more than monetary value. We suggest that a move away from a "more is good" approach to understanding the economic dimensions of festivals, and instead, have sought to show how festivals "inscribe a proliferation of economic differences" (Gibson-Graham 1996, 147) on the landscape of nonmetropolitan Australia. Cultural festivals are emotional, playful expressions of local culture, national pastimes, or global subcultures—and this connection to culture that makes them qualitatively meaningful in an economic sense.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interests with respect to the authorship and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The authors disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research and/or authorship of this article:

The Federal Government's Australian Research Council Discovery Project scheme, grant # DP0560032.

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Bios

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