Rising to the Challenge of Sustainability - Community Events by the Community, For the Community

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"We had to really think about how to make the event sustainable, because it did become all about putting on events to raise money so that we could fund peace in the park. The fund raising did dilute the purpose of the event"

Kinder Kelsai (Peace in the Park Steward coordinator)

Introduction

Community events, by their very nature, create emotions. They need to appeal to the community's wants and desires, playing with their emotions to create enjoyment and memories. Successful longstanding community events, be they annual or otherwise, need to have an organising committee that understand this emotional connection on the one side and loyal consumers that engage with the event to make it sustainable on the other – long term viability. This chapter builds on the work of Jepson et al (2014) in looking at the sustainability of local community based events, through the delivery of community events within the context of social enterprises (SE), community participation and individual engagement. We highlight these issues through the use of a case study that investigates Peace in the Park (PitP), an annual community event in Sheffield that ran successfully since 2003 but was forced to postpone in 2013 due to a lack of funds. We argue that the re-launch in 2014 has sought a broader community participation policy and is seeking to re-engage with the local community through more effective communication of their core values and beliefs of peace, reconciliation and to provide an alternative voice to issues that might seem beyond the community's control – initially the Iraq war. Through this evaluation, the level of involvement that the local community have in the event became central to the long term planning and future viability of the event.

Initially the chapter uses the framework provided by authors such as Modi & Mishra (2010) and Dolnicar & Lazarevski (2009) who argue that not-for-profit organisations (NPOs) must take a more market-orientated approach to strategy if they are to be sustainable, due to the inherent market pressures that they face. Modi & Mishra (2010: 553) highlight the need for NPOs to have a "coordinated outward focus… on its key stakeholders" to achieve successful market-orientation through four components: beneficiary orientation, donor orientation, peer orientation and inter-functional coordination. In this chapter we explore these components, looking at the beneficiaries, or end customers and argue that these benefits can be achieved within an organising committee that acts as a SE.

We argue that to develop a true community event, both sides of this symbiotic relationship must be evaluated and developed to achieve full community participation through the medium of an organising committee that adopts the principals, ethos and working practices of an SE – an organising committee that aligns social responsibilities with its financial accountabilities and vice versus. To understand the development of a sustainable and viable community event, PitP shows the complexities of balancing these commitments and the difficulties to meet requirements of the Jepson et al (2014: 7) notion of community event:-.

> *"A themed and inclusive community event or series of events which has/have been created as the result of an inclusive community planning process to celebrate the particular way of life of people and groups in the local community with emphasis on particular space and time."*

The concept of a social enterprise

Getz & Andersson (2008) have argued pervasively that for an event to have long-term sustainability it should adopt a community approach which emphasise the values and beliefs of the people. While research (Rogers & Anastasiadou, 2011) has advocated the use of liaison committees to ensure that the aims of an event are closely linked to its host community, these participatory practices can become skewed so that the community values are changed to resemble to the views of the event organisers rather than the other way round (Cooke & Kothari, 2001). Whilst most community event organising committees probably describe themselves as NPO's, the newer terminology of SE can been applied to those organisations and event providers that are trying to solve a community based issue that might be caused by either government or market failure (Ridley-Duff & Bull, 2011). While the

concept of a SE is not new, it is important to understand that it has evolved from earlier forms of non-profit, co-operative and mainstream business (Defourny & Nyssens, 2008; Teasdale, 2011).

The concept of the SE is evolutionary in nature, hence the difficultly in providing a comprehensive definition, but has been used to discuss NPO's that place social and community values at the heart of its operations (Kerlin, 2006); those focused on achieving surplus from trading activities to ensure financial stability (Somers, 2005); taking a business-like approach to solving and providing community based services (Pomerantz, 2003); NPO's that create something of value for a particular community or cause (Chell, 2007); NPO's that use entrepreneurial skills and innovation to achieve financial stability (Haugh, 2005). However, these definitions highlight the balancing of social and economic aims within a SE that is missing within more traditional NPO's. Alter (2007: 24) provides a useful definition as to the nature and purpose of a SE:-

> *"A business venture created for a social purpose (mitigating a social problem or addressing market failure) and to generate social value while operating with the financial discipline, innovation and determinations of a private sector business".*

Or as Hynes (2009:117) notes: -

> *"To achieve growth and to ensure the sustainability of the social enterprise the social entrepreneur must develop their business and manage their resources with a commercial as well as social remit, consequently strengthening the sustainability of the business".*

Hynes (2009) also notes that people start SE's because they believed that their services would provide a social need and enhance the quality of life for others, but that this requires the engagement with the market through product and market development strategies. This means that successful SE's are rooted in the demands of the market and valued by consumers. A community based event therefore needs the engagement of the local community to provide the end customers, which "may include clients, patrons, donors, volunteers, advocates, trustees, committee members, and the local community" (Bruce, 1995). This community engagement and participation is discussed below.
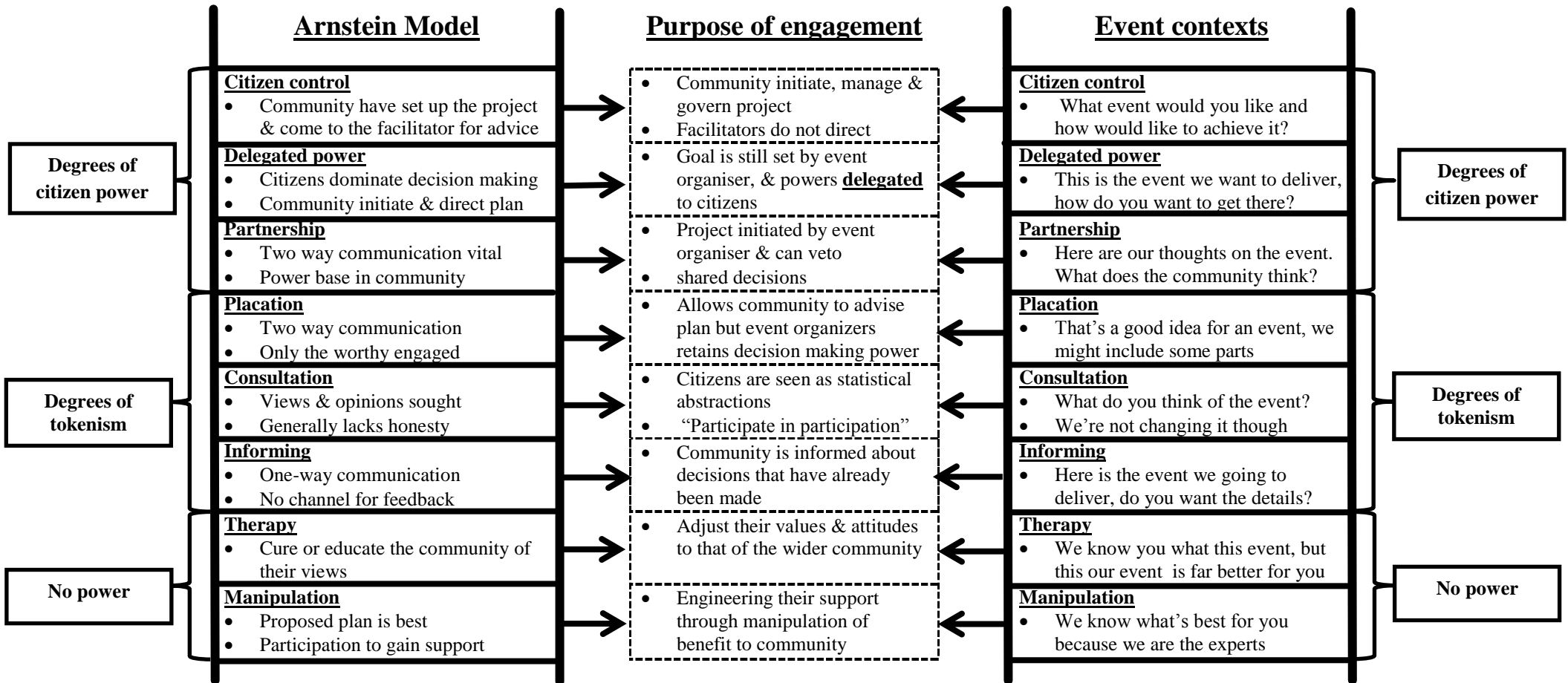
Barriers to community participation

Arnstein (1969) proposed a model of community participation (citizen participation) that places a critical lens on the participatory practices employed within community based project [event] management, which centres the concept of power at the heart of participatory practise. For example, Stout (2010) believes that community planners can, either consciously or sub-consciously, manipulate agendas, conceal information, engage only certain groups and marginalise others. Why this model is helpful is because it illustrates the importance of involving the community in the decision making process to enable their commitment to the project. More importantly, to achieve genuine community participation, the model can demonstrate to the community that their viewpoints have influenced decisions (Stout, 2010). Arnstein (1969, p.217) emphasises this point effectively:-

> *"There is a critical difference between going through the empty ritual of participation and having the real power needed to affect the outcome of the process. It allows the power-holders to claim that all sides were considered, but makes it possible for only some of those sides to benefit."*

Arnstein's (1969) proposes a typology of eight levels of participation, that link to the amount of power and influence that a local community has in defining the content and nature of the project. When applied to a community event context the model identifies or classifies the manner of which engagement is conducted by the organising committee (power-holders is our case) in relation to the community. The bottom rungs are signified by 'non-participatory' practices that act as a substitute to honest participation. The motive here is to change the community and their viewpoints to concede the 'expert' views of the organising committee. The next rungs relate to 'tokenistic' practice to allow the community to have a voice and to be heard. However, the community lack any real power to influence the development of the community event, or insure their views are acted upon. Even 'placation' is tokenistic because the community are allowed to advise the organising committee but do not have the power to force them to act. At the 'citizen power' level the community have access to increasing levels of power and influence in the decision making process, to such a degree that at 'citizen control' the community obtain the majority of decision-making seats, or even assume full decision making powers. Figure 1 attempts to illustrate Arnsteins (1969) model, demonstrate the purpose of engagement at each rung of the ladder, and to provide a contextual example of what the community participation looks like from a community event perspective.

Figure 1 – Arnstein's model of community participation

Arnstein Model	Purpose of engagement	Event contexts
Citizen control • Community have set up the project & come to the facilitator for advice	• Community initiate, manage & govern project • Facilitators do not direct	**Citizen control** • What event would you like and how would like to achieve it?
Delegated power • Citizens dominate decision making • Community initiate & direct plan	• Goal is still set by event organiser, & powers **delegated** to citizens	**Delegated power** • This is the event we want to deliver, how do you want to get there?
Partnership • Two way communication vital • Power base in community	• Project initiated by event organiser & can veto • shared decisions	**Partnership** • Here are our thoughts on the event. What does the community think?
Placation • Two way communication • Only the worthy engaged	• Allows community to advise plan but event organizers retains decision making power	**Placation** • That's a good idea for an event, we might include some parts
Consultation • Views & opinions sought • Generally lacks honesty	• Citizens are seen as statistical abstractions • "Participate in participation"	**Consultation** • What do you think of the event? • We're not changing it though
Informing • One-way communication • No channel for feedback	• Community is informed about decisions that have already been made	**Informing** • Here is the event we going to deliver, do you want the details?
Therapy • Cure or educate the community of their views	• Adjust their values & attitudes to that of the wider community	**Therapy** • We know you what this event, but this our event is far better for you
Manipulation • Proposed plan is best • Participation to gain support	• Engineering their support through manipulation of benefit to community	**Manipulation** • We know what's best for you because we are the experts

Left and right margin groupings:
- **Degrees of citizen power** (Citizen control, Delegated power, Partnership)
- **Degrees of tokenism** (Placation, Consultation, Informing)
- **No power** (Therapy, Manipulation)

Source: Adapted from Arnstein, 1969

This model has been seen to have several weaknesses, in that it is sometimes seen as an over simplification of community engagement, it views the power-holders and the community as two distinct homogenous groups, doesn't identify the 'roadblocks' to genuine participation (such as racism, socio-economic issues, education) and doesn't acknowledge that the community might simply not want to take part not matter how inclusive this process is (Arnstein, 1969; Maier, 2001; Stout, 2010). However, the key strength of the model and its useful in community event planning in that the different 'rungs' make it possible to cut through the discourse of the attempts of the community to participate, and the sometimes confusing responses from those in power (Arnstein, 1969). By acting in a more subtle manner the event organiser my avoid coming into conflict with the community, and instead harbour greater opportunities to link the social context of the community with aims and objective of the event, thus giving a greater chance for the event to become sustainable (Rogers & Anastasiadou, 2011).

Market orientation in Community Events

In the previous sections we have started to argue that the organisers of community based events need to engage with the local community and that this is one part of a broader need to have a market orientation. Andreasen & Kotler (2008) amongst other authors state that adopting a market orientation is crucial to the success of NPO's and SE's. Garcia et al (2012) note that NPO's need to be stakeholder and market oriented, using market research in order to understand the needs of their end-customers to drive product development, as well understanding their competition to differentiate themselves in the market place. They go on to note that due to the high number of multiple stakeholders in comparison to for-profit organisations, there is a greater need to build long-term relationships with these stakeholders, including beneficiaries/customers, partners and internal stakeholders. This fits with the ethos of relationship marketing, albeit with the dual SE foci of social good as well as financial surplus. However, as Dolnicar & Lazarevski (2009) note, many NPO/SE's do not view marketing as anything other than a function of for-profit organisations, to the detriment of reaching their full potential.

Individual engagement

Relationship marketing looks at the lifetime value of the customer (Doole et al 2005), focussing on repeat purchases. A consumer buying product from a company on more than one occasion highlights that the consumer has found some reason to develop loyalty, and community events are no different. Differing levels of loyalty from simple location or price loyalty (Gilbert 2002), through to emotional loyalty, is highlighted by the model of the loyalty ladder (Christopher et al 2002) where consumer satisfaction equates to an increase in emotional loyalty and show increased purchase behaviour and involvement with the organisation. Jimenez & Voss (2014; 360) note "the emotional bond connecting an individual to a specific target" and its importance with the marketing domain, are central to emotional attachment. As Thomson et al. (2005) note, consumers only develop high levels of emotional attachment to a small number of things, be they objects, people or brands. Investments in these things mean that consumers have a true emotional attachment – we invest in those things that we value. However a product, brand or event must remain relevant to the consumer, and as consumer opinion changes over time driven by competition and expectation, the product/brand must change as well to keep the same levels of emotional attachment.

Bringing the market, community participation and social enterprise together

While we have sought to explain the concept of a SE, we have not explained why community events should be delivered within this model. It should be re-emphasised that a community event delivered within a framework of a SE is motivated by two principle aims – social and financial (Alter, 2007). What is absolutely crucial is that the SE places equal importance in both these objectives, otherwise so called blended value cannot be achieved whereby social good is achieved through financial stability and vice-versus (Pearce, 2003). The organising committee need to ensure that these commitments are kept in balance so that the event has the opportunity of not only being more sustainable through the use effective marketing that creates long-term individual engagement (Thomson et al. 2005), but of engaging the local community in a more bottom-up approach to event delivery that enables more participatory practices – see figure 2 (Getz & Anderson, 2008; Bostock, 2015).

Figure 2 - The Social Enterprise Sustainability Equilibrium
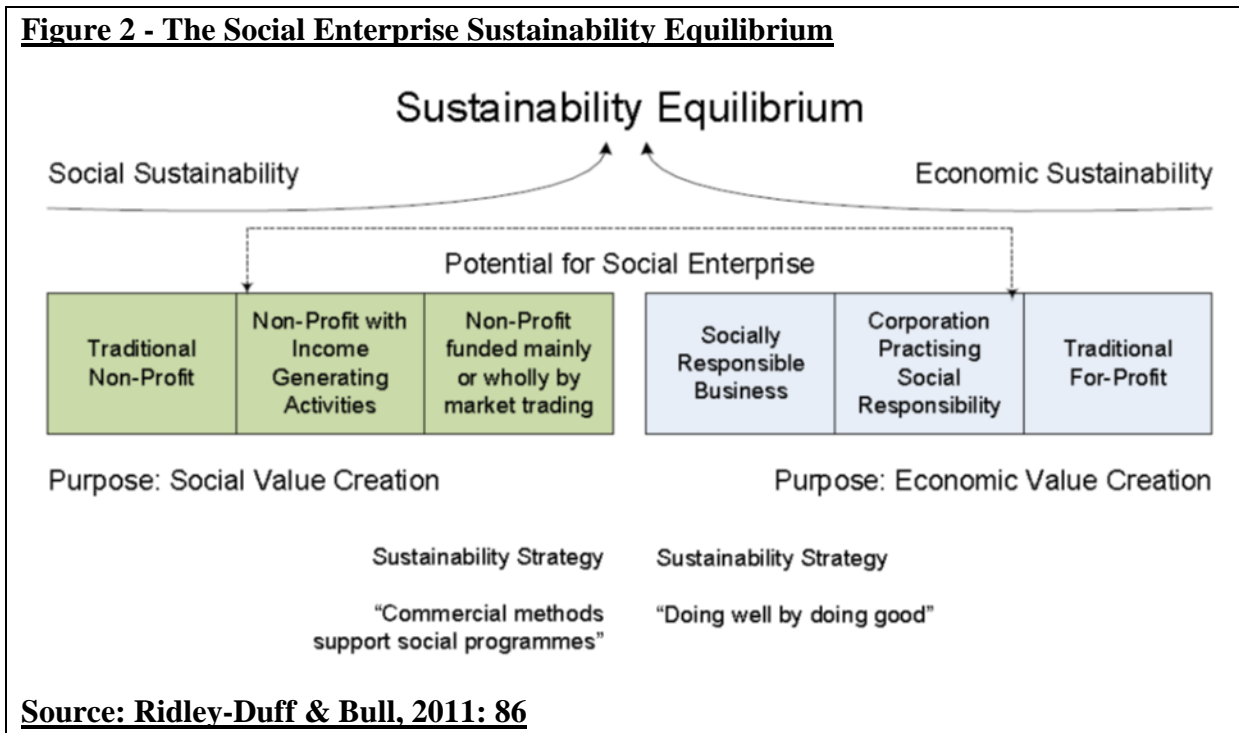
Source: Ridley-Duff & Bull, 2011: 86

Research method: Focus group

As a research team we were aware that the individual viewpoints, opinions and experiences of those community members who have played a role in the development of PitP are not formed in a vacuum, and often people form their own understanding from listening to others (Morgan, 1997; Edwards & Skinner, 2009). As such a focus group method was selected to explore, tease out and clarify the 'real meanings' of individual and group experiences in delivering this community event (Krueger & Casey, 2009). Krueger & Casey (2009: 5) go on to define a focus group as a "carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment".

In relation to this research, the perception of these individuals is key because we are investigating whether they successfully engage with the local community, and how they allow the community to participate in the construction of the event. The key strength of the focus group method is that it will allow the interaction of both past and present organisers of PitP to not only express their individual viewpoints but to challenge each other, and as a result clarify their own views (Morgan, 1997; Veal, 2006).

Selecting the participants and asking the questions

Purposive sampling was employed to allow the research team to select individuals based upon their potential to supply specialist knowledge relevant to the research aim and objectives (Babbie, 1990; Saunders et al. 2012). By having a key focus on the practices employed by PitP, this sampling technique enabled the choice of six individuals based on their connection to the event (Frey et al. 2000). With the researchers focused on the participatory practices of PitP, the following individuals were selected and took part in the focus group:-

Table 1 – List of focus group participants	
• Davo Smith	Secretary/Website coordinator/ steward
• Kinder Kelsai	Steward coordinator
• Ollie Galvin	Production coordinator
• Vanessa Wells	Media coordinator
• Jess Dawson	Patches of Peace co-ordinator
• Lucy Melleney	Founding member of festival (2003)

The focus group had broad themes of enquiry, rather than specific questions as it was felt that the respondents should guide the focus group as they would have a greater understanding of how the event engaged with the local community and advocated community participation (Veal, 2006). To allow the respondents to 'ease into' the focus group the initial focus was on gaining background and contextual information on the event and the rationale behind their involvement in the event (Greenbaum, 1998). Once the background detail was established the questions focused on the key themes of engagement and participation with the local community, allowing the respondents to begin in a moderately controlled manner which facilitated a more comfortable voicing of participant's opinions (Veal, 2006; Edwards & Skinner, 2009). The findings from this in-depth focus group are presented below.

Case study: Peace in the park

Why people got involved?

The members of the organising committee all volunteered to help, support and deliver PitP for a variety reasons but a central theme in all their motivations was a sense of community development through advocating community networking, belonging, empowerment and

participation (Derrett, 2003; Hibbert et al. 2003). While the group did have different backgrounds, the event itself mirrored their own values and beliefs, creating a strong sense of altruism and wanting to give something back to the community they are active in (Carpenter & Myers, 2010). With the values and purpose of the event being so entwined with those of the organising committee, it gives the individuals an experience that is fulfilling and satisfying because it allows them to express their own beliefs through the event, placing greater worth in this volunteering experience (Laverie & McDonald, 2007; Hallmann & Harms, 2012). Indeed, Cuskelly (2004) argues that if individuals can explicitly identify with the event they are supporting, they are more likely to show greater organisational commitment over a significant time scale, making the administration of the event more sustainable in the long-term (Fredline & Faulkner, 2001; Getz & Andersson, 2008).

Why did the event get postponed in 2013?
From discussions within the focus group it became clear that while there two separate operational issues that forced the postponement of the 2013 event, lack of finance and safety concerns, they were actually inherently linked. The fund-raising activities lacked the support from the community achieved in previous years, with the vast majority of these fund-raising events actually losing money. The organising committee did discuss the possibility of delivering a smaller event, but couldn't cut costs in a way that would enable the event to be delivered safely, as they felt that around 7-8,000 people would still attend the event. The organising committee were forced to apply for grants (the first time they had ever done so), but these attempts were unsuccessful due to the challenging financial climate that saw a decline in grant funding. There was a feeling that the event had drifted away from being as a medium to promote the concepts of peace and love, to one that was preoccupied with the generation of revenue needed to run a 'music' event. McBrearty (2007) concludes that this overly commercial approach misaligns the objectives of internal and external stakeholders, so that the SE and the community had become separated, hence the decline in support.

Members of the focus group felt the event had become too focused on revenue generation at the expense of the original purpose of the event. This had created a cycle of decline because while they were desperately trying to raise funds, the local community didn't understand why they should donate their money – many thought the event was run by the council not by volunteers. What is really interesting is that at no point were the local community disengaged from the main event, but through tokenistic practices that were shaped around a motivation to

generate revenue at the expense of the social purpose of the fund-raising events, the local community dis-engaged with this element, and the organising committee failed to generate enough finance (Arnstein, 1969). While SE's are more financial stable, PitP had developed a resource dependent relationship with the local community that saw the local population providing the bulk of financial resource needed to operate the event (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Cornforth (2014) acknowledges that this kind of pressure on SE's can lead to 'mission drift', whereby the sole purpose of the organising committee was financially motivated with little or no consideration for the social impacts of these activities. The fund-raising activities lost legitimacy within the eyes of the stakeholders they sought to engage putting the event in financial risk (Cornforth, 2014). While the lack of applications for grant funding is admirable (can lead to lack of independence and is seen as unsustainable), a more diversified approach that was inherently and explicitly linked to the social purpose of the event may have seen some funds generated, alleviating the financial pressures on the organisations and its reliance on the local community (Dart, 2004; McBrearty, 2007). One board member summarised effectively the vicious circle of decline they entered:-

> *"For me (the postponement of the event) it was the lack of support and attendance from the community around the fund raising events. It just kept putting more and more pressure on the next event. The next gig must make this amount, then when that failed it was the next gig must make this - we needed more and more numbers to come to the fund raisers but it simply didn't happen"*

Embedding 'peace' into the event

From discussions within the focus group, the individuals acknowledged that with all the practicalities of the event from booking the park, liasing and working with the council, booking stall holders, production, stages, admin and fund raising it was easy for the message of the event to be lost or even forgotten. One member of the organising committee felt they had drifted away from their original purpose becuase "every conversation was about money." It wasn't until that money came in that they started to have other conversations about the "purpose of the event" – there was clearly a need to re-embed 'peace' back into the event (Cornforth, 2014). The organising committee recognised the importance of reengaging with the local community and looked to change the emphasis of the event so that individuals could reflect on their own meaning and understanding of peace within their community. PitP needed to represent these values and understand what these values were within the local community, so that when planning their fund raising activities, they would have the opportunity to bind the community together through a shared experience – they engaged in

practices to climb the ladder of participation (Arnsten, 1969; Derrett, 2003). As Chell (2007) argues, through creating something of value or meaning to the community it creates a much stronger emotional link to the SE which can lead to long-term engagement and continually attendance to the event.

There was a strong desire within the organising committee to not only make the event financially sustainable, but to retain the local community at the heart of the fund raising effort as they felt the community can provide the core of the sustainable resource needed (Haugh, 2005). This would return the event to more a SE footing, as it was clear that they could not rely on dwindling grants. The organising committee saw these fund-raising events as a great opportunity to explain its structure and it how operates to the community because they felt if the community knew about the voluntary status, they were more likely to be supportive of the SE if they understand its key operational issues and needs   (Bull & Crompton, 2006). It was therefore acknowledged that the organising committee needed to empower the community to come together to deliver fund-raising events that created specific environments whereby their views, values and beliefs of peace can be heard, respected and embedded into the event (Reid, 2011). The 'Patches of Peace co-ordinator' summed up this process succinctly:-

> *"We are trying to avoid being a steering group that is something that we are really trying to address this year. Using these community engagement projects (the mini-pop up events, little patches) so that we can engage with a variety of communities because it is about Sheffield and its wider community, rather than just us sat here tonight."*

The future of the event
The ability of PitP to transmit the core message of 'peace' will only continue by combining a vibrant atmosphere and sense of community (Richards &Palmer, 2010). However, while PitP will remain the nucleus of activities the organising committee perform, they have also decided to make use of smaller 'pop-up' events and activities that maintain the dynamism and vibrancy of PitP throughout the year. The idea is the messages and excitement of these 'pop-up' events will spill over to the surrounding communities and create meaningful experiences that allow engagement opportunities for the organising committee to broaden the appeal of PitP to a much wider community within Sheffield (Fredline & Faulkner, 2001).

Smaller events like 'patches for peace' have been designed by the organising committee simply to get a conversation going about what 'peace' means to an individual in a variety of communities – an organising committee member said "Literally your patch and what peace means to you in this area." By using this approach they want to steer away from just creating a Saturday night music event, to shift the emphasis back to Sheffield and its wider community to provide opportunities to create communitas and liminality (Chalip, 2006). Also, by alternating between a day event (family oriented and free) and a night event (paid), it is hoped that PitP can become more financially sustainable, by using the funds raised at the night event to support and subsidise the rest of their event programme (Chalip, 2004). It is vital that these are varied in nature, from medium size events to more intimate and spontaneous performances, however whatever the content or scale of the event the core theme of 'peace' needs to remain consistent, to ensure the organising committee will create value not only for community but also for PitP (Fredline & Faulkner, 2001). Giving a voice to the community is a clear priority for the organising committee:-

> *"It's all [patches for peace] about going out there and asking people what peace means to you in the area that you live in. Literally your patch and what peace means to you in this area. We ask them to make banners which will be displayed at the main event. If we talk about world peace people just turn off because they just think we can never achieve this but you can talk to your neighbour about peace, what it means to you in your area and why peace is needed"*

Conclusion

At the heart of a SE are principles, beliefs and values that a local community can identify, understand and support a local event so as to generate benefit towards a social cause (Chell, 2007). However, using the Arnstein model we have sought to understand how it can be used highlight the issue of community participation. This clearly happened within the case study as the organising committee drifted away from a model of community participation based on the concept of peace, to one that focused on revenue generation. By using the model, event organisers can seek to locate themselves on the 'ladder' so that they can be completely honest about the actual level of community engagement that has been achieved or whether it is actually wanted. This approach highlighted the need to constantly re-evaluate their methods of future community engagement that actually advocates a more participatory experience for the local community (Arnstein, 1969; Greenbaum, 1998).

PitP, as they move forward, see that a market approach will be essential to engagement so that it is focused on the beneficiaries/customers and their engagement/non-engagement with the event at an individual level (Gilbert 2002; Jimenez & Voss, 2014). From the case study, non-engagement with the fund raising activities was clearly an issue but even when discussing the main event the organising committee discussed how most people were passively engaged with the event – happy to attend but limited individual engagement. With events like 'patches for peace' the organising committee are seeking to create opportunities where individuals are "fully active" with the event, its organisation and are committed to its ideals.

From looking at the event through the gaze of a SE, the sustainability of the event will not only be determined by the achievement of blended value (social and economic purpose) but also a combination of the organising committee's engagement with the local community, and how the local community then respond through their individual engagement. If the organising committee can achieve equilibrium with these elements, the community event will achieve legitimacy through balancing these goals with the needs of its internal (operationally based) stakeholders and its external (community) stakeholders, and avoid the consequences of 'mission drift' (Dart, 2004; McBrearty, 2007). Where one or more of these elements are missing, the event is not operating on behalf of the community and is therefore can be seen as 'unsustainable' or 'at risk' of failure in the future.

Additional research needs to be conducted that examines the relationship between the blended value that SE's can create, and how to ensure the community not only participate in the planning of the event, but are also 'active' participants. By doing so, we can deliver events that are accepted within the community due to their desirability through the creation of links to community values, beliefs and culture (Larson, 2004). Taking these areas in account will allow the organising committee to fundamentally understand and shape support for the event through interacting with its stakeholders and build 'legitimacy' (Larson, 2004). What the organising committee need to do is understand how the SE can optimise activities to ensure community support to create value in the event delivered. Stated in another way, the organising committee need to be effective and efficient at creating participatory and engaging activities that start with the community not the other way round (Lusch & Webster, 2011).

This way value co-creation in the event is more likely to happen, and the long-term sustainability of the event can be secured.

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