

Engaging communities with sport events during times of crisis: A case study of Federation University Road National Championships 2021 and Covid-19

Project Update December 2020

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FedUni Ethics ref: B20-111

Executive Summary

Research aim: This research project aims to explore the role of sport events for communities during times of crisis and recovery, and the associated event management implications, focusing on the Federation University Road National Championships ('the event'), a yearly event historically hosted in Ballarat, Victoria. Federation University researchers successfully secured \$10,000 in internal grant funding to implement a pilot project in 2020 which has included a community survey and key stakeholder interviews.

Preliminary findings: The community survey received an overwhelming response, with over 500 valid responses used in our statistical analysis. Key results from the survey include:

- Event awareness, overall satisfaction etc., all indicate mean scores of 4.5-5 out of a possible 7.
- Respondents were very conscious of both the positives and the negatives of the event. E.g. positives in terms of place marketing, broader economic benefits for the region, and the negatives including short term inconveniences, limited or uneven distribution of impacts.
- Attitude towards the event is shaped by the extent to which respondents believe it helps create a closer community, serves as an important source of entertainment, and the pride that comes from hosting such an event.
- The more passionate someone is about sport, the more likely they were to hold a positive view of the event.
- Overall attitude towards the event was influenced by the extent to which they perceive it as offering a solution to some of the problems created by COVID-19 (e.g. encouraging people to get physically active again, providing an important economic boost to the Region etc.).

We have recently completed stakeholder interviews and analysis of these will take place in early 2021.

Anticipated outputs: The successful response rate and early indications of the success of our statistical modelling, as well as the rich data from the stakeholder interviews, have the project on track for submission of at least three articles to high quality peer-reviewed academic journals (i.e., Q1 ranked). The project has also received positive interest from local media outlets, with ABC Ballarat interested in a follow-up interview on their breakfast program to discuss results of the community survey.

Further development of research program: Our discussions and preliminary findings indicate potential for further development of a Road Nats research program with the team actively seeking partnerships and funding to pursue the following:

- Scoping review of 'like events' in other regional communities in Australia and around the world to identify promising practice for event delivery and leveraging programs.
- Further community studies:
 - to test and explore statistical modelling established in this pilot project, with particular emphasis on understanding community apathy towards the event (i.e., non-attendees, non-supporters).
 - to explore the relationship between the Road Nats event and encouraging community behaviours such as increases in active transport and physical activity.
- Action research program where specialist academics work with local businesses and community groups to facilitate leveraging of the event and provide evaluation of efforts.
- Big data projects (GPS tracking, social media analysis) looking at visitor and tourist interactions in the Ballarat region, feeding this data back into local tourism stakeholders and strategy development.

We have also identified further opportunities for development of Road Nats primary and secondary curriculum resources that can be developed by our Education experts, particularly in applications for STEM. FedUni also has capacities in virtual reality technologies that could be developed and applied across areas of event management, event education, athlete development, spectator experience, etc.

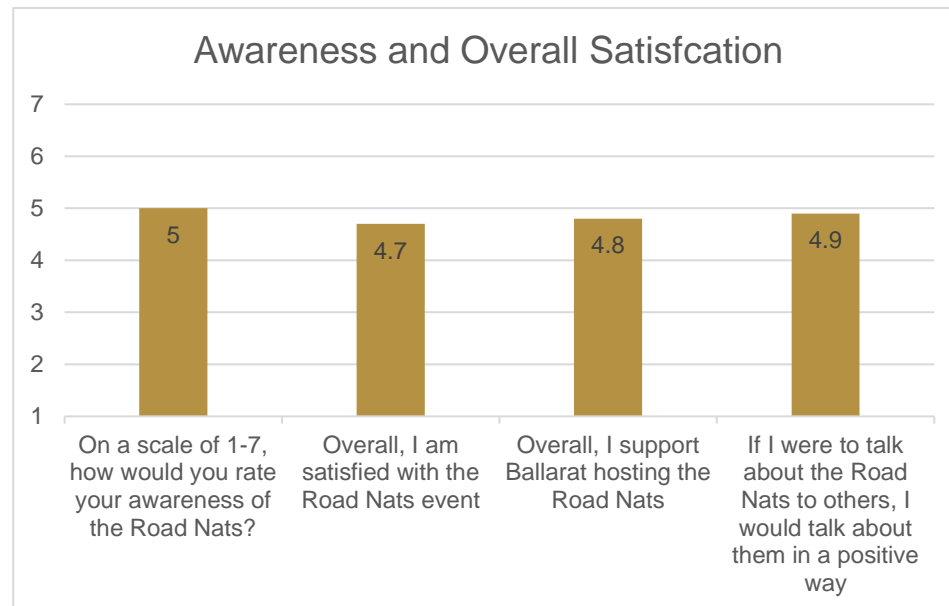
Contents

Project Update December 2020	1
About this research project	2
Headline points	2
Background	2
Research Methods	3
Anticipated Benefits of Research	3
Current Project Status	4
Research outputs	4
Road Nats research program – looking forward	4
Project Contact	4
Researcher biographies	5
Reference List	8

Project Update December 2020

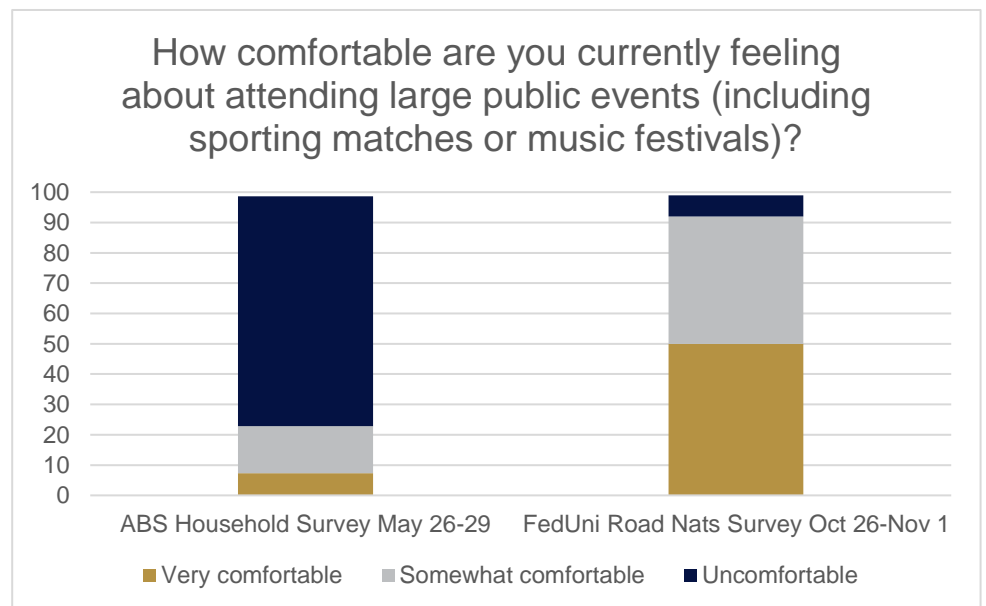
Community survey design and response rate:

- Researchers developed a scale to explore community attitudes towards the range of potential impacts of the Road Nats event (ethics ref B20-111)
- Survey ran from Monday 26 October to Sunday 1 November and was distributed via FedUni media channels, researcher email and social media networks, community social media channels in Ballarat.
- The Ballarat Courier also ran a story on October 29.
- Over 500 valid responses, sample reflective of official stats for demographics (age, education, etc).



Stories the survey data is telling:

- Respondents were very conscious of both the positives and the negatives of the event. E.g. positives in terms of place marketing, broader economic benefits for the region, and the negatives including short term inconveniences, limited or uneven distribution of impacts.
- Attitude towards the event is shaped by the extent to which respondents believe it helps create a closer community, serves as an important source of entertainment, and the pride that comes from hosting such an event.
- The more passionate someone is about sport, the more likely they were to hold a positive view of the event.
- Overall attitude towards the event was influenced by the extent to which they perceive it as offering a solution to some of the problems created by COVID-19 (e.g. encouraging people to get physically active again, providing an important economic boost to the Region etc.).



About this research project

This research project aims to explore the role of sport events for communities during times of crisis and recovery, and the associated event management implications, focusing on the Federation University Road National Championships ('the event'), a yearly event historically hosted in Ballarat, Victoria. The research questions include:

1. What is the community's sentiment towards the event, given the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. What opportunities and challenges are there to engaging the community with the event?
3. What key learnings can be taken from this case study to inform the sport event scholarship (i.e., areas of sociology and management) in terms of:
 - the role of events for communities during times of crisis and recovery; and
 - new models for sport event management during times of crisis and recovery.

Headline points

- Sporting and community events are a key part of the social and economic fabric of our regional communities in Australia. These events have been impacted by COVID-19 in various ways – with a number of cancellations and/or event adaptations across Australian event calendars.
- A survey conducted in the United States in April 2020 found 71 percent of respondents stated that they were much less likely to attend a sporting event based on what they knew about the coronavirus (Lange, 2020). A study by the ABS during May 2020 found 3 in 4 Australians were uncomfortable with attending large public events (including sporting events).
- Federation University researchers secured a \$10,000 internally-funded research grant to implement the current project to understand the issues facing community events during these unprecedented times, titled, "Engaging communities with sport events during times of crisis: A case study of Federation University Road National Championships 2021 and Covid-19" (HREC ref: B20-111)
- Our study will provide insights for event managers to deliver events which engage the community and create/reinforce a sense of community pride during the time of COVID-19.
- Our findings will contribute to a better understanding of how hosting sport events can help regional communities across Australia to boost/recover economies post-COVID-19.
- This research project is led by Federation University researchers and is a collaboration across the Business, Education and Arts Schools, and brings in experts from Griffith University, the University of Newcastle and University of Queensland in Australia and Bournemouth University, UK.
- The research project has support from Federation University Australia and Cycling Australia.

Background

Sport events, whether participatory or spectator-based, large or small scale, have become important socio-historic markers in our contemporary lives (Oja, Wear & Clopton, 2018). Many world cities now have event hosting strategies in place and portfolios of events whereby governments invest substantial amounts of taxpayer monies to secure the event-related outcomes of economic stimulation and city liveability (Antchak, Ziakas & Getz, 2019).

Sport events are typically characterised by physical participation and engagement (Chalip, 2006). However, the current COVID-19 pandemic, with social distancing measures in place across most parts of the world, challenge established modes of operating by sport event organisers, and the outcome of potential socio-economic benefits for host communities (e.g. community engagement and wellbeing, economic contributions, place marketing civic pride, etc.). However, an Australian Bureau of Statistics study, conducted at the end of May 2020, found 3 in 4 Australians were uncomfortable with attending large public events (including sporting events) (ABS, 2020). Alongside this, we have seen a newly formed industry collective, AMPSEA (Australian Mass Participation Sporting Events Alliance - <https://www.ampsea.com.au/>), which has been established to advocate for mass participation sport events and provide guidance for the industry in recovery from COVID-19.

To date, much academic inquiry has focused on international large-scale spectator-based sport events and the impacts of crisis, disaster and emergencies (c.f., Miles & Shipway, 2020; Shipway & Miles, 2020). Smaller scale events have not attracted equivalent attention and there remains a dearth of evidence base to demonstrate the potential role of these events in times of crisis and ways to best approach aspects of event management and the securing of benefits for host communities.

With the recent resurgence, or ‘second wave’ of COVID-19 being experienced across many countries, the temporary hiatus for mass gatherings has turned into a much longer-term interruption for event organisers and attendees around the world. Some annual events have now been cancelled completely for 2020 (e.g. Paris Marathon (Kar-Gupta & Sriram, 2020)), and the New Zealand’s ICC Women’s World Cricket World Cup scheduled for early 2021 has now been postponed to 2022 (NZ Herald, 2020). Event practitioners around the world are grappling with ways to move forward in the restricted operating environment that COVID-19 presents, and there have been calls in the scholarly literature for empirical research to consider ways key stakeholders might deliver, and host communities might engage with, events to secure socio-economic benefits in our COVID-19 environments (e.g., Shipway & Miles, 2020; Weed, 2020).

In responding to this gap in the body of knowledge, this project will focus on the role of a national championship cycling event – Federation University Road National Championships 2021, a recurring yearly event with a long history of being hosted in the regional city of Ballarat, Victoria.

Research Methods

Method	Description	Status
Cross-section survey (for community sentiment)	An online survey targeted Ballarat community members (i.e., those currently living/working in the community aged over 18), to elicit insights on sentiment towards the event and perceived social/economic opportunities/challenges for the event’s future. The survey was distributed via Federation University communications and other key local business and community groups.	Complete Oct-Nov 2020
Key Stakeholder Interviews	Target participants were representatives of key stakeholder organisations of the event, identified via discussions with Federation University (main sponsor) (via Federation University Commercial Services and Technology Park) and Cycling Australia (event owner). Stakeholder interviews were semi-structured and questions sought to identify existing approaches to hosting the event, hopes for the event into the future, and considerations for event opportunities/challenges in the current COVID-19 environment. Interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes, conducted via telephone or Skype at a time convenient to interviewees, audio recorded with permission and transcribed for analysis.	Complete Oct-Dec 2020

Anticipated Benefits of Research

The research has potential to benefit to participants (and their organisations where relevant), the community in which the research is taking place (i.e., Ballarat), and the event sector more broadly (both in scholarship and practice), including:

- Gains in understanding of the socio-economic value of sport events (i.e., potential for community engagement and wellbeing, economic contributions, place marketing, civic pride etc) during times of crisis and recovery, informing event scholarship, policy and practice.
- Evidence base highlighting areas of the event that are working well, and areas that could be improved/developed/ better coordinated for greater benefit to the community and stakeholders.
- Opportunity for community members to have their thoughts and ideas potentially incorporated to provide better opportunities for community engagement with the event.
- Evidence base to inform policy and practice for similar scale events in Australia and around the world.

Current Project Status

- ✓ Internal Federation University Grant funding of \$10,000 secured
- ✓ Ethics approval granted (B20-111)
- ✓ Community survey completed October/November 2020
- ✓ Key stakeholder interviews completed December 2020 and ready for analysis early 2021
- ✓ Academic outputs for the quantitative work are currently being drafted for submission to Q1 journals in early 2021.

Research outputs

Anticipated academic outputs

- Academic outputs are currently being drafted, with anticipated submissions to Q1 journals in early 2021:
 - The Meaning and Value of a National Sport Event to a Host Community in Times of Crisis and Recovery: A Case Study of an Australian National Cycling Championships During COVID-19, Target journal - Journal of Sport Management (Schimago Q1)
 - Management Considerations for Sport Events in times of Crisis and Recovery: A case study of an Australian National Cycling Championships During COVID-19, Target journal - Journal of Business Research (Schimago Q1)
 - 'You either love it or hate it': A cluster analysis of community attitudes towards a cycling event during COVID-19, Target journal: Tourism Management (Schimago Q1)

Media

- Alex Ford included mention of the community survey on 29 October, 2020, 'RoadNats 2021: Study looks at community attitudes as events return', <https://www.thecourier.com.au/story/6987576/are-we-ready-for-big-events-again-heres-a-chance-to-have-your-say/> (for subscribers/pay-to-view)
- Steve Martin, ABC Radio Ballarat Breakfast presenter interviewed Dr Alana Thomson about the project and purpose on 17 November, 2020.

Road Nats research program – looking forward

Our discussions and preliminary findings indicate potential for further development of a Road Nats research program with the team actively seeking partnerships and funding to pursue the following:

- Scoping review of 'like events' in other regional communities in Australia and around the world to identify promising practice for event delivery and leveraging programs.
- Further community studies:
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 - to explore the relationship between the Road Nats event and encouraging community behaviours such as increases in active transport and physical activity.
- Action research program where specialist academics work with local businesses and community groups to facilitate leveraging of the event and evaluate processes, outputs and outcomes realised.
- Big data projects (GPS tracking, social media analysis) looking at visitor and tourist interactions in the Ballarat region, feeding this data back into local tourism stakeholders and strategy development.

We have also identified further opportunities for development of Road Nats primary and secondary curriculum resources that can be developed by our Education experts, particularly in applications for STEM. FedUni also has capacities in virtual reality technologies that could be developed and applied across areas of event management, event education, athlete development, spectator experience, etc.

Project Contact

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Researcher biographies



Project Lead: Dr Alana Thomson, Lecturer, Federation Business School

Dr Thomson is a Lecturer in Management in the Federation Business School, Brisbane campus. Alana's research, which has been published in ABDC A-ranked journals, has looked at the connections between sport and communities, particularly securing positive legacy outcomes from large-scale sport events. Alana has worked and researched with a range of user groups in sport, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples, Pacific Island communities, Chinese communities, Masters athletes and women in sport. Alana was a postdoctoral research fellow at Griffith University from 2016-2020 and worked on a number of research projects across areas of sport and events, including an International Olympic Committee-funded grant examining social legacies of Summer Olympic Games over the last 2 decades. Alongside her research career, Alana has professional experience as a policy writer working on the Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games and practitioner in the sport and sport event sector.



Mr Josh Ambrosy, Lecturer, Federation University School of Education

Josh's previous research has focused on alternative education practices and settings. This includes areas such as year nine programs and outdoor education in Victorian schools. Through this research Josh has developed skills in using both arts-based methodologies along with mixed methods surveys. Josh has extensive knowledge of outdoor, sport and recreation policy through a number of professional roles.



Dr Abdel K Halabi, Senior Lecturer, Federation Business School

Dr Abdel K Halabi is a senior lecturer in Accounting at the Federation Business School. Abdel is a Fellow of the Chartered Accountants of Australia and New Zealand (CAANZ) and a Certified Practising Accountant with CPA Australia. Abdel is the current Chair of CPA Australia's Gippsland Regional Branch, and a member of CPA Australia's Victorian Divisional Council. Abdel's research interest is in Accounting Education, Accounting History and Accounting for sporting clubs. In terms of sports related research, Abdel's work has been published in Accounting History, Journal of Management History, Business History, Australian Economic History Review, The International Journal of the History of Sport, and The Journal of Sport Management. Abdel is the current co-editor of "Sporting Traditions" the journal of the Australian Society for Sports History.



Dr Vaughan Reimers, Senior Lecturer, Federation Business School

Vaughan has worked as a full-time academic with Monash University and then Federation University Australia for 23 years. His expertise lies in the field of marketing and he has an extensive list of publications and research grants. Vaughan is regularly employed/engaged by external stakeholders to help 'translate' complex academic concepts and content into a 'language' that practitioners can understand and implement. Vaughan also has significant expertise and extensive experience in conducting studies that focus on stakeholder needs, studies requiring large samples, survey design, sample selection and research software such as Survey Monkey. Vaughan was a key team member of the project; Development of the Evaluation framework for Latrobe with particular interest in the work with the Gippsland Primary Health Network.



Dr Bryce Magnuson, Lecturer, Federation Business School

Dr Bryce Magnuson is a Marketing Lecturer in the School of Business at Federation University, a position he has filled on a full-time basis since 2018. Prior to this appointment he worked as a sessional academic at the Gippsland Campus for Federation University from 2014-2017, and the former Monash Gippsland Campus from 2012-2014. During this time Bryce also worked overseas at partner universities in Hong Kong and China. He is currently based at the Berwick Campus but regularly works at the Gippsland Campus. His research areas of interest include ethical fashion, sustainability in marketing, and consumer behaviour among others. Bryce is passionate about teaching and creating engaging teaching environments and has made a number of connections with a variety of stakeholder groups in Gippsland and Berwick through his involvement with initiatives such as the Casey Cardinia Business Awards.



Dr Millicent Kennelly, Senior Lecturer, Griffith Business School

Dr Kennelly is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Tourism, Sport and Hotel Management at Griffith University in Queensland. Dr Kennelly's research focuses on sport event management and stakeholder experiences, with a particular focus on leveraging events to achieve positive social and economic legacies for hosting communities. Dr Kennelly has worked with Dr Thomson on several projects examining sport event outcomes, including a project funded by the International Olympic Committee. Dr Kennelly has also previously examined stakeholder perspectives of risk management, contingency planning and service recovery in the context of sport events. Dr Kennelly's work has been published in a range of ABDC A-ranked publications and she currently serves on the Editorial Boards for the Journal of Sport and Tourism, Annals of Leisure Research and Leisure Studies.



Dr Richard Shipway, Senior Principal Academic, Bournemouth University (UK)

Dr Shipway's research interests focus on the impacts and legacies of international sport events, crisis and disaster management at sports events, volunteering at sports mega events, sport tourism, Olympic studies, and sport ethnography. His work has explored a series of Olympic related research themes ranging from resident perception community studies to Olympic tourism. Richard's other research interests are linked to the experiences of endurance athletes, most notably distance runners and cycling tourists. He has previously received a major research grant from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) to develop research linked to sport tourism and sports events. Richard is currently a visiting scholar at the University of Queensland, and since 2010 he has served on the ESRC's Peer Review College (PRC), refereeing grant proposals within social sciences.



Dr Fred Chao, Senior Lecturer, Newcastle Business School

Dr Chao is a Senior Lecturer in Marketing at the Newcastle Business School. Prior to joining the University of Newcastle, Fred was an assistant lecturer at the Department of Marketing at Monash University, Melbourne. Fred's research interests focus on the areas of consumer behaviour, new product development, product innovation management and marketing research. Fred's publications appear in the Australasian Marketing Journal. He has been a reviewer for Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics and European Journal of Marketing. Fred's research interest is primarily focused on understanding the influence of consumer innovativeness on new product adoption across various product categories, services and cultures. The importance of such research enables companies addressing innovative consumers and knowing how to deal with this key segment, thus minimizes the failure rate of product innovations. He is currently engaged in a cross cultural study about drivers of consumer acceptance of novel new services.



Dr David Fechner, Postdoctoral Research Fellow, University of Queensland

Dr Fechner's research examines how sport event stakeholders such as event managers, sponsors, and participants can collaborate to create meaningful experiences for event participants. David has experience in mixed method research including conducting and analysing interviews as well as advanced statistical analysis. David's work has been published in ABDC A-ranked journals.

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