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# Building Social Capital Through Events: Some Insights From the Gathering

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# **Building Social Capital through events: Some insights from the Gathering 2013**

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# Social impacts

- Economic impacts – social impacts – social capital
- Social impacts: residents attitudes (Madrigan (1995) and Zhou and Ap (2009) Jackson (2008) and Bull and Lovell (2007)
- Deery and Jago (2010) outline many positive and negative impacts of events e.g.
  - enhanced community image, civic pride, new facilities and increased skills base, noise, increased crime levels, overcrowding and disruption to normal way of life.

# Social Capital

- Bourdieu (1986) is credited with the first contemporary analysis of social capital and he defined it as 'the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition' (p.248).
- Putnam (1993) and Naravan (1999) dissect the concept of social capital and discuss bridging and bonding elements.
- Difficulties of measurement (Arcodia and Whitford, 2006, Schuller, 2000)
- Cooke and Wills (1999) have suggested, aspects such as civic engagement, associational membership, and the development of social networks

# Impact of the Gathering

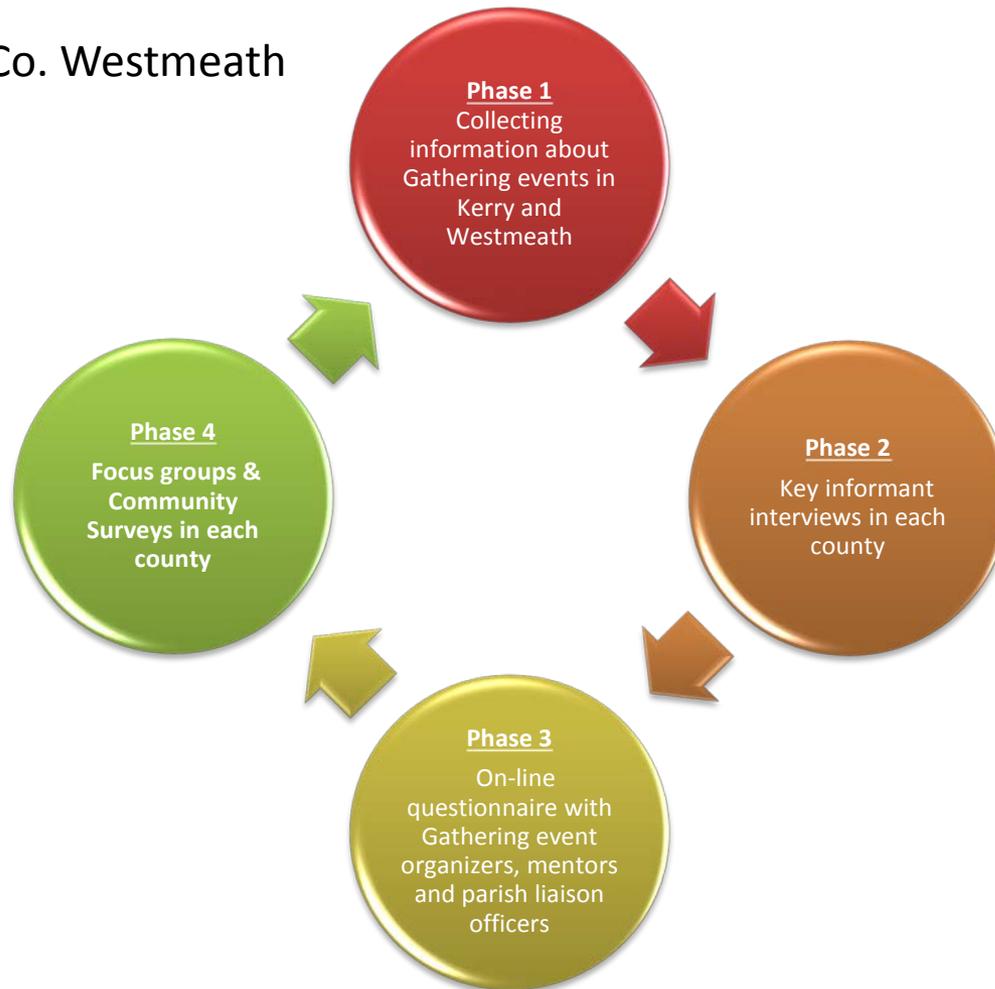
- 5,000 events
- 250-270,000 additional tourists
- €170m additional revenue generated  
(Fáilte Ireland, 2013)
  
- Objective was to attract diaspora and international tourists to visit Ireland in 2013. But the consequence was also a range of social and community impacts.

# Research Question

What are the social and community impacts of the Gathering and has it had an impact on social capital?

# Research Methodology

Co. Kerry & Co. Westmeath



# Key Findings

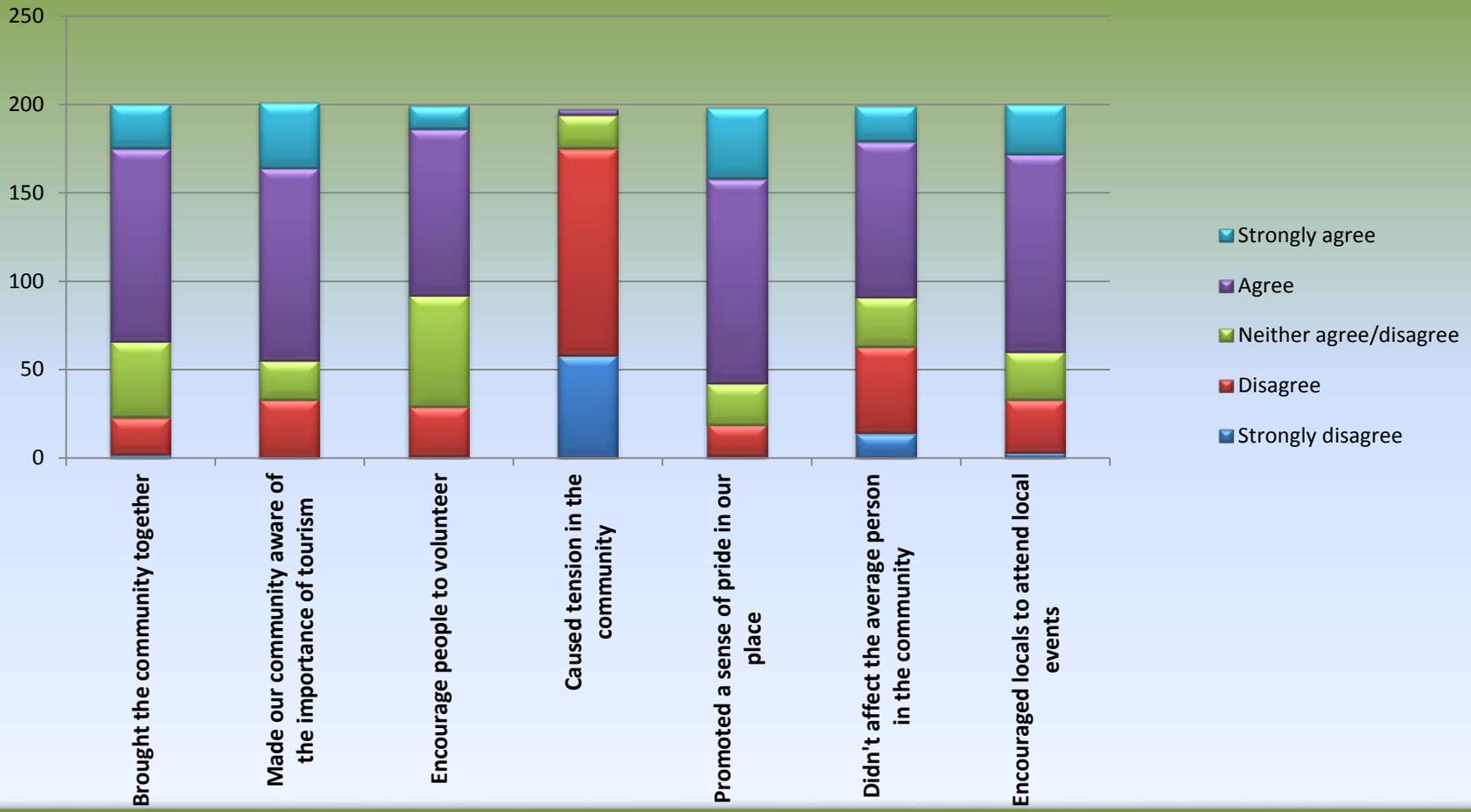
- Community Engagement
- Civic Pride and pride of place
- Intergenerational, intercultural and family relationships
- Networks and Relationships
- Building Capacities

# Community Engagement

- *'It gave ordinary people an opportunity to come up with different initiatives; gave them a purpose; opened up their minds'*
- *61% of community felt that 'it brought the community together'*
- Many people considered it as a community action rather than a tourism action' - 'Fáilte Ireland wanted to bring more people here to make money for businesses but community made a conscious decision that the Gathering is not just for people abroad it was for community'. 'At the start it was all about bringing in money but it became about much more'



04/11/2015



## Did the Gathering...

04/11/2015





## Reasons why events were organised (n=69)

# Civic pride and pride of place

- 84% of community respondents and 87% of event organizers agreed or strongly agreed that the Gathering created a sense of pride in place
- ‘communities within the area are perhaps seeing opportunities they hadn’t before, the potential to be more involved in tourism. They are recognizing that they have an offering’
- *‘Knowing your place’* and local heritage





# Intergenerational, intercultural and family relationships

- It brought different generations together which was 'good as it helps build respect and understanding across generations'
- 'It had people talking to each other who otherwise wouldn't be'
- Bonded the community

# Networks and Relationships

- The networking engendered by the Gathering created a wealth of new contacts at all kinds of levels.
  - It brought *'communities together around a table that possibly hadn't done so in a number of years ....it gave people the opportunity to talk to each other and see what they could do'*.
  - Some communities *'basically formed a group to create events so that all their businesses would benefit'*.
- *'People who have never worked together will see each-other's ability and skills and will get to know each other at events and will keep in contact and relationships will be maintained'*.

*'it raised awareness of 'who's good at what; who you can rely on.... you now know who to call on next time'.*

- Evidence of new and improved relationships was evident across public body organisations also,
  - *‘we always had a good working relationship with Go Kerry, Kerry County Council and Fáilte Ireland but this was enhanced by the Gathering. We usually work individually of each other whereas being on the Steering Committee enhanced our relationship’.*
- *Also evident between public bodies and local communities*
  - *‘... The ‘OPW are now involved with our community and this will hopefully change the lives of that community. That opportunity wouldn’t have happened only for the Gathering to be honest’.*

# Building Capacities

- Participants explained how important it was that local communities had received support : *'we need a little bit of handholding in developing strategy'*
- Training sessions *'gave people the start they needed'* also helping to *'develop contacts, initiate reciprocal support, [and develop] relationships'*.
- *'ways were found around things'* and a *'hugely supportive County Council'* was *'very willing to help'*.

*'... where there's no consultation on the ground you have failure. I think the Gathering had that in a big way and it needs to continue by all the public bodies'*

'...it was nice to be ... able to say look we actually are community people and we want to help and of course we want to promote tourism and what better way to promote tourism than to get community people actually running tourism initiatives themselves – I think that's going to be the big benefit of the Gathering here.'

- Kerry County Council approached the Gathering in a very strategic manner, with a very clear set of objectives in mind:
  - the profile of the council had been *'raised'* and *'their role as a body that can support communities was enhanced'*.
- Its involvement was very effective in supporting and facilitating community engagement in the Gathering.
  - *'support from the Gathering office ... was fundamental'*
  - *'the co-ordination of it was very important and the Gathering office was superb and it was so needed'*
  - *'the Gathering Steering Committee was excellent because we brought all the tourism players, local authorities and the development companies together so we all rode in together rather than everyone funding their own different things and I think this made a difference. I think this will continue and it will probably spill over into a tourism forum ... all working together on tourism and community initiatives'*.

● 4/17/395 73% of community respondents believed that the Gathering made the community more aware of the importance of tourism (62%



# Conclusions

- Social capital has been developed in these two counties as a result of the Gathering
- The community has been strengthened
- There is a stronger pride of place and civic pride
- Relationships and connections have been established and developed
- Capacities among communities have been enhanced
- The Gathering provided the opportunity and impetus for individuals and individual groups to develop their own relationships (bonding) but also to adopt broader perspectives and to link with others (bridging) in the pursuit of a common objective.
- The impacts of this are likely to be seen well beyond 2013