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# 6 Community Festivals Reveal Tangible and Intangible Bounty: Lismore NSW Australia

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*Cultural life contains both the wealth of being able to appreciate and treasure traditions of all peoples and an opportunity to enable the creation and innovation of endogenous cultural forms (Agenda 21 2008: 8 cited in Perry et al., 2016: 23).*

## **Abstract**

Recent research suggests that social and cultural impacts, often understood in terms of community wellbeing and resilience, indicate that cultural festivals can stimulate job creation, tourism, attract visitors and investment and diversify the traditional focus on agribusinesses that holds many rural communities in decline. This chapter examines how a local volunteer run annual community festival, Lismore Friendship Festival's Piazza in the Park, encourages participation, reciprocity, and generosity amongst residents through a process of intergenerational engagement in a celebration of multiculturalism. If the cultural tourism is community-created, as is suggested by festivals welcoming visitors, the dynamic of working together to develop the community's image and identity may bind residents and encourage identification with community. In line with current literature, the impacts of this festival suggest that social capital is the product of social interactions with the potential to contribute to the social, civic or economic wellbeing of a community of purpose.

## Introduction

The emerging literature on a sense of community, engagement, and empowerment serves this case study well. Recent research suggests that social and cultural practices, often understood in terms of community wellbeing, indicate that arts activity, including cultural festivals, stimulate job creation, tourism, attract visitors and investment, and diversify the traditional focus on agribusinesses that hold many rural communities in decline. When investigating regional culture and its reinvigoration, the phenomenon of neolocalism can manifest through the experience of groups celebrating their heritage in locations of a diasporic separate from their place of origin. Immigrant citizens can contribute to a host community, as it seeks to revive interest in preserving and promoting its identity.

My extensive personal and professional experience in festival-making research and practices has offered me opportunities to observe the strategic and tactical approaches groups have employed to conduct community festivals. My long-term interest in this phenomenon has prompted me to evaluate a festival, Lismore Friendship Festival, developed in my hometown in regional New South Wales (NSW), Australia. My determination to evaluate an emerging festival, initiated by residents to raise awareness of the contribution Italian settlers to the district in the 20th century have made to community life, is outlined in this chapter. The platform chosen to deliver this recognition was a festival. I have been an integral part of the team of volunteers who have now conducted the festival, with its roots in Italian communal life, for 5 years. It has afforded me a perspective informed by the practical and theoretical frameworks identified in this investigation of the nourishment festivals can provide for community resilience. These bear significant witness to the four main elements of sense of community suggested by McMillan and Chavis (1986: 14) of membership, influence, integration, and fulfilment of needs and shared emotional connection through sharing history and shared participation.

## Positioning festivals and communities

Cohesion and quality of life, along with a sense of community and place, acknowledges belonging, valued membership, mutual importance and dependence, shared worldviews, bonding/networking, and mutual responsibility for the community as key indicators are demonstrated in

this chapter's case study destination. These demonstrate vital dimensions, such as arts practice, sense of place, role of volunteerism, community resilience, and revitalisation of cultural heritage. Each of these elements provides a timely lens for an investigation into what is now regarded as neolocalism. Sarason (1974) proposed the existence of a psychological sense of community, asserting it is one of the major bases for self-definition, that people knew when they had it and when they didn't. This draws on the notions of interdependence, mutual responsibility, and collective consciousness. A renewed understanding of these frameworks has implications for community festival organisers attempting to connect with, and reflect, their host community to be shared with visitors. The festivals they frame can address the histories, heritage, and shared memories of particular host communities and attract visitors to acknowledge the relationships that informed the initial design and delivery of the special occasion. Central to most community festivals is an appreciation of a sense of place and the influence of its origins and meaning for residents and visitors, bringing it all back home!



Image 6.1: Lismore Festival graphic. [www.LismoreFriendshipFestival.com.au](http://www.LismoreFriendshipFestival.com.au)

The Lismore Friendship Festival hosted in regional Australia, identified in this chapter's case study, focuses on belonging to Lismore and celebrating historic and contemporary life while encouraging the whole