The underlying assumption that lies behind the festival event is that it functions as a community building activity. The festival is, as anthropologist Robert Lavenda describes it, ‘people celebrating themselves and their community in an 'authentic' and traditional way, or at least emerging spontaneously from their homes for a communitywide expression of fellowship’ (1992: 76). Hence, participation in a community festival is an interactive process that produces a sense of a social reality for a 'located' group identity, and, although a temporary event, the festival has implications for a group's identity/identities that extend beyond this time period and specific geographical location. Embedded within these sorts of ideas about the festival is an understanding of a clearly articulated relationship between place and community, with the festival a means to represent this intersection. Yet there are other processes involved, specifically the ways in which different actors understand and activate ideas about place, and how place and its various constituents (human and non-human) are connected and networked. These frameworks of place point to the ways in which heterogenous relations of people, processes and materials are important to constituting meanings about a place and
community. This also means that the festival is something that activates and is activated by ideas and issues about 'community' identity and 'place' that are already in circulation. We need to acknowledge, though, that there is inequality in any constitution of community and place. As Clarke & Jepson (2011: 8) point out, political relations are significant to the creation of a festival because there are particular individuals who are the power brokers of that community, ‘those who hold direct power over the festival and its construction.’ A community festival is therefore constituted out of a complex set of power relations that nonetheless serve to define notions of belonging.

Various processes can create a sense of belonging, which in turn constructs assumptions about identification, in terms of social location (gender, race, or class), with regards to narratives of identity (Probyn, 1996; Fortier, 2000), and how these various constructions are attributed ethical and political value (Yuval-Davis, 2006). However, given the various forms of identification, belonging is never fixed and coherent, but rather fragmented, partial and mobile (Appadurai, 1996; Bauman, 2001). Hence, notions of belonging require work (Crowley, 1999) as they involve the struggles around defining and determining what is actually involved in belonging. In this chapter we wish to explore the impact of shifting place boundaries on communities, and how such shifts raise questions around the sense of connectedness to a place and its community. Our focus is on the rapid changes occurring at Melbourne’s peri-urban fringe, and how the goals of one festival – the Yakkerboo festival, a long-held event in Melbourne’s south eastern growth corridor – addresses what have become contested notions of identity, place and belonging in this space of transition.

Constructing place and community in sites of change

The Great Australian Dream of home ownership and its links to an idealised free-standing house for the modern nuclear family has been central to the making of Australian suburbia. Yet the recent push behind the development of peri-urban regions raises a number of important challenges to this dream because of the strategic, spatial, economic and environmental significance of these sites (Buxton et al., 2006). High housing prices, rising costs of petrol, economic restructuring and changing employment opportunities, as well as growing anxieties about environmental sustainability in the face
of climate change, have combined in different ways to challenge the taken-for-granted processes of urban and suburban growth. Moreover, many rural communities that experience the advancing urban frontier have expressed frustration over their loss of a sense of place, as farming land and pastures are transformed and subdivided into ‘amenity’ or ‘lifestyle’ residential blocks. Some question the inevitability of metropolitan sprawl (Green, 2010) and destruction of the rich social fabric of rural places in order to create so-called ‘inauthentic’ and ‘placeless’ suburbs dominated by a car culture and supposedly lacking any sense of community and belonging (Qviström, 2012).

One popular form of creating community has been to generate events that serve to create a sense of shared identity and belonging. Festivals have long been understood in just this way (Gibson & Connell, 2005; Kong & Yeoh, 1997; Quinn, 2003). These events tend to support ideas of place-based identities so that participants come to feel connected and united (Derrett, 2003; Duffy & Waitt, 2011; Dunphy, 2009; Mulligan et al, 2006). More importantly, what underpins the festival is the desire to promote social cohesion, and attempts to create this are made through discourses of an official ‘imagined’ community (Anderson, 1983). This draws on aspects of the daily lives of a group or community as a means to reinforce particular socio-political, historical and spatial affiliations (Duffy & Waitt, 2011). Such a framework has been used by governing bodies such as local councils and businesses with the expectation that these events will produce a range of social and economic benefits. Festivals are often staged for broad social goals (Finkel, 2010; Wood, 2005) and much of the research on festivals has begun with the underlying premise that such events sustain social benefits through their economic implications. Yet, these are complex processes with potentially divisive outcomes, and raise many issues, particularly around what is meant by ‘the community’ and how such a formation is inclusive. Further, some research suggests that rather than encouraging community, festivals can operate as spaces of exclusion (Quinn 2003).

Taking a case study approach, this chapter examines these ideas through a focus on the annual Yakkerboo Community Festival, held in Pakenham about one hour south-east of Melbourne, a once rural community that is now undergoing processes of rapid urbanisation. The Yakkerboo festival has run for almost forty years, with little significant change to its format, and continues to include
traditional community festival components of street parade, art show and craft market. This chapter explores how such a long-held festival may or may not continue to hold relevance for a community undergoing significant social, demographic and cultural change. Through a close examination of the aspirations of festival organisers involved in Yakkerboo, we explore the role community festivals may have in creating stronger communities in the new growth corridor of the City of Cardinia, located on Melbourne’s south-eastern boundary. Through this, we consider the impact rapid urbanisation has on notions of community for those living at the peri-urban edge, given the differing needs, perceptions and histories of established and emerging communities.

**Literature on festivals and community**

Much festival research focuses on the positive outcomes of holding festivals, from early work by Falassi (1987) and Turner (1984) on communitas, to more recent work which considers festivals as places of social inclusion (Johnson et al 2011); and places where strong communities may be built (Derrett 2003). Even so, while festivals may aim to be inclusive, there remains a set of exclusive practices through boundary marking that delineates certain individuals as belonging or not; for example in marking out a community through notions of cultural or subcultural affiliations; prerequisite knowledge that facilitates appreciation of festival practices and meaningful participation, as well as any costs incurred that may deter an individual’s involvement in attending a festival (Gibson & Connell 2012). A critical role performed by festivals, as Johnson et al (2011, 69) suggest, is that they may ‘engage sections of the community not normally participating in community and political activities’. In this way, festivals act, as Gibson and Connell (2012: 9) point out, as ‘hybrid economic affairs … a central meeting place for different parts of local economies.’ Moreover, the formal and informal economic activities associated with festivals are also valuable in creating notions of place and community (Fincher & Iveson 2008), activities that provide positive feedback into place investment in terms of economy, but just as importantly in the processes that constitute and support notions of local community identity (Derrett 2009). There are often ways to facilitate access to festivals for the local community too, such as no or only a nominal entry fee or donation, thus giving greater access for lower socio-economic groups to cultural activities (Arcodia & Whitford, 2007;
Carlsen et al., 2007). The lack of formality associated with an outdoor setting compared to a theatre or opera house also helps to broaden access to many activities, particularly arts and culture (Carlsen et al., 2007)

Other often cited benefits of holding festivals include the opportunity for local people to become involved, either through volunteering or taking on temporary or casual paid work. Volunteering allows people to mix with others across a wide spectrum of backgrounds and interests (Finkel, 2010). In either case, this gives local community members the opportunity to develop skills and experience that will assist them in seeking further employment, a measurable outcome, and will also increase community capacity more broadly (Johnson et al. 2011). Arcodia and Whitford (2006) argue that while there are clear economic benefits for communities that host them, festivals are predominantly a social phenomenon with the potential to provide a variety of positive social outcomes. They suggest that festivals may facilitate the development of social capital in three main ways – by building community resources, by encouraging social cohesiveness and by giving the public opportunities for public celebration.

Other potential benefits for communities in holding festivals include the use of the festival space as a place to increase tolerance and understanding of community diversity. Festivals often encompass a range of different programming, which might highlight cultural and ethnic diversity or involve minority groups (Carlsen et al., 2007; Finkel, 2006). Indeed, it is sometimes the case that a festival can provide a focus for an otherwise marginalised group within a community (Gorman-Murray 2009). Finkel (2010) suggests that such goals or benefits act as a source of pride for organisers, and can act as a catalyst for community members to become involved.

However, alongside the benefits it is important to consider the negative impacts that festivals may have on a community. These can be particularly apparent when the event is seen to be a space of exclusion for certain groups or individuals within a community. In research carried out in the context of a festival held in Lerwick, Shetland (known as Up Helly Aa), Finkel (2010) illustrates how gender differences play out in the traditional festival roles taken on by men and women. Men are allowed to
take part in the procession, which is the main event of the festival, while women are restricted to cooking for the festival. Some women state that they are happy with this gender division, seeing it as representative of the traditions of the festival; however, Finkel (2010) argues that such a structure ignores equity and diversity and that this is not a good role model for a modern community. Quinn (2003) also notes that some festivals and events are exclusive to elite audience groups (often cultural or arts events), and that the high prices for such events act as barriers to inclusivity (Watermann 1998). Carlsen et al (2007) also note that festivals may need to change over time in order to widen their support base in the local community, as the local community itself may change over time. The implicit suggestion here is that some festivals fail to change in step with the community that they were developed for, and over time may begin to lose their relevance to local people. This is an important point in relation to the case study of this chapter, and one to which we will return.

Case study context

The Yakkerboo Festival takes place annually in Pakenham, in the outer south east of Melbourne, Victoria. Part of Australia’s rapidly growing peri-urban areas, this once rural environment is quickly being levelled and coated in asphalt and housing slabs. Rapid population growth is already evident; in 2006 the population numbered 19,644, it currently numbers around 33,999 residents (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011), and is estimated to expand to slightly over 57,500 in the next two decades (Grant, 2009). The Casey-Cardinia growth corridor, where Yakkerboo takes place, is beginning to be framed as a place that will not only face rapid social, cultural, economic and environmental transformation (with all the attendant challenges), but also where new and exciting urban-rural assemblages can be enabled. Even so, a key concern that is constantly raised is how to ensure a sense of community is valued and facilitated given the demographic and land use changes occurring.

The Yakkerboo festival, derived from an Aboriginal word meaning place of green pasture, started in the mid-1970s and has not altered substantially since then. It has a range of components including the street parade, which is probably the best known part of the festival. However, there is also a street market, a funfair, fireworks, an art show and a twilight carnival. Each part of the festival has its own
feel, with the street parade and funfair aimed primarily at families with young children, and the twilight carnival attracting teenagers and young people. The art show is aimed at both local and national artists, with prizes of up to $4,000 on offer. The festival is essentially a version of the type of event that is held in communities many countries around the world, and retains elements of a farm-based culture and a country agricultural fair.

Data collection and analysis

This research took a qualitative approach, and used both interviews with key stakeholders and participant observation to collect data. This allows us to acknowledge the multiple meanings that are constructed as people engage and form relationships with the world around them (Crotty 1998). Purposive sampling was used to identify those individuals who possess detailed knowledge and familiarity with certain aspects of the community (Jennings, 2001), while snowball sampling provided access to interviewees who were referred and recommended by others (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). Participants were interviewed by one or both of the authors and each interview was recorded with permission and transcribed. Interviews lasted between 20 and 60 minutes. Data were subjected to a qualitative content analysis that explored relevant themes as they arose. These codes formed the basis of a theoretically informed analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). During the festival, which was attended by both authors, participant observation notes and photographs were taken, providing rich data, and “incontestable evidence” of what had been observed during the case study (Stake 1995).

Discussion

Yakkerboo and its (rural) community

Originally starting in the 1970s as a community festival by the then Pakenham Shire,1 the Yakkerboo festival maintains a focus on bringing members of ‘the community’ together. The local council ‘wanted something for the municipal recreation and something [for the community] to do,’ noted one Pakenham resident who has been involved in its organisation for almost twenty-five years when interviewed, ‘when the festival started, Pakenham was just a little country town’. The Yakkerboo

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1 The Pakenham Shire was severed from the Berwick Shire in 1973, and then was incorporated into the new Cardinia Shire in 1994
festival continues to be held, although support has waxed and waned, and while its future may be in some doubt the primary role of this festival is remains clearly (and proudly) stated on the festival webpage:

Yakkerboo prides itself in providing a free festival for the people, by the people, and it is the people volunteering their time in Yakkerboo, who are the heart and soul of the event… **Festivals like Yakkerboo are the glue that holds communities together. The Yakkerboo Community Festival has become part of making new residents feel welcome, it is the vehicle for new residents to work and play beside established residents**, and, importantly, it brings children together; happy, laughing, celebrating and playing together…it is about celebrating our strong, cohesive and well-functioning community and local business and industry ([http://yakkerboo.org.au/about/](http://yakkerboo.org.au/about/), emphasis added).

The location and population size of Pakenham in the 1970s had meant its residents had to be relatively self-reliant, which in turn, has meant a more conservative definition of community, one with an emphasis on locality, tradition and a sense of neighbourliness (Lavenda 1992), has been a key defining characteristic of Yakkerboo. These rural origins, and indeed, the taken for granted ideas about what constitutes rural festivals, are understood particularly by longer-term residents as important as a means to connect individuals and social groups to a particular location, something that was affirmed – and even mourned – by one participant, who exclaimed,

I probably liked it better ten years ago before [Yakkerboo] got bigger… I knew nearly every person, or most of the people in Pakenham. I don’t know that now. I could walk up the street … and we wouldn’t know anyone. You miss that.

A councillor and ex-president of the festival acknowledged the inherently nostalgic flavour of the Yakkerboo festival, and the focus is deliberately on the old township of Pakenham with very little acknowledgement of the more recent changes to Pakenham or even other places within the shire. Even so, the dimensions of the Pakenham community are not easily delineated. As stated on the festival’s webpage and echoed by others interviewed, the function of this festival is also one that
seeks to reconnect and recreate community, that ‘Yakkerboo means that for one moment people are
brought together’, and this is understood as a significant thing given people are seen to be less
community oriented than in the past. In many ways this festival differs little to festivals we may see
anywhere else – the opening event, the street parade, consists of various floats showcasing the local
community groups, volunteer organisations, kindergartens and primary schools – and these groups are
a means to anchor the event within this location and community. Indeed, people watching the street
parade were heard to comment on the differences between this parade and those of previous years,
and one family noted that this particular spot in the street was where they always stood to watch the
parade. Another long-term festival organiser also noted that Yakkerboo functioned as a form of
community reunion, explaining, ‘the festival is a little bit like a mini “back-to” because people come
back to the festival and they haven’t been around for a few years’. Such comments reflect traditions
and familiarity, both important concepts in local community festivals.

One of the key parts of the festival is the appearance of Mr Yakkerboo. Mr Yakkerboo is the name
given to a bunyip-like creature originally created by school children in Pakenham. These children had
made individual papier maché tiles, which were then stuck onto a wire frame to form the outline of
the creature, described imaginatively by one local as having a ‘crazed buck-toothed grin’ and that you
would feel ‘the earth shudder as the bilious bunyip moved his morbidly obese body’ (Berwick Star
April 2011). As the then festival committee’s president explained, ‘He is his own personality, he’s not
like anything’ (Berwick Star March 2011). Why this particular creature is less clear. The bunyip is a
mythical creature originating in Aboriginal mythology that lives in swamps, riverbeds and
waterholes.2 Perhaps it connects to the region’s terrain and local stories. The region around
Pakenham, and in particular the areas in which the Casey-Cardinia growth corridor is located, lies
between streams and drainage lines that channel water from the upland area just to the north of the
town (Sinclair Knight Mertz, 2005). Much of what was designated swamp land was reclaimed about
20 years ago, although in winter this low-lying area is prone to flooding and is often covered in mist,

2 The origin of the word bunyip has been traced to the Wemba-Wemba or Wergaia language of Aboriginal people of South-Eastern
Australia
particularly at night. Nonetheless Mr Yakkerboo appears to be a favourite especially amongst younger children, as we found when attending the 2013 festival parade. One small girl eagerly asked us if we were also going to have some of Mr Yakkerboo’s birthday cake and icecream, while a young boy excitedly waiting for the start of the parade told those around him, ‘I love Mr Yakkerboo! He's my favourite!’

Much of the community involvement and investment in the festival centres on the street parade, where schools, community organisations and volunteers design floats which process along the streets during the parade. Our observations at the 2013 event were that those involved in the street parade strongly reflected the existing, older identity of Pakenham, one that maintains strong connections to its rural past and communities. For example, the parade featured the schools and kindergartens from the original part of town; as well as organisations such as the Country Fire Authority, State Emergency Service, and St John’s Ambulance, all of which have been active in Pakenham for many years; and a range of volunteer groups reflecting the heritage of the area, such as the Country Woman’s Association. In short, the parade reflected the identity of the traditional rural townscape. However, this is a place under transition, and in spite of the strong presence of local community groups, it was difficult to see any major contribution from the new growth areas during the parade.

**Yakkerboo and Cardinia’s (changing) communities**

Stakeholders of the event recognise the need to change and better engage with the community (or more precisely, new communities) that are now living in Pakenham. One idea proposed by the organising committee is to take Mr Yakkerboo round the schools, presumably including those built in new housing estates on the outskirts of the town, in order to build up the enthusiasm levels of the children (*Berwick Gazette* May 2011). Yet, at the recent festival parade, there appeared to be less participation from the schools and kindergartens built recently in the growth areas. While it may simply be a matter of time before these children become part of the festival, it may alternatively be the case that for those moving to the outer suburbs involvement in such long established community traditions is a low priority compared with settling into new homes and adjusting to new workplaces,
or long commutes, and may not even be desired (Lynn & Monani 2010). Then again, for some of the stakeholders we spoke to, while there is an expectation that change is occurring and with it, a change in what the community of Pakenham is, there is a sense that such change needs to be minimised, that this is ‘our festival’ and something should be done to defend it. This type of response is reminiscent of the study by Carlse n et al (2007) which highlights a common failing among festivals to adapt to changing circumstances. A third response has also opened up, one that recognises change is inevitable and that the festival lends itself to such change. As one participant pointed out, the festival can target the sort of growth happening within the region, and a multicultural type festival is possible, however such a radical change is ‘just a little too early at this point’.

It is interesting to consider whether it is likely that those new entrants to the Pakenham region will eventually share the notions of community and belonging that currently exist in the region, perhaps by some form of social osmosis, or whether active steps may need to be taken in order to encourage this process. At the same time, the local council must address the question of whether new residents want to be connected with an existing community. It may also beg the question as to whether the new entrants to the community would feel any sense of connectedness to the existing notion of community, given it reflects another time and arguably another place. If community is an ever-evolving construct, then surely the newcomers will contribute as much to any new notions of community as the existing residents. However, the current format of the event does not appear to encourage active participation by newcomers. This point is acknowledged by the event organisers, who note that the festival is in need of a revamp (Berwick Gazette May 2011), yet what form any future revamp will take is currently uncertain.

A strand of festival research has sought to understand the role and function of festivals in terms of processes of identity, belonging, social inclusion and exclusion (Barraket, 2005; Duffy, Waitt, Gibson, 2007; Gorman-Murray, 2009; Mulligan et al, 2006; Waitt & Duffy, 2010). This research suggests that when listening closely to the stories that unfold at festivals, what is often expressed is a considerable emotional investment and a strong desire for place-based attachment. Our data suggests that there are long-held issues around territoriality embedded within such events that suggest this peri-
urban region is distinct from the assumed urban-rural dichotomy. In addition, people living here value this difference through expressions of boundedness to specific localities and regions.

Our research also underlines the points made by Carlsen et al (2007) about festivals failing to change to keep pace with changes in the composition of the local community. It seems that in the case of Yakkerboo, the festival has not accepted, or indeed paid any heed at all to the changing demographics of the community in Pakenham, and it can be argued that in doing this, the festival is now acting almost (but not intentionally) as a space of exclusion for new community members.

**Conclusion**

Lyndon Terracini, founder of the Northern Rivers Performing Arts (NSW Australia), argues that the ways place, arts and cultural practices intersect, is more than simply setting cultural activities in a particular place or region. The event of a festival, he declares, ‘should be about fundamentally understanding what resonates within the people who live there, left there, or died there; and about translating those deep local associations for the benefits of a much wider audience’ (Terracini 2007: 11). There is then, deep emotional significance in the relationships created and built up between people, place and festivals, and has implications for any festival that seeks to create, support and celebrate ideas about community and identity. Yet, we need to be mindful in the conceptualization that community and place are not interchangeable entities (Massey, 1994), and that different understandings and activations of these terms are an inherent part of place-making processes (Cresswell, 2004). Drawing on aspects of the daily lives of a community is a means to reinforce particular socio-political, historical and spatial affiliations. A festival program tends to support notions of boundedness to particular places and people, and this can ensure certain people feel (re)connected and (re)united to that of the group or community. However, if the festival fails to keep pace with changes in the community, can new entrants to the community ever feel connected or united in the first place? It is precisely this problematic notion of feeling that needs closer consideration.

The challenge for a community festival like Yakkerboo is to closely examine how local place and a sense of community are constituted and given meaning over time through the transitory situatedness
of social relations at crucial moments, which occur in work connections, sites of retail and commerce, education and health facilities, faith, the local social and community structures (such as sport and personal interests, as well as the connection between interest groups), and through informal social relations that ‘just happen’ in the everyday. However, the changes wrought by development in peri-urban regions often lead to anxieties and concerns about the social impacts of change, and the community-building events of the past become a vehicle for reinforcing a sense of who a community is. This of course is not to say that a festival like Yakkerboo will not change or adapt – and indeed, many of those involved in its organisation recognise the need for the festival to both celebrate the township’s past and find ways to involve recent arrivals to the area. However, it is important not to underestimate the difficulty of this task.
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