Learning and knowledge transfer processes in a mega-events context: The case of the 2011 Rugby World Cup

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HIGHLIGHTS

• We analyse the impact of the 2011 Rugby World Cup on knowledge transfer processes.
• Firm-level knowledge transfer channels were used most frequently.
• The level of knowledge transfer was higher intra-regionally than inter-regionally.
• A model illustrates the knowledge transfer channels used in a mega-events’ context.

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ABSTRACT

The study explores the impact of the 2011 Rugby World Cup on knowledge transfer processes among organisations in two regional tourism networks in New Zealand. The first network comprises organisations within the Auckland region (intra-regionally); the second comprises regional tourism organisations across New Zealand (inter-regionally). Interviews and documentary evidence are gathered before and after the event, from 35 representative organisations. Findings indicate organisations in both networks acquired valuable knowledge that may facilitate the attraction and organisation of future events, and enhance operational processes. The most common channels of knowledge transfer operated at the firm level and included imitation/demonstration/observation, inter-firm collaboration, and document exchange. Levels of knowledge transfer were higher intra-regionally than inter-regionally. A model is developed that explains the knowledge transfer channels utilized in a mega-events context. The study highlights the value of knowledge-sharing in tourism networks, and the role that a mega-event can play in fostering knowledge-sharing.

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1. Introduction

Most tourism research on mega-events analyses short-term and visitation-related impacts, rather than long-term outcomes such as strategic development and knowledge management and transfer (Singh & Hu, 2008). However, individuals and organisations involved in organising mega-events at a destination accumulate an extensive amount of tacit and explicit knowledge, such as knowledge in event planning and execution, and expertise in destination marketing, that could be transferred and reapplied for future benefits (Singh & Hu, 2008; Stokes, 2004). Knowledge management and transfer among organisations involved in organising mega-events have attracted little research attention (Beesley & Chalip, 2011; Singh & Hu, 2008). The specific forms of knowledge acquired in the context of hosting a mega-event, as well as the transfer channels through which knowledge flows, remain unclear. As such, one could expect the knowledge acquired in the context of a mega-event to be different compared to knowledge gained during normal, operational processes among tourism companies. Singh and Hu (2008) note, “Given the huge public and private investments involved in these large-scale events, the need to fill this gap in the extant literature seems surprisingly obvious and necessary” (p. 937).

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This research explores the impact of a mega-event on knowledge transfer processes within regional tourism networks. It examines the 2011 Rugby World Cup (RWC 2011) in New Zealand (NZ) and analyses the knowledge transfer processes between Tourism Auckland and other public and private sector organisations. The focal organisation for this research is Tourism Auckland (TA), a regional tourism organisation (RTO). Consultation with TA executives identified two TA-centric networks. The intra-regional network (AKL network) comprises organisations within the Auckland region such as the Auckland Council and Auckland Transport. The inter-regional network (RTO network) is comprised of other RTOs throughout New Zealand. The study compares the impact of RWC 2011 on knowledge transfer processes within these networks.

The study addresses three research questions: In a mega-events context, 1) how do participant organisations learn?, 2) what kind of knowledge is gained?, and 3) how is knowledge transferred between the participant organisations? The study provides a comparative case study of two networks, both centered around the same focal organisation. Semi-structured interviews and documents are the focal sources of evidence in this research. Conceptually, the study focuses on information and knowledge management and knowledge transfer. In doing so, we bring together the fields of tourism management, destination management and sport event management.

2. Theoretical background

This section explores key literature on organisational learning, information and knowledge management (IKM) and knowledge transfer (KT). IKM and KT research in the tourism and events contexts are considered. The significance of networks as facilitators of KT is discussed.

2.1. Organisational learning as a foundation for knowledge

Individuals are the key repositories of knowledge and it is through them that organisations learn (Grant, 1997). Senge (1990) notes: “Organizations learn only through individuals who learn. Individual learning does not guarantee organizational learning. But without it no organizational learning occurs” (p. 139). Through organisational routines, the learned individual knowledge is converted into organisational knowledge. Hence, these organisational routines form the basis of collective learning within an organisation (Eisenhardt & Santos, 2002). However, a learning culture must be embedded within the organisation in order to achieve successful learning. This culture encourages learning as a way to grow the organisation’s capacity (Senge, 1990). In this context, the literature uses the term learning organisation, which refers to an “organization skilled at creating, acquiring, and at transferring knowledge, and at modifying its behaviour to reflect new knowledge and insights” (Garvin, 1993, p. 80).

2.2. Information and knowledge management

The concept of knowledge is fragmented, with no universally-accepted definition (Assundani, 2005; Nonaka, 1994). This article utilises the definition from Beesley and Chalip (2011), who define knowledge as “information with meaning that exists within the individual” (p. 328). Knowledge is different from data and information. Data are unrelated, not yet interpreted facts (Brauner & Becker, 2006). When data are used in the context of relevance for a certain system, they become information (Schlegelmilch & Penz, 2002; Willke, 1998). Thus, information is data used “in a context to which meaning has been attributed” (Standards Australia International, 2003, p. 1). Knowledge accumulates within individuals and is only shared if the individual is willing to do so (Beesley & Chalip, 2011). Knowledge is a company’s most valuable resource (Scott & Laws, 2006) and an essential source of lasting competitive advantage (Nonaka, 1991).

Knowledge management (KM) “involves the design, review and implementation of both social and technological processes to improve the application of knowledge” (Standards Australia International, 2003, p. 1). An organisation needs to ensure that its ‘data’ becomes ‘information’ and then ‘knowledge’ (Halbwirth & Toøhey, 2001). Specific KM activities focus on acquiring, storing and using knowledge for problem solving, dynamic learning, strategic planning and decision making (Geisler & Wickramasinghe, 2009). Information and Knowledge Management (IKM) describes the combined application of both information and knowledge (Skyre, 2011). Information facilitates the development of knowledge, which then creates more information, which in turn deepens knowledge (Swan, Langford, Watson, & Varey, 2000). There is no correct way to implement IKM. Rather, best practice must reflect the organisation, and its cultural, national, regulatory, political and legislative environments (Halbwirth & Toøhey, 2001).

2.3. The knowledge creation process

Within the (IK)M literature, two types of knowledge are usually defined: tacit knowledge (i.e., know how) and explicit knowledge (i.e., know what) (Polanyi, 1967). Explicit knowledge is codifiable, formal, and systematic (Scott & Laws, 2006); it can be translated into words or symbols, and thus be transformed into books or manuals (Inkpen, 1996). In contrast, tacit knowledge is more difficult to translate and to explain to outsiders. Tacit knowledge can sometimes only be learned through practice and direct immersion with the person who possesses it (Lei, Slocum, & Pitts, 1997). Knowledge is created and transferred in a dynamic interaction between four different modes of knowledge conversion (Nonaka, 1991, 1994, 1996; Nonaka, Toyama, & Konno, 2000). Socialisation is the conversion of new tacit knowledge into the existing base of tacit knowledge. Externalisation is the conversion of tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge through verbalisation. Combination refers to the process of converting explicit knowledge into even more systematic and complex forms of explicit knowledge. Finally, internalisation occurs when explicit knowledge is converted into tacit knowledge.

2.4. Knowledge transfer

There is no single best method for KT (Awad & Ghaziri, 2004). KT depends on many different factors, such as knowledge type and transfer barriers. KT can be informal, spontaneous and unstructured. However, due to its value, KT often purposeful. KT can occur through peer-to-peer exchanges, interactive knowledge sharing, team learning, electronic discussion spaces, inter-firm linkages and partnerships, knowledge-creating bodies (e.g., universities and government agencies), and exchanges of work-related gossip (Bathelt, Malming & Maskell, 2004; Scott, Baggio, & Cooper, 2008). The core concept is to ensure the effective application of intellectual capital within the company or network to achieve certain objectives. However, for effective transfer to occur within a network, all partners must participate, as each partner controls access to certain knowledge (Scott et al., 2008). Knowledge that is expressed becomes information to others. For knowledge to be successfully transferred, receivers must apply thought or reasoning to it and incorporate it into their individual knowledge networks (Beesley & Chalip, 2011). The degree to which it has been transferred largely depends on the communication processes (Davila, Epstein, & Shelton, 2006). Knowledge may be transferred
but it is not successfully adopted unless it leads to the generation of new ideas and concepts (Davenport & Prusak, 2000).

2.5. Knowledge management and knowledge transfer in the tourism context

Many organisations contribute to providing a quality tourism experience (Waeschke, Dickson, & Woll, 2013). Hence, there is a need for effective collaboration and KT within and between tourism organisations. However, KM and KT research in tourism contexts is disproportionately small (Clark & Scott, 2006; Scott et al., 2008). Shaw and Williams (2009) emphasise the need for a “better understanding of how we can conceptualise and theorise knowledge transfer in tourism” (p. 333). In this context, KM is a valuable instrument to respond to the fast-changing tourism industry with its increasing uncertainty, shorter product life cycles, rapidly developing technologies, and increased regulatory constraints (Scott & Laws, 2006). Knowledge is a driver of innovation, productivity and competitiveness in tourism (Shaw & Williams, 2009). A knowledge base is a necessity for tourism organisations to be competitive (Cooper, 2006). The tourism industry is dominated by small and medium-sized businesses, characterised by activity fragmentation and poor human resource practices, which acts as a barrier to knowledge transfer and acquisition (Cooper, 2006).

Scholars have recently started to focus on KT models and KT channels utilised among tourism organisations. The model of absorptive capacity (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990) has received particular attention by tourism scholars (Awad & Ghaziri, 2004; Cooper, 2006; Scott et al., 2008). Absorptive capacity is an organisation’s ability to: (1) understand new external knowledge; (2) assimilate it; and (3) apply it to commercial ends (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990).

Hjalager (2002) suggests four different channels for KT in tourism: the trade system (e.g., market surveys, trade associations); the technological system (e.g., purchases or leases of technology); the infrastructural system (e.g., public authorities acting as ‘knowledge transfer agents’); and the regulation system (e.g., safety control, labour regulations). In contrast, Hall and Williams (2008) identify six KT channels in tourism. Labour mobility refers to knowledge transferred through the physical movement of workers, i.e., through people relocating within a firm or across firms. Inter-firm exchange includes vertical and horizontal collaboration with suppliers, intermediaries or other tourism businesses. Learning by imitation/demonstration/observation can be either planned or unplanned. Knowledge brokers include influential individuals with a large reservoir of knowledge they can transfer. Learning regions refer to territorial spaces characterised by proximity, trust and shared values, providing an environment for collective learning. Finally, communities of practice are groups of individuals bound through shared meanings and understandings.

Weidenfeld, Williams, and Butler (2010) combined four of the six channels of KT suggested by Hall and Williams (2008) (labour mobility, knowledge brokers, imitation/demonstration/observation, inter-firm exchanges) and the four systems proposed by Hjalager (2002) (trade, technological, infrastructural, regulation). In total, eight channels of KT are suggested that operate at the individual level, the firm level, and as systems. Weidenfeld et al.’s model (see Fig. 1) proposes that both tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge are absorbed through internal sources (e.g., staff or senior managers) and external sources (e.g., suppliers). Knowledge is then transferred through the channels/mechanisms and added to the existing knowledge stocks, creating a reservoir of tacit and explicit knowledge among staff. It can also potentially be transformed and adapted as innovations. However, this depends on the absorptive and adaptive capacities of the firm (Weidenfeld et al., 2010). Despite these efforts, there is a need to further improve our understanding of the processes underlying KT in tourism and destination marketing (Cooper, 2006; Hjalager, 2002; Scott et al., 2008).

2.6. Knowledge management and knowledge transfer in the events context

There is a considerable debate around the impacts of mega-events on the host community (Balduck, Maes, & Buelemans, 2011; Jones, 2001; Ohmann, Jones, & Wilkes, 2006). While a number of studies point to the negative impacts (e.g., traffic congestion, excessive noise, increased pollution, inflated prices; Allen, O’Toole, Harris, & McDonnell, 2011), previous research has also demonstrated that events can provide benefits to the host community such as increased publicity, a more prominent position in the tourism market and hence a competitive advantage (Buhalis, 2000; Morse, 2001; O’Brien, 2006). However, effective coordination between the organising committee (a temporary organisation) and the destination marketing organisation (not of temporary nature) is essential (Singh & Hu, 2008). Successful destination marketing in the events context thus requires the integration of strategies and operations from two different knowledge domains: sport-event planning and destination marketing. These two domains need to be coordinated and aligned carefully. A strategic alignment of these two domains provides significant knowledge benefits for destinations to attract and deliver future events. Overall, mega-events can be viewed as sources for precious knowledge that “should be transferred to and re-used by future organizing committees and destination organizations” (Singh & Hu, 2008, p. 937).

The organisers of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games placed high emphasis on IKM (Toohey & Halbwirth, 2001). In June 1998, two years before the start of the Games, the Sydney Organising Committee for the Olympic Games (SOCOG) introduced the internal Sydney 2000 Games Information System. The system provided a “shared environment for the creation and dissemination of information and knowledge that promoted “the sharing and linking of existing data” (Toohey & Halbwirth, 2001, p. 7). Over the following two years towards the event, SOCOG’s KM grew and developed from a mere information management approach into a wider knowledge management role. As per their agreement with the International Olympic Committee (IOC), SOCOG shared a written manual of experiences with the organising committees in both Salt Lake City and Athens. Good KM systems thus represent a beneficial and essential tool to transfer know-how from one Olympic Games to the next (Halbwirth & Toohey, 2001; Toohey & Halbwirth, 2001). However, the existence of a KM system is not sufficient to ensure the uptake of mega-events know-how (Beeley & Chalip, 2011). KT is a far more complex task than the mere sharing of information, technology, and techniques (e.g., via simple presentations from one organiser to the next one). Rather, successful KT requires a sound understanding of the social, cultural, political, and historical context of the host destination and the knowledge “needs to be honed refined, and adapted to be made relevant in the context to which it is to be transferred” (Beeley & Chalip, 2011, p. 341).

This short review of work within the events field points to a mere handful of studies in which attempts have been made to explore empirically some of the key concepts on KM and KT surrounding mega-events. Additional research on KM and KT will enhance understanding of how to better leverage events in the future (Singh & Hu, 2008; Stokes, 2004).

2.7. Network approaches to knowledge management and transfer

Network analyses facilitate effective KT strategies (Inkpen & Tsang, 2005; Scott et al., 2008; Shaw & Williams, 2009). Networks allow the sharing and transfer of knowledge among
organisations, provide sources of knowledge for innovation, and facilitate business performance improvement (McLeod, Vaughan, & Edwards, 2010). Brass, Galaskiewicz, Greve, and Tsai (2004) highlight that “interorganizational networks offer a variety of knowledge, innovation, performance, and survival benefits” (p. 807). Other scholars argue that the core function of networks is to facilitate organisational learning (e.g., Dredge, 2006; Gibson, Lynch, & Morrison, 2005; McLeod et al., 2010; Pavlovich, 2003).

Scholars in the tourism and destination marketing field also acknowledge the use of network analysis to analyse KT processes among stakeholders (e.g., Scott et al., 2008; Shaw & Williams, 2009). Network analysis assists in identifying barriers to knowledge acquisition (e.g., weak or broken links) and understanding the key knowledge gaps at the destination (Scott et al., 2008). Shaw and Williams (2009) state:

Networks are of particular importance in the study of knowledge transfers in tourism. Of particular note is the issue of the efficiency of networks in knowledge transfer (and innovation) in tourism destinations. (pp. 329–330)

Recent studies of KT and knowledge diffusion within tourism and destination marketing networks are using quantitative methods of network science, computer simulations and network analysis software (e.g., UCINET) to measure network constructs. These constructs include density, centrality, structural holes and brokerage (e.g., Baggio & Antonioli Corigliano, 2010; Baggio, Scott, & Cooper, 2010; da Fontoura Costa & Baggio, 2009; McLeod et al., 2010). These preceding arguments demonstrate the value of using network analysis to investigate KM and KT processes among organisations (McLeod et al., 2010). However, theory and research on KM and KT using network analysis is still limited in both the tourism and events literature.

2.8. Event networks

For a successful event, a destination needs to integrate a variety of organisations from different sectors, such as tourism, sports and events. Each organisation makes a contribution towards producing a successful event (Ziakas & Costa, 2010). The network established by a destination marketing organisation (DMO) to organise an event for the destination thus draws on existing relationships but also includes a variety of both new relationships (e.g., event organisers) as well as relationships with companies to which limited pre-event connections existed. This provides valuable new (knowledge) opportunities as companies from different industries...
and sectors operate under different knowledge, regulatory, and technology regimes, and can mobilise their specific constellation of regimes (Hjalager et al., 2008). The mega-event thus changes the DMO’s existing tourism network which shifts from a mere tourism domain to a network incorporating partners from the tourism, events and sports domains (see Fig. 2). Due to the often strict deadlines of an event this process requires a fast and efficient implementation.

In addition, a mega-event brings into the destination a large amount of new knowledge from international corporations, sporting bodies and international sponsors, as well as new personnel with international events experience. The local DMO and organisations within the destination (such as airlines, hotels and tour operators) draw on these international knowledge connections; this subsequently affects the configuration of the local knowledge networks and the diffusion of innovations (Weidenfeld & Hall, 2014).

3. Research context: the 2011 Rugby World Cup in New Zealand

The Rugby World Cup is a quadrennial event owned by the International Rugby Board. The 2011 Rugby World Cup was the biggest event ever hosted in New Zealand. The 48 matches between the 20 participating teams were held in 11 cities in 12 different stadia around the country. New Zealand was granted the right to host RWC 2011 on 17 November 2005, in Dublin, Ireland. The bid to host the event was built around the slogan of New Zealand’s ‘Stadium of Four Million’, referring to New Zealand’s population of approximately 4 million (RNZ 2011, 2008). Four key themes emerged from the government’s objectives for the tournament (New Zealand Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment, 2012): (a) demonstrate major event capability to the world; (b) provide a stimulus to the New Zealand economy in 2010 and 2011; (c) promote Brand New Zealand to the world to achieve tourism and business benefits; and (d) build social cohesion by engaging New Zealanders in the event. Rugby New Zealand 2011 (RNZ 2011) was the company responsible for delivering the RWC 2011. RNZ 2011 was a joint venture between the New Zealand government and the New Zealand Rugby Union (NZRU).

Documents released by the organisers and the government both pre- and post-event generally painted a very positive picture of the event and its benefits — which often is the case with large-scale events (Higham, 1999; Jones, 2001). In particular economic benefits (e.g., increase in economic activity, high tax revenues) and a boost for the tourism industry were heavily promoted as successful outcomes (RNZ 2011, 2008). Official figures released post-event showed that RWC 2011 attracted 133,200 visitors between July and October 2011, who spent approximately NZ$390 million (Statistics New Zealand, 2011). The event thus exceeded the forecast visitor arrivals of between 60,000 and 95,000 (International Rugby Board, 2012; Tourism New Zealand, 2011). Also, the financial loss from the event (NZ$31.3 million) was NZ$8 million lower than forecast (International Rugby Board, 2012).

New Zealand’s tourism operators, however, reported mixed perceptions about the impact of RWC 2011 on their businesses and described the event as “very patchy” (ONE News, 2011, October 21), with operators in the main game centres benefiting the most. Normal domestic and corporate travel patterns were also highly disrupted through RWC 2011, with most New Zealanders not travelling around the country, and a decline in corporate and business travel over the Cup period (Tourism Industry Association New Zealand, 2012). Thus, while organisers and the government spoke positively of the impacts of RWC 2011, the benefits for the tourism industry are open to debate.

4. Methodology and methods

This research adopts the interpretive paradigm informed by qualitative methods — an approach “that portrays a world in which reality is socially constructed, complex and ever changing” (Schulenkorf, 2010, p. 88). The researchers sought meaningful insight and understanding of the KT processes among the organisations involved in both networks and how they evolved as a result of RWC 2011.

4.1. Focal organisation and network specification

A common approach to network studies is specification of a focal organisation (Rowley, 1997). The focal organisation for this study is TA. TA is the largest of New Zealand’s 29 RTOs. TA is ideally suited to be the focal organisation for a number of reasons: 1) Auckland hosted 15 RWC 2011 matches; 2) Auckland is New Zealand’s largest city accounting for more than 30% of the population (Statistics New Zealand, 2012); 3) Auckland is a key element of the New Zealand tourism product.

After determining TA as the focal organisation, the process then identified TA’s event network. To do this, two TA senior executives were asked to determine the relevant network partners including (a) TA’s ‘business as usual’ relationships, (b) new relationships established for RWC 2011 as well as (c) partners with whom very limited pre-event connections existed. The final network determined by the two executives (independently from one another) could further be divided into two sub-networks. The intra-regional network (AKL network) is comprised of organisations from the Auckland region, including central government organisations with an Auckland office or agent. The inter-regional network (RTO network) is comprised of organisations from the Auckland region, including central government organisations with an Auckland office or agent. The inter-regional network (RTO network) is comprised of organisations from the Auckland region, including central government organisations with an Auckland office or agent.
Participants from outside the networks were also interviewed. CEOs and senior staff from the participating organisations (see Table 1) were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews. Only employees who were best suited to provide a meaningful and in-depth insight into the topic area were interviewed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), and so positions such as chief executive officer (CEO), general manager (GM), marketing manager or events manager were selected. To enhance research dependability, four other positions such as chief executive of the 29 RTOs in NZ. All participants generally held collective interests of the 29 RTOs in NZ. Participants generally held favourable views towards hosting RWC 2011 in Auckland across all Auckland Council agencies with RWC 2011 deliverables. RTONZ represents the collective interests of the 29 RTOs in NZ. Participants generally held favourable views towards hosting RWC 2011 in Auckland, however, they also demonstrated a healthy scepticism concerning any potential benefits for their organisations as well as for New Zealand as a whole.

4.3. Data collection methods

This research used two of the six key sources of evidence recommended for case study research (Yin, 2009): interviews and documentation.

4.3.1. Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews provide the appropriate balance between consistency and flexibility (Patton, 2002). Sixty-nine semi-structured interviews were conducted either face-to-face or via telephone. All interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. All transcriptions were sent to the interviewees for verification, to make sure the transcription was a true and accurate reflection of what had been said. This process also minimised the likelihood of researcher-imposed bias (Halcomb & Davidson, 2006; Patton, 2002). Examples of the questions include: ‘How did you learn in the RWC 2011 context?’; ‘What kind of knowledge was transferred among organisations in Auckland/among the RTOs for RWC 2011?’; and ‘How do you think knowledge was transferred among the organisations?’ An overview on all questions used in both the pre- and post-event interviews is included in the Appendix.

4.3.2. Documentation review

Reports and internal records, email communication, formal studies and evaluations, agendas and minutes of meetings, bid documents, websites, and newspaper and online articles were analysed. In addition, the researchers attended a number of industry updates, public presentations and seminars related to RWC 2011. In total, over 100 newspaper and online articles, 73 emails among the ACG members, 52 websites, 56 pages of interview and seminar notes and 39 reports, impact studies and strategic documents with over 2000 pages were reviewed.

4.3.3. Timeline of data collection

The data collection for the research was divided into two phases: pre-event (March 2009—August 2011) and post-event (November 2011—February 2012). With the start of the research in March 2009, a constant, extensive analysis of websites, newspaper and online articles, administrative documents, agendas of meetings, etc. was carried out. This document review covered the entire period of the study’s data gathering until February 2012. The pre-event interviews were conducted between August 2010 and June 2011. The post-event interviews involved the same interviewees (in order to reflect on earlier thoughts and opinions and to evaluate the event from KT perspectives) and were conducted between November 2011 and February 2012.

4.4. Data analysis

Thematic analysis underpinned the qualitative data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A number of advantages of using this method are evident in the literature: it is very flexible, can summarise the key features of a large body of data, and may also generate unanticipated insight into the topic. In addition, thematic analysis is a method that is easily accessible to the general public, is very useful when having participants as collaborators, and can highlight similarities and differences across the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). ATLAS.ti 6.2 — software for qualitative data analysis, management and model building — was used to systematically code, theme, and analyse the data (cf. Parent, Rouillard, & Leopkey, 2011). The data analysis process followed the step-by-step guide for thematic analysis as developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Continuous interaction with the data, a thorough process of thematic analysis, the use of ATLAS.ti 6.2 software, and constant cross-checking of codes and themes among the three researchers added salience and depth to the process and enhanced the trustworthiness of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

5. Results

This section presents the main findings. It addresses the three research questions: In a mega-events context, 1) how do participants organisations learn?; 2) what kind of knowledge is gained?; and 3) how is knowledge transferred between the participant organisations?

5.1. Learning mechanisms and opportunities in the RWC 2011 context

This section relates to research question 1 and focuses on the learning mechanisms and opportunities in the RWC 2011 context. It particularly focuses on how the participants learned.

5.1.1. RWC 2011 was an important learning opportunity

Participants from both networks recognised RWC 2011 as an important learning opportunity. One interviewee from the AKL network noted: “I think those that are involved will learn a lot out of it and the country will be better off.” Another participant explained, “…there is a constant stream of learning … And the specialists in my team will learn from other specialists in other

Table 1

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<th>Networks Members in the AKL and RTO network.</th>
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<td><strong>Network members</strong></td>
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<td>Local council</td>
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<td>AKL Local economic development agency</td>
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<td>Local golf club</td>
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<td>Local hospitality association</td>
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<td>Match venue</td>
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<td><strong>RTO</strong></td>
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<td>11 regional tourism organisations (RTOs)</td>
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organisations. And I will learn from them and they will learn from me.” Similarly, the RTOs highlighted the positive role of RWC 2011 as a learning opportunity. One CEO noted: “RWC 2011 will be a starting point to learn for the future and be prepared.”

5.1.2. Learning mechanisms

Five learning mechanisms were evident amongst participants in both networks. All ways of learning are discussed below.

Learning by doing. The most popular way of learning in the RWC 2011 context was ‘learning by doing’. One interviewee (AKL network) remarked that people learned “by participating, so learning by doing.” An RTO participant explained, “I think mainly it is learning by doing, to be honest. Working with different parties, and it has been a bit of a learn-as-you-go process.”

Learning through exchange. Through meetings, email exchanges and telephone conversations the participants exchanged ideas and experiences. One AKL interviewee stated, “we have transferred a lot of knowledge on mega-events in discussions and sitting around tables and meetings.” Another participant remarked, “every time we meet I learn something …. And hopefully, I like to think that it is also a dual carriageway, so in both directions.” One RTO spoke about a mutual process of giving and taking: “it’s about I show you mine if you show me yours; so it is about sharing.” It is important to note that not all information and knowledge was shared among the RTOs — the interviews demonstrate that information sharing among the RTOs was selective.

Learning from other events. The participants in the AKL network described how they analysed other mega and major events. This included previous events in New Zealand (e.g., the 2005 British and Irish Lions Tour, America’s Cup 2000 and 2003) and offshore events. One participant referred to the 2005 Lions Tour: “there was a debriefing exercise after the event …. Those learnings were taken into account for RWC 2011.” Two organisations from the AKL network (plus Tourism Auckland) were also part of an extensive knowledge acquisition process prior to the event. This process included extensive desktop research on mega-events in other cities and countries, a visit to RWC 2007 in France and participation in the ‘Play of Cities forum’ (a forum in which the major host cities for RWC 2011 — Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch — and RNZ 2011 came together to learn from each other). The RTOs shared similar views. One RTO highlighted that “the America’s Cup and Lions Tour have been quite helpful to understand what RWC 2011 might be about.”

Learning through prohibitions. Participants from both networks referred to the Major Events Management Act 2007 (MEMA). The MEMA prohibits unauthorised association between a major event and a brand, good or service (New Zealand Major Events, 2012). One participant from the AKL network described that MEMA “… was indoctrinated in us, that we had to watch this and watch our businesses so nobody got fined and all of that.”

Learning from event experts. In the AKL network, three organisations hired specialist staff with prior mega-events experience. The other participants of the AKL network frequently referred to these ‘event experts’ and their knowledge. One participant explained, “they have brought people over from Australia who have got that mega-event experience and they are transferring their skills and knowledge to those of us in Auckland who didn’t have it, and that is really valuable.” Experienced experts were not as prevalent in the RTO network. Only two RTOs hired international event experts due to limited financial resources.

5.1.3. The event provided limited learning opportunities in the tourism field

Participants from both networks highlighted that ‘RWC 2011 tourists’ were similar to ‘normal tourists’. Therefore, the event did not require major changes to the routine processes for tourism businesses. Rather, the high season was duplicated. Hence, the learning opportunities in the tourism field were limited. One of TA’s participants explained, “… the learning wasn’t so much for the tourism industry. … it’s not a difficult event in terms of the visitor nights and arrivals — they are very easily managed by the tourism industry.” The RTOs shared similar views. In a post-event interview a RTO CEO said that knowledge gained “wasn’t so much in the tourism side …. It was not different in kind from anything else we would do; perhaps a little different in degree …; it was business as usual really.”

5.2. Forms of knowledge acquired in the RWC 2011 context

This section relates to research question 2 and focuses on the forms of knowledge acquired through RWC 2011.

5.2.1. RWC 2011 helped organisations acquire new experiences

All experiences acquired by the organisations in the RWC 2011 context are outlined below.

Learning about other organisations. In the AKL network, the participants learned a lot about other organisations within the region. One interviewee emphasised that knowledge was gained:

… especially from some of the other stakeholders … like the holiday parks, with which we’ve got a relationship anyway, and maybe some of the hoteliers so we can see what the hotel sector is doing. There’s then also the public sector as well that is involved in the organisation of RWC 2011, so there’s building relationships with them, but also learning about what issues they have.

Another interviewee noted:

… as a result of collaboration we’ve become better informed about each other’s organisations, for example about the role of the [Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs]. I’ve become more aware about the role of Tourism Auckland, the Ministry of Economic Development, etc.

The RTOs indicated that they particularly learned about their stakeholders and other partners within their region. This included their roles, strategies and goals for RWC 2011. In this context, one RTO noted:

We are also learning about the way the councils function, and what different department of the council does what etc.; so we are learning a lot more about how those organisations and departments work.

One RTO noted that their learning was “more in our local relationships, so with [our] City Council, [our] Rugby Union, [our economic development agency], etcetera.”

Operational experiences for ‘business as usual’. The AKL-network interviewees highlighted the opportunity to gain operational experiences relevant to their ‘business as usual’. One participant noted the potential to “apply some of those [pricing] principles to other convey groups and large groups that come through on a regular summer.”

Learning about the distinctive features of an event. In the AKL network, RWC 2011 was frequently compared to the 2005 British and Irish Lions Series. However, all participants recognised that RWC 2011 was a much bigger event, which made comparisons
difficult. The Chair of the ACG (who had a high level of prior international mega-events experience) explained:

> I have learnt heaps in the last four years of being here. Because every city operates quite differently in the way they go about their business. And certainly from a NZ perspective the cultural element, the innovation elements are certainly different. It is a totally different scale.

Hence, most participants highlighted the difficulty in comparing events. They referred to the unique characteristics of every event which creates difficulty in correctly utilising potential ‘learnings’ from one event to the other. One interviewee noted:

> Every event from my perspective is different. Everybody travels differently, everybody moves differently. ... every event we had, the 15 [matches] here in Auckland ... every event was different.

**Learning about social benefits.** The participants in the AKL network also learned that a mega-event’s impact extends beyond financial impacts. Social benefits, such as increased community pride and lower crime rates, were specifically mentioned. One CEO also referred to the increased international profile of NZ through RWC 2011. Beyond the immediate economic impact, he said “there were greater benefits, long term; in terms of profiling the country.”

**Importance of communication.** Several participants in the AKL network also emphasised an increased understanding of the importance of good communication. Asked about the most important experience they had during RWC 2011, one CEO stated, “the importance ... of communication with all the agencies that are involved in delivery of an event of that scale.”

**Experiences with politics.** In the RTO network, the participants referred to an increased level of competency in politics. One RTO emphasised the importance when noting: “Event management of this scale, managing expectations of the industry as well, that’s quite important. There is quite a strong political and stakeholder role in this; because it is seen as such a big deal.”

### 5.2.2. RWC 2011 helped organisations acquire new skills

Through their involvement in the event, the participants acquired a wide set of new skills that did not exist prior to the event. These are outlined below.

**Event management skills.** Participants from both networks emphasised the acquisition of event management skills. One CEO (AKL network) confirmed, “there were a lot of learnings ... from an event management sort of perspective.” The new event management skills included sponsorship, bidding for events and legislation. The Chair of the ACG referred to a recent feasibility study carried out to determine whether Auckland should host the 2018 Commonwealth Games and explained: “... if Auckland would have been asked to do this before RWC 2011 came along, I doubt that they would have actually been able to do it.” Similarly, the RTOs emphasised the field of event management. Participants now felt more capable of coping with unreliable forecasts and statistics, large budgets; and high stakeholder expectations.

**Relationship-building and collaboration skills.** Participants in both networks also acquired relationship-building and collaboration skills. Participants regularly attended meetings, interacted closely, and created a variety of new relationships. One AKL network participant stated, “there is lots of learning taking place in relationship building.” One RTO noted: “working collaboratively has improved as a skill and inter-relationship building.”

**Communication skills.** Participants from the AKL network referred to improved communication skills. There was a requirement for high quality communication with each other, their stakeholders, the public and the media.

**Project management skills.** Several AKL-network participants referred to improved project management skills. They spoke of an enhanced ability to deliver projects involving complex, stakeholder relationships under considerable time pressure. One interviewee noted their newfound ability to “project-manage something carefully.”

**Negotiation skills.** Participants in the AKL network made reference to improved negotiation skills. This refers to an ability to better negotiate a compromise but also to operational negotiations. One participant noted: “At the operational side of things we’ve learned a lot about negotiating, prices for venues, etcetera.”

**Marketing skills.** In the RTO network, several participants mentioned “general marketing skills.” One CEO stated: “[RWC 2011] was a biggie, in the areas that we normally wouldn’t have done. Particularly in terms of our appreciation of online marketing; we certainly learnt a lot about that.”

### 5.2.3. Both tacit and explicit knowledge was acquired

In both the AKL and RTO networks, tacit knowledge (e.g., employees sharing and exchanging ideas, observing and imitating) and explicit knowledge (e.g., acquired through manuals and documents) were transferred. Also, all four modes of knowledge conversion as defined by Nonaka (1994) were evident in both networks. 1. Tacit-to-tacit (socialisation): i.e., face-to-face conversations and meetings among the businesses in the Auckland region and among the RTOs. 2. Tacit-to-explicit (externalisation): i.e., email contacts, creation of documents and manuals, workshops for employees and stakeholders. 3. Explicit-to-explicit (combination) i.e., circulation of documents. 4. Explicit-to-tacit transfer (internalisation): reading written documents (e.g., generic mega-events manuals and templates) or from learning by doing.

### 5.2.4. Sources for new knowledge included external and internal sources

Both external and internal sources provided knowledge. In the AKL network, external sources included the IRB and RNZ 2011, other organisations in the Auckland region as well as other cities (e.g., Sydney, Melbourne) and countries (e.g., France) with mega-event experience. Internal sources included staff within the organisations, especially those employees with prior (mega-) events experience.

In the RTO network, the RTOs referred to other within-region stakeholders as important external knowledge sources. One RTO emphasised how much they learned from their participation in the regional coordination group for RWC 2011. He stated, “I sit on a steering committee. ... So I am fortunate to get a lot of that information even though some of it doesn’t directly involve me. So in terms of gaining a much wider knowledge it has been great.” Interestingly, the RTOs rarely referred to each other as external knowledge sources. Internal sources comprised staff members within the RTO organisations. Most RTOs had one or more staff members with significant RWC 2011 involvement. These members passed on knowledge and information to the remaining staff.

### 5.3. Knowledge transfer channels

The section addresses the third research question: How was knowledge transferred between the organisations involved?

### 5.3.1. Firm-level KT channels predominated

As outlined earlier, imitation/demonstration/observation and inter-firm exchanges were important learning mechanisms. One interviewee in the AKL network indicated that the KT happened by
“observing how [others] are doing it.” Another participant explained that KT within the organisation happened “... by coaching .... So it is face-to-face transfer.” And a RTO summarised the KT process as follows:

It is being able to pick up the phone to [name of a TA staff member] in Auckland and saying, ‘What do you think about that? What are you guys doing?’ and then she asks ‘What are you doing?’ and we tell them. It is that sort of exchange.

5.3.2. Individual level KT channels were more evident in the AKL network

As described earlier, three AKL-network organisations hired staff with prior mega-event experience. These people acted as knowledge brokers, defined by Weidenfeld et al. (2010) as “influential individuals who ... play a key role in knowledge transfer” (p. 608). Asked how knowledge was transferred, one participant explained: “through the people with mega-event experience that have come over from overseas, by observing how they are doing it.” Thus, labour mobility was an important KT channel. In contrast to the AKL network, KT channels at the individual level were not mentioned by the RTO network participants. While several international event experts were hired specifically for RWC 2011 by organisations in the Auckland region (e.g., TA, Auckland Council), only two RTOs employed additional staff with prior mega-events experiences.

5.3.3. The infrastructural system and the regulation system were the most important KT systems

The systems for KT mentioned by the AKL network organisations included the infrastructural system, the regulation system and the trade system. In contrast, the RTO referred to all four systems (infrastructural, trade, regulation and technological system); however, technological and trade systems appear less relevant.

Inferstructural system. The infrastructural system was frequently referred to in the interviews. Auckland Council and its agencies diffused knowledge. A variety of RWC 2011 seminars and industry updates were held for tourism businesses and other stakeholders “to ensure visitor-facing businesses were prepared for RWC 2011 with a focus on business planning that required a long lead time for implementation” (Auckland Council, 2012, p. 144). This included the ‘speaker series’ featuring presentations about RWC 2011 from business leaders (Auckland 2011 Ltd., 2010). The ‘Match Ready for Business’ programme (Tourism Auckland, 2011, March 25) was specifically designed for Auckland businesses (Auckland Regional Steering Group, 2009). Additionally, staff from Auckland Council and its agencies conducted intensive desktop research about other international mega-events, and went to observe RWC 2007. Staff sought to transfer all information and knowledge gained to other Auckland organisations through meetings, workshops, seminars, industry updates, emails, and telephone conversations. Similarly, the local councils also played a significant role for KT in the RTO network. One RTO stated: “We are also learning about the way the councils function, and what different department of the council does what etc.”

Regulation system. The regulation system also provided a KT channel through the Major Events Management Act 2007 (MEMA). The Ministry of Economic Development (MED) published the Guide to the Major Events Management Act 2007 (New Zealand Ministry of Economic Development, n.d.). Auckland Council and its agencies passed on their knowledge and information about appropriate business behaviour in the RWC 2011 context (as per the MEMA) to businesses around Auckland. One interviewee noted, “MEMA provides an outline on how to run a major event like this, sponsorships and all those kinds of things. So there are always great learnings.” Similarly, the MEMA requirements were also mentioned by the RTOs.

Trade systems. Trade systems were not specifically described as a form of KT in the interviews. However, it was evident that many surveys, economic reports, forecasts and other research were conducted or simply distributed by tourism, events and other industry associations. This information was shared among organisations in both the AKL and the RTO network to prepare for the event.

Technological systems. Technological systems (e.g., purchase or lease of technology) were only briefly mentioned by participants of the RTO network. During the early preparations, ‘Google docs’ was used by RTOs to share documents and information. However, this tool was abandoned because “it was too much administrative effort and time — so it hasn’t been updated and used. It was just too much.”

5.3.4. Document exchange was an important channel for knowledge transfer

While this channel appears to be similar to ‘inter-firm exchange’, it refers to the transfer of explicit knowledge that does not require close collaboration or exchange. Exchanged documents included internal event reviews from previous events, economic impact reports, policies, strategic documents, statistics, forecasts, and official documents and agreements from the IRB and RNZ 2011 (e.g., the Host Union Agreement). All participants perceived that documents provided an important tool to write down experiences made and knowledge gained, and to pass them to colleagues, partners and other stakeholders (tacit-to-explicit and explicit-to-tacit forms of KT). Similarly, documents from previous events and documents describing generic processes and processes for major events were also highly regarded.

6. Discussion

The findings demonstrate that TA’s tourism network shifted for RWC 2011 and that TA incorporated new partners from the sports and events domain with whom only limited relationships had existed pre-event. While this represented a challenge within the short event timeframes and strict deadlines, it also provided valuable new opportunities due to the incorporation of different knowledge, regulatory, and technology regimes (Hjalager et al., 2008). In addition, TA, and the member organisations from both the AKL and RTO networks, benefitted from a large amount of new knowledge from international corporations, sporting bodies and international sponsors, as well as new personnel with international events experience.

Overall, RWC 2011 provided a significant learning opportunity. Useful experiences and skills were gained. These included event management skills, relationship-building and collaboration skills as well as increased knowledge about other organisations. Participants referred to the usefulness of the new knowledge to attract and deliver future events as well as improving ‘business as usual’. As previous studies suggest (Beeley & Chalip, 2011; Davenport & Prusak, 2000; Tooley & Halbwirth, 2001), it is important to apply the new knowledge to other contexts (e.g., to other mega-events or other ‘business as usual’ contexts). The transfer of new information should lead to the “generation of new knowledge that in turn allows individuals working within a new context to identify new opportunities relating to products, services, markets, or processes” (Beeley & Chalip, 2011, p. 329). Given that RWC 2011 generated a lot of knowledge for ‘business as usual’ processes, the probability of successful adoption elsewhere is high.

The findings also demonstrate that participants learned in a wide variety of ways. ‘Learning by doing’ was one of the most
common learning mechanisms. This is an explicit-to-tacit form (internalisation) of knowledge conversion (Nonaka, 1994) where individuals internalise knowledge from documents into their own experience (Skyrme, 2011). Learning through exchange, from other events and through prohibitions (i.e., by finding out what was not permitted to do under the MEMA) was also prevalent. Participants from the Auckland region also learned from recently recruited employees with prior mega-event experiences. On this basis, ‘labour mobility’ was recognised as an important mechanism for learning (Weidenfeld et al., 2010).

Interestingly, all participants pointed to the limited learning opportunities from RWC 2011 in the tourism field. The participants highlighted that ‘RWC 2011 tourists’ were similar to ‘normal tourists’ that come to NZ throughout the year. ‘RWC 2011 tourists’ did not just want to spend their time in the stadia watching rugby matches but were very interested in visiting NZ’s tourist attractions and sights. These impressions were confirmed in a recent study by the Ministry of Economic Development (New Zealand Major Events, 2013), and are in contrast to previous research suggesting that event visitors are less interested in visiting sights or other programmes can be in the mega-events context (Halbwirth, 1986).

The findings indicate that the RTOs learned more from organisations within their region and from the national organising bodies than they did from other RTOs. The RTOs collaborated very closely with organisations within their region (e.g., council, local rugby unions, economic development agencies) and learned from them. They also referred to the RWC 2011 organising bodies (e.g., RNZ 2011) as an important knowledge source. However, only limited knowledge was passed on among the RTOs. The structure and set-up of RWC 2011 in NZ played an important role in this context. For RWC 2011, the RTOs were often just one of many members of a regional coordination group. These coordination groups were tasked with organising the relevant parts of RWC 2011 for their regions. The relationships within the regions among the group members strengthened because of the event and they shared valuable information and knowledge. The members of the coordination groups also connected with national bodies (i.e., RNZ 2011, Tourism New Zealand) and shared information and knowledge with them. On the other hand, the connection to other RTOs was limited and the event did not facilitate KT among them. As such, the structure of RWC 2011 in NZ highly impacted on KT processes. This finding again highlights the close inter-relatedness between collaboration and KT, as already noted in previous studies (e.g., Bramwell & Sharman, 1999; Inkpen, 1996; Inkpen & Tsang, 2005).

Overall, the findings demonstrate that no systematic, strategic IKM approach was in place in the AKL and RTO networks for RWC 2011. In the AKL network, leading organisations (e.g., the Auckland Council) took part in KM initiatives such as the ‘Play of Cities forum’ to learn from other cities and to transfer information and knowledge to future hosts. However, there was no strategic approach to systematically ‘tap’ into the vast amount of information and knowledge sources and to leverage the knowledge opportunities provided by RWC 2011. While an aspiration to learn new skills and experiences existed, specific IKM programmes and/or technological systems did not accompany this. Similarly, while the RTOs shared ideas and experiences, no strategic IKM approach existed in the RTO networks. A more strategic, systematic IKM approach, accompanied by technology would have provided further opportunities for information and knowledge acquisition and sharing around RWC 2011. Previous research demonstrates how beneficial (IKM programmes can be in the mega-events context (Halbwirth & Toohey, 2001; Toohey & Halbwirth, 2001). This should be considered for future mega-events in NZ.

The findings also confirmed that all four modes of knowledge creation, as described by Nonaka (1994), were evident in the RWC 2011 context: socialisation, externalisation, combination and internalisation. Knowledge was created and transferred in a dynamic interaction between the different modes of knowledge conversion (Nonaka, 1994; Nonaka et al., 2000). Given the nature of a mega-event (with a well-defined end), it is, however, questionable whether the knowledge does move as a spiral (as suggested by Nonaka, 1994; Nonaka et al., 2000). Understanding the influence of the time-bound nature of events on KT is an opportunity for future research.

The KT channels at the firm level were most important. This is consistent with earlier research. Hall and Williams (2008) and Hjalager (2002) point to the relative ease of imitating partners and competitors in the tourism industry. Furthermore, the tourism destination is an amalgam of individual operators who need to collaborate to provide a positive total tourist experience (Murphy, Pritchard, & Smith, 2000). It is therefore not surprising that these two channels play an essential role in the given context. The infrastructural and regulation systems were important for KT. The findings demonstrate the importance of public sector organisations for KT (Hall & Williams, 2008; Hjalager, 2002; Weidenfeld et al., 2010). In the AKL network, the Auckland Council and its agencies engaged in an extensive knowledge acquisition process. The AKL network interviewees referred frequently to these public sector organisations as the organisations they learned the most from during RWC 2011. Similarly, the RTOs in the inter-regional network also emphasised the role of their own regional councils as important channels of KT. The infrastructural system was thus a very important channel for KT in both networks. Participants from both networks also referred to the regulation system as an important source of knowledge. Through the MEMA the participants learned about prohibitions and restrictions in the RWC 2011 context, and shared this knowledge with their partners and stakeholders. Hence, these regulations contain “a substantial bulk of knowledge … rapidly diffused to potential users” (Hjalager, 2002, pp. 472–473). Finally, it was evident that document exchange was as a highly important KT channel in both networks. Documents included internal event reviews from previous events, economic impact reports, policies, strategic documents, statistics, forecasts, and official documents and agreements from the IRB and RNZ 2011 (e.g., the Host Union Agreement).

All findings underpin our adaptation of Weidenfeld et al.’s (2010) model of KT to reflect the mega-events context. The new model is presented in Fig. 3.

Within the model, information is acquired through external and internal sources, and through new and existing relationships. Through applied reasoning and thinking (Beesley & Chalip, 2011) this information generates relevant tacit and explicit knowledge which is transferred (Cooper, 2006; Weidenfeld et al., 2010). Individual and firm-level channels and systems are all evident. At the individual level, international events experts — hired specifically for the event — act as knowledge brokers and also represent some form of labour mobility (given that they often relocate from overseas). At the firm level, imitation/demonstration/observation, inter-firm collaboration and document exchange serve as important channels and mechanisms of KT. The model represents these channels as closely inter-related, yet they can still be distinguished from each other. Imitation/demonstration/observation mostly refers to tacit knowledge being transferred in an often unplanned or uncoordinated manner during which the other party does not necessarily need to be actively involved. Inter-firm collaboration involves the planned transfer of mostly tacit forms of knowledge in
a process in which both parties actively interact with each other. Finally, document exchange mainly refers to explicit knowledge being transferred in a process that does not necessarily need close collaboration.

The most important systems in the mega-events context referred to the infrastructural system (with Auckland Council and other regional councils and public sector organisations being important agents of KT) and the regulation system (through the MEMA). Technological systems and trade systems were used, but were less important. As described by Weidenfeld et al. (2010), the KT process creates stocks of knowledge embedded within an organisation that help create a reservoir of tacit and explicit knowledge. This is useful not only for ‘business as usual’ processes but also for future mega-events. The additional knowledge stocks may also indirectly inform the innovation process, and will to varying degrees stimulate and shape future learning. This, however, depends on the absorptive and adaptive capacity of the organisation. It is important to note that the findings of this study particularly sought to identify knowledge sources and channels: the potential future use of this knowledge and the ability of the organisation to do so (i.e., the absorptive/adaptive capacity) lie outside the scope of the study.

In contrast to Weidenfeld et al.’s (2010) model — which was designed for tourism and attractions — the model depicted in Fig. 3 incorporates the IKM concept and the acquisition and sharing of information as an essential first step (Skyrme, 2011; Swan et al., 2000). Only through reasoning and thinking can this information generate tacit and explicit knowledge (Beesley & Chalip, 2011). The new model also demonstrates the importance of external and internal sources, and both new and existing relationships, as knowledge sources. The model particularly emphasises the firm level with three KT channels: imitation/demonstration/observation, inter-firm collaboration (renamed from ‘inter-firm exchange’ to emphasise the collaborative aspects), and document exchange. It also adapts the relevant systems: the infrastructural and the regulation system were particularly prevalent while other systems (technological and trade systems) played a minor role. The individual level is made up by international events experts relocating to the host country/city to disseminate their events knowledge (thus combining the original channels ‘knowledge brokers’ and ‘labour
7. Conclusion

The research demonstrates the significant opportunities for a mega-event to facilitate knowledge acquisition and transfer among organisations in regional tourism networks. Through the event, valuable skills and experiences were acquired by the organisations which augurs well for effective knowledge assimilation (Cooper, 2006). The additional knowledge stocks may also indirectly inform the innovation process, and will to varying degrees stimulate and deliver future events in New Zealand.

However, the findings also highlight the need to strategically leverage these opportunities ex ante. KT processes in the RWC 2011 context were not strategically planned and happened spontaneously. There is an increasing need to implement a more systematic IKM approach for future mega-events in NZ to leverage the knowledge opportunities provided. Knowledge is arguably the most important asset of an organisation (Singh & Hu, 2008) and the driver for innovation and competitiveness (Hall & Williams, 2008; Shaw & Williams, 2009). If destinations are to benefit from the hosting of mega-events, strategic IKM approaches between participant organisations during the planning and execution of an event are essential. This study has revealed some of the mechanisms by which knowledge creation and transfer can occur.

Appendix. Indicative interview questions pre- and post-event

Pre-event:

- Do you see your relationship with other organisations in Auckland/with the other RTOs as an opportunity to learn and share knowledge?
- In which areas do you think you can learn from the other organisations/the other RTOs?
- Do you think that the current structure and environment of the AKL network/of the RTO network encourages knowledge transfer, i.e., do you see shared visions and collective goals among the partners that can facilitate the knowledge transfer process?
- What kind of skills/information/knowledge do you think is/are transferred among organisations in Auckland/among the RTOs for RWC 2011?
- How do you think is/are new skills/information/knowledge being transferred?
- How would you describe your organisation’s ability to learn and to absorb skills/information/knowledge?
- Do you think that this ability will improve because of RWC 2011 and the collaboration with other organisations in Auckland/among the RTOs? If so, why?
- What is the most important piece of knowledge you gained as an organisation so far?
- What is the most important piece of knowledge you gained as part of the AKL network/RTO network so far?
- What do you still expect to learn in the RWC 2011 context?

Do you think that the knowledge gained while preparing RWC 2011 will be helpful for future mega events in NZ (e.g., Cricket World Cup)? If so/not, please explain why.

Post-event:

- In which area did you learn the most for RWC 2011?
- How did you learn?
- How was knowledge transferred? Which channels/ mediums were used to transfer knowledge?
- Do you think that the knowledge acquired for RWC 2011 will assist you in the future in other contexts?
- Did you learn from other organisations in Auckland/other RTOs? What did you learn from them?
- Did you gain more knowledge from existing relationships or from new relationships?
- Did you gain more knowledge from close relationships or from organisations you didn’t deal with never before?
- From which organisation do you think you learned the most?
- Please summarise the knowledge transfer process in the Auckland region/among the RTOs in one sentence.
- From a knowledge management perspective: Is there anything in particular you would do differently to leverage mega-events in the future? What is it?

References


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