

The promotional value of motorsport culture

A sociological investigation of the FIA World Rally Championship



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Preface

I have been a fan of rally sports since I was a kid in the 1980s. My father used to take me to a national winter event in Norway called *Lygnasprinten*. Memories of freezing temperatures and old Volvos going much too fast, combined with hot dogs grilled on provisional bonfires, accompanied by a never-ending stream of ‘war stories’, still bring a smile to my face. Later, as a teenager, I was glued to the TV screen on those rare occasions when WRC rallies were aired on foreign channels. With the coming of the Internet in the late 1990s, my interest really skyrocketed. At times, I was a WRC junkie! And even though my interest was ignited by local heroes, it is the WRC names, cars, sounds and places that really have stuck with me – not least since my fellow countryman Petter Solberg became world champion when I was an undergraduate student in sociology in 2003.

As a result, while this thesis in essence is an academic product, I have done my best never to lose the personal flavour in conveying what a fantastic roadshow the FIA World Rally Championship (WRC) is. Not coincidentally, there will be book version of it coming out in late 2014. At the same time, due to a couple of broken illusions, I must admit that an analytical distance from the sport has been beneficial to me. Among these is the fact that it is a business, for good or ill, and some of those people in positions I assumed would be helpful in conducting this thesis turned out to be surprisingly unresponsive, as there was nothing in it for them in involving me in their work. Academically, I also had to overcome my own fears and the scepticism of others of whether this thesis deserves a place in the sociological portfolio or not. Conversely, I have met people who have offered me more support than I could ever ask for, both academically and sportingly, as well as introducing me to their lives as WRC aficionados. It is in their spirit this thesis is written.

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Hans Erik Næss, Oslo, June, 2014

List of central abbreviations

ACF – Automobile Club de France
ACM – Automobile Club de Monaco
AIACR – Association Internationale des Automobile Clubs Reconnus
BPICA – Bureau Permanent International des Constructeurs d'Automobiles
CAMS – Confederation of Australian Motor Sport
CSI – Commission Sportive Internationale
CSI-1 – Convers Sports Initiatives
EBU – European Broadcasting Union
ERC – European Rally Championship
FIA – Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile
FISA – Fédération Internationale du Sport Automobile
FFSA – Fédération Française du Sport Automobile
FHI – Fuji Heavy Industries
FOA – Formula One Administration
FOCA – Formula One Constructors Association
F1 – Formula 1
ISC – International Sportsworld Communicators
IRC – Intercontinental Rally Championship
IRCM – International Rally Championship for Makes
NOS – North One Sport
NOT – North One Television
NSW – New South Wales
RBMH – Red Bull Media House
RETO – Receptive Tours and Events Organization
SAVM – Sport Automobile Vélocipédique Monégasque
STI – Subaru Tecnica International
TTE – Toyota Team Europe
WEC – World Endurance Championship
WMSC – World Motor Sport Council
WRC – World Rally Championship
WTCC – World Touring Car Championship

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Chapter 1: The paradox of commercialism

Introduction

From the snow and ice of Scandinavia to the glamour of Monte Carlo, from the heat of Kenya to the thin air in the Argentinian mountainsides, the FIA World Rally Championship (WRC) has served up passionate motorsport drama since its inauguration in its current form in 1973. During that time the sport has transformed from a little-known series to a pop-cultural roadshow worth millions of euros, as of 2014 with 13 rallies scattered around the world and more than 600 million TV-viewers annually, fiercely competing for attention in the global landscape of entertainment industries. By and large, it therefore follows the typical development phases in sport – foundation, codification, stratification, professionalization, post-professionalization, commercialization and post-commercialization (see Beech and Chadwick, 2004). In the WRC, like in a variety of other sports like football, cricket and basketball, this has led to diverging opinions on how to balance sporting identity with commercial concerns. As a consequence the WRC community has become quite polarized.

On the one hand we find the ‘traditionalists’ who wants rallying to be what it was ‘back in the days’ and defy any changes made on the behalf of anything but the sport itself. On the other hand we find the ‘modernists’ who desire a real shift into ‘the commercial age’ by adapting to contemporary media consumption patterns and promotional desires. As such, the WRC seemingly is trapped in what is called ‘the paradox of commercialism’. This paradox is defined as ‘the challenge of extracting commercial value from their brands without compromising the intrinsic “integrity” and spirit of the game’ (Smith and Stewart, 2013, p. 534). I think Oliver Ciesla, head of WRC’s current promoter WRC Promoter GmbH, described the situation well when he in 2013 said that sacrificing WRC’s traditional values

should not be the price to pay for improved commercial vigour. But, Ciesla added, without commercial strength, traditional values will not survive (cited in Holmes and Heimrich, 2013). Hence, the question instigating this thesis was: how can we unravel this paradox?

Others have addressed this paradox before, and the WRC is not the only sport having to deal with it (see Giulianotti and Robertson, 2004; Rein, Kotler and Shields, 2006; Szymanski, 2009; Smith and Stewart, 2013). Through my investigation of the WRC, however, this thesis exemplifies how its paradoxical force can be weakened. Above all, the promotional understanding of the sport is not just about selling the drama. It is also about telling the story of it, paying proper attention to its ideations, and being empathic to the community to which it provides an integrative force. In that respect it is a response to Simon Chadwick's (2009) claim that lack of cultural understanding within sport management and the neglect of management research in the social sciences leaves much room for new analyses. By combining narrative inquiry with trans-local fieldwork in particular this thesis manifest a way to explore what there is to promote in the first place, regardless of sport, and why this content cannot be untwined from the sport's promotional aspects. For these reasons this thesis make valuable theoretical and methodological contributions to the sociology of sports, which can be defined as 'the systematic study of processes, patterns, issues, values and behaviors found in the institution of sport' (Delaney and Madigan, 2009, p. 7).

Based on a relational analysis of the promotional context (chapter 4), the media (chapter 5), places (chapter 6), spectators (chapter 7), cars (chapter 8) and the drivers (chapter 9) of the WRC, I argue that the first step towards a solution to the paradox of commercialism is to realise that these 'traditionalists' and 'modernists' actually are allies, not enemies. The reason is, as will be explored in the upcoming chapters, that the WRC's sporting identity is the championship's key promotional asset. Drawing upon interviews with key people in the sport, historical studies, online forum analysis and trans-local ethnographic research from

rallies (Monaco and France), spectator cultures (Finland and Argentina), the inner life of a WRC team (Italy), and the media production facilities (Wales), I have primarily sought to merge tradition and commerce in the WRC by specifying in each chapter how the cultural meanings of these arenas supply promotional substance to the championship. To outline my approach I would first like to introduce what kind of sport the WRC is before I place the WRC into the sociology of sports. At last, a reader's guide to the upcoming chapters is provided.

What is the World Rally Championship?

Motorised sports on four wheels have been going since the late 19th century. Run either on purpose-built tracks (racing), in the wild (raids) or on ordinary roads (rallying), motorsport competitions have since become the ultimate challenge for cars and their drivers. From local competitions and cross-country (cross-continental, even) motoring adventures, motorsport has turned into a large hierarchy of established championships. At the time of writing, there are five global motorsport championships: the World Rally Championship (WRC), Formula 1 (F1), World Touring Car Championship (WTCC), World Rallycross Championship (World RX) and the World Endurance Championship (WEC) series. Together, these series constitute the apex of the motorsport pyramid. They represent the ultimate challenge, the best drivers, the most advanced technology, the most spectacular cars and the most diverse string of events. They attract the greatest audiences, the largest amount of money, the most glamour and the biggest celebrities.

All of them are managed by the *Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile* (FIA). What we know as the FIA today has existed under different names. For the sake of clarity only the latter abbreviation will be used in this thesis, unless otherwise noted. Originally

established as *Association Internationale des Automobile Clubs Reconnus* (AIACR) in 1904, as of 1 February 2014, the FIA brings together more than 230 national motoring and sporting organisations from over 130 countries on five continents. The organisation follows a governmental style similar to that of a nation state. Its supreme body is the General Assembly, which brings together the Presidents or Delegates of the Clubs and National Sporting Authorities, which are members of the FIA. The annual General Assembly approves and votes on the reports and proposals from the FIA World Councils, the budget and accounts, the international sporting calendar, the Statutes and proposals for membership changes.¹

Specifically, there is a clear separation between:

- the making and amending of sporting rules as the primary legislative function
- making and reviewing executive decisions regarding the management of financial resources and organisation of sporting events, and
- resolving disputes between members, sporting participants and other relevant parties.

Next in rank is the World Council where each representative is elected by the General Assembly, chaired by the FIA President, and assisted by specialised commissions. These specialised commissions act in much the same way as ministries to a national government.² In many ways, that makes them more important than the body's general policies as they work directly on the development of motorsport. For WRC, the Sporting Commission is called the World Rally Championship Commission. Morrie Chandler, Commission President from 2006-2011, explained its workings like this in 2009:

The Commission is effectively responsible for steering the WRC, growing the sport and ensuring its continued success. It's made up of nine people, six of whom are

chairmen of relevant FIA working groups. These groups provide expertise in matters like technical regulations, promotion and safety, and also represent the views of manufacturers and rally organisers. A representative of the sport’s commercial rights holder, ISC, also sits on the Commission, as does the President of the FIA Rallies Commission, which is responsible for the other rallying series – like the FIA’s regional championships. Decisions of the Commission ultimately come down to votes. But to be honest we don’t use this method much in the early stages of discussion because we try to find a solution that everyone agrees with.³

This format of what has humorously been called ‘a United Nations for racing fans’ means it holds, in its own words, ‘the exclusive right to take all decisions concerning the organisation, direction and management of International Motor Sport’.⁴ It is, in other words, in charge of rules and regulations, as well as commercial strategies, for *all* international four-wheel motorsport (except for some US series). For the FIA-managed rally series, which is the theme of this thesis, that means keeping track of numerous championships that pit production-based cars and drivers in an annual series of weekend events through some of the toughest and most varied conditions on the planet.

Table 1.1. The FIA hierarchy of rallying 2014

| | Championships | | | | |
|-----------------|---|---------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| Global | The World Rally Championship | | | | |
| Regional | European Rally Championship | Asia-Pacific Rally Championship | African Rally Championship | Middle East Rally Championship | CODASUR Rally Championship (South America) |
| National | British, German, Norwegian, Australian, etc. (national championships are not managed by the FIA like the regional and global ones, but are sanctioned by the FIA and organised by an FIA- approved institution) | | | | |

Each of these championships is divided into separate classes where regulations differ in terms of what cars that are eligible for competition. In the WRC you also have WRC 2 and WRC 3, which follows approximately the same seasonal pattern as the premium category, but with other cars. In this thesis I will only concentrate on the WRC, mostly because of the championships listed in Table 1.1, it is by far the most popular, both on site and as a media phenomenon. It is the cream of the crop of rallying and is without doubt the final desire of every little boy or girl who dreams of becoming a rally driver.

A WRC car in 2011



Daniel Sordo's WRC Mini at Rally Sardinia, 2011. Current WRC cars have to follow the same regulations as when Sordo drove this car. Photo: Hans Erik Næss.

Yet it has in many ways a ‘common touch’ and ‘it is still one of the few motorsports that retains its traditional values’,⁵ says David Richards, one of the most industrious people in the WRC community. Besides co-driving Ari Vatanen to the WRC title in 1981, he is also the founder of highly successful UK motorsport company, Prodrive that built WRC Porsches in the 1980s, Subarus in the 1990s and Minis in the 2000s (see Henry, 2005; Saunders, 2007). In addition, he was the chairman of the media company International Sportsworld Communicators (ISC), later renamed North One Sport, when it organised the major promotional reforms in the WRC around 2000 (see Chapter 4).

In my interview with Michèle Mouton, the former works driver for Audi and Peugeot during the Group B era in the 1980s with four victories to her name, and the WRC’s General Manager since 2011, she said something similar. ‘People can easily identify our cars with those they drive at home’, she underlines. ‘This is something very different to the traditional image of a racing car. Rally stages are also on public roads, they are the same roads you can drive on – this makes it very real. Plus I think there is a different level of skill in rallying, because the conditions are ever changing. You could drive the same stretch of road ten times and it would never be the same.’⁶ I think Mouton points to something important as each modern WRC rally – there are 13 a year under the current regulatory regime – is filled with venues which spectators, in principle can reach. In length, these stages are (at least since the 2000s) anything from a couple of laps on a small street circuit to more than 60 kilometres. That means there is a lot of road to cover if you want to. Entrances are dispersed along the stage, depending on access opportunities by road or on foot, but you can enter from anywhere if you’re really determined to do so. Some stages have specially built ‘tribunes’, spectator zones and scenic views set up by the organiser, sometimes further divided by different VIP arrangements. Since there are few shops along most stages, many people bring backpacks and camping equipment like foldable chairs, knives, portable stoves and food and drinks.

One WRC season comprises 13 rallies and goes on throughout a year. As many WRC rallies have changed their name and location within a country during the history of the sport, only their national origin is used here. As an example: What in 2013 is called Neste Oil Rally Finland (after its sponsor), and formerly known as the 1000 Lakes Rally, is here referred to as 'Rally Finland'. National rallies take place within one country, whereas regional championships are dispersed over a larger geographical area. WRC events are organised around the world and, according to FIA rules, have to take place on at least three continents during the same season in order to qualify for the label world championship (Henry et al., 2007, p. 12). WRC rallies are organised by a national institution approved by the FIA, who in turn rely on a large network of economic investors and volunteers. Whereas investors often provide events with considerable support – Rally de France-Alsace 2011 received €1.44 million from a group of investors to make the event come true⁷ – approximately 3-5,000 volunteers participate throughout a WRC weekend to act as marshals, time-keepers and communication conduits. At Rally Ireland 2007, as an example, the financial gain from volunteering has been computed at €726,600 worth of work if each volunteer provided 3.5 days of labour at 8 hours each day at the Irish minimum wage (O'Connor, 2010, p. 72).

While spectator figures vary a lot from rally to rally, and from year to year, several million people attend WRC rallies annually. Rally Japan, for example, claimed that their WRC event in 2008 attracted more than 540,000 spectators.⁸ The most popular events, like Rally Argentina and Rally Finland, are rumoured to have attracted more than *one million* spectators each (these numbers are difficult to verify because most rallies don't charge entry fees and because the number of rallies in a season shifts from time to time). It is also a popular media phenomenon. Between 2003 and 2009, annual TV viewing figures oscillated between 571 and 816 million viewers. In 2009, WRC was aired on 264 television channels in over 120 countries worldwide, while WRC's official website had more than 12 million hits

from users in 224 countries. The same year wrc.com attracted almost five million unique users from 224 territories and served 29 million videos (WRC Fact book, 2010, pp. 13-18). On video game consoles like PlayStation and Xbox, the official WRC games have been bestsellers since their first edition was put on the market in 2001 (by 2005, the official WRC series had sold more than four million copies). These games also introduced the WRC to popular culture, not least because WRC have some of the youngest spectators in motorsport: in 2009, 63 per cent of spectators were aged between 16 and 34 (WRC Fact book, 2009, p. 24).

In sporting terms, a WRC rally is typically split into between 15 and 25 'special stages', run on closed roads, which are otherwise used for normal traffic. Drivers tackle these stages one car at a time in an effort to complete them in the shortest time. During the special stages, a co-driver, or navigator, reads pace notes to alert the driver to the conditions on the road ahead. Because rallies go on for several days, cars and drivers need to be looked after now and then. This is done at a service park or remote service zones at predetermined times during each event. During a strictly limited time, a fixed number of mechanics is allowed to work on each car. At the end of the rally, the driver who has completed all of the special stages in the shortest total time is the winner. Points are allocated to the top ten drivers in each competition on a given basis. In contrast to the majority of world championships, the WRC is not primarily a contest between nations. Titles are awarded to teams and drivers. There are basically three types of WRC team, although they compete on equal terms:

- a) manufacturer teams type I: the manufacturer builds rally cars and more or less runs the entire operation,
- b) manufacturer teams type II: the manufacturer provides funding and technical assistance, but leaves the engineering and operational aspects to a partnered subcontractor, and

c) privateers – independent teams who buy a WRC car normally from one of the manufacturer team types, run (almost) the entire operation themselves and fund their participation with sponsor money.

Competition rules are subject to change and are found in Appendix J to the FIA’s Sporting Code, which contains ‘all technical rules governing the classification into which vehicles could be admitted for the purposes of motorsport’ (Davenport and Klein, 2012, p. 12).

Table 1.2. A timeline of WRC regulation eras

| Year | 1973-82 | 1983-1986 | 1987-1997 | 1997-2010 | 2011 - |
|--|--|--|--|---|---|
| Categorisation | Group 4 | Group B | Group A | WRCars | WRCars II |
| Famous cars | Ford Escort RS1800, Fiat 131, Opel Ascona | Audi S1, Peugeot 205T16, Lancia Delta S4 | Toyota Celica, Subaru Impreza, Mitsubishi Lancer | Peugeot 206, Citroen Xsara, Ford Focus | Citroen DS3, Ford Fiesta, Mini |
| Minimum number of production cars produced that made the manufacturer eligible for competition | 400 | 200 (20 for the evolution models) | 5000 (2500 from 1993) | 2500, but with far more liberal options to develop rally cars from the production model than Group A | Same as 1997-2010 |
| Key technical specs | Two-wheel drive (until the Audi Quattro came in 1981), normally aspirated engines, H-gearboxes, 250-280 hp | Two- and four-wheel drive, turbo, compressor, spaceframe, exotic materials (titanium, magnesium, composite), H-gearboxes, 350-550 hp | Four-wheel drive, turbo, sequential gearboxes (from 1996). Exotic materials were forbidden, 270-350 hp | Like Group A, but with electronic differentials, sequential gearboxes operated by flappy paddle gear systems. Exotic materials were forbidden except when present in the base model, 300-340 hp | Like WRCars, but with maximum 1600 cc engines, mechanical differentials, sequential gearboxes (like in Group A), 300 hp |

Even though emphasis is laid on the cars and the many technical issues involved, the FIA regulations also cover the rallies and the team structure of WRC (two or three cars, point

scoring regulations, driver classifications, the number of mechanics allowed per car, etc), and, not least in modern days, the commercial rights of the championship. Although regulatory changes are common in the WRC, it has as *a coherent set of rules* been altered only four times since it was established in its current format in 1973 (see Table 1.2.). As will be explored, more or less chronologically throughout the chapters, these eras differ greatly in their contributions to the WRC's sporting identity.

What the WRC is all about



Driver's world champion nine times, Sébastien Loeb, lifts off with his Citroën DS3 WRC at Rally Argentina, 2012. Photo: Hans Erik Næss

Common to all regulatory eras, however, is that WRC cars look like their road-going cousins, but are built at engineering facilities with varying degree of specialisation. From 2011

onward, they have been built on production 1.6-litre four-cylinder cars like Ford Fiesta, Mini, Volkswagen Polo and Citroën DS3, but feature turbochargers, four-wheel drive, sequential gearboxes, aerodynamic parts and other enhancements, bringing the price of a WRC car to around €345-600,000.⁹ Minimum weight must be 1200 kg empty, and 1350 kg with driver and co-driver. Inside a WRC car, there is only painted metal composite panels and two carbon fibre seats, moulded to fit the driver and co-driver. The result is a car that reaches 100 kph in around 3.5 seconds on all surfaces and can power-slide between the trees on a narrow gravel track under full control at very high speeds. Average speeds vary between rallies, from 60 (Cyprus) til 120 kph (Finland), but the all time high for one special stage came in Argentina in 1983. Swedish Audi driver (and later world driver's champion in 1984) Stig Blomqvist completed the 81,5 kilometres of road called the Fray Louis Beltran-Valle Azul stage with an average speed of 189 kph!

Most manufacturer teams have one to three cars. Teams have between 30 and 60 crew members and are on the road all year long – 250 days away from home every year is not unusual – travelling between rallies, testing, doing R&D work and PR activities, leaving a geographical mobility pattern behind closely resembling those of big rock bands on tour. Cars and personnel are then shipped to rallies that take place in both remote regions of the world (mountains, deserts and forests) and close to populated areas (major cities, historic venues) on surfaces as diverse as tarmac, gravel, snow and sand. Two so-called 'kits' of cars and equipment are used; one for the European rallies (as most WRC teams are based in Europe) and one for the long-haul events, like Argentina or Japan. WRC teams are notoriously cagey about their budgets but there is no doubt that they form a large part of the global motorsport industry, which, in 2005, was estimated to have a turnover of €57 billion (Henry et al., 2007, p. 10). Hyundai's four-year commitment to the WRC starting in 2014, for example, had a price tag of €80 million a year (Foy, 2013). Some drivers are almost as famous as movie stars,

at least in their home countries, with salaries to match. In 2011, it was reported that multiple world driver's champion Sébastien Loeb made €10 million (plus bonuses) per year.¹⁰

From the first WRC rally, the Rally Monte Carlo in 1973, to Rally Monte Carlo 2014, there have been over 500 WRC rallies in over 30 countries on five continents. For each event, a team normally arrives on Saturday and starts to build up on Sunday, a job done by the truck drivers (normally about six people), ready for the boys to arrive on Tuesday to work on the cars. Wednesday is recce – the opportunity for drivers and co-drivers to complete two exploratory runs through the stages to prepare pace notes. Thursday is scrutineering, 'shakedown' (a final test) and, sometimes, a ceremonial start with a 'super special stage' at a football stadium or similar. Friday, the rally starts. On Sunday or Monday, the camp is taken apart and teams leave either to the next event or to go back to base. Since 2000, most events have been organised in the so-called 'cloverleaf format'. This means that the service park, a confined area usually set up in or near some urban centre, is the focal point, with special stages scattered around for three to five days of rallying. At the service park, trucks and cars are lined up alongside hospitality areas (for sponsors and guests) and the designated areas for mechanics working on the cars between the stages are visible to the public.

Motorsport and social science

The WRC, like any other sport, is of course a lot more than facts and figures. After four decades of research, sports sociologists are unanimous that it plays an important part in people's lives. Regardless of what kind of sport you look at, there is a particular dramaturgy involved – good guys and villains, tragedies and successes, outrageous moments and sheer boredom. When this is exploited within the frame of competition, we are socialised into views about the right and wrong of winning and losing, honesty and cheating and we are also

introduced to worlds of companionship and social bonds, integration, identity formation and individualisation. Everywhere you look in the world of sport, there are traces of a love/hate relationship between emotional investment and commercial interest (see Delaney and Madigan, 2009; Coakley and Pike, 2009; Gantz, 2013, for good introductions to the field). Motorsport is, both at this intersection between management and sociology and elsewhere, however a rare bird in social science, something David Hassan and Sean O'Connor (2009, p. 709) with the WRC as case finds 'remarkable against the backdrop of a discipline that has truly global appeal'.

One reason might be that studies of sport in sociology usually comprise phenomena tied to class, nationalism and ideology (Hassan, 2011b, p. 187), features that we shall discover are less relevant to understanding the sociology of the WRC than for example the sociology of football or cricket. Another reason may be that the invites to study world championship rallying and its promotional discontents have gone largely unnoticed. In 1999, for instance, Andrew Cowan, who was in charge of Mitsubishi's WRC efforts in the 1990s and who had considerable experience of the sport before that, said:

We must move forward, we must do something. You look at the figures that have been quoted for people that watch a rally and watch a Formula 1 race. We've got to look at these two things: find out what they want and try and give them it (cited in Williams, 1999, p. 65).

While research on the WRC is scant other investigations of motorsport, in a broader sense, can be divided into three categories. The first consists of socio-historical explorations of developments in motorsport (see Robson, 2007; Cofaigh, 2011). Emphasis here, apart from the history of motorsport in general, is on the sporting legacy of certain events and what they

have meant to different world championships. In the WRC, the single most researched event is Rally Monte Carlo which is not only the oldest existing rally – launched in 1911 – but was also the inaugural event of the first-ever WRC season in 1973. With its spectacular location in the Alps above the Principality of Monaco, its narrow and winding roads in changing conditions (snow, ice, wet and dry tarmac) and with many stages having the mountain on the inside and a drop on the outside, it has for many years offered a scenic display of rallying drama. Add to this dedicated spectators who camp overnight in all kinds of weather, especially in the mountains and at legendary spectator points like Col de Turini. Graham Robson, one of the world’s leading motorsport historians, summarised it well in 2007: ‘It may no longer be the most important in the world’s rally calendar, but the Monte Carlo Rally is certainly the most famous’ (Robson, 2007, p. 6).

The second category consists of socio-economic or organisational studies where the business, the social and environmental impact and general governance of motorsport are quantitatively assessed (see Lilley and DeFranco, 1999; Henry et al., 2007; Dredge et al, 2010; Mackellar, 2009; 2013; Hassan and O’Connor, 2009). Sean O’Connor’s work (2004; 2010) on the promotional aspects of the WRC is worth mentioning in particular. By evaluating the marketing strategy of International Sportsworld Communicators (ISC), the commercial rights holders to the WRC 1996-2007, his findings reveal a troublesome road in converting the formerly quite capricious championship into a neatly packaged media product. Far more attention, however, has been given to Formula 1, the main racing world championship first launched in 1950. Since ‘the Ecclestone revolution’ in the 1970s (see Chapter 3), it has managed to transform itself from a poorly organised series to a globally and commercially successful motorsport venture. Even in difficult financial times, like the global economic recession in 2008-9, it has proven more profitable than any other motorsport.¹¹ Moreover, because speeds and risks are extremely high in F1, and it is raced on purpose-built

circuits, rivalry between flamboyant drivers both on and off the race track introduced a theatrical element, even used by film directors like Ron Howard in the 2013 Hollywood film *Rush* (see Henry, 2003; Lovell, 2004; Folley, 2009).

The third category is socio-cultural, though it does not primarily focus on motorsport as such, but on its related sub-cultures and the relationship with identity, masculinity and class in modern societies (see Vaaranen, 2004; Kwon, 2004; Redshaw, 2008; Shackleford, 2011). Here, the WRC is more or less absent from the literature that instead concentrates on illegal street racing or car customising sub-cultures, but one exception is research on NASCAR (an American track-based racing series). Often portrayed as a ‘redneck’ sport with origins in the rural south, and accompanied by cultural stereotyping and moonshine folklore, it has nevertheless become a national spectacle where a set of rituals like tailgating (derived from having a barbecue on the back of a pick-up truck) and symbolic engagements are displayed in conjunction with the race, current societal events (US patriotism apparently thrives in NASCAR) and the sport’s history. Authors disagree on the socio-cultural effects of this; some describe it as a masculinised blue-collar fraternity while others claim it is as much a family event, with ramifications for children’s popular culture, as the *Cars* animated movies show (Howell, 1997; Shackleford, 2011; Spinda, 2012).

Additionally, there is a category that does not qualify as a research tradition, but still harbors information relevant for the research topic. It is socio-biographical, with the focus on individual drivers, cars or statistics (see for example Todt and Moncet, 1985; Collins, 2008). Most of these books fail to meet in a profound way the criteria for the genre outlined by biographical sociologists, that is, ‘an attempt to understand the changing experiences and outlooks of individuals in their daily lives, what they see as important, and how to provide interpretations of the accounts they give of their past, present and future’ (Roberts, 2002, p. 1). However, there are some notable exceptions (see Chapter 9), and despite their lack of

interpretative rigour, they offer many glimpses into the smaller corners of WRC. Even though their life stories have been screened to portray a certain image of themselves (most WRC drivers take part in the writing), they still refer to real events and experiences that researchers can put into context as events are ‘placed within understandings of the individual life – by metaphor, myth and so on’ (Roberts, 2002, pp. 7-8). Besides filling in a number of details needed to understand the bigger picture and providing amusing anecdotes, their attitude towards the sport and how they got to the top tells us much about the values on which it is grounded.

A theoretical vantage point

Besides this handful of academic publications, yearbooks, driver autobiographies, technical publications, newspaper and magazine articles, websites and other material also make up the library of potentially relevant information about the WRC. While these studies and the enormous amount of visual media that exists offer substantial insight into a variety of themes, there is equally less research on the paradox of commercialism. In order to overcome this paradox, my argument is that cultural factors should be included in the same category as economic analysis and marketing actions when investigating the promotional value of sports (see also Funk, 2008, p. 32). One of the earliest expressions of this thought came in a 1967 article, ‘Meaning, Value, and the Theory of Promotion’, by Jerome B. Kernan and Montrose S. Sommers. They define the concept of promotion like this:

(Promotion is) any identifiable effort on the part of a seller to persuade prospective buyers to accept the seller’s information and store it in a retrievable form. Such effort is commonly manifested in product and package design, advertising, personal selling,

sales promotion, publicity, and public relations. The collective intent of these activities is to imbue a seller's product with appropriate meanings – that is, ideations about the product that will encourage favorable evaluations of it and increase the likelihood of explicit negotiation for its purchase (Kernan and Sommers, 1967, p. 113).

To grasp how *ideations* are communicated on the WRC's promotional arenas a cultural approach is indispensable. A 'promotional arena' is a site of social interaction in the WRC from which the championship promoter can extract cultural content for promotional purposes, as well as use it as a venue for promoting the sport itself. Fundamental to this definition of a promotional arena is the recognition that the WRC is about experiences, not products or services. Similar to how 'having a coffee' is not merely about mixing beans and hot water, the world of rallying is not only about money or cars – it is about the complex whole of entertainment that differentiates the WRC from other sports in 'the experience economy' (Gilmore and Pine, 2011, pp. 3-4).

My way to make sense of this 'whole' is therefore by approaching the WRC as what anthropologist Anthony P. Cohen (1985) named a 'symbolic community'. In his path-breaking book *The Symbolic Construction of Community* Cohen argues that 'people construct community symbolically, making it a resource and repository of meaning, and a referent of their identity' (Cohen, 1985, p. 118). From a managerial point of view Simon Long, CEO of International Sportsworld Communicators (ISC) and later North One Sport (NOS) (the WRC's former promoters), exemplified this well when he in an interview with me contemplated about the changing face of the WRC: 'You have to play as part of the WRC community. If you don't then you won't have a part to play in the sport'.¹² The WRC community, as symbolic communities elsewhere, are consequently made in the eyes of the beholders where boundaries are 'themselves largely constituted by people in interaction' and

can be perceived differently, not only by people from different sides of it, but also within the community itself (Cohen, 1985, pp. 12-13). Among these perceptions of the WRC as symbolic community, I discovered in my research, the past – or rather specific versions of it told in particular ways – was of utter importance to understand the situation of today.

Take notice, for instance, of the story once told by Ari Vatanen, WRC driver 1977-1998 and driver's world champion in 1981, to whom the WRC it was like a traveling circus in the 1970s and 1980s compared with today's circumstances: 'Our families met every year at the Acropolis Rally. Each driver brought his children, we lived in bungalows, we had a lot of free time, and it was completely different. It was as if we were gone camping together' (cited in Morelli, 2013, p. 50). In fact this yearning for yesterday is common in sports, as Barrie Houlihan writes in his book *Sport and Society*: 'any present-centered analysis of sport needs to remember that the past figures strongly' (Houlihan, 2008, pp. 57-58; see also Snyder, 1991). In a similar vein, Cohen points to a number of ethnographic studies to make the claim that the symbolic expression of community

...refers to a putative past or tradition. We thus encounter the paradox that, although the re-assertion of community is made necessary by contemporary circumstances, it is often accomplished through precisely those idioms which these circumstances threatens with redundancy (Cohen, 1985, p. 99).

As the upcoming chapters will exemplify, this paradox Cohen emphasises surfaced on all the WRC's promotional arenas and evoked the need for a relational investigation of their reciprocal importance. According to Nick Crossley, author of *Toward Relational Sociology* from 2011, a relational sociology translate into the general study of 'networks of interaction demarcated by their participants' mutual involvement in specifiable sets of activities ... They

are generated by interaction but also function as a context and environment which shapes interaction' (Crossley, 2011, p. 138; see also Donati, 2011; Powell and Dépelteau, 2013; Dépelteau and Powell, 2013). Moreover, as Cohen's paradox constitutes conceptually the source of the polarization between the traditionalists and the modernists introduced early in this chapter, I found it relevant to investigate those *narratives* that were integrative or disintegrative to the WRC community.

I will explore this concept in more detail in Chapter 2, but suffice to say that while narrative is not a 'story' in the sense of being fiction, it does on the other hand not mirror things that happen. Instead, according to Gerald Prince, 'it explores and devises what can happen. It does not merely recount changes of state, it constitutes and interprets them as signifying parts of signifying wholes' (Prince, 1987, p. 60). I find this relevant because often in studies of sport, as I will explore in this thesis with the use of the WRC, a dilemma is drawn between managers and participants who simultaneously face commercial opportunities and the constraints of heritage (Chadwick, 2009, p. 192). By investigating the promotional value of the WRC on those arenas mentioned above through a narrative inquiry, I however seek to demonstrate how commercial adaptations and sporting traditions are not incommensurable processes. On the contrary, my argument is that the WRC's prime commercial asset is its traditions and the narratives that constitute its sporting identity.

Former research as well as my own findings uncovered that storytelling is a big part of the intersection between promotion and sports. Research on grand sporting events like the Olympic Games or Tour de France shows that their commercial value across cultures, nations and socio-economic backgrounds is 'their ability to appeal to both the committed sports fan, and also the peripheral sporting viewer who becomes interested partly due to the narratives which television, in conjunction with the press, constructs around the event (Boyle and

Haynes, 2009, p. 64). A useful definition of narratives therefore comes from sociologists Kevin F. Fox and William G. Staples. They are:

...forms of representation that can provide knowledge about the past in terms of sequences of events, that include causes and effects, individual action and collective mobilization, background conditions, practical deliberations, complications and consequences, and resulting actions (Gotham and Staples, 1996, p. 492).

As a consequence a narrative inquiry is a form of story making (in which my voice as the author also must be accounted for) which, in the WRC's case, enabled me to uncover the processes within what sociologist Margaret S Somers call 'a narrative constitution of identity'. In contrast to identity politics and the social construction of identity her concept is based on 'constellations of relationships (connected parts), embedded in time and space, constituted by causal employment' (Somers, 1994, p. 616). My focus on the entire championship, rather than just one of its promotional arenas, is subsequently based on the notion that to bond promotional issues with a sporting identity one must investigate all its major aspects – the defining elements of its entire community – and explore 'the ties that bind' narratively.

Reader's guide

In this chapter I have introduced the sporting basics of the WRC and put it into the world of motorsport. Unlike other motoring world championships the WRC is the only one that is not track-based and thus convey a unique diversity through its rallies, its history and its competitors. To grasp this uniqueness systematically, and what it means in a promotional

context, I have found it relevant to investigate the research topic – how can we bridge the gap between those who cherish the elements that according to them once made the sport great with those who put forward the promotional concerns as they see a sport in pain that have developed in the past two decades – through narrative means. Obviously socio-economic, quantitative or historical insights are important in today’s commercial sporting landscape, and will be extensively utilized alongside my own material. Neither of these approaches is, however, able to account for the profound qualities of the sporting diversity the WRC possesses.

To elaborate on my way of investigating the WRC I elaborate in Chapter 2 a theoretical framework with the relationship between sports management and sociology of sports as point of departure. After having established my view on this relationship I turn to its close association with narrative inquires. With references to theories by Donald E. Polkinghorne in particular and his division between analysis of narratives (the stories people tell) and narrative analysis (the way the researcher ‘construct’ a pattern out of these stories), I specifically discuss why and how the concept of narrative is theoretically beneficial in the context of the WRC, as well as taking into account the significance of historical sociology in this type of analysis. Throughout the chapter particular attention is given to the relation between theory (and the specific kind of theory I am including in this thesis) and data as they are mutually important in enabling me as a researcher to uncover the answers to the research question.

In Chapter 3, I continue this introduction of my analytical framework by discussing at length the reasons for, and implications of, my methodological choices. Through a deliberation of the benefits and shortcomings of qualitative research – interviews, online forum studies and trans-local ethnography – I seek to make the road from idea via research to text as transparent as possible. Of particular prominence in this chapter is the method of

trans-local ethnography which was conducted in six different sites between 2010 and 2014 and therefore represents a special challenge, not only in terms of doing it (for example, when it comes to constructing the field, access issues, the kind of data one gathers, and so on), but also in terms of the academic credibility in the context of conventional ethnography. As a consequence, I discuss the pros and cons of this method against the backdrop of the empirical discoveries I made along the way.

In Chapter 4, I continue with a review of the WRC's promotional context. Starting in 1996, the year when the commercial responsibilities were coordinated by one company for the first time – International Sportsworld Communicators (ISC) – I review the emergence of what is called 'the promotional culture' and how it affected the WRC until Red Bull Media House (RBMH) and Sportman Media were jointly appointed the new promoters in 2012 (eventually forming WRC Promoter GmbH the next year). For a number of reasons, I argue that we need to step away from both the Red Bull way of promotion and the Formula 1 model, two of the most often-suggested alternatives for WRC promotion, and instead investigate the qualities that make the WRC promotionally unique. At the end of this chapter, I argue with particular reference to the presence of nostalgia in sport why this investigation should not begin with economics but with an ethnographic engagement with the WRC community.

In Chapter 5, I continue this mode of investigation. Based on fieldwork from Wales Rally GB 2010, I look at the most important part of the promotional apparatus: the media production, how it works on a WRC event, and what strategies are utilised to make the coverage of the championship coherent. Furthermore, by placing the actual production and the feedback from viewers into the context of the promotional development outlined in Chapter 4, as well as introducing reasons why 'glocalisation' is a keystone in this respect, I investigate how the recent WRC coverage has served to support or weaken the narrative identity of the sport. A crucial theme here will be whether the various promoters, through their official

media production unit, have incorporated the widely discussed concept of ‘transmedia storytelling’. I end the chapter by discussing how opinions on coverage taken from Internet forums reveal, within the context that has been established earlier in the chapter, some significant insights into the essence of rallying.

Primarily based upon fieldwork at Rally Monte Carlo 2013, Chapter 6 is an investigation of the fact that, while drivers and teams come and go, some rallies are aggregates of tradition, custom and myths – landscapes of memory, in short. This is intertwined with the sporting legacy of WRC events which, as they are run on ordinary roads (unlike Formula 1, which is run on purpose-built tracks) do not leave behind physical traces (like stadiums), except for environmental prints, as is illustrated by a case study of the quarrel prior to Rally Australia in 2009. Furthermore, I discuss why the relationship between place and the WRC is particularly observable in rallies with a long history, like Rally Monte Carlo, which makes the entry of new rallies or removal of old ones in the WRC calendar (the line-up of rallies in any given season is decided by the FIA) a touchy issue. For that reason, this chapter also includes a review of the sport from its very beginning in the late 1800s to 1973, the inaugural year of the WRC in its current format.

Closely tied to the sense of place, and to the identification of sport consumer behaviour, is the experience of spectating a rally – of ‘being there’. That’s why, in Chapter 7, by taking part in spectator life mainly in Rally Finland 2010 and Rally Argentina 2012, I study how spectator culture is formed and what a good spectator experience in the WRC is comprised of. Unlike other sports, it seems, WRC spectators are much less concerned about nationalities or socio-economic background in their use of motorsport as a way to create sport entertainment experiences. Because the Group B era of the WRC, 1983-1986, is essential background to explain why this is the case, a historical recollection of what those years (and those leading up to it since the establishment of the WRC in 1973) have provided in terms of

narrative identity formation is included. Yet, since women are generally excluded from the culture of rallying, different perspectives are included to illuminate why this is so.

In Chapter 8, I turn to WRC cars. With fieldwork at M-Sport, Ford's WRC team, at Rally Sardinia in 2010 as point of departure, I investigate how teams – promotionally, organisationally and logistically – are the greenhouses of car manufacturers' rationale for participation in the WRC. As M-Sport was one of the lead actors in grappling with the implications of this role under the emergence of a promotional culture, I also include a historical review of the sport from 1987-1997, a period of the WRC where many changes were made both commercially and sportingly. Additionally, I consider the possibility of technological development, publicity and brand awareness that the WRC offers to manufacturers and argue that whether it helps them sell cars or not derives in the end from the level of cultural impact they have had on the community. To illustrate this argument, I use examples from the rallying history of Audi, Peugeot, Subaru and Hyundai.

In Chapter 9, I examine the WRC's drivers. With the increased individualisation of sport heroes going hand in hand with progress of the promotional culture, I discuss the new commercial circumstances that WRC drivers are part of, for good and ill, with special emphasis on the period from 1997 until today. Unlike those who think that a driver can be branded to fit the sponsor's ideals, I argue that it is precisely the championship's history of allowing individuals to keep their identity (in terms of language, clothing, facial hair and general behaviour) that makes them and the sport popular. If drivers are going to be part of a promotional renewal of the WRC, one cannot replace biographical authenticity with fictional instructions on proper demeanour. By taking a comparative look on Ari Vatanen, Colin McRae and Petter Solberg – three highly popular WRC drivers from the 1980s, 1990s and the 2000s – discussing their role in a sport where a certain kind of driver attitude and personality trait is the real fuel of positive attention.

Finally, in Chapter 10, I resume the research question introduced in Chapter 1 and, based on an analysis of the findings in Chapters 4-9, argue that the promotional quality of the WRC is its positive nostalgia. In my view, the WRC is kept together as a community because it is not mostly about the money or about edgy lifestyle projects. Instead, people form a community by sharing a positive nostalgia that, in addition to being a narrative pillar, defines what the sport should be like. How they share and communicate this nostalgia, and the amount of narrative detail they use to exemplify it with reference to memories and fantasies about cars, rallies and drivers, is essential knowledge to any promoter simply because it exposes the things that really matter – unfiltered and unpolished. For the road ahead, this means that although people in the WRC community accept that changes are natural in sport once in a while, the sport's past must be included promotionally in a different way than it is today.

Chapter 2: A theoretical framework

Introduction

According to Jay Coakley and Elizabeth Pike (2009, p. 26) theories in sport ‘provide frameworks for asking research questions, interpreting information, and uncovering the deeper meanings and stories associated with sports’. Marketing professor Chris Hackley (2005, p. 32), however, claims that many of those working in promotion and advertising ‘rarely have much time for theory’. The aim of this chapter, therefore, is to provide a theoretically informed argument about why overcoming the paradox of commercialism is dependent on a profound understanding of the WRC’s cultural meanings. Otherwise, sports cannot be promoted well among either existing or new fans because of an inadequate perception of what those meanings are. Alternatively, I will discuss why a narrative inquiry is useful to apply as a way to link sports management (which promotion is a central part of) and sociology of sports (which allows us to investigate the meaning of the WRC).

As discussed in Chapter 1, a narrative is not necessarily fiction – it is according to Donald E. Polkinghorne ‘the cognitive process that gives meaning to temporal events by identifying them as parts of a plot. The narrative structure is used to organize events into various kinds of stories’ (Polkinghorne, 1991, p. 136). As the upcoming chapters will demonstrate, that does not mean there is one grand story to tell from my investigation of the WRC as a symbolic community, yet that is precisely why a narrative inquiry is theoretically relevant to explore ‘the paradox of commercialization’ introduced in Chapter 1: the situation where sports face the challenge of being dependent on a commercial expansion even though that very expansion may come into conflict with its traditional values.

To unpack this claim, I continue this chapter with a discussion of the theoretical interface between sports management and sociology of sports in order to provide a proper context to the elevated status of promotion as a key concept in sports management. Because the sociology of sports has been mostly overlooked in this context, I introduce a conceptualization of ‘promotion’ which emphasizes the meaning of the service or product being promoted, which demands a sociological investigation of what constitutes this meaning. As the investigation in this thesis is predominantly based on analysis of narratives (the stories people tell) and a narrative analysis (the way the researcher puts together the stories into a coherent answer to the research question), I will thereafter discuss why such an approach is useful here. I end the chapter with a brief discussion of what turned out to be the most important element of meaning making during my narrative inquiry: nostalgia, and the ways in which it matters to the WRC community.

Sports management and the sociology of sports

Subsumed in the field of *sports management*, broadly defined as ‘any combination of skills related to planning, organizing, directing, controlling, budgeting, leading, and evaluating within the context of an organization or department whose primary product or service is related to sport and/or physical activity’ (DeSensi et al., 1990, p. 33), the WRC got involved in the 1990s in the emergence of what’s been called an international business of sports culture. In addition to drivers, engineers and team managements, agents, brokers, public relations organizations and commercial consultants took on a central role (Boyle and Haynes, 2009, p. 160). The position of sponsors was no longer confined to the field of play or sports stadium but, according to one study, ‘increasingly central in the actual coverage of the event itself’ (Boyle and Haynes, 2009, p. 58). Sports media had proliferated and with them a

celebrity cult of sorts, paving the way for a far more aggressive journalism than in the past. Fred Gallagher, WRC co-driver for more than three decades and currently involved in the organization of WRC events, said in 1997:

Ten or 15 years ago, we were guys doing rallies because the teams wanted to win events and all the PR men and marketing departments and the like weren't really part of our world ... Certainly, 20 years ago there was more of a code of honour. I think a rally or race driver or footballer then would have felt comfortable to go out with a tabloid hack, have a skinful with him and there would be an honourable outcome. The hack wouldn't write about it. There are very few people I would trust these days, whereas that wasn't so back then (cited in Williams, 1997, pp. 56-57).

One reason for the new prominence of non-WRC professions was the sums of money now involved. Where there is exposure, there are investors. Worldwide, the level of sports sponsorship increased from 8.5 billion dollars in 1992 to 24.6 billion dollars in 2001 (O'Connor, 2004, p. 43). In 2006, the number had gone up to 26.7 billion, and it's projected that it will rise to 45.3 billion dollars in 2015 (PwC, 2012, p. 18). According to Phil Schaaf, the author of *Sports, Inc.*, this is very significant because 'sponsorship is the promotional mechanism by which sports entertainment penetrates consumer markets to create identifiable publicity and profits for corporate buyers/participants' (Schaaf, 1995, p. 110). Furthermore, Schaaf argues, 'by spending money to be associated with the audience at a sporting event, companies buy the enthusiasm of fans of that particular event, the access to the crowds, and all of the associated media efficiency benefits' (Schaaf, 1995, p. 115).

Partly as cause, partly as consequence of globalization, a new, global sponsorship context where investments are made to achieve objectives in multiple countries, has also grown considerably according to John Amis and Bettina Cornwell:

The expansion of regional trading blocs, furthered by neo-liberal legislation that has removed trading barriers in the European Union, North and South America, Asia and the Pacific Rim have been accompanied by the collapse of communism and the subsequent opening up of markets in the former Soviet Union and her various satellite states, a raised awareness of international terrorism, and greater commercial access to China. The adoption of the Euro by twelve countries in Europe also emanated from a desire to ease and promote trade, not just within Europe, but also to make investment from external sources, notably North America and Asia, more attractive. With increased trade in different parts of the world comes more opportunity for sport sponsorship as firms seek to ingratiate themselves in locales within which they may have no heritage or tradition. Further, the awarding of major sporting events – such as those presented to previously excluded countries like China (2008 Olympics) and South Africa (2010 FIFA World Cup) – are undoubtedly influenced by the desire to help develop certain commercial opportunities for global sponsors (Amis and Cornwell, 2005, p. 5).

In light of this development we discover some of the reasons to why the paradox of commercialism has gained attention. The range of marketing, public relations and advertising opportunities have become as important as the sport's competitive elements (Boyle and Haynes, 2009, p. 48). Agencies like the US-based International Management Group (IMG), which was founded in 1960 with golfer Arnold Palmer as its first 'object', was instrumental in

this expansion by taking a coordinating role as well as developing its own production units; TWI, its television division, had in 2013 become the world's largest independent distributor and producer of televised sports.

Table 2.1. IMG's overview of promotional methods

| Method | Description | Main benefits | Drawbacks |
|-------------------------|---|--|--|
| Advertising | Paid placement of a company's message within established media channels; typically intended to affect its target's awareness and perceptions of the company's product or service or the company itself. | Complete control of the message; ability to reach mass audience. | Often inefficient in reaching the target audience; fragmented media and consumer consumption; low relevance. |
| Direct marketing | A form of advertising that communicates directly to an individual customer or prospect. | Intimate form of engagement with controlled messaging; efficient. | Need permission to contact prospects directly; more effective at rational messaging than emotional. |
| Personal selling | Delivery of a company's message (and possible conversion of a sale) through an oral presentation directly to prospects. | High relevance; effective; well suited to deliver complex messages. | Limited reach; applicable mainly toward bottom of sales funnel. |
| Public relations | Disseminating information about an individual or organization to the public through established media channels on the merits of its newsworthiness instead of a payment for placement. | Low out-of-pocket costs; credibility of messenger. | Reduced control of message; low target engagement. |
| Social media | General term for the media channels enabling the electronic exchange of information between individual entities (people, organizations, etc). | Low out-of-pocket costs; engages with audience in a conversation. | Reach dependent on size of a company's network; shared control with audience; time-intensive. |
| Event marketing | Creation of a programme by a company in order to engage audience directly through an experiential activity. | Opportunity for meaningful engagement as well as social amplification. | Message may not be relevant to audience; limited control over social amplification. |
| Sales promotion | A combination of marketing efforts taking place for a limited, pre-determined period of time that often reaches beyond promotion to stimulate demand for a product. | Effective in delivering short-term results and gaining attention. | Potential erosion of perceived product and brand value. |
| Sponsorship | A connection with an event property or an organization that appeals to a target audience in order to effectively engage that audience and increase brand awareness (among other objectives). | Can incorporate many activation/promotional methods that are tailored based on brand objectives. | Costs can potentially be high, depending on programme scope. |

Source: Adapted from IMG, 2013, p 7.

In its 'white paper' on corporate sponsorship released the same year (see Table 2.1. above), IMG outlines in a clear way the multiplicity of links between corporations and the methods to

reach consumers: I will come back to the necessity of contextualizing the methods in this table below. For now, although the WRC was not affected by this promotional tidal wave in the same way as Formula 1, there were many signs that a new era was coming. Because more sponsors were coming from outside the sporting industry, financial return on investments alongside the edging of brand awareness through media and event exposure (see below) had become as important in any marketing strategy as the competition itself, the rules of the game or the wider socialization processes they represented. Gordon Lott, head of group sponsorship at Lloyds TSB, the Olympic sponsor of London 2012, made a relevant argument in this context as well as in the light of Table 2.1 above:

Advertising, the way I relate to it, tells you the price, the product and where to buy it. At this point, our sponsorship will probably not tell you any of that. It will tell you this is the brand, this is what it stands for, this is how it relates to you and your community.¹³

A promotional message, on the other hand, is even more widespread as, in sociologist Andrew Wernick's words, it 'is a complex of significations which at once represents (moves in place of), advocates (moves on behalf of) and anticipates (moves ahead of) the circulating entity or entities to which it refers' (Wernick, 1991, p. 182). These words are from his 1991 book, *Promotional Culture: Advertising, Ideology and Symbolic Expression* where he traces, 'the unfolding relationship between the intensive and extensive development of the market as an organizing principle of social life, and the increasingly diffuse and convoluted forms of promotional communication to which this has given rise' (Wernick, 1991, p. vii). Exemplifying what later would be termed a revolution in public communication, public relations researcher Heather Yaxley uses the *Top Gear* phenomenon, with its evolution from a

BBC programme to a global bundle of expressions, products and shows, to show what Wernick names ‘the many-sided interrelatedness of promotional messages’ (Yaxley, 2013, p. 110; Wernick, 1991, p. 94).

I will come back to Wernick in later chapters, but suffice to say that theoretically, marketers have shown little interest in how the methods of Table 2.1 could be combined with the sociology of sports and ‘the promotional culture’. Neither the WRC’s promoter nor the FIA have considered this intersection in a profound way, with the exception of profiling the fan base of the WRC in the early 2000s (see Chapter 7). This is odd given the verdict from sport management researchers Michael Levin and Robert E. McDonald: ‘it is critically important for sports promoters to understand how to provide entertainment that consumers value’ (Levin and McDonald, 2009, pp. 8-9). In my view, this is even more problematic since the definition of promotion introduced in Chapter 1 puts heavy weight on the meaning of sports and the interaction between the sporting bodies and the community.

Let me give you an example. A couple of months after the WRC got its new promoter in 2012, there was still no real news about where the WRC was going promotionally. Fed up with this lack of information, Croatian rally fan, owner and creator of the popular World Rally Blog, Tomislav Stajduhar, put into words what many felt, especially across the rallying blogosphere:

Did someone forget this very business depends on fans and spectators? Is it really necessary to take them for granted? I find it really sad and pretty pathetic that FIA and whoever is in charge of WRC media promotion at the moment are behaving like that. They are not talking to us – I don’t find few odd interviews from WRC bosses in 2012 really relevant – if anything, those interviews felt like formality rather than actual desire to talk about the sport and to talk to fans and WRC community. FIA and WRC

have no real understanding on how to talk to fans, they lack any sense of real interaction with the public (Stajduhar, 2013).

Serious analytic treatment of the interaction between ‘supplier’ and ‘consumer’ analytically, exemplified by Stajduhar’s comment above, also has support from a range of marketing economists, including Phillip Kotler. One of the veterans in marketing research, he writes that: ‘Marketing is a societal process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through creating and exchanging products and value with others’ (Kotler, 1994, p. 6). According to another marketing economist, Bill Shank, this exchange process is crucial in any successful marketing strategy because ‘an exchange is a marketing transaction in which the buyer gives something of value to the seller in exchange for goods and services’ (Shank, 1999, p. 29).

To follow up on these ideas, I found Chris Hackley’s emphasis on the so-called AIDA model relevant as a stepping stone for my narrative investigation of the WRC:

Attention-Interest-Desire-Action. The idea is that the consumers’ attention is necessary for a commercial transaction to take place. The promoter then needs to keep that interest by engaging with the consumer and consequently eliciting a desire for the service or product being sold. In the last phase, the transaction itself is carried out (Hackley, 2005, pp. 38-39). In between these steps, there is a constant *negotiation* between promoter and consumer.

According to Kernan and Sommers, the authors of the definition of ‘promotion’ in Chapter 1, a compilation of product specifications and a discussion of these and their terms of sale exemplify *explicit* negotiation with a seller. If both seller and buyer can agree on the terms of the proposed exchange, communicated properly, the negotiation can be successfully concluded, exchange can take place and the transaction can be consummated. This is the ‘how to’ part of promoting the WRC. In an *implicit* negotiation, on the other hand, activity begins

when ‘prospective buyers become aware of advertisements and other products or services in use’ (Kernan and Sommers, 1967, p. 112). This, in my view, is the ‘what is there to promote’ part of the WRC and is central in circumventing ‘the paradox of commercialism’.

Behind this strategy of dividing the negotiation phases is a view of behaviour in which the engagement with promotional activities is *cognitive* (thinking process), but also manifests *affective* (emotional) and *conative* (motivational) elements. Both the product and the promotional efforts that communicate information about it operate as symbols which convey the meaning of the product (Kernan and Sommers, 1967, p. 116). Meaning, furthermore, can be referred to as what Montrose and Somers call ‘a receiver’s aggregate perception of a communicated symbol’ (Kernan and Sommers, 1967, p. 116) – in other words, the entire idea of what the WRC is about and the plethora of channels through which it is available. According to Montrose and Somers, whether would-be consumers are prompted to enter explicit negotiation depends on whether their reactions to symbolic meanings are positive (Kernan and Sommers, 1967, p. 118). Said differently, these meanings are the basic requirement for what is called ‘integrated marketing communications’, in which, as Hackley puts it, ‘brand communications reflect implied values and imagery that are consistent throughout different media channels’ (Hackley, 2005, p. 15). If successful, he adds, ‘then clearly these channels act in a mutually reinforcing way with each successive consumer engagement’ (Hackley, 2005, p. 15).

A narrative inquiry

To comprehend this meaning and use it in a negotiation process in the way it is perceived in a symbolic community (see Chapter 1), one option is to locate the investigation theoretically within ‘the social definition paradigm’ (Snyder, 1981, p. 9, see also Ritzer, 1975). Basically,

this approach seeks to explore how people actively interpret and create definitions of social reality through relations that serve as the basis for social action (Ritzer, 1975, pp. 161-62; Snyder, 1981, p. 9). This interpretation obviously does not exclude reality, historical or otherwise, but takes into account that people use their (lack of) knowledge and real-life experiences differently when they act. In the context of the WRC, it is relevant to specify this location through a narrative inquiry because, as David Hassan and Sean O'Connor put it, 'the much vaunted notion of a sporting "legacy" has a peculiar application in relation to the WRC in so far as it is the event itself – the experience, the region and its configuration – that constitutes its particular legacy, rather than sporting infrastructure, which is typically true of most other major events' (Hassan and O'Connor, 2009, p. 720).

To unravel the narrative constitution of identity in the WRC, Kevin Fox Gotham and William G. Staples provide a point of departure by arguing that 'the analyst must incorporate all those events and actions that are necessary for telling the story, and that previous research has identified to be relevant to the subject at hand, and that meet various standards of objectivity, depth, and comprehensibility' (Gotham and Staples, 1996, p. 493). After one has gathered the information needed to produce an insight in the WRC's myriad meanings, there can be a sense of a sport's value which the promoter can utilize through the methods in Table 2.1. The next question is what kind of narratives should one pay attention to. Noel Carroll, for example, stresses that 'there are different stories because there are discrete courses of events whose interest is relative to the questions the historian asks of evidence' (Carroll, 1990, p. 153). Methodological relativism of this kind does not suggest that narratives are fiction – they are just one way to tell the story. David Maines (1993, p. 21) argues that because the researcher enters people's lives 'that are partly formed by still unfolding stories', they will most likely tell different stories depending on who's asking.

At this crossroads, my choice of methods (see Chapter 3) provides some signposts that are theoretically relevant in terms of lowering the risk of conflating the findings into a quasi-fictional tale (Hughes, 1994, p. 45). For proponents of ‘global ethnography’ (GE), it is unthinkable to enter fieldwork without theory as it makes it impossible ‘to know where to look, what to ask for or what fieldnotes to take’ (Lapegna, 2009, p. 13). Theory and data inform each other, yes, but ‘theory makes data possible’, as Lapegna puts it, with the result that GE aims ‘to construct social explanations of social phenomena developing social theory’ (Lapegna, 2009, p. 13). ‘Multi-sited ethnography’ (MSE), alternatively, takes the almost opposite view and states that theory should be ‘held in abeyance’ since theory may constrain the ethnographer’s fieldwork by introducing preconceptions (Marcus, 1998, p. 19; Lapegna, 2009, p. 13). While proponents of multi-sited ethnography often neglect what Pablo Lapegna call ‘the effect of historical legacies’ in favour of an explanatory strategy bordering on postmodernist constructivism, those who work in the tradition of global ethnography argue that ‘the logic that justifies the connections between sites or the historical changes of a site is explained as a result of larger determinations or “global forces”’ (Lapegna, 2009, p. 11).

While grand concepts are not included in my research as determining forces, I do argue in favour of investigating the promotional arenas within the WRC and the relations between them as historically conjured. As I will discuss in the upcoming chapters, a major part of the community evaluation in the WRC comes from people’s experience of the rally as a day out and the recurrent debate of what the sport is like today compared with past times. Take notice, for example, of the comment of John Davenport, British motorsport historian and former chief of the MG Metro’s motorsport division (which participated in the WRC in the 1980s). In 2012, he remarked on the legacy of controversial Group B era in the WRC, which lasted from 1982 to 1986:

The Group B era had its awful moments but it was a time of great vitality when drivers and engineers were liberated to express their talent – and in some cases, genius – in a way that has not occurred since. Indeed, the strictures placed on twenty-first century rallying are such that many people think that the pendulum has swung too far in the direction of conformity. No wonder then that so much interest still resides in rally cars that are now more than twenty years old. Who knows, through the continuing interest and debate it creates, we may one day return to rallying to cars that fully reward both the spectator and the driver (Davenport and Klein, 2012, p. 237).

Besides illuminating some of the issues that part ‘traditionalists’ and ‘modernists’, Davenport’s recollection also sheds light on the sensitive methodological relationship between sociology and history. Although I concur with global ethnographers on the importance of history, analysing the history of the WRC against the backdrop of a global force, such as ‘capitalism’, seems less relevant in this context. Instead, the relation between past and present (and future) in this thesis is a result of how the sport is perceived, valued and judged against a historical backdrop that both my informants and I understand in a narrative way. Sport as narrative signifies a temporal distance from the past, which is not viewed as a ‘dead interval’ but, as underlined by Paul Ricoeur, is rather a ‘transmission that is generative in meaning’ (Ricoeur, 1984, p. 221). Along the way, the relationship between sociology and history has been operationalized in line with the advice from Philip Abrams:

Doing justice to the reality of history is not a matter of noting the way in which the past provides a background to the present; it is a matter of treating what people do in the present as a struggle to create a future out of the past, of seeing that the past is not

just the womb of the present but the only raw material out of which the present can be constructed (Abrams, 1982, p. 3).

In a similar vein, Arpad Szakolczai writes in the introduction to his book *Reflexive Historical Sociology* that:

Events and processes belonging to the distance past, or to distant cultures, can become relevant in the sense of holding up a mirror to the present: the mirror of the ‘other’, or the mirror of our own past selves. In this way they help to shed – often suddenly and unexpectedly – new light on aspects of present practices that are taken for granted and unseen not because they are so distant, but exactly because they are so close (Szakolczai, 2000, p. xiv).

That means that when historical data is approached from a sociological angle, especially a narrative one, it is not necessarily about the age or extent of the data, but the nature of it – ‘the representation of events’ as Larry Griffin calls it (1992, p. 405) – that matters analytically. To exemplify how this works, let me reprint the message from the Rally Guide of Argentina 2012:

Thirty-two years after its first edition, the event promises to offer a rally like the old times; for the nostalgic, both, its characteristics and its roads will see the return of some of the greatest special stages ever (Rally Guide 1, Argentina 2012, p. 2).

While the Rally Guide of Argentina exemplifies the importance of analysing narratives relationally, the dynamic and often metaphorical nature of narratives means they cannot be

‘considered as evidence of the authenticity of a shared past’ (Neiger, Meyers and Sandberg, 2011, p. 2). Actually, the ‘greatest special stages ever’ referred to in the Rally Guide was not exactly like the old days, neither was the rally – for example, it was almost half the length, and therefore half as rough according to the traditionalists, than it was in the early 1980s. According to Philip Abrams, the author of the standard text *Historical Sociology* who is quite negative about narratives in historical sociology, this use of history means that ‘the sense of connectedness and unity that commands assent is achieved by presenting a flow of events with which we allow ourselves to flow’ (Abrams, 1982, p. 309). As a result, Abrams argues, narrative fails to work as an explanation because it cannot cope with ‘the debate between the story (or facts) and the theory of cumulative causation’ (Abrams, 1982, p. 314).

In one sense, I think Abrams is too punitive. While researchers should ask to what extent a story’s plausibility depends on its empirical accuracy (see Poletta et al., 2011, p. 123), a narrative inquiry does not, as mentioned above, legitimize a relativistic treatment of facts. How these facts are put together analytically can differ and still be historically correct, as historian William Cronon (1992) demonstrates in his review of the literature about the American dustbowl. I will come back to this at the end of Chapter 10, but the point here is that any research strategy has its limitations. Instead of pretending that there are unflawed ways to do historical sociology studies, I think it is more important to be aware of, and open about, the shortcomings and biases in one’s research design. In my case, for instance, I have been very aware of what Nicholas Taleb calls ‘the narrative fallacy’. Basically, it occurs when people simplify data and information through overinterpretation and through a preference for compact stories over complex data sets (Taleb, 2010, p. 63, cited in Flyvbjerg, 2011, p. 311). Flyvbjerg, consequently, extrapolates Taleb’s concept by writing that:

It is easier to remember and make decisions on the basis of ‘meaningful’ stories than

to remember strings of ‘meaningless’ data. Thus, we read meaning into data and make up stories, even where this is unwarranted (Flyvbjerg, 2011, p. 311).

Flyvbjerg here touches upon the much-debated issue between the narrative and the real. In his influential essay, David Carr reviews several of the attacks on narrative as ‘unreal’ and concludes that, to the critics, narratives constitute a diversion from reality. At worst, he continues, ‘it is an opiate – a distortion imposed from without as an instrument of power and manipulation. In either case narrative is a cultural, literary artifact at odds with the real’ (Carr, 1986, p. 120). In return, Carr argues that critics interpret the relationship this way because they have a one-dimensional view of time: ‘Whatever else “life” may be, it is hardly a structureless sequence of isolated events’ (Carr, 1986, p. 122). This bears on the reasons why it is useful to examine the WRC as a symbolic community, an idea introduced in Chapter 1. ‘A community,’ Carr writes, ‘exists not only as a development, but also through the reflexive grasp of that development, when its members assume the common we of mutual recognition’ (Carr, 1986, p. 130).

As I will come back to throughout this thesis, my empirical findings support Carr’s view of the intertwined relationship between narrative and the real world. Many of my informants expressed a historical view of WRC mirroring what anthropologist Jonathan Friedman (1992) describes as ‘a mythical construction’. By ‘mythical’, Friedman implies that accounts involve ‘a representation of the past linked to the establishment of an identity in the present’ (Friedman, 1992, p. 195). When reading autobiographies, for instance, this has to be constantly kept in mind. As with any other life stories, the researcher who carries out a narrative analysis on the analysis of narratives (see below) must, according to Donald E. Polkinghorne, include:

descriptions of the cultural context in which the storied case study takes place ... Particular meanings of happenings and actions are provided by the cultural heritage; assumptions about acceptable and expected personal goals are maintained by the social environment; and normal strategies for achieving these goals are sustained by the milieu (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 16).

As underlined in Chapter 1, biographies about WRC drivers vary greatly in quality. As a way of understanding why these WRC drivers have become so popular, however, they enable us, as the biographical sociologists say, ‘to understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and the external career of a variety of individuals’ (Mills, 1970, p. 11; Roberts and Kyllönen, 2006, p. 3). For these and many other reasons that I will explore in the upcoming chapters, I therefore see narrative pluralism as a strength since it allows the study to be different things to different people, rather than giving readers the impression that there is a truth waiting at the end of the path (see Flyvbjerg, 2011, p. 312). Partly explored in what I shall discuss as ‘the ethnographic path’ in Chapter 3, I concur with Alan Peshkin who wrote that:

When I disclose what I have seen, my results invite other researchers to look where I did and see what I saw. My ideas are candidates for others to entertain, not necessarily as truth, let alone Truth, but as positions about nature and meaning of a phenomenon that may fit their sensibility and shape their thinking about their own inquiries (Peshkin, 1985, p. 280).

At the same time, the desire to avoid one-dimensional conclusions can paradoxically be coloured by the risk of what has been called ‘narrative smoothing’, or ‘the Hollywood plot’,

where the story is conveyed without (the possibilities of) severe distortions (Clandinen and Connelly, 1990, p. 10). Especially if one has a twofold way of looking at history, as in this thesis, paying attention to divergence from the dualism is a matter of analytical credibility, not just literary choice. Combined with the methodological obligation in narrative inquiries of structuring ‘order and meaningfulness that is not apparent in the data themselves’ (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 18), the compromise in this thesis was to align with those who emphasize the *dialogical* nature of narrative research:

Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience. It is collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in this same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experience that make up people’s lives, both individual and social (Clandinen and Connelly, 2000, p. 20).

That said, in the end it is still the researcher who makes the decision on what to include, what to exclude, and how to convert those processes into text. As any ethnographic text is an invitation to the reader to join the author ‘in contemplating it, evaluating it, and responding to it’ as active producers of the narrative (Pratt, 1977, p. 136), the key concept in this part of the investigation has been what Polkinghorne calls a ‘narrative configuration’ which takes place through the process of *emplotment*, the means by which narrative weaves together the complex of events into a single story (Polkinghorne, 1991, p. 141). In this thesis, these means have been an *analysis of narratives* and a *narrative analysis*. The former has been deployed as a way of organizing data because it ‘seeks to locate common themes or conceptual manifestations among the stories collected as data’ (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 13). Narrative

analysis, on the other hand, which became equally important in analysing the data, is according to Polkinghorne ‘the procedure through which the researcher organizes the data elements into a coherent developmental account’ (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 15). This thesis, accordingly, is my attempt to introduce a developmental account of the paradox of commercialism in the WRC.

Promotion and nostalgia

As an example of the promotional usefulness of a narrative inquiry into sport, I would like to take you to France. In 2011, I was investigating the move of the French WRC event from the island of Corsica (where the event called *Tour de Corse* had been held from 1973 to 2008) to the Alsace region on mainland France. Both commercially and in sporting terms, the new event stood in stark contrast to the well-known mythology of the *Tour de Corse*, or the ‘Ten Thousand Turns Rally’ (*Rallye aux 10,000 virages*). Under pressure to deliver an event narratively different from the Corsican rally, therefore, as well as having to endure the displeasure of many fans for ditching Corsica from the WRC calendar, the organizers of the relocated event ensured that it would be promotionally linked to Alsatian attractions instead. A representative from the *Fédération Française du Sport Automobile* (FFSA), the main organizer of the Rally de France-Alsace (who did not wish to be named), told me that Alsace was chosen because the automobile industry is deeply rooted in this region and it has a long tradition of motorsport.¹⁴

However, the actual rationale for the move was, the person admitted, that the Corsican organizers were unable to meet the FFSA’s demands. These ‘demands’ translate into logistical difficulties (Corsica is a small island) and commercial viability. Relocation to Strasbourg meant greater possibilities for spectators from across Europe to come and see the

rally, in addition to easy access for media and a wide range of hospitality features in the tourism-friendly Alsace region. Add to this that Haguenau, a little Alsatian town, is the birthplace of Sébastien Loeb (who eventually won *nine consecutive* driver's titles between 2004 and 2012), the star driver of the highly successful French Citroën WRC team.

A local hero



Haguenau was cluttered with stuff associated with their own WRC star, Sébastien Loeb. Photo: Hans Erik Næss

With Loeb as the hero of the day, and even including a stage where the drivers raced through the town, a new narrative of the French WRC event was established:

Hollywood could not have scripted a better weekend for Citroen and Sébastien Loeb – local boy returns to his boyhood home town to contest his national rally in front of

300,000 adoring fans, he leads the event from start to finish racing through the streets of the town in which he grew up, he wins the event – his record breaking 60th World Rally Championship win – and takes his seventh successive World Rally Championship title, while Citroen, which fills podium with its C4 WRC model, takes the world manufacturers' title.¹⁵

Knowing why and how the Alsace region can be linked to the WRC makes it, in other words, easier to construct an involving story around the event and offer the WRC community a meaningful presentation of the sport through the Rally de France-Alsace. My main discovery, however, was the emotions that were evoked by the event that was left behind. First held in 1956 the Tour de Corse (or Rally Corsica), and feared for its dangerous roads (which had caused a number of fatal accidents), it was an intrinsic part of the WRC's sporting identity until it was chucked from the WRC calendar. 'It was natural for people to be worried about changing the location and losing the Corsican identity after so many years,' the FFSA representative told me. In effect, the representative and the reactions to the move were but one example of a comparative judgement that I discovered was highly common in the WRC community. Since these judgements were, almost exclusively, expressed narratively, they provide a theoretically informed intersection where sociology of sports and sports management bond.

More specifically, as I will demonstrate in upcoming chapters, these judgements revealed meanings of the WRC as they were fundamentally linked to people's *nostalgia*. Instead of defining the concept, I will demonstrate throughout this thesis, partly because of the narrative theories that form this investigation, how nostalgia works as 'motive, as socialisation tool, and forms an integral part of the norms and rituals of various social worlds'

(Fairley and Gammon, 2005, p. 183). There are three reasons for this. First, it is crucial not to confuse nostalgia with melancholy, writes historian Svetlana Boym:

Nostalgia, in my view, is not always retrospective; it can be prospective as well. The fantasies of the past, determined by the needs of the present, have a direct impact on the realities of the future. The consideration of the future makes us take responsibility for our nostalgic tales. Unlike melancholia, which confines itself to the planes of individual consciousness, nostalgia is about the relationship between individual biography and the biography of groups or nations, between personal and collective memory (Boym, 2007, pp. 8-9).

Rather, it should be seen as a positive form of nostalgia (because its counterpart, negative nostalgia, involves a personal sense of loss that the past cannot be replicated. See Holak and Havlena, 1998). As I will come back to on many occasions, people's cherishing of past eras does not necessarily imply a wish to close down the sport altogether if it fails to live up to a somewhat jumbled past. Analytically, this is in fact one of the main reasons why the negotiation of meaning in a promotional situation should include a narrative inquiry.

The second reason, which is linked to nostalgia's global ubiquity, is also a tonic to the WRC, namely, that you don't have to have experienced something personally to be nostalgic about it. Bruno, one of my Norwegian informants, described his historical impression of the WRC like this:

My favourite era has to be the 1980s. Unfortunately I could not witness it 'live', as I had just been born. But after seeing and hearing videos of roaring Audis and flame-throwing 205s on narrow mountain roads one gets the idea of what it was all

about. Cars were monsters and men were men. I have seen and experienced a lot of entertainment with modern rally cars as I have gotten older, but harbour a strong feeling of having missed the real fun.

According to two researchers on sport and nostalgia, the explanation is that memories can be *lived memories*, that is, ‘reflections that people have of their personally experienced past’, but they can also be *learned memories*, that is, ‘based on external sources such as books, media or stories’ (Sierra and McQuitty, 2007, p. 100). So-called ‘vicarious nostalgia’ could be a result of one’s exposure to social media, and is consequently not time-bound, either. In contrast to the belief that the amount of time elapsed influences one’s aptitude to be nostalgic, sociologist Fred Davis put forward ‘lived-time’ – the current state of an individual that contrasts with events from the past – as far more important (see Davis, 1977; 1979). In Bruno’s case above, the resentment of not having been around to experience the Group B cars is amplified by the fact that it is not that long ago. Sheranne Fairley and Sean Gammon thus rightly say that:

In many instances we try and relive pasts that are not our own but that related to a group to which we feel a sense of belongingness. In particular, individuals extend their identity by including an imagined past related to what they believe the past eras of a group or subculture entail (Fairley and Gammon, 2005, p. 184).

The third reason is that nostalgia is promotionally relevant on an individual as well as a group level. When investigating the influence of brand associations among sports teams, James Gladden and Daniel C. Funk (2002) found that nostalgia was one of the key dimensions. Mainly it helps the consumer attach meaning and value to the brands he or she consumes. It is, however, important to note that this is not an either-or situation. Nostalgia proneness in a

consumer behaviour setting is generally understood as ‘a potential facet of individual character – a psychographic variable, aspect of life-style, or general customer characteristic – that may vary among consumers’ (Holbrook, 1993, p. 246). Similarly, as I will show in chapters to come, the receptiveness to nostalgia does not mean that everybody in the WRC is nostalgic about the same things. A set of sports marketing researchers, for instance, uncovered various affections to sport because people refer to very specific things about the past; memories, smells and events, rather than general feelings about past times (Summers, Johnson and McColl-Kennedy, 2001).

My focus on nostalgia, however, need not imply accepting that changes are unnecessary. In fact, as in all sports, changes are necessary once in a while, even when they are not considered as changes. Interviewed by *Top Gear* just before his retirement in 2013 Sébastien Loeb, for example, commented on the issue like this: ‘I think that they’ve tried to change it in different ways but in the end nothing really changes.’¹⁶ Opposition to changes, moreover, are as common as seasonal shifts. In his classic study of hooligans, Geoffrey Pearson writes that ‘the grumbling of the older generations against the folly of the youth – in which the rising generation is accused of breaking with “timeless” traditions of the past – has all the appearance of being a “timeless” phenomena [sic] itself’ (Pearson, 1983, p. 20). Changes arise for different reasons, of which some are more discussed than others. With very little notice, research on recent editions of Rally Finland shows the technological evolution of a complex set of operations (in contrast to the ‘camping office’ situation three decades ago) in managing safety and security issues at a temporary rally control centre (Wahlström et al., 2011).

In other cases, examples of which we have seen in this thesis, people long for the days when service on the rally cars was done in people’s backyard. Why this is no longer the case, however, seems to have slipped from memory. In 1995, Bruno Thiry, on course to his first

WRC victory at Rally Corsica in a Ford Escort Cosworth, was forced to retire in the penultimate stage of the rally as a front wheel bearing collapsed in a place where service was not allowed. To ease the loud groan that followed within the WRC community about going back to more or less unrestricted service, FIA subsequently sent out a press release explaining the background to the regulation – it was about keeping the costs down, a recurring complaint within the WRC:

Some time ago, it was decided that manufacturers wishing to score points in the FIA World Rally Championship should make a commitment to participate in all eight rounds. In agreeing to this, the manufacturers asked the FIA to make the rallies more affordable. Obviously, the FIA cannot determine how much a manufacturer pays its drivers, or spends on the development of its cars, or even how much it spends at each rally. What the FIA could do was create a framework in which incredibly high expenditure at events was not absolutely necessary to achieve success. After extensive consultation with the manufacturers, it appeared that the most straightforward way to lower non-discretionary costs was to apply a limit to servicing.¹⁷

What it is even more interesting is that the FIA, as a method of constructively solving the problem, recommended event organizers to create routes ‘which permit competitors to return as often as possible to the same service area, thus cutting down on the number of service vehicles required and, incidentally, on the movement of those vehicles around the event.’¹⁸ Remember that this was one year before the WRC got its first official promoter – and yet it led to what it is now known as ‘cloverleaf’ format of rallies. As discussed in upcoming chapters, this is keenly debated when it comes to whether the WRC should adapt rallying to modern media formats or adapt the media coverage to its sporting identity.

Our challenge, then, is to explain how a nostalgically infused communal narrative, rather than those from the individuals in it, works in the WRC. The reason, as David Carr points out in his 1991 book *Time, Narrative and History*, is that we assume that the network (Carr uses ‘the group’, but the argument still holds) is ‘posited by its members as subject of experiences and actions in virtue of a narrative account which ties distinct phases and elements together into a coherent story. But whence comes this account, and how does it function?’ (Carr, 1991, p.155). In my view, we need to ‘pinpoint the characteristic acts of transfer’, as sociologist Paul Connerton calls them in his discussion of group identity. That is, the ways in which the narrative is kept vital through socialization and communication (Connerton, 1989, p. 38). In order to develop an understanding of the content, contours and contexts of that contemporary experience which nostalgia refers to, we need, according to sociologist Fred Davis (1979, p. 7), to track down the sources of mnemonic experiences in group life. As building blocks to a community of meaning, where narratives can thrive or be repelled, this is, in my view, the real source of both sporting identity and the promotional assets of the WRC.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the reasons why theories of narratives are a central link in the case of the WRC between sports management and sociology of sports. Above all, viewing the WRC as a symbolic community where narratives constitute its identity prepares us to investigate ethnographically how identity-formation takes shape within ‘relational settings of contested but patterned relations among narratives, people, and institutions’ (Somers, 1994, p. 626). That means that although Chapters 4-9 are separate investigations of the research theme – the clash of traditionalists versus modernists – they are also relationally induced expressions

on how the WRC's meaning is constituted narratively. Because of my research design, however, the theoretical discussion in this chapter is perhaps less rich than it could have been. The reason, as sociologists Paul Willis and Mats Trondman write in their 'manifesto for ethnography', is that 'the criterion for theoretical relevance in an ethnographic study is maximum power in relation to the data for purposes of illumination, not theoretical adequacy or sophistication for its own sake' (Willis and Trondman, 2002, p. 399).

That does not make the actual integration of theory less important as I pay attention to 'the integrity of the conceptual tools or views being mobilized' (Willis and Trondman, 2002, p. 400). Even though this thesis is the result of an exploratory process with the intention of learning something (and communicating it back to the world), rather than proving something (Eysenck, 1976, p. 9), I argue that the theoretical framework utilized here helps to make progress on how to create an interdisciplinary approach at the crossing of sports management and sociology of sports (see Chapters 1 and 10). Apart from its theoretical addition to how this hybrid research field may overcome some of its most wearisome issues, a narrative inquiry also allows the researcher to better explore the methodological potential of trans-local ethnography. The advantages of this combination are 'the connections within and between the conceptual (ideas) and empirical (data) planes and allowing for a logic of discovery rather than only a logic of validation' (Van Maanen, Sørensen and Mitchell, 2007, p. 1146). In the next chapter, I will explain how this was done methodologically.

Chapter 3: On methods

Introduction

In the mid-1970s British sociologist Frank Bechhofer (1974, p. 73) wrote that ‘the research process ... is not a clear cut sequence of procedures following a neat pattern, but a messy interaction between the conceptual and empirical world, deduction and induction occurring at the same time.’ Those elements and their trajectories are rarely discussed, John Van Maanen and colleagues argue ‘since the flow of research is lengthy and uneven, is seen most clearly in hindsight, and, perhaps most important, is contextually idiosyncratic, often chaotic, and always personal’ (Van Maanen, Sørensen and Mitchell, 2007, p. 1146). While that may be true – it was in my case – sociologists also have a methodological responsibility towards their professional environment and readers in general to explain their path from messy research process to finished text.

Some think that this ‘ethnographic path’ should not be interpreted literally, but is rather a question of making one’s norms about accomplishment transparent (see Stewart, 1998, pp. 34-35; Sanjek, 1990b, pp. 398-400, for discussion). My opinion is that if we claim that an ethnographic perspective ‘can help ground globalization by showing how global “flows” always have to make terrain’ (cf. Lapegna, 2009, p. 18), we should disclose information on all the actors and informants who were observed, and the actual network path of access. To counter an impression of haphazardness further, I seek to build a methodological frame named ‘globography’ around the key methods used in this thesis: interviews, online forum studies, motorsport texts (previous research, history books, annuals, biographies, documentaries), photos and trans-local ethnography.

First coined by anthropologist Joy Hendry (2003) ‘globography’ was predominantly used as a metaphor for the new trends in trans-local fieldwork. While she does suggest that the researcher can trace, or follow, the phenomena by teaming up with locally based collaborators in each site, her article is nevertheless short on arguments why globography is different from the other main directions in trans-local fieldwork: multi-sited ethnography (MSE) and global ethnography (GE). Because trans-local ethnography, in particular, has been the subject of recurrent criticisms, I therefore review some of the most pertinent issues in this chapter; constructing the field, the significance of historical sociology and some general demystification of how trans-local fieldwork is done. Finally, for both methodological and communicative reasons, this chapter aims to outline the ‘polymorphous engagements’ (Wulff, 2007, p. 143) that made me arrive at conclusions presented in later chapters and give ‘globography’ a concept-specific content.

Preparations

This thesis began in January 2010 and ended in the spring of 2014. After I had made sure the ethics approval from Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD) was in place, I began to contact potential informants, organise interviews, book hotels, order flight tickets, as well as taking care of my other academic obligations. Early in the process, I was frustrated by the lack of response from a variety of actors – among them, some of the biggest ones in the WRC. With time, things changed and I learned how getting access to different fields was dependent on a mix of choices, financial possibilities and arbitrary and external circumstances. At this point, it would turn out that my prior knowledge of the field was a blessing when it came to access, selection of research themes and fields, and overview of potential interviewees. However, I have never been an active part of rallying on any level, except as an enthusiast. I

did not know anybody quoted in this thesis beforehand, and had to work my way through the ethnographic data as I would in any other research project.

Due to the trans-national nature of my research topic and the characteristics of the WRC, I had decided that trans-local ethnography would be my key method for data gathering. I understand ethnography in general as ‘a qualitative social science practice that seeks to understand human groups (or societies, or cultures, or institutions) by having the researcher in the same social space as the participants in the study’ (Madden, 2010, p. 16), undertaking, as Raymond Madden remarks, ‘research and writing about groups of people by systematically observing and participating (to a greater or lesser degree) in the lives of the people they study’ (Madden, 2010, p. 1), traditionally with significant time spent in the field, usually 12-18 months (Stewart, 1998, p. 68). However, as I wanted to conduct fieldwork on the WRC’s promotional arenas I knew that I could not rely on the traditional understanding of ethnography: a ‘single-society synchronic study’, preferably in small-scale societies with uninterrupted participant observation for at least a year (Eriksen, 2003, p. 6; Wulff, 2007, p. 139).

Based on my prior knowledge of the WRC, I considered instead the possibility that social space as a field is composed by several sites – sometimes far from each other and connected with each other in different ways, on different scales and with different intensity. On the one hand the phenomenon itself freed me from the constraints of ‘methodological nationalism’ in sociology, that is, the use of national community ‘as the terminal unit and boundary condition for the demarcation of problems and phenomena for social science’ (Martins, 1974, p. 276; see also Chernilo, 2006). On the other hand it enabled a distancing from ‘the hierarchy of purity’ when doing anthropological fieldwork (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997, p. 13; see also Amit, 2000). As a result, it was up to me to construct the field. At the outset, before fieldwork began, I was automatically given a lot of ‘access venues’ because of

the fixed bi-annual set-up of the WRC calendar (that is, the rallies in a given year). My budgetary limits, however, made me realise that I could not afford to be everywhere and thus my network of localities became a matter of educated choice, as well as where I got access. As in any other ethnographic study, gaining access is a test of one's patience and due to the WRC's temporal characteristics I soon found myself in a situation similar to that described by Kathryn Tomlinson:

The particular challenge of multi-sited ethnography is not only that the difficulties of gaining access are multiplied, but also some of the typical objects of study in multi-sited projects often only have fleeting connections with sites, or the sites themselves are only temporary in nature, such as meetings (Tomlinson, 2011, p. 168).

To be prepared for these situations, two practical takes on trans-local fieldwork became relevant. Through the seminal works of sociologist Michael Burawoy (advocating a 'global ethnography') and anthropologist George E. Marcus (making 'multi-sited ethnography' academically famous) ethnographic methods for this kind of investigation have been installed across a variety of themes (Burawoy, 2000b; 2001; Marcus, 1995; 2009; Lapegna, 2009). For instance, as Marcus wrote in his seminal 1995 article,

any ethnography of a cultural formation in the world system is also an ethnography of the system, and therefore cannot be understood only in terms of the conventional single-site mise-en-scene of ethnographic research, assuming indeed it is the cultural formation, produced in several different locales, rather than the conditions of a particular set of subjects that is the object of the study (Marcus, 1995, p. 99).

With a topic like the WRC, Marcus's focus on 'cultural formation' was, as I will demonstrate in upcoming chapters, of crucial importance. Although Burawoy and Marcus differ on certain important respects, as I will discuss below, they have also a lot in common as far as field techniques go. Most importantly, they are united by the fact that numerous short field stays are not the equivalent of one long one – they are practical variations on a shared set of methodological principles (see Falzon, 2009b, p. 9). Even prominent scholars have failed to understand this distinction. In 1995, sceptical of the increasing number of ethnographic studies of complex societies, anthropologist Clifford Geertz wrote that 'there was the idea that the time had come for anthropology to turn away from its nearly exclusive focus on "primitives" and begin to investigate large-scale societies directly in the stream of contemporary history' (Geertz, 1995, p. 103). Of course, that never happened, as Geertz writes on the next page, 'has still not happened, and in my opinion anyway, is no nearer happening now than it was then' (Geertz, 1995, p. 104).

Besides the need to see the methods apart some of the critique exemplified by Geertz revealed a surprising ignorance of anthropological history. Although conventional ethnography was the standard form of anthropological inquiry for years, its shortcomings were not unknown. Instead, they were accepted as a trade-off for its advantages (Eriksen, 2003, p. 6; Eriksen and Nielsen, 2013). For instance, there is no lack of ethnographic studies that diverged from tradition. In 1946, American anthropologist Ruth Benedict published her highly influential *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, a study of Japanese society. Due to the Second World War, Benedict writes, fieldwork was impossible. She as an American could not live in their houses and observe 'the strains and stresses of daily life, see with my own eyes which were crucial and which were not. I could not watch them in the complicated business of arriving at a decision. I could not see their children being brought up' (Benedict, 2006, pp. 5-6). Instead, Benedict used mostly written documents, something that according to her 'gave

me an advantage which no anthropologist has when he goes to the Amazon headwaters or to the New Guinea highlands to study a non-literate tribe' (Benedict, 2006, p. 6).

After Benedict and others, anthropologists James P. Spradley and David W. McCurdy published *The Cultural Experience: Ethnography in Complex Society* in 1972 as a way of demonstrating how to do 'proper' fieldwork 'at home' (at that time, *home* for anthropologists was usually a large-scale society). Besides highlighting the fact that fieldwork at home also has challenges because 'it takes a very skilled person with a high degree of self-awareness to study a cultural scene he has already acquired' (Spradley and McCurdy, 1972, p. 34), which in my case translated into a constant difficulty of not taking things for granted, they turned away from 'culture' as a coherent whole and instead paid attention to 'the labels and categories shared among any group of people who customarily interact together' (see Wolcott, 2008, p. 35). More than two decades later, originally just as much a review of current research as a novel concept, Marcus' coinage of multi-sited ethnography arose 'in response to empirical changes in the world and therefore to transformed locations of cultural production' (Marcus, 1995, p. 97). As I will demonstrate in Chapters 6 and 7 in particular, such a view has proven vital to this thesis, as the culture of the WRC is not circumscribed by territory, nationality or a predisposition of its qualities. It is identified through narratives, interaction and fluid networks of collectives emerging from these interactions.

Constructing the field

In contrast to the territorial demarcations common in ethnography, the composition of a trans-local field is done, as Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson argue, through its 'suitability for addressing issues and debates that matter to the discipline' (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997, p. 10). Within this field, the researcher chooses – or is led to, during his or her investigation –

different sites that are interconnected. In a multi-local study, sites are, according to anthropologist Ulf Hannerz (thus) ‘connected with one another in such ways that the relationships between them are as important for this formulation as the relationships within them’ (Hannerz, 2003a, p. 206), which makes such a study different from a mere comparative study of localities. These connections can take different forms. According to George E. Marcus, a field is constructed around ‘chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations in which the ethnographer establishes some form of literal, physical presence, with an explicit, posited logic of association or connection among sites that in fact defines the argument of the ethnography’ (Marcus, 1995, p. 105). This way, the researcher can place himself ‘at critical points of intersection of scales and units of analysis and (...) directly examine the negotiation of interconnected social actors across multiple scales’ (Gille and O’Riain, 2002, p. 279; see also Xiang, 2013).

This is not to say that trans-national connections must be present at all times, or that trans-local fieldwork requires mobility across two nations or more, only that the field and its sites are created by a qualitatively chosen set of relevant social dimensions that appears through a primarily inductive research strategy. Here we find an example from anthropology, long before Marcus thought of multi-sitedness. After her study of the Hollywood film industry in the 1940s, Hortense Powdermaker wrote that:

In Hollywood, no physical community existed – a serious handicap. Studios and home were scattered over the eighty-odd mile-long area of Los Angeles. Nor were people indigenous; there was a coming and going. Casual mingling in the daily lives of the movie-makers and any significant degree of participation was not possible. All interviews had to be carefully planned and set up far in advance (Powdermaker, 1966, p. 288).

Similar to Powdermaker’s manoeuvring in the field, my positioning in these ‘empirical junctions’, as it were, was a result of reflexive tinkering about where and when I could get the most out of my ethnographic research, including more formal interviews. This network of localities is listed below in Table 3.1, chronologically from left to right.

Table 3.1. My network of localities

| Locality | Jyväskylä, Finland | Cardiff, Wales | Olbia, Italy | Haguenau, France | Cordoba, Argentina | Monte Carlo, Monaco |
|---|---|--|---|--|---|--|
| Ethnographic focus | Spectators | Media | Teams and cars | Venues, drivers | Spectators | History |
| Short description of why they were chosen | I wished to explore the culture of a famous rally | I wished to explore the production of rally media at WRC TV (the production unit of North One Sport) | I wished to explore the workings of a WRC team (M-Sport) and how they convert rally cars into ‘cultural heritage objects’ | I wished to explore the meaning of place and space as well as the reasons to certain drivers’ popularity | I wished to explore the culture of a famous rally | I wished to explore the significance of history at the oldest rally in the WRC |
| Exploratory themes | Culture, social life | Media production, commercial aspects | Team life, organisation, logistics, economics | Identity and place, transformation | History, culture, social life | The importance of narrative to the WRC story |
| Duration | 5 days, 2010 | 3 days, 2010 | 4 days, 2011 | 4 days, 2011 | 9 days, 2012 | 4 days, 2013 |

During fieldwork on these sites, I constantly struggled with the questions posed by network sociologist Mustafa Emirbayer: ‘where to draw the lines across relational webs possessing no clear-cut, natural boundaries’ (Emirbayer, 1997, p. 303) and how are network dynamics, and whatever historical context they draw upon, to be accounted for? (Emirbayer, 1997, p. 307). In my view, with the aim of unfolding the WRC in mind, these two issues may be resolved by the same response. According to Emirbayer (1997), there are two strategies for demarcating boundaries, ‘realist’ and ‘nominalist’. The first takes the point of view of the actors involved,

treating the network 'as a social fact only in that it is consciously experienced as such by the actors composing it'. The latter – where I place myself – proceeds from correspondence between 'the investigator's analytically drawn boundaries and the subjective awareness of these boundaries by participants [as] an empirical question rather than an assumption' (Laumann, Marsden and Prensky, 1983, pp. 20-21).

Clearly, such an outlook allows for an understanding of the boundaries of a network as outlined by sociologist Tom Shibutani (1955, pp. 566-67), 'set neither by territory nor by formal group membership but by the limits of effective communication' and by 'differential association', that is, by patterns of who interacts with whom about what. My merging of sites into a 'field' is therefore a result of three processes: 1) the empirical findings introduced in the upcoming chapters, 2) my knowledge about the interconnectedness of various sites that I found relevant to my research topic, and 3) the places where I managed to get access. This partly answers the unavoidable question of how the sites are bridged. According to Ulf Hannerz, 'the fields are not some mere collection of local units. One must establish the trans-local linkages, and the interconnections between those and whatever local bundles of relationships which are also part of the study' (Hannerz, 2003a, p. 206). Put another way: the researcher is forced to reason systematically about how he or she has captured the linkages between the different locations. Theoretically this fits well with the apparatus of narrative inquiry introduced in the previous chapter. By coupling fieldwork and narratives I managed to unravel the relations between the various promotional arenas and repackage them in the way that I argue is constitutive to the symbolic community of the WRC.

In some way, this also answers the criticism against the potentially arbitrary nature of trans-local ethnography. Zsuzsu Gille and Sean O'Riain (2002, p. 286) may have a point in that the methodological imperative of 'being there' is, with trans-local ethnography, in danger of being replaced by that of chasing things around. For example, Matei Candea, albeit quite

positive to trans-local fieldwork, spent more than a year trying to organise his field research sites, only to be left with ‘a constant sense of incompleteness and arbitrariness, the obsessive feeling of missing out, of vagueness and unjustifiable indeterminacy, of never being at the right place at the right time’ (Candea, 2009, p. 33). In contrast to those who argue the benefits of making the researcher’s worldview radically different from those he or she lives with (Wolcott, 2008, p. 22), trans-local ethnography actually requires some groundwork to avoid situations like Candea’s. This is not to say that you can always begin with a pre-existing field or a set of trajectories that are being followed, but insight into the field’s structure does help you find ‘entry points’. Paradoxically, this might even create an impression that trans-local ethnography hides ‘a suggestion that bursting out of our field-sites will enable us to provide an account of totality “out there”’ (Candea, 2009, p. 27).

Naturally, a problem with assembly of sites through prior knowledge is that it could lead to a situation where the end-product is more a result of the researcher’s pre-existing knowledge than discoveries along the way. One’s path might be coloured by the ethnographer’s interests prior to entering the field rather than by the field itself, opening up the question of ideographic bias (Gille and O’Riain, 2002, p. 286). Yet, in my defence, sites were ‘constructed’ along similar lines to those posed by Joanna Cook, James Laidlaw and Jonathan Mair. They write that abandoning the idea of the sited field ‘makes it possible to admit that it never was possible to achieve a complex description of any area or group of people’ (Cook, Laidlaw and Mair, 2009, p. 58). In exchange for acknowledging that fields in my view always are ‘portraits’ and not ‘maps’, we would, according to the set of researchers, ‘gain the freedom to determinate their boundaries explicitly, in relation to our research questions’ (Cook, Laidlaw and Mair, 2009, p. 58). This also deals with another criticism of trans-local fieldwork: holism, since according to Cook, Laidlaw and Mair, ‘a valid ethnographic field need not correspond to a spatial entity of any kind, and need not be a

holistic entity “out there” to be discovered’ (Cook, Laidlaw and Mair, 2009, p. 68). In my situation, this enabled me to construct a field out of the sites included in this thesis – even if there is, obviously, more to the field of the WRC than what has been chosen here.

The investigative dialogue

When doing a narrative inquiry of sport ethnographically, I discussed in the previous chapters some profound implications on how to understand ‘the story’ when it comes to the relationship between researcher and the researched. I discussed this briefly in Chapter 2 by referring to the narrative dialogue when doing this kind of research, and another argument for that is provided by Tom Clark who correctly points out that ‘research is not necessarily something that is passively consumed by those who are “researched” and is instead actively negotiated by those who engage, who make decisions about their engagement’ (Clark, 2010, p. 400). People are not necessarily liars or unknowing, they only tell their version of things, and it is the author’s duty to patch the narratives together as an analytical whole. This was particularly noticeable in interviews with key people in the FIA and the wider WRC community that were conducted alongside the accumulation of fieldwork. I conducted ten semi-structured and structured interviews, some by telephone, others by e-mail and some face to face (FtF).

The reason for this diversity was both practical and intentional; in some cases, I contacted the interviewee by social media (like Facebook and LinkedIn) or e-mail with a set of questions, to which they could reply in their own time. In other cases I made appointments through formal procedures including marketing departments and the like. While FtF and telephone interviews worked in some cases, I found e-mail interviews in other cases to be a good alternative because there are no travelling costs and because I assumed that the

interviewee needed time to respond to the questions. The downside of non-FtF interviews is the absence of non-verbal communication, but I regarded this as less important, given the kind of information I was looking for.

Table 3.2. Interviewees

| Name | Position |
|-----------------|---|
| Anonymous | A representative for the <i>Fédération Française du Sport Automobile</i> (FFSA) |
| Nick Atkins | Head of WRC TV |
| Mario Fidelibus | Founder and director of Receptive Events and Tour Organization (RETO) an Argentinian event company specialising on rally tours |
| Simon Long | CEO of International Sportsworld Communicators (ISC) and later North One Sport (NOS) (the WRC's former promoters) |
| John Millington | Logistics manager of M-Sport (the WRC team that ran Ford's rally operation 1996-2012) |
| Michèle Mouton | FIA WRC General Manager |
| David Richards | Former World Co-driver Champion (with Ari Vatanen), co-founder of Prodrive and prior owner of International Sportsworld Communicators (ISC) |
| Ari Vatanen | Former World Driver's Champion and losing candidate to the FIA presidency in 2009 |
| Steve Webb | Former PR representative for the Subaru World Rally Team and PR Manager at WRC TV |
| Malcolm Wilson | A former WRC driver, founder and head of M-Sport (the WRC team that ran Ford's rally operation 1996-2012) |

All interviewees were selected because they either held, or had held, important positions in the WRC since its establishment in 1973 (see Table 3.2.). I assumed beforehand that even

with factual questions about the sport's development, the answers from the interviewees would reflect their personal views and memories because they were all contributors to it. Nearly everybody was asked a fixed set of questions regarding the history, the main changes and the future of WRC, which served the purpose of providing me with cues as to where to put the emphasis in contextualising historically the development of WRC. Because of that, and because of my reason for interviewing these people in the first place, I did not embark heavily on linguistic or performative issues connected to the interview as a communicative event. Although I was mildly inspired by the concept of 'active interviewing', emphasising 'that all interviews are reality-constructing, meaning-making occasions, whether recognized or not' (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995, p. 4), due to my prior interest in the sport, all interviews were structured but without the intention of capturing codifiable data – rather, they were read as pieces of the narrative that I, as the project progressed, identified as important to the WRC community. The benefits were that this made it possible to standardise the interview, at least to a certain degree because I had to modify the questions along the way both in order to improve the questions and to adapt to the interviewee, without necessarily standardising the interview situation (see Opdenakker, 2006, for a discussion).

I found this investigative dialogue fruitful for a number of reasons. If we recall the discussion on the historical fidelity of narrative analysis in Chapter 2 we concluded that as long as one keep the facts right, a narrative depiction of a phenomenon has no less historical value than if the analysis had been conducted with, for instance, Philip Abrams' programme for historical sociology. Not that I digested any opinion uncritically, though. I will discuss potential signs of 'autoethnography' below, but most importantly, as fieldwork progressed, I found sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's concept of 'participant objectivation' relevant in translating experiences to text. In Bourdieu's eyes:

one does not have to choose between participant observation, a necessarily fictitious immersion in a foreign milieu, and the objectivism of the “the gaze from afar” of an observer who remains as remote from himself as from his object. Participant objectivation undertakes to explore not “the lived experience” of the knowing subject but the social conditions of possibility (Bourdieu, 2003, p. 282).

Accordingly, as mentioned briefly above, concluding any kind of ‘objective truth’ about the WRC would be misrepresentative. Rather, and despite the fact that I am not in any way inventing history, I think Bent Flyvbjerg puts it well when he writes that ‘the goal is to allow the study to be different things to different people’ (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 238). Sport sociologist Joseph A. Maguire writes in a similar vein that the mission of historical sociology is ‘not only to generate substantive research, but also to explain the status, selection and interpretation of such “facts” as part of a more general endeavour of enlarging our understanding of the various ways in which individual people are interconnected’ (Maguire, 2011, p. 879). In this way, as discussed more extensively in Chapter 2, the researcher does not simply produce a description of what’s happening, but writes a history (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 19).

Apart from physical fieldwork I also had to be sensitive to this issue when I did online ethnography. Though people did not talk for very long when asked (or not) about their personal opinions on the situation of the WRC when doing ‘offline fieldwork’, they opened their minds far more freely online. Only two forums may seem like a small sample but here, similar to the selection of venues to conduct fieldwork, I have selected them on the basis of prior knowledge gained by roaming through dozens of Internet debating forums where the progress of the WRC has been discussed.

Table 3.3. Selected forum sites where WRC coverage was discussed

| Site | Thread name | First post | Views | Number of posts | URL |
|-------------------|--|-------------------|--------|-----------------|--|
| MotorsTV | ‘WRC Coverage’ | 14 February, 2010 | 3217 | 54 | Thread 1: http://www.motorstv.com/en/wrc-on-motors-tv-from-2010-t83831.html |
| | ‘WRC ON MOTORS TV FROM 2010!’ | 23 May, 2010 | 3901 | 29 | Thread 2: http://www.motorstv.com/en/wrc-coverage-t91274.html |
| | ‘Top 5 Short term MTV could improve in their WRC coverage’ | 6 April, 2010 | 1928 | 39 | Thread 3: http://www.motorstv.com/en/top-5-short-term-issues-mtv-could-improve-in-their-wrc-coverage-t91260.html |
| Motorsport-forums | ‘Future Rally Media Coverage’ | 17 February, 2010 | 62 787 | 888 | http://www.motorsportforums.com/wrc/137024-future-rally-media-coverage.html |

Note: On the MotorsTV website there were 63 threads on the same topic (‘WRC coverage’) and close to 700 posts, hence I needed to make a selection.

As to why exactly these two forums were selected, MotorsTV was picked because it struck a three-year deal with North One Television in 2010 as the European supplier of satellite-aired coverage, connecting this responsibility directly to a forum where others can discuss their work. In addition, Motors TV Head of Programming and Acquisitions, Frédéric Viger, and Simon Hill, the commentator of the programmes in early 2010, were active participants in the forum – Viger actually initiated the first two threads included in the analysis, while the latter was initiated by a Norwegian forum user. Motorsportforums was chosen because it is one of the biggest forums for all kinds of motorsport discussions, as well as a very popular site, documented by the number of views. Based on discussions with other forum users, both these forums are considered ‘tidy’ communication arenas where great store is set by matter-of-fact discussions, proven by collective moderation if the discussion got out of line. In other words,

these forums were a good example of how Internet users shape the quality of the data and respond to them at the same time (see Sade-Beck, 2004).

While these forums are often regarded as less important because of their virtual nature, they are not less real, as online ethnographer Robert V. Kozinets points out from a consumer research position: ‘these social groups have a “real” existence for their participants, and thus have consequential effects on many aspects of behavior, including consumer behavior’ (Kozinets, 1998, p. 366). Moreover, the virtual arena allowed people from a variety of locations, demonstrated by the lack of English language skills, to engage in the debate. Evidently, that was part of the reason for conveying their views exactly as they were written because, as Annette Markham points out:

We literally reconfigure these people when we edit their sentences, because for many of them, these messages are a deliberate presentation of self. Even when they are not deliberate, texts construct the essence and meaning of the participant, as perceived and responded to by others (Markham, 2004, p. 153).

It was, however, not ‘netnography’ – perhaps the most comprehensively developed apparatus for doing online ethnography – in a strict sense (see Kozinets, 2002). Instead, I was a ‘lurker’, that is, a researcher reading texts on online forums without interfering with the data or settings where unobtrusive observation is provided (Garcia et al., 2009, p. 58). At the same time, as Kozinets underlines, online researchers ‘must be conscious that they are analyzing the content of an online community’s communicative acts rather than a complete set of observed acts of consumers in a particular community’ (Kozinets, 2002, p. 69). My emphasis was therefore on retrieving indications of what debates on WRC coverage contributed to the narrative

constitution of identity rather than systematic ‘netnographic’ representations or content codification per se.

Doing trans-local fieldwork

Tran-local ethnography is composed by a number of fieldwork exploits where time spent at each site is limited. Because trans-local ethnography therefore means less time in the field, whatever this field in the end might be, according to the critics, it deprives the researcher of the opportunity of immersion – a concept in conventional ethnography which Erving Goffman argued made the ethnographer see from the inside how people lead their lives, subjecting him- or herself to the set of contingencies that play upon a set of individuals, getting access to the fluidity of others’ lives and enhancing people’s sensitivity to interaction and process (Goffman, 1989, p. 125). ‘With more time’, anthropologist Alex Stewart writes, ‘the field-worker processes more complex information and self-corrects for information-processing errors,’ creating more ‘opportunities for those breakdowns of old understanding’, so that he or she eventually become able, as Bronislaw Malinowski – often considered the founder of ethnographic method – so famously put it, ‘to grasp the native’s point of view’ (Malinowski, 1922/1984, p. 25; Stewart, 1998, p. 20). Ultimately, critics thought, the aim of exposing the researcher to ‘culture shock’ and breaking down old understandings to establish new knowledge about the culture one’s investigating was abandoned (Stewart, 1998, p. 20).

While time spent in the field is a relevant factor in general, it is a mistake to view it as a guarantee for ethnographic quality. We cannot, as anthropologist Mark Anthony Falzon points out, assume that ‘ethnographic consciousness reveals itself to the fieldworker as water boils, that is gradually but also through a defining moment, at which one suddenly realizes

that one “understands” (Falzon, 2009a, p. 7). One reason is that, in today’s interwoven world, ethnographers cannot, writes anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, ‘assume that as they approach the local, they approach something elementary, something contingent, and thus more real than life seen in larger-scale perspectives’ (Appadurai, 1996, p. 54). In addition, local culture does not ‘freeze’ while the ethnographer slowly come to grips with what Malinowski once called ‘the imponderabilia of actual life’ (Malinowski, 1922/1984, p. 18). In a similar vein it is possible argue that the field should not be defined by its spatial dimensions only, but also its temporal composition. Against the idealized time of the field – a view we found to be common among some historians sceptical to narrative inquiries in Chapter 2 – two Danish sociologists argue that time is relative concept that, similar to other parameters defining the field, should condition the analytical framework rather than vice versa (Dalsgaard and Nielsen, 2013, p. 10). For example, what the locations in a trans-local ethnography have in common has not necessarily happened yet (Dalsgaard and Nielsen, 2013, p. 6; Strathern, 1999, p. 163).

Most importantly, even though one can argue about the benefits of different ethnographic modes, the real issue is what kind of data you can get. Like I discussed in Chapter 2 with reference to the social definition paradigm collecting qualitative data – observations, interviews and communicative acts – is about grasping the meaning of a given phenomenon, topic or problem. Hence, qualitative research is, according to Jennifer Mason, ‘grounded in a philosophical position which is broadly “interpretivist” in the sense that it is concerned with how the social world is interpreted, understood, experienced or produced’ (Mason, 1996, p. 4; see also Denzin, 1997). Combining trans-local fieldwork and network sociology additionally provides the researcher with *relational* data. This means the possibility of accounting for what Norbert Elias called ‘sociogenesis’ (Elias, 1984; Van Krieken, 2001, p. 357) of any given phenomenon and of fleshing out the developmental interplay between

history, individual and context through a combination of trans-local ethnography, interviews and text studies. As an example, Susanne Freidberg's research on commodity chains display why trans-local fieldwork should be applied given the right circumstances:

Above all, the Afro-European trade in green beans and other fresh foods must be understood as a set of linked human activities and biophysical processes, all subject to a range of unpredictable perils, from infestations and wind storms to cancelled flights and market gluts (Freidberg, 2002, p. 354).

Although Freidberg does not harness it directly, the process of analysing data in a trans-local, relational study often has similarities with 'the pattern model' of social scientific research. Originally an argument in Abraham Kaplan's *The Conduct of Inquiry* from 1964, this means that 'we understand something by identifying it as a specific part in an organized whole' (Kaplan, 1964, p. 333). Rather than taking a functionalistic perspective, which it may sound like, Kaplan emphasises 'that particular relations that hold constitute a pattern, and an element is explained by being shown to occupy the place that it does occupy in the pattern' (Kaplan, 1964, p. 334). In other words, 'the activity of describing the relation between one action and others in a context is equivalent to interpreting or explaining the meaning of that action. Describing its place and its relation to other parts is therefore to explain it' (Williams, 1976, p. 128). Others argue that the pattern model fails to have true explanatory power. Instead, its real value 'lies not in the context of justification (with the notion of explanation) but rather in the context of discovery' (Hunt, 2010, p. 94).

As this thesis is a form of network analysis, which acts as a link between explanation and discovery, I find the latter interpretation of the pattern model relevant as it allows us to uncover central relations in the WRC through what Mustafa Emirbayer and Jeff Goodwin

calls ‘the fact of social connectivity itself – as well as through density, strength, symmetry, range, and so on, of the ties that bind’ (Emirbayer and Goodwin, 1994, p. 1424). For example, I discovered that ways of travel could itself be a data gathering technique. Similar to my experiences, studies of sports tourism demonstrate that travelling itself in the company of sports fans or participants can be ‘particularly conducive to group formation and interaction’ (Fairley and Gammon, 2005, p. 192). In this context I used photographs as ‘visual records of symbolism’ to frame interpretatively those symbols of meaning I encountered in the WRC (see Schouten and McAlexander, 1995, p. 47). Several of my informants, among them Sandra, also pointed out how unexpected encounters can be more formative to one’s perception of things than planned acts:

Occasionally I have travelled on the same plane as WRC drivers and teams, including Sébastien Loeb with his family. Once I unexpectedly earned myself an invitation to meet and talk to a former WRC champion. It is always a humbling experience to travel along the road sections between stages with the WRC cars, for instance being sandwiched between Marcus Grönholm and Dani Sordo. There are many stories like this as I seem to have the knack of being at the right place at the right time, but other memories will forever remain secret and taken to my grave!

Hence, I made good use of the advice that when analysing data in a qualitative study, it is less about particular techniques and set research stages and more about grasping the dynamics involved in the research process (Bryman and Burgess, 1994, p. 2). During this process of discovery and analysis, I had to reconsider my position as researcher continuously. Although I would not agree that the researcher’s ‘style of reasoning’ necessarily *determines* the nature of the knowledge it produces (Hacking, 1983, p. 128), I had to pause now and then when I was

asked if I was a fan or a researcher. My answer was both, but at different times. For that reason, parts of the project are slightly 'autoethnographic', that is, 'a form of writing that make[s] the researcher's own experience a topic of investigation in its own right rather than seeming as if they're written from nowhere by nobody' (Ellis and Bochner, 2004, p. 733-34). This affected my 'membership role' as well. In the literature on qualitative researchers engaged in observational methods, three such 'membership roles' are often identified: (a) peripheral member researchers, who do not participate in the core activities of group members; (b) active member researchers, who become involved with the central activities of the group without fully committing themselves to the members' values and goals; and (c) complete member researchers, who are already members of the group or who become fully affiliated during the course of the research (see Adler and Adler, 1987).

Of these roles mine was somewhere between a) and b), depending on the site. One reason was that I found myself in the middle of the insider-outsider debate in qualitative analysis. Insider research is when researchers conduct research with populations with whom they share, for example, language and experiential base with the study participants. When conducting outsider research, researchers find themselves studying a group of which they are not members (Corbin Dwyer and Buckle, 2009, p. 58). In one sense, therefore, I was a member of the WRC community. Because I, as a white male in my 30s walk, talk and look like most of the people in the WRC community, I had no difficulty blending in, especially since I had some knowledge about the sport before I entered the fields. Yet, I had to inform people about who I was as soon as possible. If, for some reason the introduction of my project was delayed, I had to make twice the effort to convince them that my intentions were right. Nobody got really defensive, but some voiced concern over whether I would include their comments and actions in my text and asked why I had not informed them at an earlier point.

Either way, write Sonya Corbin Dwyer and Jennifer L. Buckle, the benefit of this insider role in general is acceptance and the provision of:

a level of trust and openness in your participants that would likely not have been present otherwise ... Participants might be more willing to share their experiences because there is an assumption of understanding and an assumption of shared distinctiveness (Corbin Dwyer and Buckle, 2009, p. 58).

On the other hand, as I was aware of the access benefits, I also took into account how this role might potentially impede the research process as it progressed. According to Corbin Dwyer and Buckle

it is possible that the participant will make assumptions of similarity and therefore fail to explain their individual experience fully. It is also possible that the researcher's perceptions might be clouded by his or her personal experience and that as a member of the group he or she will have difficulty separating it from that of the participants (Corbin Dwyer and Buckle, 2009, p. 58).

Aware of this potential pitfall of blending my own views with the informants, I decided early on to adopt a particular conversation mode during fieldwork, prompted by the discovery that asking people directly about a particular thing produced little information. Adapting 'speech-in-action' as a technique proved a lot more fruitful. Fundamental to this technique is situated listening, as exemplified by W. F. Whyte's classic ethnography *Street Corner Society*. During fieldwork Whyte was advised by Doc, his key informant, to 'go easy on that "who", "what", "why", "when", "where" stuff'. If you ask such questions, 'people will clam up on

you. If people accept you, you can just hang around, and you'll learn the answers in the long run without even having to ask the questions' (Whyte, 1955, p. 303; see also Richards, 1939; Sanjek, 1991, p. 618). After a while, these findings on my role as a researcher gave me ideas on how to extract information without having to ask for it and made me follow a certain dynamic:

As ethnographers watch and listen in a wide-ranging manner (though within parameters set by the significant theories that bring them there), they learn to understand culturally meaningful conventions, and to formulate culturally appropriate questions. As this initial stage of the ethnographic process develops, the fieldworker must constantly make decisions about where to be, who to listen to, what events to follow, and what safely to ignore and leave out (Barnard and Spencer, 2012, p. 247).

Decisions on 'who to listen to' and so forth were made on the basis of existing theory, knowledge and discoveries in the field, at the same time as reflexivity in this form guided me to select and pursue certain themes and ways of meaning-making during the fieldwork, while avoiding trespassing in zones in which I had no business. Approaches like these are demanding to the researcher because they require knowledge about the phenomena and the way people interact within the community, putting the traditional ideal of the ethnographer being 'alone among the unknown' (Geertz, 1995, p. 102) under pressure. One example is the demand of efficiency. Time was always short during my fieldwork regardless of data gathering activity. Yet this pressure may be an opportunity, anthropologist Helena Wulff writes:

When I was in the field in Ireland I had to use my time even more efficiently than I, if I am completely honest, always did in my traditional field studies. In Ireland I had to push myself forward if I was going to get anything done, which I did. My field weeks were filled with activities, meetings, interviews. Most of them were arranged via email or phone before I went to Ireland, but I tried to leave some space for improvisation, to be able to seize sudden opportunities, which is an aspect of all fieldwork (Wulff, 2007, p. 143).

In my case, this *modus operandi* was a benefit, too, as the specific set up of fieldwork similar to Wulff's study of ballet dancers made it possible to combine insider benefits with outsider reflexivity. Here, field notes and other notes became a central element in organising the data. Before, in between or after fieldwork and interviews I read all I could find about the WRC that included sociological material, as well as watching documentaries and coverage in general, both from the past and the current seasons. I did not follow the often-emphasised advice that data should be recorded in 'distinct packages' of material according to whether they constitute 'observational notes', 'theoretical notes' or 'methodological notes' (Schatzman and Strauss, 1973, p. 99). Instead, field notes of any kind were separated in terms of what chapter they would be a part of. Because each site was investigated with a specific topic in mind, these notes (and photos, interviews and literature studies connected to them) were helpful in distilling the narrative from the 'noise' that inevitably forms part of one's field experience. To explore this further, I now turn to my ethnographic path.

The ethnographic path

My first field trip was to Rally Finland, 28 July to 2 August 2010. The substantial reason for choosing this as a site was that Rally Finland, ‘widely regarded as the spiritual home of rallying’ (Todt, 2010, p. 9), in the words of FIA president (from 2010 onwards) and former Peugeot Talbot Sport manager Jean Todt, celebrated its 60th anniversary in 2010. For that reason alone, I assumed that the rally would be a festival with hoards of spectators and a plethora of rallying events all weekend long, generating vast empirical data on spectator culture. I knew there were several companies offering ‘package deals’ to spectators who wished to travel to different rallies, but for a number of pragmatic reasons – including money value, a good reputation and no problems with communication – I chose to book with the Swedish company RallyTravels.

In Stockholm, I met up with the approximately 100 others who were travelling with RallyTravels. On the 24-hour trip from Stockholm to Helsinki, we sailed with Viking Lines ferries, which advertised ‘a world without Mondays’, no less, where I shared cabin with three others (four beds in approximately 3x2 meters). Already at this point its international clientele – as would be the case at every rally I attended – crystallised the claim by two researchers on sport consumers of sports fans transgressing social norms when they are together. Their shared sense of identity as fans is more important than their every-day roles’ (Fairley and Gammon, 2005, p. 191). After arriving in Finland the next day and sitting on a bus for nearly four hours, we arrived at the cabin village at Himos Jämse, some 50 km south of Jyväskylä (rally HQ) and near several of the stages. The same day, after having kicked gravel for some hours, we got on the bus again, heading towards SS1. There, I discovered the familiar full range of entertainment and a party atmosphere.

SS 1, Laajavuori, Rally Finland 2010



SS1 (special stage 1) ran up a hill otherwise used as part of an alpine skiing centre, and into the forest. Photo: Hans Erik Næss.

As this was my first field trip, I kept in mind guidelines and advice from ethnographic handbooks when I talked to people and observed their actions on arrival at the Viking Line terminal in Stockholm, based on a continuous assessment of what kind of perspective would generate information useful to my project. It was here I discovered, for the first time, that asking straightforward questions did not get me any good answers. People were not unfriendly, but they did not reflect very much on the issue we were talking about. Instead, they passed it off with a joke or came up with answers that were beside the point. Most of the time, I made use of the abovementioned technique of ‘speech-in-action’ which enjoins the ethnographer: ‘listen carefully to what people say, watch what they do, and keep their voices

down’ (Sanjek, 1990a, p. 211). After a while I also figured out how to derail the conversations onto what I wanted to talk about.

By the time of my next field trip, I had come to the conclusion that such a visual sport as rallying cannot be properly analysed without taking the media production and reception into account. With less literature and loads of footage it was clear to me that the identity of the sport is very much encapsulated in how it is depicted on screen. With the strong emphasis on nostalgia from Rally Finland in mind – especially the awe and discussions when movies from the old days were screened on the tour bus – this idea now became essential, not only in terms of providing material for people to access, but also as an interesting approach to the inner workings of the world of WRC.

Producing the WRC



One of the media production trucks at Wales Rally GB, 2010, parked at Cardiff harbour. Photo: Hans Erik Næss

WRC rallies offer some of the world's most scenic venues, and I was interested in knowing more about the production of media in order to establish a link between how they actually produce footage and other kinds of material (like web information), how they balance between the natural variety of different events and standardised event formats, and how this material as a whole is received and responded to by people. After establishing contact with information officers at WRC TV, a subsidiary of North One Sport, I was invited to Wales Rally GB to check out their operation there.

Here, direct questions were a necessity, even outside the interview situation, as I was totally unaware of how media coverage was produced. Prior to arrival, I gathered data related to sport media production and reception, and since I had been granted an interview on the spot with key figures in WRC TV, these preparations served as both a way of generating material and as backdrop for potential interview questions. These preparations would turn out to be fruitful when I got to Cardiff. In conversations about the visual characteristics of motorsport, as well as through the insights into how rally media is produced technically and strategically, I got a clearer picture – literally speaking – of the different responsibilities, difficulties and opportunities a media production company has when engaged in a sport like the WRC. For some years, there have been discussions on Internet forums on the coverage of WRC, why it sucks, or why it doesn't. Interviews with people who worked with the media production of the WRC, as well as observations of the practical challenges they encountered, gave me a useful context in which online forum discussions could be analysed discursively, as the quality of coverage means a great deal to anyone interested in the sport. Later, this material became a natural backdrop when doing online forum studies.

One of my main goals in choosing ethnography was to be a 'fly-on-the-wall' in one of the WRC teams during an event. After a series of enquiries, Morten Østberg – father and

manager of WRC driver Mads Østberg – gave a positive reply. Before he could make any promises, however, he underlined that taking me along had to be accepted by the team (Ford) and its members. I told him that of course I would respect that, and offered to come and explain the aim of the project (they have their base in the city of Moss, a one-hour drive south-east of Oslo). In the event, that would not be necessary, as I got the approval from the Ford team shortly after.

In the field



My workstation in the M-Sport tent, Rally Sardinia, 2011. Photo: Hans Erik Næss

More specifically, it was Adapta World Rally team who set me up for this. They were, in turn, part of the Stobart Rally Team, a subsidiary of M-Sport, the organisation that administers the manufacturer's team for Ford. So it was a complex venue to enter, but luckily Morten Østberg – a successful businessman who is very hands-on with everything – offered me the chance to eat, stay and live with the team as I had said I wanted to do. My days in Sardinia would become a research marathon. From early morning (sometimes as early as 4.30 am) to past midnight, I was in ethnographic mode. Mostly, I sat in the main tent of M-Sport (shared by all the Ford drivers) which served as diner (there was fixed meals – but no fixed seats – throughout the day where everyone, from team bosses to people like me, sat down to eat), hang-out spot (for both fans and celebrities. More about that in Chapter 8) and an office for team members monitoring how the rally progressed. As in Finland, it was 'the silent approach' that proved most efficient – when asking people directly about a topic their answers turned out to be trivial or flippant, very similar to the responses I got in Finland.

Next in line was Rally de France-Alsace 2011. Otherwise an anonymous commune in the Bas-Rhin department, located in the north-east of France right next to the German border, it is significant to the WRC as the location of the hometown of multiple world champion Sebastien Loeb. Mainly, the issue was the relationship between transformation and continuity. The move of the French WRC round from Corsica – in many ways a mythical event due to its dangerous roads and dramatic history – to Strasbourg and region was not very well received by many.

WRC on the menu



Le Tigre, the local pub in Haguenau, seemingly ready for WRC 2011. Photo: Hans Erik Næss

Even though it meant better conditions for nearly all aspects of the sport: substantial investments from the local communities, easier travel and, with that, a potentially larger spectatorship, including hospitality feature and culture happenings, many thought it was a betrayal of one of the most iconic rallies in WRC history.

After France, I went to Argentina. RETO – Receptive Events and Tour Organization – is an Argentinian event company which cooperates with RallyTravels, the company in charge of my fieldtrip to Rally Finland, and Rally Travel, the company in charge of my field trip to Monte Carlo (see below). I was allowed to join the week-long all-inclusive programme they ran at Rally Argentina 2012.

The flipside of the Argentinian WRC rally



Walking and waiting. Two inescapable elements of being a spectator at any WRC rally. Photo: Hans Erik Næss.

During these days, I got up really early in the morning, around 6 a.m., and drove out to several stages and sites (including the service park) together with a couple of others, before returning to the hotel around 7-8 p.m. At this point, I had discovered a natural research rhythm when doing fieldwork. After a quick shower before dinner in the evening, I organised my field notes on a laptop. I wrote field notes every now and then during the day, either in my notebook or on my iPhone, as well as taking pictures – not as a visual confirmation device, but as a way of remembering the things I might have missed by direct observation only. Furthermore, Rally Argentina turned out to be the prime example of utilising the researcher's socialisation skills. As before, I ate, drank and behaved like the others depending on the milieus I investigated, but here, I experienced the socialisation processes differently. We who

travelled with RETO all stayed at the same hotel and became a tightly knit group because of our shared age and interests. Every night, we had dinner together and shared the niceties of Argentinian cuisine as well as our fascination for rallying. Due to his local knowledge of the stages and thoughts on rally as cultural phenomenon in Argentina, as well as his kind demeanour, the son of the director (who we will meet in several chapters) became an important informant and even friend.

Finally, as the oldest and most famous rally in the WRC, I knew that I had to include a field trip to Monte Carlo. I had a problem, though: its more or less enforced sabbatical from the WRC that began in 2008 (see Chapter 6), whose duration was unknown. Eventually, it returned in 2012, but since the 2013 edition was already being planned (and the 2012 rally fettered with uncertainties because of the Antonov affair), I opted for that one – also because 2013 marked its 40th anniversary, which would add a nuance to the reason I wanted to study it: the relationship between history, social interaction and the sense of place. Then, I was struck by the snowball effect in social science. In Argentina, I was told by one of the other RETO travellers about his experiences as a Monte Carlo spectator. He used a travel company called RallyTravel (not the same as RallyTravels above). Impressed by his recommendation, I contacted them and they allowed me on board as references to all the famous places and stages were included, as were social events. In the field, this turned out to be similar to my other journeys. The sociability among travellers was easy-going and we had much to talk about due to our shared interest.

On tour in the French Alps



Almost exclusively, we were able to park the silver VW minibuses (to the right) right next to the finish line. The man holding the map is Neil Prunnell, our travel guide and company director of Rally Travel. Photo: Hans Erik Næss

An informal style at the briefing conducted by Neil Prunnell, the company director himself, along with his confident explanations of the doings the next days (and the subsequent dinner in the Italian shack next door) also helped to ease the nervousness that may have been present. That some of us had been to other WRC rallies also gave us common denominators in terms of event experiences and how they relate to childhood memories in particular.

Ethical considerations

Across the methodological spectrum, I have striven in this thesis for loyalty to common research ethics. Sarah J. Tracy (2010, p. 847) emphasises four forms of ethical considerations as relevant to qualitative research: procedural ethics (the importance of accuracy and avoiding fabrication, as well as informing the participants about their rights); situational ethics (constantly ask the question if these means justify this end in a variety of contexts); relational ethics (meaning that the researcher engages in a reciprocal relationship with participants based on respect and openness); and exiting ethics (the obligation to seek control over the results after publication by portraying the field without giving the participants the feeling that they have been set up or fooled). The ethnographic path, the description of the methodological process in general above, as well in later chapters, can be seen as the structural integration of these ethical considerations.

Let me specify how this was dealt with in practice with some additional examples. When it comes to the online forum studies, I am not concerned about any criticisms of invasion of privacy or even spying made against my ‘lurking’ (Garcia et al., 2009, p. 58). If I had interfered with the communication, I would have risked altering the configuration of narrative (see Chapter 2). On other occasions, I was careful to proceed with cultural sensitivity. Somewhat surprised by the level of aggression from the spectators towards the police in Argentina, I wondered if it had some relation to the country’s past dictatorships – the last one ending in 1983 – and the atrocities from the so-called ‘dirty war’ where the state and the military brutally suppressed ‘political subversives’. But I did not ask, afraid of ruining the trust I had gained at the time, as well as finding it less relevant for my research topic. A more amusing example came when I discussed which cars we had had and driven at the time with an informant:

Me: *I drive a Ford Mondeo.*

Informant: *That's a big car. I drive a Polo.*

Me: *Really? My mother drives a Polo, (an attempt to create a bond between us).*

Informant: (tight silence)

Apparently, underlining the fact that he and my mother drove the same car had hurt his pride, as driving old women's cars does not conform to the macho ideal of Argentina.

Another aspect is situational sensitivity. Because the WRC is a small community, you meet people on flights, in airports and restaurants in the town where the rally is held, and so and so forth. In my case, that meant additional access to ethnographic material, but at the same time it introduced a need for special caution in what I was saying or doing, for instance, at dinner. Decisions on when to approach someone or to leave him or her alone became regular.

Anonymity, however, was never a problem. All the interviewees were provided with a letter of consent – but only a handful wished to remain anonymous. In other circumstances, for example, on stages where I have just been talking to people, I identified myself as a researcher very early to avoid any misunderstandings. Sometimes people became a bit more defensive because of that, but overall, it was more important to state my place than to fear the eventual loss of information. As a result, some people agreed to be identified by name, while others have been given pseudonyms. For the sake of simplicity, all of my informants who have not been formally interviewed are referred by their first names only. For any remaining issues, especially concerning exiting ethics, my project is less controversial than for example, studies where children or other vulnerable groups are involved. That means that while my conclusions may not be of global popularity, they do not hide ethical conflicts of any sort.

At last, I have used my way of writing as a technique to stay honest in the company of informants as well as my supervisors. In a similar manner, John Van Maanen writes in the second edition of his very influential *Tales of the Field* that, ‘ways of personal expression, choice of metaphor, figurative allusions, semantics, decorative phrasing or plain speaking, textual organization, and so on all work to structure a cultural portrait in particular ways’ (Van Maanen, 2011, p. 5). Through research, a social process, culture or any other category lifted to the forefront becomes visible in the form of text. As I discussed above, but especially with a narrative analysis, the researcher has an intricately designed responsibility to patch the pieces articulately enough together to satisfy both his or her informants and the academic environment in which the researcher belongs. My take on how to carry out this mandate is based on the above-mentioned Tracy’s discussion of quality in qualitative studies in which what she terms ‘meaningful coherence’ ultimately has been the aim.

Generally, Tracy argues, meaningfully coherent studies ‘eloquently interconnect their research design, data collection, and analysis with their theoretical framework and situational goals’ (Tracy, 2010, p. 848). More specifically, Tracy argues, ‘researchers should take care that their representation style matches the goals of the project’ (Tracy, 2010, p. 848). Paired with the overall aim of this thesis as outlined in Chapter 1, I have for these reasons chosen a textual vantage point seemingly less used in sociological theses, where as much – sometimes more – attention has been given to portraying the phenomenon in a comprehensible way as to adherence to the conventions of academic prose. After all, as the authors of *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* published in 1995 write, ‘the ethnographer draws on a variety of writing conventions in order to actively create characters and scenes on a page, to dramatically depict action and speech, and to effectively convey the meanings of events as perceived by those involved in them’ (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 1995, p. 211). At the same time, two authors argue, ‘if you are a storyteller rather than a story analyst then your goal

becomes therapeutic rather than analytic' (Ellis and Bochner, 2004, p. 745).

Undoubtedly, the theoretical framework has influenced the organisation of arguments in this thesis. Because traditionalists often narrate their feelings about the sport and the modernists emphasise the analytical perspectives, this thesis may therefore be mistaken as 'policy advice' on how to 'save' the WRC from both traditionalists and modernists (see Chapter 1). While that in one sense is a consequence of my choice that readers can interpret the findings differently (see Chapter 2), I have in another sense never had the intention to act as an interlocutor for anything but a sociological perspective on the research question. Yet, even though I have approached the sport from a qualitative perspective grounded in social science, and to a lot lesser degree pursued the agenda of sports management studies, it was never my intention to choose sides. Rather, this thesis has explored 'the social conditions of possibility' (see Bourdieu, 2003, p. 282) as far as the relationship between traditions and commerce goes in the WRC in particular, but also for sport in general.

Conclusion

Although not equally well received by all, trans-local fieldwork in its various forms has nonetheless been established as a credible method of gathering and interpreting qualitative data, and one that could lead me to conclusions on the WRC's promotional qualities. While there are many other opportunities and pitfalls with the arsenal of methods introduced in this chapter, I have drawn my ethnographic path to make the research process as transparent as possible. It should be noted that these methods did not follow a set pattern with interviews first and then fieldwork etc., but were used alternately as research progressed. Other than that, most of the space has been used in discussing the emergence of trans-local ethnography, and

some general thoughts on the ethnographic proceedings in terms of specifying what I early in this chapter named ‘globography’ (a phrase borrowed from Hendry, 2003).

Most importantly, I have demonstrated that since the trans-local ethnographer now documents a process, rather than a slice of time, which according to anthropologist Helena Wulff, used to be the case in traditional fieldwork (2007, p. 143), the methods need to be reworked accordingly. While I have leaned on achievements from those who work in the tradition of global ethnography and multi-sited ethnography, respectively, I have tried to exemplify how ‘globography’ differ from these traditions in important respects. Some of its conceptual implications are listed in table. 3.4:

Table 3.4. GE, MSE and ‘Globography’ compared

| Approaches | Sites | Context | Research design | Reflexivity |
|--------------------------------|---|--|---------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <i>Global ethnography</i> | Different levels of scale | Capitalism, Nation-State, History | Extension of theory | Structural position |
| <i>Multi-sited ethnography</i> | Different locales | ‘of the ethnographer’s and his informant’s own making’ | Theory ‘held in abeyance’ | Self and textual representation |
| <i>Globography</i> | (Relational) network of localities on different levels of scale | Historical sociology, Communication, Culture | Theory as signposts | Narrative dialogue |

Source: Adapted from Lapegna, 2009, p. 16 and expanded by the author.

As comprised in Table 3.4. the features of globography necessitate, as discussed above, a different view on sites, context, research design and reflexivity than those posed by advocates of MSE or GE. Especially when the use of history in sport as a way to discuss authenticity and myth is included in the methodological framework, a globographic investigation allows the researcher to gather relational data on the research topic and generally back up Roger Sanjek’s statement that ‘what the ethnographic method aims to achieve are accounts that

support the claims they make' (Sanjek, 1991, p. 621). In this thesis, these are essential acknowledgements to make as it promises no historical truth to be used, as it were, by either the FIA or the promoter, but the account conveys a considerable amount of ethnographic insight into what really matters within the WRC community. Before we enter the first promotional arena where this becomes visible, namely the media, we shall devote the next chapter to outlining the promotional context that has staged the circumstances from which the research question emerged.

Chapter 4: The promotional context

Introduction

Well into the 1990s, there was a remarkable gap between the potential interest in the World Rally Championship (WRC) around the world (huge) and the efforts to coordinate media production and sport promotion (small). In fact, as late as 1996, each WRC rally still had to find its own partners for the production and broadcasting of images, as well as for the promotion of the event. But then things changed dramatically and the FIA was forced to take action. Chris Hackley concluded in 2005 that there had been nothing less than a revolution in public communication in the 1990s:

Broadcast deregulation, vertical and lateral mergers in the media industry and technological advances in communication are creating a promotional environment that has no precedent in modern history. The ethos, language and aesthetic forms of promotion have become parts of everyday experience that are taken for granted (Hackley, 2005, p. 13).

More specifically, while there have always been efforts by brands or companies to give their products symbolic meaning, Andrew Wernick claims that in the early 1990s, 'the mutual entanglements of promotional signs in one domain with those in another has become a pervasive feature of our whole produced symbolic world' (Wernick, 1991, p. 12). The emergence of such a culture hitherto almost alien to the WRC, meant that it would be entangled with promotional issues on a much deeper level whether the sports managers of the championship liked it or not. Faced with competition from other sports, as well as

entertainment industries in general, it became obvious that the WRC could not afford to stand on the outside of these changes. To understand the impact of this, I trace in this chapter the promotional development of the WRC. It leads to a conclusion that the current promoter must apply the same level of cultural sensitivity to the WRC as their mother company Red Bull has done so successfully with other sports.

On the brink of breakdown

‘Are you cold, Hans?’

Alejandro’s soft baritone is emphatic, yet it could have been taunting. It is very early in the morning, and we are somewhere high up in the Argentinian mountains, on stage 7 of Rally Argentina 2012, San Augustin-Santa Rosa that starts in an hour. I, the Norwegian accustomed to spectating rallies at 20 degrees below zero, am freezing like hell. When I left Norway, it was spring, but here in Argentina, in the southern hemisphere, it’s autumn. Bummer! Accordingly, I am not at all dressed for chilly mornings like this. Alejandro, on the other hand, in his Michelin jacket given to him by the French tyre manufacturer after they were provided services by RETO, the travel agency that Alejandro’s father’s runs some years ago, is seemingly unfazed by the sour climate.

‘Not a bit,’ I lie while walking back and forth to keep warm.

Alejandro is the driver, the guide, the fixer...well, the everything on this rally. His local shrewdness (‘the Argentinian way’, according to him) would turn out to be a MacGyverian ability when we were confronted with blocked roads, angry motorists or untrained marshals. Wherever we go we are reminded of the uniqueness of this particular rally, and the strong local pride in the town of Villa Carlos Paz, the rally’s focal point just

outside Cordoba city, in hosting a WRC event. In a tourist brochure, the myth of the rally – *El mito del Rally* – was described in the following way:

Cities rise and grow with the rhythm, customs and passion given by their people.

Thus, each city creates the personality that identifies them forever, like a trademark.

Buenos Aires city, for example, created the great local myth of the coffee table and its bars, a place of encounter with friends and artists who got together to chat and to argue.

In this way, Cordoba people characterised by a half-cunning half-rebellious temperament, created a decalogue of passions with an undisputed first place: the RALLY. Our geography full of hills, valleys and pampas is the ideal place for this activity. For many years it has attracted thousands of local people who, enduring all kinds of weather inclemencies, form a human cordon by the roadside for the astonishment of the world press and for the foreign pilots [sic] themselves who see in this a unique event in the world.

With an organised ritual, the local people start to live the competition: they plan their location in the hills, they invite the friends that will form part of the group, they make the necessary excuses that justify the absence to the place of work, and they get the inevitable barbecue and Fernet drink that will guarantee the success to this ritual of the encounter with friends.¹⁹

It would not take me long before I discovered that, for once, the advertisement did not lie. At the rally's first stage on Thursday night, the Super Especial Amarok, at a specially built track near Cordoba, the show factor was high with floodlights and fireworks and old motorsport heroes driving like maniacs. The atmosphere was thick in the evening darkness with the smell

of burned fuel and grilled meat and the strange, sweet aroma of the native plants. Spectators were a surprisingly assorted group. Few dressed up in team merchandise, in fact, they seemed more like models from a McKinley catalogue with the addition of the ubiquitous *churro* – the typical Argentinian winter cap. Some VIP girls tiptoed around with advertisement umbrellas. *Mate*, a sort of tea with a smoky taste which was originally an indigenous Amerindian staple, and is now considered Argentina's national beverage and drunk at all times of the day, was widely consumed. Although not as intensely as in Bruce Chatwin's classic travelogue *In Patagonia*, where men 'talked about *mate* the way other men talked about women' (Chatwin, 1977/2005, p. 101), the entire rally would turn into an exhibition of people carrying thermoses with hot water and the unique cups in which they mix leaves with hot water.

On our way back to the hotel later that night, Alejandro told me that this was just the beginning. In the next couple of days, I would get to experience the myths first hand, among them the fantastic spectator life high up in the Argentinian mountainsides. 'Rally Argentina is unique because of the people,' said Alejandro. 'I guess you are thinking that is the same all around the world, but here it's a friendship celebration where you can join your best friends and wait happily many, many hours playing cards, eating *asado* and drinking Fernet with coke just to see a few minutes of an exciting spectacle.' Even far into the mountains, where people carried with them lots of food and built impressive *parillas* (an Argentine grill) on the spot, the *asado* is just as much about the whole phenomenon as it is about eating. While the meat is being grilled, it is the custom to 'trash-talk' other groups, for example, those on the other side of the road. It may seem rude, but it is all in fun, a way of keeping the mood up. Like at football matches, groups take turns chanting and wait for the other group to respond. And while rally spectators elsewhere, like in Scandinavia, can get annoying under the influence of alcohol, it is the opposite among rally fans here in Argentina – according to Alejandro, they sometimes become too friendly!

The El Copina-Condor stage, Rally Argentina 2012



Spectator culture in the Sierras Grandes, Argentina. Above us flew the mighty condors. Photo: Hans Erik Næss

Either way, the rally endorsed the organisers' approach to the event, which had promised 'a kind of itinerary as in the old times' and 'an historic edition'.²⁰ First launched in 1980, the rally quickly earned the reputation as one of the most exotic rallies in the WRC and, reportedly, the first one to attract more than a million spectators. If 2012 was not totally like the old times – in 1982, for example, the itinerary was more than twice as long – it was seen as a sign of better days for a championship that had been struggling in recent years. Less than a year earlier, in fact, there had been nothing to celebrate about the WRC. Its commercial promoter collapsed, almost taking the sport with it.

On 24 November, 2011, Russian banker Vladimir Antonov and his partner Raimondas

Baranauskas were arrested in London on allegations of serious fraud; fraudulent accounting, forgery of documents, abuse of authority, misappropriation of property, money laundering and other criminal offences, all connected to Bankas Snoras bank in Lithuania, after the Lithuanian authorities found over €290 million in assets missing. As Antonov's financial empire trembled with further revelations of connections with the mafia, secret accounts and the withholding of information from the financial authorities, the WRC tottered with it because Antonov was the main backer of the multinational investment group, Convers Sports Initiatives (CSI-1), which, in turn, owned North One Sport (NOS), the company in charge of the global media production and promotion of the WRC 2010-20.²¹ If NOS lost their financial backing, the future of WRC would be in danger as only a few large companies in the same sector were able to take over the apparatus involved in such a long-term promotional venture. A few days later, the situation got worse as CSI-1 entered administration. Under UK law, that meant that the creditors took over the company and appointed an external independent source to manage it (see Cutler, 2011).²²

When December came, the *Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile* (FIA), the sport's governing body, realised it was in trouble. The first round of the WRC 2012, the glamorous Rally Monte Carlo, was scheduled for 17-22 January and teams had begun to make preparations. Since the oldest and, for many, most prestigious, event in rallying was making a much-anticipated return to the championship after an enforced sabbatical of three years (see Chapter 6), there was also a lot of lively anticipation among the spectators. Behind the scenes, however, things were heating up. The FIA normally celebrates the heroes of motorsport at the Annual General Assembly (AGA) and Prize-Giving Gala from 5 to 9 December. The 2011 event in New Delhi, India, must have been characterised instead by a frantic round of informal meetings. British motorsport magazine *Autosport* informed its readers on 7 December that the FIA was working on an 'immediate plan' to make sure the 2012 World

Rally Championship went ahead, and that several companies were being considered for the promoter rights as an alternative to CSI-1, among them energy drink and lifestyle consortium Red Bull.²³ FIA President Jean Todt was also forced to return to FIA headquarters in Paris from his vacation in Bali with Hollywood actress wife Michelle Yeoh to deal with the matter personally.

After discussing various options back and forth, among them a significant investment proposal from a Qatar-based group, high hopes for a long-term solution collapsed on 7 January when the Qatari deal fell through. A North One source said:

It's unbelievable. We have come so close to landing this. The deal was on the table and, believe me, it would have been by far and away the best thing for the sport and for the World Rally Championship. What is desperately disappointing, after working so hard for 11 years on the WRC, is that nobody from the FIA picked up a phone and talked to us – and goodness knows we tried to call them. We were treated with complete contempt. I find it extraordinary given what the new investor could have done. It's a very sad day.²⁴

Not only was North One Sport affected, but also hundreds of national broadcasters with North One Sport contracts who had planned to air WRC events in 2012. The next day, 8 January, the FIA finally released a statement where it stressed that the contract with North One Sport was terminated as it had 'conspicuously failed to deliver its contractual obligations and is in fundamental breach of contract'.²⁵ While the FIA blamed NOS, the Qatari side was unhappy with how they were being treated – they could for instance not seem to get a sit-down with FIA representatives – and hence pulled out of the deal, claiming they were unable to work alongside the FIA (Rothman, 2012a). Now people across the WRC community begin to

express how clearly dissatisfied they were with the development of things and demanded action.

Despite this, and a one-time deal with Eurosport that saved the Rally Monte Carlo 2012, no long-term solution was arrived at. Antonov was still under arrest and due to go to trial. On 3 February 2012, the FIA issued a further statement in which it regretted to announce that, ‘it has not proven possible to find an international promoter as well as a global broadcaster for the 2012 World Rally Championship season at this stage in time.’ It also stated that it would ‘open discussions with all the other parties which have expressed interest in the promotion of the WRC in order to guarantee the future development and growth of the FIA World Rally Championship’.²⁶ These discussions, as it turned out, would last a while. Meanwhile, the 2012 season of the WRC got by through a temporary agreement with European Broadcast Union’s (EBU) production subsidiary Eurovision Production Coordination as the WRC’s production partner, in addition to numerous ad hoc deals and a tremendous portion of goodwill.

The promotional development of the WRC

In itself, the Antonov affair was not really that important.²⁷ It was not the first time the WRC had been in promotional distress. Many blamed the Russian investors for turning the sport into a mere business and ditching it when things got bad. But commercialisation has always been a part of motorsport, for good or ill – as long ago as 1906, a British racing driver lamented that, ‘only men who make it their business to drive these cars can hope to be successful ... the curse of commercialisation is the ruin of every sport’ (cited in Rendall, 1991, p. 35). More than a decade prior to the 2011 crisis, those involved in WRC needed to contend with profound changes in the way the entire sport was organised. In 1995, two

motorsport historians observed that even in rallying, ‘the battle for commercial advantages is almost as fraught as that on the special stages’, while adding: ‘Teams of PR people crash out information, herd journalists from one place to another, and fight for attention from radio and TV crews in an effort to score more publicity for their sponsors. There is as much talk about market segments, demographic profiles and column inches as tyre choice, power outputs and drive shafts’ (Campbell and Campbell, 1995, p. 17). While the promotional aspects of the WRC had been neglected since its very beginning, it was clear that the scope and scale of the championship from the 1980s onward demanded a coordinated strategy of promotion, finance, law and the organisation of it all.

In the WRC’s case, however, neither the FIA’s nor the ISC’s attitude towards this synergetic development was particularly proactive. Instead, they borrowed most of the strategy from Formula 1, often uncritically, which is not surprising since the managerial manpower of the F1 and the FIA was, in fact, the same in the 1990s. Here, the vision of Charles Bernard ‘Bernie’ Ecclestone, a British businessman dubbed by UK financial magazine the *Economist* (2011) ‘a motor-racing Machiavelli’, is fundamental to what happened (the following section is based on *Economist*, 2000; 2011; Beck-Burridge and Walton, 2001; Henry, 2003; Lovell, 2004). Briefly, he is responsible for transforming Formula 1 into the global spectacle it is today. Ecclestone entered the sport in 1971, at a point where it was ‘unprofessional, the circuits and the cars were dangerous, and drivers were often killed’ (*Economist*, 2000). As only die-hard fans could put up with the poor organisation of events, and TV networks tended to favour their national races and drivers, F1 was in the awkward situation of being a worldwide, yet hardly global, championship. Ecclestone noticed in particular the slight interest from his colleagues in politics and administration for the sport, not to mention the daunting challenge of ‘moving the F1 circus around the world’ (*Economist*,

2000). In many ways, he is one of the creators of the promotional culture identified by Andrew Wernick.

Alongside Ecclestone came Max Mosley who, as will be explained in the forthcoming chapters, was one of the architects of the revamped WRC in the 1990s. In 1987, Jean-Marie Balestre, in his role as president of what was at the time called *Fédération Internationale du Sport Automobile* (FISA, later renamed FIA - see Chapter 1), the worldwide governing body for motor sport, was encouraged to appoint Bernie Ecclestone to the role of vice-president of promotional affairs, with authority over all of its motorsport series. Mosley's relationship with Ecclestone began in the 1970s, when the former became the official legal adviser to the Formula One Constructors Association (FOCA). FOCA was created in 1974 by Ecclestone, Mosley and F1 insiders Colin Chapman, Teddy Mayer, Ken Tyrrell and Frank Williams and would represent the commercial interests of the teams at meetings with FISA. In this role, Mosley drew up the first version of the so-called 'Concorde Agreement' in 1981 (it has gone through a number of additional versions since then), which settled a long-standing dispute between FOCA and FISA and which eventually gave FISA control of the rules and FOCA control of promotion and television rights to F1.

From this point on, the Ecclestone-Mosley strategy was twofold. First, they took control over the commercial side of motorsport. One result of the Concorde deals was stability – teams who signed to them guaranteed to turn up to each race. This, in turn, meant that broadcasters could rely on a proper spectacle, which made it easier for Ecclestone to secure more lucrative TV agreements. In 1982, he signed a deal with the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), an umbrella organisation for public service broadcasters in Europe (see also Chapter 5). That same year, Ecclestone also started International Sportsworlds Communicators (ISC) which would later hold the commercial rights to the WRC. Under the new deal, European broadcasters agreed to show every F1 race, instead of

the previous ad hoc coverage. This was a turning point for the teams' finances as sponsorship – instead of investments by manufacturers – had become an essential source of income for an F1 team, and the price that a sponsor paid was now directly linked to the number of TV viewers. Over the next decade, a number of convoluted deals were made and, according to the *Economist* (2000), if one tries to follow the money around, an incredibly complex web of companies is involved.

Second, Ecclestone and Mosley realised the potential in not only gaining, but also creating, political approvals for their work. In 1987, Ecclestone became vice-president of the FISA, and in 1991, Mosley challenged the increasingly unpopular Jean-Marie Balestre for the presidency of FISA, winning by 43 votes to 29. Two years later, FISA became FIA after a large reconstruction of the organisation, ensuring an even closer relationship between Ecclestone and Mosley, and in 1995, the FIA introduced new rules under which it claimed the television rights to all the motorsport events it authorised. It then transferred these rights to ISC in 1996, also controlled by Ecclestone at the time, who still held his post as one of the FIA's vice-presidents. Early in the 1990s, Ecclestone had ensured that a consistent season-long approach was taken to filming WRC events by ISC. The catch was that if national broadcasters wanted a piece of this, they also had to opt for a season of F1 events. The introduction of these new rules also meant that a promoter wishing to establish an international series was forced to assign the television rights for that series, whether it wished to or not, to a competing promoter, namely the FIA. Later, the FIA also passed the rights to all its other directly sanctioned championships and events to Ecclestone, for 15 years (Lovell, 2004, pp. 254-56).

Dissatisfaction with Ecclestone's favouring of F1 resulted in the formation of World Rally Teams Association (WRTA) in 1994, co-founded by former WRC driver and Toyota Team Europe's team principal. Ove Andersson, who, until his passing in 2008, was seen as

one of the stand-up guys in the WRC. Its aim was to speak with one voice in negotiations with the FIA and Ecclestone, especially on subjects like increasing media exposure and decreasing costs. As an alternative to Ecclestone's idea of appointing a host broadcaster for each WRC event, who in turn was expected to provide ISC with programming for sale to other markets (resulting in little coherence), WRTA set up a TV fund to ensure continuity in the production. However, as ISC still controlled the distribution of coverage, there were no significant improvements (O'Connor, 2004, p. 9-10). Among teams, the situation with Ecclestone's neglect of the WRC now started to become unbearable. What's more, Ecclestone and his many hats started at this point to become a legal concern for European authorities. FIA's role as governing body and its direct engagement in promotional activities was viewed as a conflict of interest and sparked an anti-trust investigation by the European Commission after they had received complaints from various motorsport actors. Following its inquiries, the European Commission alleged that the FIA had abused its dominant position in the market for global motor sport series in four ways.

Among them was the claim that the FIA used 'its power abusively to acquire all the television rights to international motorsports events' (Budzinski, 2012, p. 25). As a result, the Commission concluded that FIA must establish a complete separation of the commercial and regulatory functions in relation to F1 and the WRC. Ecclestone's solution was to sell ISC to British motorsport entrepreneur David Richards and US venture capital company, Apax for \$38 million in 2000 (Henry, 2003, p. 147). This included, allegedly, a 10-year deal which would allow Richards to take over the worldwide rights and production of the WRC which included television, media, sponsorship and licensing for the championship. This move, along with other organisational adjustments executed by Ecclestone, satisfied the Commission to such a degree that they closed the file on the investigation in October 2001.²⁸ FIA, on their side, agreed to 'enter into arm's-length commercial agreements which will provide for fixed

payments to be made to FIA removing thus any incentive for FIA to discriminate in favour of any series for commercial purposes.²⁹ With Richards as ringmaster, the WRC community suddenly felt re-empowered.

From Richards to Red Bull

To David Richards, the acquisition of the commercial rights of the WRC in 2000 meant a free hand to introduce a range of new media strategies which would in theory better cater for the WRC in the ‘mediascape’ of the 1990s and 2000s – a term coined by anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (1990, p. 9) and defined as ‘the electronic capabilities of production and dissemination, as well as the images of the world created by these media’. Richards, a well-connected man in the WRC as co-driver to Ari Vatanen in the WRC Driver’s title in 1981, and a successful businessman in charge of Subaru’s title-winning assault on the WRC in the 1990s, envisioned WRC fans not only as spectators, but also as consumers:

Conventional television gives us a wide-scale, global audience, which is great for building awareness and building our brand. But to guarantee our financial success we need to communicate with the individual consumer. That’s our main challenge over the next few years – how to talk to the individual consumer. We not only need to talk to them, but we also need to build a commercial relationship with them (cited in Accenture, n.d.)

Richards was, at that point, convinced that WRC has been largely under-exploited (Jenkinson and Sain, 2004, p. 4) and sought some inspiration from Formula 1, whose promotional

foundation had been created by Ecclestone, as described above. In fact, as two researchers on sports management put it in 2001:

Formula 1 Grand Prix racing was to be the formula that led to the development of motorsport business (...) parallel changes based on that example, of providing a reliable show of competitive quality, were adopted by other branches of motorsport. That has been particularly true of the World Rally Championship (WRC) (Beck-Burridge and Walton, 2001, p. 13).

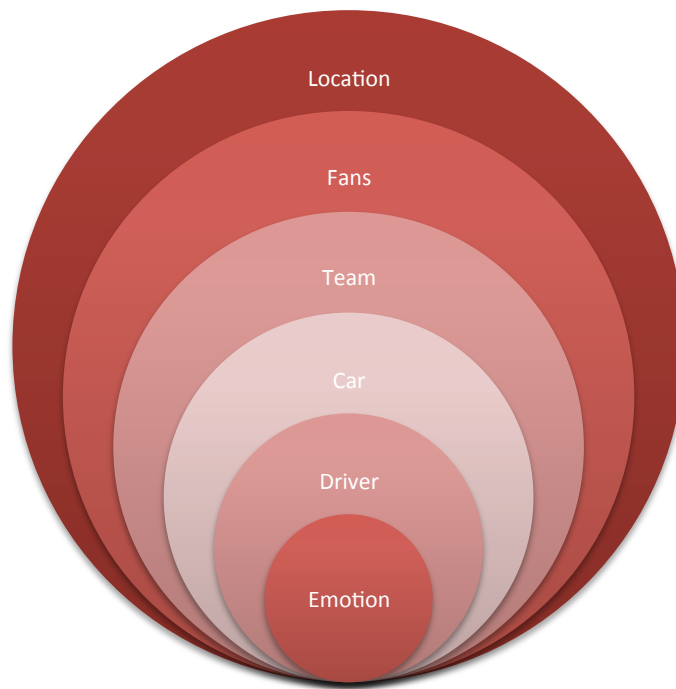
The general idea was that WRC had to be treated as a commercial venture in itself, better adapted to the promotional culture described in the beginning of this chapter. Simon Miles, former Marketing Director of ISC, recalls: 'Our job number one was to understand what we had in our hands, what values were there and how they were perceived' (cited in Jenkinson and Sain, 2004, p. 4). Miles turned for advice to Jane Asscher and Sean Kinmont of the advertising agency 23red. According to a report by Angus Jenkinson and Branko Sain at the UK research agency, Centre for Integrated Marketing (CFIM) at the University of Luton, the main difference from previous marketing strategies was the realisation that the sport was now fighting for airtime against not only motorsport, but against the entire entertainment industry (Jenkinson and Sain, 2004, p. 4).

In the beginning there was plenty of optimism in the air, according to Sean O'Connor (2004) – an insider of the WRC since 1991 – who in 2004, evaluated the new marketing strategy of WRC following ISC's takeover in 2000. Based on 16 in-depth interviews with key people in the ISC, FIA, Event Promoters, Teams and EU-based broadcasters, among other sources, he underlines that there was a clear business strategy as Richards involved a large team of people from outside the WRC as well. Partnering among others Puma, Sony and

Accenture, ISC sought to convert the sport into a global brand through formalisation of responsibilities between themselves, the teams and the FIA. First, ISC produced a Manufacturers Marketing Agreement (MMA) where the manufacturers would provide an annual budget to assist in the marketing of the WRC. Second, ISC negotiated a contract with the event organisers which spelled out how each event would be run. Third, six target markets were identified (France, UK, Germany, Italy, Spain and Japan) for promotional purposes. Fourth, the WRC as a brand was honed through the partnership with UK advertising agency 23red. Fifth, a deal to develop a licensed game for the PlayStation console was inherited by the previous owners of ISC, but entered a new phase as Richards and his crew wished to be much more involved in the development of the game. Sixth, with the proliferation of Internet access a new, official, and later openly accessible website (the old one was in the hands of a third party) was produced in partnership with global consultancy company Accenture.

Changes, in other words, were plenty and thorough. Explicitly, the Accenture report on their work states, Richards' order was to 'attract a new 16 to 35 year-old target audience by communicating the essence of the WRC in the most entertaining, informative and interactive way as possible. That meant building a sense of community and loyalty among WRC fans around the world' (Accenture, 2002, p. 3). Consequently, a new look at the consumer was required. In gaming and magazines, for instance, the competition is more focused on communities that share the passion for sport, particularly motorsport. Ad agency 23Red even ventured on a primitive form of mobile application service where users with cell phones would be able to 'access news and race results, as well as where to eat or park their car, based on their location' (Accenture, 2002, pp. 2-6). These multimedia innovations, as I will return to in the next chapter, were placed within the '360 Degree Context' – six defining factors that should always be combined to successfully communicate the sport.

Figure 4.1. The defining factors of successfully communicating sport



Source: Adapted from Jenkinson and Sain, 2004, p. 7.

The events themselves were thought to attract the hard core of the WRC fans, who are probably less influenced by WRC's competitors (Jenkinson and Sain, 2005, pp. 5-6). Others would be following the rallies by other means. In a rapidly growing environment of social media, this included a far more intense and multimedia approach to rallying:

ISC and 23red decided to take charge of editing all the images and audio on site, meaning at the event, selling them all over the globe to the subscribing TV stations. The TV stations can mix and match the material to their liking but can never go off brand because every screen and every shot has already been edited to have a common, WRC-true, flavour (Jenkinson and Sain, 2004, p. 6).

According to *Autoweek*'s (and journalist at wrc.com) Anthony Peacock, who looked back at the turnaround in 2009, this was a revolution in the entire way the sport was conveyed: 'Suddenly, the sport was sold in a slick, prepackaged-television format, and the sprawling events were reined in to more manageable distances in terms the "dead time" of road sections and servicing as the made-for-TV SuperSpecial Stage took on more prominence' (Peacock, 2009). At last, as demonstrated in ISC's Brand Book from 2004 (ISC, 2004), the idea was to develop the WRC into a premier entertainment brand. Because brands simplify the otherwise complex nature of the product, or the experience, it was vital that the brand captured the eclectics of the WRC as well as conveying them in a jargon-free manner that could appeal both to new and existing fans, sponsors and teams.

This strategy brought both ups and downs. Leaving aside the popular game named after WRC Driver's champion in 1995, Colin McRae, the ISC-officially licensed World Rally Championship series was the game that really broke the electronic barrier for the PlayStation generation. A game like this might seem like sheer fun. But given the demographics of the majority of WRC fans, males of the age of 16-34, it is also an important asset to the WRC brand. Paul Hembery, motorsport boss of WRC tyre partner Pirelli, confirmed in 2009 the importance of an official game as recruitment tool: 'It is probably the prime motorsport gaming platform for around the world. It's about bringing new people into the sport and getting them to feel rallying, and understand how exciting the sport is.'³⁰ In Sean O'Connor's analysis, he concludes that the relationship between the WRC and Playstation 'presents substantial added value benefits to other members of the WRC network' (O'Connor, 2004, p. 183). With the new game, you could actually play all the current drivers in the WRC and bond with the sport on several levels.

Besides the fact that it is worth a lot of money – in their forecast for 2012-16 American consultancy firm PwC (2011) says that total global spending on video games will

expand to \$83 billion by the end of the period – the WRC games provided people with a sense of what it's like to be a rally driver, in other words, obtain a desired role different from yourself, an important feature in game design (see Rouse, 2005). Game developers collaborated with drivers, engineers and others to make the gaming experience as authentic as possible within the realms of the genre. Simon Long, CEO of ISC and later North One Sport (NOS), said before the re-launch of WRC game in 2009 that, ‘the official WRC game will engage a whole new audience for the sport and we’re tremendously excited at the opportunities to grow our fan base and the profile of the WRC. It provides a hugely powerful touch point for us in which to showcase the WRC to consumers.’³¹ When I was attending Rally de France-Alsace in 2011, for instance, tyre supplier Michelin had installed a virtual rally car simulator in the service park. Others, like the organisers of Rally New Zealand with their multi-media MotorExpo and FanZone in Auckland’s Viaduct Events Centre, even organised a virtual rally car simulator competition in 2012 called ‘The Brother Cup’. The grand prize was a two-day course with the country's best rally driving tutors.³²

In contrast to the Playstation success, the remaining ISC strategy met some weighty obstacles, not only from those who favoured a return to the roots of the WRC (‘the old guard’, according to O’Connor), but also those who claimed that Richards could have changed a lot more. Promoting the WRC with input from the Formula 1 business model was not the success that Richards hoped it would be, even though there was a significant increase in popularity measured by the number of spectators and by a 20 per cent rise in worldwide television audience for the WRC in the previous five years to 2007 (as many as 816 million viewers in one year) (WRC Fact book, 2008, p. 14), although it is difficult to judge whether this was the result of expanded airtime or expansion of interest. One explanation for the problem of converting the WRC into a sustainable media show, in the view of Sean O’Connor, was the somewhat naïve approach from ISC to the media industry. When ISC first approached

broadcasters, they had to choose between television networks like Eurosport, or go down, in the words of an ISC representative, ‘the hard road’ and offer a partnership to conventional broadcasters like BBC in the UK and TVE in Spain (O’Connor, 2004, p. 143).

Prior to this approach, measures were taken to make the championship more TV-friendly. The aim of introducing a single event format (the so-called ‘cloverleaf’ format), as opposed to the rough and diverse set-ups of the past with rallies that went on for days, often with night stages, far into the wild, was to demystify the sport. It was believed that if only the ISC could produce a high-quality rallying show, neatly packaged around the cloverleaf format, the broadcasters would be sufficiently impressed to air it. An exhibition in 2002 at Sportel, the annual world sports content media convention held in Monaco, made ISC change their mind completely. Simon Long said it like this: ‘I realised that actually the broadcasters increasingly today don’t care whether it’s Formula 1 cars, whether its football players, whether its rally cars, what they care about is a commercial model that makes money for them’ (cited in O’Connor, 2004, pp. 149-50). If that was not enough, manufacturers voiced dissatisfaction with ISC’s work to such a degree, O’Connor underlines, that ‘a them and us perception’ had become ‘a barrier in moving the process forward’. According to one ISC representative, the promoters were seen as a threat to the sport because they were trying to make money: ‘And that in making money, we are prostituting the values of the sport and its heritage and not delivering value necessarily back to the people investing 30-50 million dollars participating’ (cited in O’Connor, 2004, p. 150).

With ISC’s main innovator, David Richards, occupied with his new role as manager for the BAR Formula 1 team, ISC consequently revised its entire strategy by closing down its marketing department and emphasising sales operations exclusively. A few years later, in early 2007, ISC consolidated its relationship with Sportfive and its extensive international sales network, ‘dedicated to securing new distribution agreements, to optimise the media

exposure for WRC on a global level' (WRC Fact book, 2008, p. 3). Profits, however, continued to elude the ISC, as, among other things, the frustration among traditional fans was not balanced by the influx of new ones even though statistically, the WRC had never been more popular. While the Playstation game was a true success with high sales and strong connectivity with a new trans-national demographic, teams, sponsors and event organisers did not subsidise the promotional efforts in the same way as happened in F1, nor as they were expected to do by ISC. When UK media company North One Television acquired ISC from David Richards later in 2007 and later re-badged it as North One Sport (NOS), it was losing millions of euros a year.³³

In the meantime, O'Connor also points out the unclear working relationship and division of responsibilities between the FIA and the ISC as a barrier to commercial development (O'Connor, 2004, pp. 174-84). In 2009, after resigning as FIA President, Max Mosley described the situation like this from his side of the table:

Rights holders felt entitled to make their own decisions, and they needed to be put into their place. Manufacturers likewise, so every time the FIA took the initiative in making decisions manufacturers screamed that they should be making the decision instead. The trouble is, the manufacturers never agree between themselves, and anyway, they come and go and we at the FIA are here to stay (cited in Holmes, 2009, p. 45).

It also seems like the consumers were overlooked, although the ISC did partner with British consultancy firm TNS Sport to quantitatively profile the WRC's fan base as part of their promotional reforms. But, as I will return to in Chapter 7, there are shortcomings to such an approach. It can – and did, perhaps – result in a situation where there is little point in getting

the WRC on more TV channels, especially if it is not packaged to satisfy the broadcaster's financial motivations, because the product does not resonate with the WRC community. And just to make things worse, following the launch of the fifth version of the official Playstation WRC game in 2005, it would take *five years* before another edition was on the market. Instead of keeping the momentum, as Electronic Arts has done with the successful FIFA series (football), it was shut down – by joint agreement from the producers as well as the rights owners – and it left a gaping hole in the WRC's promotional portfolio.

Setbacks like these adversely affected the championship. Only two manufacturers – Subaru and Ford, in addition to the semi-private Citroen Kronos team – undertook to do all events in the 2006 season of the WRC, compared with six manufacturer teams the year before. At first, it seemed like NOS was able to rectify the situation in 2007 with assistance from the FIA, despite the worrisome withdrawal from the WRC in 2008 by Suzuki and Subaru as manufacturer teams, the latter of which had been in the WRC since 1992 (see Chapter 8). In 2007, David Richards acknowledged the importance of television networks for the consumption of motorsport events: 'As motorsport is a minority sporting activity it will, inevitably, mostly appear on dedicated sport satellite channels. We have to accept this segmentation when producing motorsport programs and look at things in a different way.' (cited in Henry et al., 2007, p. 137). Furthermore, says Richards, 'motorsport will need to change the way it sells itself to TV, as it will appear on specialized channels, possibly even those totally dedicated to motorsport' (cited in Henry et al., 2007, p. 138).

NOS seemingly had the same vision as Richards when it in 2009 became the WRC's first official Championship Promoter (the former company only held the commercial rights) with a contract that would run from 2010 until 2020. This marked a turning point and the new direction was strengthened by the acquisition of North One Sport from Convers Sports Initiatives (CSI-1) in 2011. According to Neal Duncanson, Chairman of North One Sport, the

reason for the sale was a matter of priorities.

We acquired the business and then negotiated an agreement with the FIA to become the sport's first ever promoter, alongside the commercial and media rights holders. However, North One Television's business is primarily content creation, production and ownership, rather than commercial and promotional management, so we always felt that we were only caretakers of that side of the business until a potential new partner came along with the resources to fulfil all our ambitions.³⁴

Based in London and founded in 2010, CSI-1 was part of the Conwers Group headed by Russian entrepreneur and investor Vladimir Antonov. When asked what changes he would like to see (or make) in the WRC, Antonov responded:

It's vital that whatever changes we make to the WRC respect its heritage and the DNA that makes it a unique motorsport challenge. We'll work hard to strike the right balance between the past and the present, respecting the roots of the WRC but packaging it for the latest television, mobile and multimedia markets.³⁵

A new dawn was seemingly on its way for the WRC after some rough years, boosted by the arrival of the new manufacturer Mini WRC team in 2011 nostalgically linking the sport to some of its glory years in the 1960s when the old Minis were successful. With new technical regulations introduced in 2010, as an effort to decrease costs and to attract more manufacturers, confidence in the WRC community grew. Sad to say, CSI-1 never got around to making these sympathetic plans happen as the accusations of financial fraud against

Antonov put an end to the company's collaboration with the FIA. Not until 28 September 2012 – almost a year after Antonov was arrested – was a new promoter in place.

At a meeting in Paris with the World Motor Sport Council (WMSC), which consists of representatives from national automobile clubs throughout the world and which decides on rules and regulations for the FIA's various motorsport series, German-based Sportsman Media Group and Swiss-based Red Bull Media House were appointed as the new global promoter of the WRC. They brought in television production company Host Broadcast Services (HBS), a subsidiary of the Swiss sports marketing company, Infront Sports & Media, which would take charge of producing the championship together with Finnish sports production company Fireworks. Eventually, in May 2013, all these companies were gathered under the umbrella of the new company, WRC Promoter GmbH.³⁶ With an initial partnership term of six years, the new promoter's tasks were 'investing in and developing the WRC with a view to increasing its profile, reputation and commercial value,'³⁷ as well as, 'proposing the WRC calendar to the World Motor Sport Council and building the field of manufacturers and competitors.'³⁸ As part of the package, the FIA introduced new rules – which the manufacturers had to agree with – on the use of images, logos, livery, name and sponsor logos (for example for TV and computer games) giving them much more hands-on control.³⁹ It all looked good – or did it?

A quest for differentiation

Sociologically, I find reasons to reconsider the applause. Among these reasons, one was put forward by Sebastian Joseph in the leading business magazine *Marketing Week*. In his view, 2013 was the year when 'sponsors everywhere started adopting a use it or lose it approach when it came to content. The shift comes amid the war for attention between sponsors and

non-sponsors looking to exploit *the cultural conversation* around events to drive sales' (Joseph, 2013; italics added). For my British informant Sandra, for instance, this was one of the many things that now had turned a long-time WRC aficionado into a distant fan:

Unfortunately the WRC has become too commercialised since 2013, and I get the impression that it has been reduced to a mere sales campaign by one manufacturer. Therefore I only visited two WRC rallies in 2013, and this year it will probably only be one.

As a consequence we need to review the options of following in the tracks of Red Bull's ideal event (where they, as event organiser, also is the sole sponsor of it) or emulate the F1 model. Tim Barkey (2012), formerly marketing director for North One Sport, was among those who suggested after the Antonov affair that the WRC should adopt the entire Formula 1 business model once and for all. Some of the economic arguments for this are quite strong: by organising the triangle of media rights, race hosting fees and licensing agreements, almost the reverse of what happened with the WRC, F1 has been transformed into an exuberantly money-making business, 'wall-to-wall with conspicuous consumption, private jets and remarkable personalities' (Henry, 2003, p. 6). More obscure, but not irrelevant, is the annual four per cent payment (in 2013) that Ferrari receives from the revenues that teams share 'in recognition of their historical contribution to the sport' (Judde, Booth and Brooks, 2013, p. 413). Imagine a similar deal in the WRC profiting for example Ford, which has been in the championship since the late 1970s – it would have raised hell.

A large part of the explanation to F1's success is that, besides famous personal grievances between drivers fighting for the championship title, since the early 1980s, it has had a distinctive corporate identity that has been developed under the strict supervision of

Bernie Ecclestone and a closely knit group of associates. In the late 1990s, for example, Ecclestone was Chairman of the FOCA, as well as chairman of Formula One Administration (FOM), ‘a company which collects, divides and distributes the revenues from circuit owners, race sponsors, television companies and trackside advertisers’ (Williams, 1998, p. 9). His position is therefore unique, according to one study: ‘poacher, gamekeeper and lord of the manor too’ (Williams, 1998, p. 9). But whereas Ecclestone was the F1’s Minister of Finance, Mosley ruled the law. Together they came to an agreement with the F1 teams to implement a Resource Restriction Agreement (RRA) in 2010. In contrast to the extravagant spending by some F1 teams, this mechanism would see maximum budgets progressively reduced to 50 per cent of their 2008 level, as well as introducing a maximum workforce (Judde, Booth and Brooks, 2013, p. 416).

In the case of Red Bull Media House (RBMH), the main owner of WRC Promoter GmbH, a more cultural discussion is needed. While some fear and others desire a ‘redbullization’ of the WRC both camps fail to see the implications of how deep a sporting identity runs. Conversely, while the company’s ability to turn a product into a lifestyle has been much discussed, predominately their invention of events that fit their brand profile rather than sponsoring existing ones, less attention has been given to the cultural circumstances of modern societies that have made people adaptive to ‘lifestyle sports’ since the 1960s, where a ‘style of life’ is closely associated with the sport (see Wheaton, 2004). Whereas Formula 1 grew as a commercial enterprise due to the sophisticated business techniques and corporate vision developed by Bernie Ecclestone, Red Bull has thrived on the long-term effects of a cultural process that began in the developed world almost immediately after World War II. Instead of settling for a place in the universe based on traditions, class, gender, nationhood, socio-economic status or cultural capital, people now actively sought to become the version of themselves they wanted to be.

This liberation process was given a great stimulus by increased income and a decrease in working hours, together with higher employment levels and the formalisation of individual rights in what has been called ‘the golden age of capitalism’ (OECD countries, especially, improved their economic performance radically in the 1950s and 60s) (see Marglin and Schor, 1992). With traditions no longer taken as given, as sociologists later would argue (see Giddens, 1994, p. 105), the way was paved for a variety of sub-cultures or counter-cultures, as people worried less about the economy. American sociologist Daniel Bell argued in a 1972 essay on ‘the cultural contradictions of capitalism’ that ‘the “social location” of the individual (his social class or other position) no longer determines his life-style and his values (Bell, 1972, p. 14). Many cultural movements are associated with sports – surfing in 1960s California, for example – as well as fashion, argot, music and lifestyle sports has begun to be seen as a research theme in recent decades, with studies of, say, skateboarding, rock climbing or windsurfing.

In spite of this, as Joseph Heath and Andrew Potter argue in their 2005 book *The Rebel Sell*, this was not a counter-cultural threat to capitalism. Long before the invention of Californian surf culture, there was a European value battle between the bourgeoisie and the bohemians in the 19th century. While the bourgeoisie valued hard work, self-discipline, restraint and the dominant institutions of society (Bell, 1972, p. 13), the bohemian ethic was ‘hedonistic, individualistic and sensual. It valued experience, exploration and self-expression and opposed conformity’ (Heath and Potter, 2005, p. 201). Up to a certain point in time, it was believed that these opposing value systems tried to colonise each other’s worlds, that’s to say that a bohemian lifestyle was a direct criticism of the capitalist system and that capitalism would pervert the bohemians.

The fact was that capitalism had long since ‘capitulated to the bohemian values’ because ‘cool’ – the epitome of bohemian values – was in effect an area of potentially new

markets, regardless of who inhabited it (Heath and Potter, 2005, p. 201). This did not mean the end of capitalism – quite the contrary because, although consumer choices changed, consumer behaviour did not. Products were still purchased, as buyers were driven by the same need for acquiring what have been termed ‘positional goods’, or ‘those things whose value depends relatively strongly on how they compare with things owned by others’ (Frank, 1985, p. 101; see also Hirsch, 1977). In the societal context, this created lifestyle clashes. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984) draws attention to the same mind-set to explain his theory of distinction. Based on an empirical study of French culture in the 1960s and 1970s, he explores the creation and distribution of people’s tastes – or distaste, to be more precise – and what kind of effects they have on class and social structure.

Most important here is the notion that tastes or positional goods are defined in contrast to what they are not. As Bourdieu points out, it is not really about good or bad taste in music, art, cars, candy or whatever, but which tastes current power relations see as legitimate and which as illegitimate. His conclusion is revelatory: ‘Aversion to different lifestyles is perhaps one of the strongest barriers between the classes’ (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 56). As, therefore, the economy of needs became the economy of wants, the counter-cultural lifestyle became powerful when the so-called baby boomers (those born after the Second World War) ‘graduated from the university and began to move into positions of authority, bringing their hippie values with them’ (Heath and Potter, 2005, p. 202). The result is that, Daniel Bell argued in 1972, ‘the protagonists of the adversary culture, despite their sincere and avowed subversive intentions, do substantially influence, if not dominate, the cultural establishment today’ (Bell, 1972, p. 18). Later ramifications were huge, according to Heath and Potter: ‘By the time this group had become the political, economic and cultural elite in the ‘90s, lying in its wake was a society transformed’ (Heath and Potter, 2005, p. 202).

While this ‘conquest for cool’, as it were, has been particularly researched in the US, it is not too much to say that we have seen similar tendencies across the whole spectrum of economically developed countries. Red Bull, for instance, did not make a move on the American market until 1997 when the energy drink was first launched there. Part of the reason, as noted above, is that the two logics – capitalist and bohemian – have merged, or were never parted in economically developed countries. Corporations, like counter-cultures, though perhaps not for the same reasons, still seek social distinctiveness and entrepreneurial edge. According to Heath and Potter, ‘cool people like to see themselves as radicals, subversives who refuse to conform to accepted ways of doing things. And this is exactly what drives capitalism’ (Heath and Potter, 2005, p. 209). Effectively this illustrates what we discussed at the beginning of this chapter with reference to Andrew Wernick’s *Promotional Culture*. It became everyday practice in the 1990s to be knowledgeable about the broader communicative context in which media operated.

Two steps ahead of this development, Red Bull guru, the Austrian Dietrich Mateschitz, who founded the company with Thai businessman Chaleo Yoovidhya in 1987, began building his brand empire based on the merger of the capitalist and bohemian logics described above. Originally called *Krating Daeng* (Thai for ‘Red Bull’, a Thai drink which Mateschitz found suited for overcoming jet-lag), it was brought to Europe, remixed and rebranded (*Economist*, 2002). Rather than indulging in traditional advertising, former toothpaste marketer Mateschitz took a much cleverer tack. Soon, the company sponsored snowboarders, action skiers and other wild sports enthusiasts, segmenting a particular demographic sector (*Der Spiegel*, 2011). Research has uncovered that people in this sector understand technology and utilise the Internet extensively, are goal-oriented, and value honesty and integrity. Often referred to as Generation Y – those born between 1977 and 1996 (Gladden and McDonald, 2005, p. 193) – they grew up with the concept of ‘lifestyle’ as a

guide to organising identity from birth, perhaps as a replacement of ‘sub-culture’. Sociologist Mike Featherstone wrote in 1991 that:

New heroes of consumer culture make lifestyle a life project and display their individuality and sense of style in the particularity of the assemblage of goods, clothes, practices, experiences, appearance and bodily dispositions they design together into a lifestyle (Featherstone, 1991, p. 86).

While there has been some animosity between those who despise a sell-out and those who accept that you can get paid to have fun, the general tendency throughout the 1990s – as Red Bull’s success shows – was not toward radical conflict between the two. Action sports combine sport, music and fashion into a lifestyle receptive to interactive branding (Gladden and McDonald, 2005, p. 193). Besides the sociological explanation provided by Heath and Potter above, another clarification, offered by a study of skateboarders, is that it was not necessarily just the sale that mattered, but who it was sold to. If the ‘seller’ and ‘buyer’ showed respect for the cultural characteristics of a lifestyle sport, it could turn into a highly fruitful cooperation (Beal and Wilson, 2004, p. 32).

Hence, while this has been the case of Red Bull and a variety of sports, in the context of this thesis, it is not primarily a battle between authenticity and commercialisation. Yet, even though I think there is a lot to learn from the F1 in terms of creating a great spectacle and improving the financial condition, replicating F1 with skin and hair is not necessarily the best way out for the WRC. Besides that, it would take two decades of corporate authoritarianism wholeheartedly supported by the FIA and it would go against the basics of promotional activities. Economists agree that ‘the promotional mix’ (the combination of advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, public relations, direct marketing, corporate

image and sponsorship; see also table 2.1) is used to achieve three objectives: the first is to present information to consumers as well as others. The second is to increase demand. The third, and most important in my view, is to *differentiate a product* (see Kurtz, 2010).

As I will show on numerous occasions in this thesis, one of the main reasons why people care so much about the WRC is the promise of a unique experience. As examples of the experience economy, WRC spectators, for instance, use money to spend time enjoying a series of memorable events that a company, or in this case, a promoter, stages – as in a theatrical play – to engage him or her in an inherently personal way (see Pine and Gilmore, 2011, pp. 3-4). According to economics professor Philip Kotler, one of the most prominent veterans of marketing research, recognition of this is of absolute importance:

In today's highly competitive marketplace, a product will not survive – let alone thrive – without some distinct competitive difference that sets it apart from every rival product. This is why smart companies rely on differentiation, the act of designing a set of meaningful differences to distinguish the company's offering from competitors' offerings (Kotler, 1994, p. 175).

The theory is that, if successful competition is reduced, comparisons with others in the same line of business are fewer, and you gain interest, income and stability (see Sharp and Dawes, 2001). In this context, Philip, a UK rally fan who I met at Rally Argentina, made an interesting comment: 'In my view rallying is more of a challenge than circuit racing as a result of its variety from stage to stage and from event to event. This makes it more enjoyable to watch and more of a test for the drivers. To me, the sport also involves a degree of knowledge and understanding (which I like) to fully appreciate the sport.' His comment exemplifies what differentiation means for marketers: that definitions of its purpose – 'the

specific application of marketing principles and processes to sports products and to the marketing of non sports products through association with sport' (Shank, 1999, p. 2) – needs to be matched with a clear perception of the sport's cultural substance. Remote locations 'in forests and mountains', as the above-mentioned Tim Barkey phrased it, for instance, do not necessarily make it 'hard to create a brand and hard for new and existing fans to see', either (Barkey, 2012). Imaginary or real elements of outdoors adventure (or at least recreation) off the beaten track are, in fact, highly appreciated by many of my informants.

The great outdoors of the WRC



A spectator camp beside one of the stages at Rally de France-Alsace, 2011. Photo: Hans Erik Næss

Besides the numerous examples of this in the following chapters, we can cite Rosemary, a female Irish rally fan: 'The best [thing] about spectating rallies is the atmosphere, huge

crowds, commitment to get up so early and wait in the outdoors in often rain and or sun just to get to see these top drivers.’ Jennifer, a Canadian rally fan who has travelled to European WRC events several times, put it well:

From rocks on the road to spectators uncomfortably close to the side to natural risks like cliffs, rock walls, narrow roads, stage conditions like asphalt, gravel and so on, and weather. It's the fact that is so unscripted that makes it so much more exhilarating to watch.

I also think Alejandro, whom we met at the start of this chapter, clutched what many seems to agree is the essence of experiencing a WRC rally:

If you are able to resist hours of waiting, extremely cold weather, rainy days, mountains of dust, sun burns, long walks and, despite all these things, be excited with every car pass, I'm sure that you have the rally fever inside.

One could argue that these people are above average on the fandom scale. But, as I will come back to in Chapter 7, most WRC spectators could be described as ‘fans’ (those who have a significantly higher emotional solidarity and abiding interest in their sport than ‘spectators’, see Schlesinger, 2013, p. 435) – albeit for various reasons. For commercial purposes, these insights are not revelatory, but they are of far greater importance than what has hitherto been the case. Promotional awareness of the distinctive substance of the WRC does not have to come at the expense of commercial viability, in fact, as Barkey also underlines, the economic condition of the WRC could be much more sustainable if its unique character were taken into account in promoting it. Given the political economy of event tourism strategies it is hardly

surprising to think that the WRC, like many other special events, have been ‘oversold’ in the past 20 years, since ‘many groups in the economy have their interests linked to the promotion of events’ (Dwyer, Forsyth and Spurr, 2003; Tranter and Lowes, 2009, p. 62). In Chapter 6, we shall experience a grave difference between those who underlined the economic benefits from the Australian WRC event and those who called the maths into question by pointing to cultural and environmental issues.

It is in the context of this cultural and social complexity outlined above that WRC Promoter GmbH may encounter trouble if it doesn’t include the importance of narratives in the sport. If ‘rally fever’ is what makes the WRC promotionally unique among fans, that is, a great interest in being outdoors as well as appreciating its unscripted characteristics and ever new occasions for story-making, then we simply need to understand how this ‘fever’ provides the negotiating basis for any promotional strategy between the promoter and the rest of the WRC community. It is thus not about disrespecting the F1 or stereotypically portraying action sport events as fundamentally different than rallying. It is about acknowledging the WRC’s traditions as promotional qualities because they differentiate the sport in a positive way. To do so, the FIA and the promoter must work as a team, not as separate divisions, simply because they can bridge the gap between traditionalists and modernists by executing specific powers. In the upcoming chapters I will therefore explore some of the most central examples of this claim.

Conclusion

In the context of a still-intensifying promotional culture, cluttered with opportunities for people to engage with their favourite sport (and associated lifestyles) on designated media formats 24/7, the WRC is faced with a huge challenge. Not only did the sport itself go

through a lot of technical and organisational changes from the late 1990s up to the present, it also had to adapt to a commercial paradigm which included accepting the role of the promoter having a say on the sport – like the introduction of the cloverleaf format. While the Playstation game was a success, other strategic moves faltered due to problems in carrying out the very difficult balancing act between turning the sport into an economically profitable business and harnessing the traditional elements that made it great to begin with through media reforms.

As this relationship seems to become amplified as we come close to today's WRC, the FIA and its promotional partner – now WRC Promoter GmbH – cannot move on without taking a more profound dive into what there is to cover in the first place. Merely adopting the business model of Formula 1 would run counter to the promotional concept of differentiation. Lessons from the case of ISC support this notion by underlining the difficulty of balancing the sporting heritage of rally with contemporary broadcaster desires and format changes seemingly inspired by both action sport events and Formula 1 races. Furthermore, it would clash with the sense of community in the WRC that is portrayed in the following chapters, as the members of this community appreciate experiences that are foreign to F1. I will let Nathalie, a Canadian WRC fan with extensive and successful experience as a co-driver in other rally championships, get the final word for now:

There are so many things that make this sport so incredible. It's like a drug for the people that are involved in it – we can never get enough! The speed and adrenaline rush, the combination of man and machine, the epitome of teamwork and the need for everything and everyone to be on top of their game in order to win, the feeling of knowing you aced a stage, the ultimate definition of 'trust', the uncertainty that

Mother Nature throws into the game, the camaraderie among competitors, the global community. All of this makes rallying the best sport in the world.

Finally, the WRC is – at least so far – unaccustomed to the corporate merger of bohemian and capitalist values that defined the sociological pillars on which Red Bull was founded. The fact that it continued to struggle at the end of 2013 makes the arguments put forward in this chapter even more compelling.

For that reason, we need to go back to the idea I introduced in Chapter 1: the WRC as a symbolic community of meaning, formed by a narrative constitution of identity. To make this tangible, we use the behaviourally induced concept of promotion as outlined in Chapter 1 as a point of departure to investigate the media production of the WRC and its feedback within a specified set of circumstances in the next chapter. Being the first of WRC's promotional arenas investigated in this thesis, that is a site of social interaction in the WRC from which the championship promoter can extract cultural content for promotional purposes, as well as use it as a venue for promoting the sport itself, it sets off a bigger discussion. As the promotional mechanism of any sport media production in a global mediascape of interactive entertainment, it brings forward a special dynamic when applied to different sports.

Connected to the issue of nostalgia, it is just as much a matter of whether actors manage to successfully communicate a certain kind of story based upon a combination of facts. As in other sports, there is both divergence and unity in how media producers and fans value the WRC and we thus need to address how this relationship comes about. The next chapter will therefore concentrate the media arena of the WRC.

Chapter 5: Imagining the story

Introduction

The first promotional arena of the WRC is the media. In the previous chapter, we learned that International Sportsworld Communicators/North One Sport (ISC/NOS) had partial success in meeting one of the general challenges, that of striking a balance between past and the present of the world rally championship in the promotional culture that emerged in the 1990s. In this chapter, I therefore first turn to WRC TV, the production unit of North One Sport, as it was the championship's 'key media agent' in 2010 (see Vösu, Kõresaar and Kuutma, 2008, p. 249), to investigate the issue further. Although much ink has been spilt in hyping up the 'YouTube generation', there are several reasons to why an official media producer is still important. The first is the sheer scale of the operation, which I will come back to below, which no amateur can compete with. The second is that, travelling the world along with the championship, they bring coherence to it, something that is impossible with user-generated content due to its fragmented nature. The third reason is that only an official producer (or similar specialist network) has the skills to 'create narrative pleasures' from playing director with uncertain variables, their conditional elements and incidental moments (Boyle and Haynes, 2009, p. 77).

On the other hand, it is necessary to include the interactive mode of communication with the WRC community through social media – that is, Internet based applications that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p. 59). As people use social media interactively and thus become a part of what has been named 'transmedia storytelling' – co-producers of a media development where hardware diverges and content converges in the production of memory (see Jenkins, 2006) – we need to

incorporate the reflections of the audiences on the representations in question (Kansteiner, 2002, p. 179). What's more, according to David L. Andrews and Andrew Grainger (2007, p. 488), we need to investigate this issue within the context of what they call a 'strategic sporting glocalization'. While 'glocalisation' is a term popularised by the sociologist Roland Robertson to denote the tailoring of goods and services on global basis to increasingly differentiated local markets (Robertson, 1995, p. 28), its sporting expression symbolises a process where media conglomerates have expanded as global businesses while their programmes have increasingly catered to local markets. In this development, its unifying logic is as central to the analysis as the separate expressions of it.

The question in this chapter is how this twin process of transmedia storytelling and glocalisation has been incorporated into the media production of the WRC and what kind of feedback it has generated. By coupling fieldwork at WRC TV during Wales Rally GB 2010 with an analysis of selected Internet forums where the progress of WRC coverage was discussed, I address the question of how and whether the media production units have managed to successfully communicate a certain kind of story based upon a combination of facts, transforming, as Paul Ricoeur writes, 'the succession of events into one meaningful whole' and making the story followable (Ricoeur, 1984, p. 67). Because nostalgia is very much in play as part of the above-mentioned media and glocalisation developments, the phrase 'back to the future' may be less oxymoronic than it sounds.

Rally and the media

Televised coverage of rallying was, like promotional efforts in general, with some rare exceptions, almost non-existent until the late 1960s. Prior to the invention of satellite broadcasts in the 1960s, the introduction of a cross-continental association of broadcasters in

1954 called Eurovision, under the auspices of the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), meant that sport was disseminated to a wider, and international, public, ‘the philosophy of which resonated with the desire of broadcasters to bring new exotic experiences into people’s homes on a transcontinental basis’ (Boyle and Haynes, 2009, p. 40). According to Robert Boyle and Richard Haynes’ great 2009 book *Power Play: Sport, the Media and Popular Culture*, UK national broadcaster BBC had by then made a series of deals with different sports, notably football and tennis, but in comparison with ITV, the largest independent UK broadcaster, the BBC looked conservative as ITV pushed hard with their ‘more lively, populist forms of programming’ (Boyle and Haynes, 2009, p. 39). Among other things, ITV ‘sought new avenues of televised sports including a mobile unit to film the Monte Carlo Rally for the Associated Rediffusion (AR) programme, *Cavalcade of Sport* in addition to ‘behind the scenes’ interviews with sport personalities in a programme called Sportstour’ (Boyle and Haynes, 2009, p. 40).

During the 1960s, motorsport occupied a rather small portion of these broadcasts, despite the inherent exoticism of its events, and coverage was largely random and nationally motivated, even years after the establishment of the world championship in 1973. Developments within sport sponsorship, too, in particular by corporations who viewed sponsorship as a way of securing television exposure, which dovetailed with sport’s need to secure television coverage in order to attract sponsors, had, for a long time, a much larger impact on the national public than international markets. Despite the fact that sports programming proved to be ‘cheap, popular and easily scheduled’ (Boyle and Haynes, 2009, p. 46), and furthermore, a way to avoid the ban on cigarette advertising, the promotional value of WRC remained underdeveloped for a long time. According to motorsport author Alan Henry, who has written, among other things, a biography of David Richards, this did not change much as the meagre attempts of advertising were ‘the promotional equivalent of

sloshing a can of paint up a wall; you just hoped some of it stuck' (Henry, 2005, p. 19). While other sports, especially Formula 1 after Bernie Ecclestone's media revolution in the 1980s (see Chapter 4), realised the potential range of marketing possibilities and integration into the global entertainment industry, the WRC continued with event-specific deals and short-sighted media arrangements well into the 1990s.

Besides the FIA's lack of interest, manufacturers cared mostly about their own achievements and seemed less occupied by the sport as a whole, and while most broadcasters hesitated to include this motoring adventure in their schedules, it was also a question of other motorsport actors not really taking advantage of the dramaturgical and visual elements in rallying. A turning point, however, came when British lubricant company Castrol released a film called *The Flying Finns* in 1968. It featured the 1968 edition of Rally Finland and concentrated on the duel between two Finnish drivers, Timo Mäkinen (European Champion in 1965) and Hannu Mikkola (later to be WRC Driver's Champion in 1983). Somewhat slow and perplexing in editorial style as well as low on camera quality by today's standards, the film was nevertheless one of the earliest attempts to systematically picture the stagey elements of rallying. Shot as a mix between documentary and action film, with drivers explaining what they are doing driving flat out combined with on-board and stageside footage of the cars, it showed several things unknown to the greater public at the time.

In my view, *The Flying Finns* and other rally films later sponsored by Castrol showed that rally, like almost any other sports, found its own way of staging action – note the 'duel' metaphor used by director Peter Whale and producer Frank Crawford – which could be exploited by the TV format. Even though it could never replace the actual presence, it seems by watching these films that the spectator experience became the lead motive when directors and producers came to work on translating hours of raw footage of the WRC into packaged broadcasts. More than four decades later, the legacy of these films was in many ways carried

on at WRC TV, the production unit of North One Sport, at Wales Rally GB 2010 in Cardiff. Rebadged as North One Sport in 2007 from what we formerly knew as International Sportsworld Communicators (ISC), it had a considerable amount of experience as many of the ISC people continued in the new company before it was given the boot by the FIA after the Antonov affair in 2011. In contrast to *The Flying Finns*, the operation in 2010 was at an entirely different level.

The media production hub at Wales Rally GB, 2010



Where the stories all comes together. Photo: Hans Erik Næss

WRC TV is not a separate broadcaster, but produces material to broadcasters that have a deal with the official promoter – among them MotorsTV – as well as the official websites of WRC. Inside the space station-like silver truck, a dozen computer screens flash, with tables

and numbers whirling all over them, whilst a big electronic whiteboard (the hub of all information, so to speak) provides raw material for all producers to access as cables run up and down the walls. I find the setting and the four or five people working in quite relaxed. They are doing their thing, keeping up with the information ticking in from stages, camera crews and reporters out at the stages. All raw media material is transferred back to these trucks and stored in one big server (the largest mobile server of its kind), so that all WRC TV edit suites can access this footage and begin the production of the programmes.

Despite what looks like information mayhem to an untrained eye Catherine ‘Cat’ Ding, Production Manager at WRC TV, is in full control from her spaceship-like desk at the back of the trailer. She tells me that their international broadcast partners operate out of the WRC TV International Broadcast Centre (IBC) inside the TV trucks at each event. The IBC offers facilities to customise world feed programmes and to tailor-make programming and content depending on commercial requirements, as well specialised facilities like editing. To maximise the relevant exposure of each WRC event, ISC works closely with each local broadcaster to facilitate their local TV operations. ‘Whether the broadcaster wants interviews with the national driver, mere rally action or on-board footage, scenery material or entertainment chats with the team boss, we can edit a programme that responds to their wish,’ Ding says. Yet, almost hidden away from the rest of the service park at the WRC event, which is located next to the futuristic Millennium Centre at Cardiff harbour, a multiplex with cinema, cafes and other stores, the media production unit does not make much of itself despite its being the single most important element in the promotional apparatus of the WRC.

On my way back to the service park, stumbling over cables in the shadow of the Millennium Centre, I meet up with Nick Atkins, head of WRC TV.⁴⁰ After having tapped coffee in paper mugs from gallon-sized cans, we enter a sort of canteen tent where I am introduced to how a WRC event is produced. And although he never mentions *Flying Finns*, it

seems like much of the original thinking from it is still valid when conveying the drama.

Before each WRC season, they plan a lot in advance, says Atkins, who was a sports reporter before he turned to the WRC in 2003:

For the season we have to work out our staffing requirements, both on and off event, as well as the number of cameramen, editors and edit suites that we will need on each rally, dependent on the schedule of programmes that the rights holders have sold to broadcasters around the world. Some of our content is world feed programmes and news feeds, some of our content is bespoke programming for individual broadcasters and some of our content is raw or edited material for individual broadcasters, sponsors, or manufacturers.

To do this around the world, just like with any WRC team, is a matter of detailed planning, Atkins elaborates:

The main challenges from the global perspective are logistical and technical – arranging transportation for 13 tons of television equipment to be transported around the world, sometimes with very limited time between events. The manufacturers have several car bodies to use at different events, but we have only one set of TV equipment, and great care has to be taken to avoid damage in transit. For European events all of our equipment is transported in trucks, driving from one event to another and often only returning to base in the UK for repairs or maintenance. For what we call long haul events – to Argentina, Mexico, New Zealand, Australia, Japan – all of the equipment has to return to the UK, be de-rigged from the trucks and reloaded into large flight containers.

Like most elements of the WRC, this isn't exactly a job for Joe Public. 'Even though it is hectic at almost every rally, I urge my staff to stay calm and focused,' Atkins says. Out in the stages, they must face all kinds of challenges, from wild animals to all kinds of weather to bullying policemen. When I did fieldwork at Rally Monte Carlo in 2013, two guys from the official camera crew came knocking on our door at Hotel des Trois Vallees on the Col de Turini stage because they were chased away from their chosen spots by the French *gendarmerie* who, I came to understand, discuss everything as if it were a debating contest. Not surprisingly, Atkins underlines, WRC TV's staff is characterised by experience – they know what they are doing, which is pivotal for such idiosyncratic production operations that travel 'around like a circus'. 'They aren't the regular office people', Atkins continues, 'working behind the computer 9-5, but people who are attracted by this kind of conditions,' and furthermore qualified to keep up the brand standards that WRC TV requires in its role in charge of the media production and promotion of the WRC series.

In 2010, they had just six crews to cover all the action and interviews at one event. Because safety rules mean they have to be in position two hours before a stage starts, they have to organise things with military precision. Camera schedule details include when a crew has to leave their hotel, directions to the camera positions, descriptions of the camera shot and photos to illustrate, and when and where motorcycle couriers will be for camera discs and tapes. In addition, an overview sheet helps producers easily see where crews are and when material will be back at the production unit. Much of this is also dependent on how the rally proceeds. During stages, the locations director informs crews by radio of split times and uses a tracking map to see if cars have stopped anywhere, whether they have crashed or have a mechanical problem, and they can also listen to team radios. Crews radio in anything they have seen (for example a bumper hanging off a car, signalling that something has happened)

and drivers submit end-of-stage interviews about problems they may have had, so the crews can look through the on-board tapes to find an incident. A team of four on-board technicians fits cameras in various positions inside and outside cars prior to the rally.

During the event, WRC TV collects content (action footage, interviews, location shots, feature footage, B roll) for all of the programmes they make during each event and also for programmes made in between events. In total, they film more than 250 hours of footage each rally – so all 600 camera discs and on-board camera tapes have to be named and numbered and logged in according to a coded system. The locations director makes notes of the best stories and the best camera shots on an electronic ‘whiteboard’ so all the producers and editors can plan their different programmes. When the discs and tapes get back from the stages, they have to be digitised into an editing system, which is based on a large server that all the edit suites can access simultaneously. Programme editors also make notes on a separate whiteboard to let the digitisers know which particular on-board tapes they want to go into the system. Programme editors also have access to graphics packages:

- (a) conventional TV graphics for leaderboards and name identification
- (b) telemetry graphics which works off data from the cars like speed, gears, revs and when the footbrake and handbrake is being used
- (c) 3D graphics – also working off the data produced by the car – to show what would be happening if the cars started the stage at the same time, or as an analytical tool to work out exactly why a driver crashed.

In total, they have seven edit suites producing a variety of material:

- (a) A 30-minute daily highlights programmes at the end of every day for several broadcasters around the world
- (b) A one-hour Access All Areas programme the following Friday, with additional colour location footage, in-depth analysis and behind-the-scenes features for more than 200 broadcasters round the world
- (c) Entire programmes for individual broadcasters, such as MTV3 in Finland
- (d) A live one-hour programme for worldwide broadcasters covering action on the final stage of the rally. This is called the Power Stage and gives the drivers a chance to compete for championship bonus points. This programme can be taken in its entirety by broadcasters (with build up and post-rally interviews) or they can build their own studio programme around the live action coverage
- (e) Interviews and programme segments for different international broadcasters
- (f) News feeds every day
- (g) Material for wrc.com
- (h) A one-hour magazine programme the week before each WRC event, which also includes highlights from the various support championships – the SWRC, PWRC and The Academy.
- (i) Mid- and end-of-season reviews, DVDs and a series of archive-based programmes
- (j) Promos for car manufacturers, rally organisers and sponsors.

To produce all this, Atkins finishes, they have a team of 15 full-time TV and production staff based in London – rising to around 100 at an event – with freelance cameramen, editors, engineers, truck drivers and helping hands, to produce international and bespoke highlights programmes, news feeds and, if ‘live’, the Power Stage programme on the final stage of the rally.

Transmedia storytelling and glocalisation

Later that day, while eating my delicious fish and chips, served from a van located in the service park beside the Monster Energy RV of American WRC driver and stuntman Ken Block (with his entourage who all look like they come straight out of the Hollywood series of the same title crowding around), the itinerary of the British WRC event gives me a hint of why it is considered one of the classics in the championship. Dating back to 1950, the 2010 edition marked the 50th anniversary of the first-ever special stage on what was then called the RAC Rally. To commemorate that event, the Welsh organisers gave stages 9 and 13 the name ‘Monument Hill’, the same name as that original stage – even though back then, it was driven in Scotland. While the scale and detailing of a WRC media production is impressive, the creation of Monument Hill signifies how the *resonance* of media production – in media professor Michael Schudson’s view ‘a public and cultural relation among object, tradition and audience’ (Schudson, 1989, p. 170) – needs to be measured against what transmedia storytelling is all about and how the glocal dimensions of rallying have been incorporated into the coverage. Throughout this chapter, Nick Atkins offers sympathetic thoughts on what WRC TV emphasised within the sport when it was producing the championship.

Yet, as I will argue below and in later chapters, it seems like both the FIA and the promoter has overlooked a central transformation of sport media of the 1990s that in the end may have affected the WRC TV’s production strategies. Initially, everything was done ‘by the book’. With the introduction of the ISC as sole promoter from 1996 onward, the FIA latched on to the development where governing bodies of sport employ agencies to ‘find exclusive sponsors for their sporting events, and to sell both the television and arena advertising rights to potential clients. Television exposure becomes of central importance both in generating

substantial rights revenue and providing global exposure for sponsors who in turn pay handsomely to have their company linked with a premier sporting event' (Boyle and Haynes, 2009, p. 49). In view of the frantic addition of new social media like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and the like, enabling a wide range of what has been called 'technologies of memory' due to their ability to create virtual encyclopaedias of any given theme (see Sturken, 2008, p. 75), Simon Long emphasises that the WRC has seen a revolution the last decade, as far as media coverage goes:

For a start, as recently as 10 years ago, when we bought the rights from Bernie Ecclestone there was a 30-minute [TV] programme that was delivered on tape three days after the end of each event. If you look at what we do now, we're creating 250 hours of content per event, we're producing programmes before the rally, daily shows, news roundups, reviews and so on. The content has been revolutionized, and so to has the broadcast universe. We're going out to 140-odd countries, the audience figures are up to a staggering 568 million viewers last year and the Internet is a major part of our media story telling. We now have an interactive game product out in the marketplace as well. So we've moved from being a peripheral, delayed programme, to one that now includes live coverage – with the Power Stages – live access via the Internet, live access via your mobile phone and ultimately a live gaming opportunity via your video gaming console/device. It's a revolution in the way the sport is communicated.⁴¹

With every WRC team, driver and manufacturer as well as the WRC apparatus itself now available on any social media of choice, the sport has turned itself into what media professor Henry Jenkins (2006) names transmedia storytelling. Originally coined as a term to understand the dispersal of fiction across various channels, each making a unique contribution

to a larger story, it explains a development in which hardware diverges while content converges. On the technical side, this meant that, as Long mentioned above and according to the WRC Fact Book (2009, p. 2), ‘WRC exposure is now not just limited to TV programs but encompasses a whole multi-media offering and specially tailored content for Internet, mobile and TV platforms.’ Equally important here, but seemingly much less incorporated into the WRC’s promotional vision, is that transmedia storytelling is not the same as taking content and ‘repurposing’ it for different media. Apart from the specific script involved, as well as honing the art of parsing out content to reach various needs and groups through a try-and-fail process, the main intention has never been to sell consumers a ready-made story. Instead, it is an invitation to become co-participants to expand the narrative (see Rutledge, 2011).

To explain why the WRC’s promoters may have underestimated the power of this process, it is useful to underline how glocalisation is now used to augment the production of cultural pluralism (or what the anthropologist Ulf Hannerz names ‘organization of diversity’) against the background of the promotional culture addressed in the previous chapter (Robertson, 1995, p. 31; Hannerz, 1996, p. 35). A year before ISC’s promotional turn in 1996, David Morley and Kevin Robins addressed in their book *Spaces of Identity: Global Media, Electronic Landscapes and Cultural Boundaries* the double role of broadcasting. Following the de-regulation of media industries in the early 1990s, many broadcasters were no longer tied to public service duties, enabling a regime where trans-national mergers or cooperation became the norm. Consumers, rather than citizens, were now the main targets. These consumers, as in other areas of life, faced a new level of reflexivity issues on identity, culture and community since media was imperative in making the world larger (by expanding the communication possibilities) and smaller (by reinforcing localism as a market opportunity) at the same time.

Promotional agencies elsewhere have not left this development untouched. In a society where ephemerality has apparently replaced stability, where we in the Western world are 'living after the end of tradition', according to sociologist Anthony Giddens (2002, p. 43), traditions are reconceptualised in a positive way by marketers to achieve, for instance, sporting management objectives. The authenticity issue is also at stake here, though. Clothing gear company Adidas' sponsorship of the New Zealand 'All Blacks' rugby team was an 'overt attempt' to craft an artificial heritage within New Zealand society, particularly through associations with famous national rugby teams of the past (Amis and Cornwell, 2005, p. 6). At the same time traditions still justify themselves in sport, meaning that they do not necessarily have to be explained, as opposed to other areas of society where somebody has to convince others of their legitimate presence (Giddens, 1994, p. 105). Although it is seen by some as drained of context and authenticity, this understanding of sport also creates a forceful link between the past and the present that makes it possible to combine the two for management purposes. A prerequisite for doing so is that the promoter takes into consideration the narrative evaluations that are found on the WRC's promotional arenas.

By supplying a sense of identity, a symbolic homeland even, on the one hand, and fragmenting the public sphere as media houses were moulded into transnational businesses on the other, this new media regime paradoxically revamped local ties in a global context. According to David L. Andrews and Andrew Grainger the producers of mega-sport spectacles into the 2000s, 'adopt both interiorised and exteriorised forms of glocalisation, in that they simultaneously customise coverage to internal local markets, while embellishing it through recourse to aspects of external local difference' (Grainger and Andrews, 2007, p. 488). In many sports, nostalgia, as discussed in the previous chapter, becomes a key method of exploiting people's need for belonging in unruly times at the same time as they, in fact, often addressed 'geographically dispersed segments of different national or other communities'

Morley and Robins, 1995, pp. 3-4). Greg Ramshaw (2005, p. 2) draws attention to how branches of large television networks, such as US specialty channel Classic Sports Networks (founded in 1995 and rebranded ESPN Classic in 1997), are dedicated to replaying great performances and games, 'propagating (or even creating) nostalgia for the sporting past'.

Examples of such glocal expressions also occur everywhere in the WRC. At Rally Monte Carlo in 2013, besides being the 40th anniversary of the rally – it was the inaugural rally of the WRC in its current format – much attention was given to the 'apple pie stage' between Le Moulinon and Antraigues. In Antraigues, a small village on the heights of Vals-les-Bains, there is a patisserie called 'La Remise'. Run by Yves Jouanny and his sister Yvette for more than forty years, it has become the scene of a peculiar WRC ritual: drivers stopping to have an apple pie (*tarte aux pommes*). Nobody really seems to remember how or why this became a tradition, but I was told by one of the locals that it was former WRC driver Jean-Claude Andruet and his teammate, who during 'recce' in the 1973 Rally Monte Carlo, stopped and asked if they could have a snack. As rumour spread, and as the recce was a more social event back then than it is today, other drivers began to stop by to have a piece of this unforgettable apple pie. Four decades later, it has turned into a global media event whenever the WRC drivers stop – not at recce, but after the stage – to be served the home-made pastry.

According to Morley and Robins, this development contain more than a simple reproduction of nostalgic rituals, in fact, the 'insight into this relational logic between enterprise and heritage then helps us to understand the neurotic ambivalence that is, we believe, at the heart of contemporary cultural transformation' (Morley and Robins, 1995, p. 118). It is not a matter of pitting authenticity against commercialisation but, as the previous chapter concludes, about marrying the two. To Morley and Robins, as well as Andrews and Grainger, this development primarily had negative consequences as it deprived local culture of its authenticity while benefitting large media corporations who were only in it for the

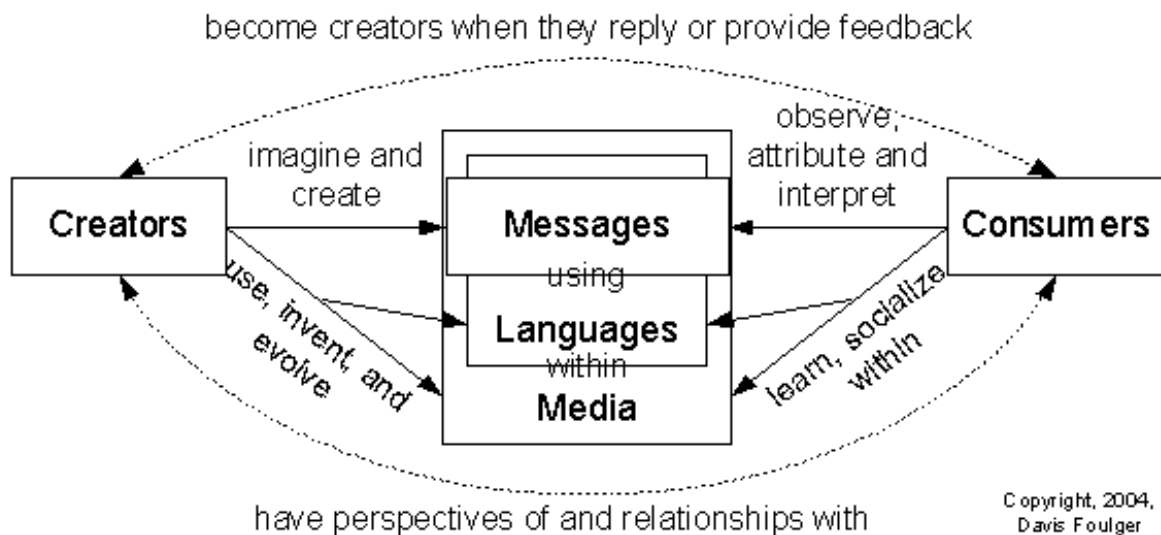
money. Given the political context they use for investigative purposes (the West versus the Rest, the EU community, etc.), I at least think the first set of authors is right in some aspects. I disagree, however, that the response from local forces to this development must be ‘a nostalgic, introverted and parochial sense of local attachment and identity’ (Morley and Robins, 1995, p. 118). For the promotional understanding of the WRC, these otherwise ambiguous forces could be happy bedfellows given a more profound integration of media consumers.

Despite the power of big media conglomerates in deciding how and what is served as entertainment in the mediascape, successful distribution of media content increasingly depends, according to Jenkins, on the active participation of consumers. Our analysis of rallies in Chapter 6, for instance, resembles the findings of Sean O’Connor who in his analysis of the ISC’s media strategies in the early 2000s, argued that ‘the local angle’ of any WRC event was disregarded in favour of the homogeneous ‘Global Entertainment product’ (O’Connor, 2004, p. 190). Likewise, as I will discuss in Chapter 7, there is an untapped potential here when it comes to promotional engagement with the spectators’ experiences and the narratives they circulate before, during and after a rally. In the context of this Chapter, Alvin Toffler’s term ‘prosumers’ from 1980 has been reinvented to describe the rapidly expanding interactivity enabled by the proliferation of social media like YouTube and Facebook; networked individuals who simultaneously can produce, distribute and consume their own goods or services (Santomier and Hogan, 2013, p. 179).

The emergence of prosumers, independent and Internet savvy as they are, therefore has potentially deep impact on how the WRC use social and traditional media. According Tapscott (2009) the emergence of prosumers may even, at least in the future, replace the four Ps of marketing – product, price, place and promotion – with the ABCDE model (anyplace, brand, communication, discovery and experience). Our online forum study below,

consequently, calls for the use of what American media researcher Davis A. Foulger names ‘the ecological model of communication’. In this model, as shown in the image below, the roles of consumer and creator are, according to Foulger, highly reflexive which results in a specific communication mode.

Figure 5.1 Davis Foulger’s ecological model of communication



Source: Adapted from Foulger, 2012, p. 8.

Whether they watch TV or use YouTube, people become creators when they reply or supply feedback to other people, online or on site. Despite the massive production of footage and information from WRC TV, as described above, there is in the WRC community always a need for more or different media experiences. Consequently, creators, for instance, those who upload their own clips, become consumers, or ‘prosumers’, when they make use of feedback to adapt their way of profiling the sport (see Santomier and Hogan, 2013). In some cases one could concur with Gillin (2007, p. i) who claim that ‘the real influencers are no longer marketing experts, nor the traditional media that has always controlled and filtered marketing messages, but millions of ordinary people who are determining in direct and powerful ways

what people hear, say, and believe'. With the emphasis on nostalgia as a narrative pillar introduced in Chapter 2, it is interesting that several scholars have noted this reflexivity as 'prosumers' may have an effect on the historical imagination:

It is clearly important to address an environment where the past is sensuously rather than critically evoked, where the meanings available are juxtaposed and jumbled rather than represented in an integrally cumulative way and instantly to hand rather than represented through a process which itself exists through time (Pickering and Keightly, 2006, p. 930).

User-generated feedback or content uploads to file-sharing sites like YouTube or Vimeo spearhead a development in which the use of multimedia shapes the WRC's narrative constitution of identity. Not only do these clips and experiences influence the storybook of the WRC, as many fans go to YouTube instead of the official media producer when searching for WRC coverage and thus gain a different idea of its history; they also affect the spectator experience. One example is a research experiment from Rally Finland 2005, hypothesising that multimedia interaction may produce new forms of spectatorship (Jacucci et al., 2005). Researchers from Helsinki Institute of Information Technology, through a local travel agency, recruited two participant groups two months before the rally. A small town group consisted of seven males who were over 30 years old (group A) and a capital area group (group B) consisted of three males and one female of about 25 years of age (and a dog). Both groups had also attended the rally previously.

Eight pre-paid Sony Ericsson K700i phones – four for each group – were utilised. After the rally, the phones were collected and all of the pictures, video clips and MMS content were extracted for analysis. In all, the participants shot 527 pictures, producing numerous

findings, of which three are relevant here. First, fewer than half of the pictures were related to the (sporting) event, but the aspects of ‘being there’ were emphasised nonetheless. According to the research group, ‘this observation provides more evidence for our claim that spectatorship is not about sitting alone, experiencing events, and recording and sharing them; the active construction of the experience is important as well’ (Jacucci et al., 2005, p. 210). Second, a large proportion of the pictures clearly represent emotional scenes having their meaning in the social interaction triggered by the picture. Third, the pictures represent a large spectrum of the social networks involved in the spectator experience, ranging from the self and group members to strangers and drivers. The sociality of the spectator experience is well illustrated by the fact that 44 per cent of the pictures involved people as their object (Jacucci et al., 2005, p. 211).

Even more important than the discovery that new technology makes being a spectator a qualitatively different experience from what it was in the 1980s, is as introduced above the use of social media as a way of debating the sport’s identity. Based on two forum debates on motorstv.com and motorsportforums.com, including a number of discussion threads, we shall now see how Foulger’s ecological model of communication works in practice. As to why exactly these two forums were selected, MotorsTV was picked because it struck a three-year deal with North One Television in 2010 as the European supplier of satellite-aired coverage, connecting this responsibility directly to a forum where others can discuss their work. In addition, Motors TV Head of Programming and Acquisitions, Frédéric Viger, and Simon Hill, the commentator of the programmes in early 2010, were active participants in the forum – Viger actually initiated the first two threads included in the analysis, while the latter was initiated by a Norwegian forum user. Motorsportforums was chosen because it is one of the biggest forums for all kinds of motorsport discussions, as well as a very popular site, documented by the number of views. Based on discussions with other forum users, both these

forums are considered 'tidy' communication arenas where great store is set by matter-of-fact discussions, proven by collective moderation if the discussion got out of line.

The first thread at MotorsTV starts off with a kind of newsletter, before Viger comments on the editing of the material, most notably the introduction of more in-car cameras:

I've always felt WRC's on-board footage is state of the art, and while mainstream broadcasters need to make a mainstream show our channel is all about the hard-core fans. Those viewers are willing to BE the driver when watching the coverage on their flat-screens, and that is just what we're going to offer them. More than 50% of our highlight packages in fact will be dedicated to onboard, giving a brand new feeling to the show.

Thread two seems like a follow-up to other threads discussing WRC coverage (as noted, there were a lot of them), again initiated by Viger:

As already stated in another post, just wanted to ensure you all that we are, and I personally am, hearing all your comments...

The last thread-starter is clearly dissatisfied with the WRC coverage so far and wants to create a serious discussion on the top 5 changes to be done in order to turn things around.

Pls list here what in your opinion are the 5 most important improvements Motors TV could do in their coverage of WRC in 2010? Pls be constructive and realistic on issues that they could improve short term. Long term issues we will take in another thread!

The thread on Motorsportforums starts off in a similar way:

There has been a lot of discussion on how Rally is covered today and has been in the past. Motors TV has been given a lot of uppercuts on how their first weekend went, but are learning. North One Sport (<http://www.northonetv.com/>) owns the rights, and has a contract with FIA, that also say that they will develop WRC to a Premier Brand (<http://www.crash.net/world+rally/New...mpionship.html>) What do they need to do to get there? What media to use to reach that goal, and how to use them: TV, Internet, Mobile phones and so on? If you could have your saying, what would you like to have to improve your experience using new technology?

With these point of departures, the discussions quickly blossomed into a bouquet of opinions on everything from camera angles to image quality, as well as the editorial priorities made by the producers and what deep promotional concerns lack of proper coverage might bring. The long-term/ short-term distinction was quickly abandoned. Besides that, and the recurrent claim of free-to-air coverage as a way of satisfying both the hard-core fan and the casual viewer, discussions also revealed that the problems were bigger than whatever company was producing the footage. Coverage was not only a matter of technicalities – like the discussion below between Viger and other users on the quantity of onboard footage – but a part of conveying the very essence of the sport. As such, the following discussion shows why we must include David Carr’s main criterion for how a group narrative comes together: the story must be shared ‘if it is to be constitutive of a group’s existence and activity’ (Carr, 1991, p. 163). Consequently, we need to unravel the relationship between the story itself and the way it is communicated, as Carr elaborates:

Other participants may not tell the story, but they must believe or accept it as the genuine account of what the group is and what it is doing. Thus, in the relation between formulating and communicating, on the one hand, and receiving or accepting a narrative account, on the other, the group achieves a kind of reflexive self-awareness as a subject that is analogous to what we have found in the individual ... In this sense, where such a community exists it is constantly in the process, as an individual is, of composing and re-composing his own autobiography. Like the autobiography of an individual, such a story seeks a unifying structure for a sequence of experiences and actions (Carr, 1991, p. 156, 163).

To rebuild this unifying structure of the story that Carr speaks of, communication researcher Willem Hesling gives us a tool when he writes that, from a semiotic viewpoint, sports broadcasts shouldn't be regarded as transparent reflection of reality in front of the camera, but as a coded, textual construction (Hesling, 1986, p. 175). He then outlines four such textual codes which are often used to formulate sports events in television pictures: length of the broadcast, camera positions, the basic shot and the camera's field of interest. While he discusses football, tennis and cycling, I will argue that they are relevant in the context of the WRC as well. After I have organised their opinions by these codes, I will turn to what kind of coverage alternatives the forum users deploy.

Four codes of coverage analysis

The first code is length of the programme. According to Hesling, not every second of a sports event is shown on TV. The pictorialisation of the event, in terms of hours or minutes, is

selected on the basis of the sport's inherent competition qualities. In the WRC, this used to be solved by using four different standard formats on the broadcasts, at least in the period 2007-2010, catering to different demands:

- *WRC Event Highlights*. This is a 52-minute wrap-up with all the best action from the four days of the event, including on-board camera footage, interviews, behind-the-scenes features and Virtual Spectator animations
- *WRC Rally Magazine* (later named *Inside WRC*). This is a 26-minute programme available on Friday, one week prior to each event. Each programme over the season includes a summary of the action from the previous WRC event, driver interviews, historic footage, behind-the-scenes features and a general update of all recent WRC news, including an insight into the upcoming event
- *WRC All Access*. This is a lifestyle entertainment programme focused on a behind-the-scenes experience of WRC life, both on and off the road. These programmes focus on all elements of each country visited including culture, food, people, attractions, as well as the WRC event itself
- *WRC Archive Programmes*. Using archive footage dating back to the 1970s, programmes under different titles feature here - "WRC's Craziest Moments", "WRC's Greatest Cars" and "WRC's Greatest Rallies"

However, as most of the aired WRC footage is re-edited by national or specialist broadcasters, it is difficult to tell how much of each programme format the online forum discussants have seen. Regardless of format, it can be said, as Hesling does about cycling, that 'television focuses on the supreme moments of victory and loss,' whereas team work 'which is not so spectacular but often decisive for the development of the race, is usually kept out of the

picture' (Hesling, 1986, pp. 181-82). Through this focus, the absence of the road to glory – which in many cases, in cycling and rally, is as important as the result – is potentially destructive of the story. One forum user posted this comment:

The biggest failing in your coverage is any sense of cohesion to the story that is The Rally. You're telling a story here. You need to tell it clearly and consistently through words, video and graphics/info – otherwise you lose the viewer. (OldSchoolWRCFan, Motors TV, thread 2)

Another user said this:

Most importantly...as many others have stated... Rallying is about a story... and you are the story tellers. (RallyGuru, Motors TV, thread 3)

Similarly, a third user emphasised the editing as crucial to display the competition:

Edit the coverage better than the way you have done ... I hate the coverage on Dave but like I have already said on another post at least they know how to peice the covearge together to tell a story of how the rally is going over the three days. (gogsie, Motors TV, thread 3)

These three comments all want improvements in how the story is told. More than minutes and hours, really, it seems to be a matter of using different lengths or formats to convey the evolution of the rally, or the championship. And while WRC TV has done so, to a large degree through their standardised programme formats, forum users agree on the claim that

there still is a missing element in how the various types of footage could be better pieced together narratively.

The second code is camera position. In football and tennis, Hesling argues, ‘the lines of the field are never crossed: the cameras are physically placed outside the lines.’ At cycling races, or rallies, however, the partition between competition ground and camera location is less marked. Because of this, Hesling argues further, ‘an optical involvement grows more or less automatically between competition and televiewer, because the latter can experience the race from the inside as it is’ (Hesling, 1986, pp. 182-83). Above, we found that Frederic Viger of MotorsTV held this view, but in the WRC, the use of in-car cameras to do this has for a long time been contested field of debate. One user, stating that he has ‘watched Eurosport coverage of EVERY rally starting with the 2003 season,’ found the recent WRC coverage very bad with specific reference to Viger’s initial comment about more on-board cameras:

DUDE -- VIDEO GAME PLAYERS ARE WILLING TO 'BE' THE DRIVER. Would you watch skiing from the perspective of the ski? Golf from that of the golf ball? A bike race from the handlebars? NO!!! ... We want to see the spins from spectators point of view, the outside of the car, or the air. We want to see the raw speed fly by us, the car sail overhead from a jump, the amazing sliding and turns. You proved that you have the camera placement every time you showed video of the fans watching the action. It sucks for us that we didn't get to see it too. I'm willing to bet the sponsors want to see the outside of the cars more as well -- they paid a lot for those stickers!
(tangleridge, Motors TV, thread 3)

Other users moderated this position by referring to in-car camera footage from the past, which really was an asset to the overall coverage. Rather than being in favour of or against on-board

cameras, it seems like their use is dependent on quality (one contributor mentioned the weird experience of seeing two heads bobbing up and down in dark blue) and placement inside the car. Looking back at drivers' faces was almost unanimously shunned, whereas fish-eye views out the front window generally was positively received as long as they did not occupy too much of the length of the programme (the 50 per cent initiated by Viger was way past maximum). Here, the commentators flesh out what Hesling writes about the variation of viewpoints and why it fulfils an informative function as well: 'Television (as well as radio) is the best means of keeping a close track of the development of a competition. So even though television shows a very incomplete picture, it does it in such a way that the viewer gets more information from it than the spectator along the road' (Hesling, 1986, p. 183). While the narrative element of this was dealt with above (and will be again, in more detail, below), it is necessary to include this function as it solves one of the most obvious problems with rallying – you can't always see who is in the lead.

The third code is 'the basic shot', according to Hesling, 'that shot which functions more or less as the ideal general shot of a sports event,' becoming 'the stable centre from which the game is shown and around which the other shots cluster'(Hesling, 1986, p. 184). For the WRC, as with cycling, this shot is 'the action shot' – a sequence showing the cars at speed in designated places, as Nick Atkins talked about earlier in this chapter. Rather than a basic shot, WRC is composed of several variations on the basic shot unified by the logic of the ideal of giving 'the viewer the illusion that he is directly involved in the game' (Hesling, 1986, p. 184). Here, the ideal shot, according to the forum discussions, would be that of a spectator:

I was brought up an "anorach" of rallying and I will always be one, but come on Motors TV, get your act together your reports were awful. Like many others on here

I was shocked at the sound, the editing and the sheer crapness of the shows, yes we want to see the battle at the front and the closeness between the two leading but we also want to see the cars and the battles further down the field, we want to see the emotions of Henning (who by the way has never been seen yet on the reports after two days), we want to follow the rally as we where all promised and hoped for, we want to see a programme dedicated to the fan, the guys who go and watch it live when they can and know what rallying is all about. (gogsie, Motors TV, thread 1)

By taking the spectator's role, not least by showing more cars than just the top three, television ideally mimics the experience of being there. As I will come back to in Chapters 6 and 7, this experience of *being there*, preferably 'up close and dirty', is part and parcel of what constitutes the identity of WRC community members. Let me give you a brief example from one of my spectator informants in advance. In Sarah's view:

Rallying has a feeling of adventure and level of access which very few forms of motorsport provide. Without the confines of a single venue, it's possible get up close and personal with the cars and even sometimes the drivers. The adventure itself could be to camp in the forest and wake up to the sounds of rally cars or jump in a car with your closest friends and share in the journey. The sport has a very visceral presence which is able to captivate audiences in person and watching at home.

It should noted that some forum members emphasised the need for a much more multi-media approach to fans, giving them the opportunity to enjoy a coffee at the breakfast table while catching up with the rally, but nevertheless, the desired element when seeing it online or on TV was an experience as close to being there as possible – and then some (repeats,

commentaries, etc.).

The fourth code is the camera's field of interest. By this, Hesling asks the question, 'which aspect or which moment is high-lighted by the cameras?' (Hesling, 1986, p. 185). On this matter, forum users predominantly complained about the inability to experience the entire rally. As previous chapters note, this kind of discussion cuts to the bone of what the WRC should be or not:

...because of the apparent desperation, through ever shorter routes with repeated stages, to turn rallying into some kind of close relative of rallycross or circuit racing. It completely, utterly misunderstands the nature of the sport, and — while different opinions are all well and good — I have found it rather disheartening in recent days to read so many apparent fans of the sport saying they think the days of long routes belong only in the past. To me, this too represents a lack of appreciation of what rallying should be about. Not every event, not every stage, need be a 100 per cent flat-out blast. And, certainly, when shown on TV as recorded highlights this never need be commentated on "as live" (BDunnell, Motorsportforums)

Another user wanted to include the competitors more broadly and exemplify through his comment the glocal dimensions discussed earlier in this chapter:

Only showing the top 4 or 5 also makes for extremely boring television, because the way the WRC is at the moment we will be seeing basically the same 4 or 5 drivers every rally. But more importantly, it really does not do justice to the character of the sport; in the 90's for example, you would see the coverage taking in drivers from across the spectrum, from local specialists like Aghini and Cunico, to Puras in Grp N,

to the F2 cars. I think we would be going down a very dangerous (and boring) road just covering the top 5 cars. That is the same sh*te that NOS has been doing for the last few years, and look where that has got us....(RAS007, Motorsportforums)

These comments underpin Hesling's notion that even if television coverage of cycling is most concerned with the mass-spurt and the finish, including the combination of replay and slow motion, it often happens that passing the finish is just a formality because the stage winner is already known. In rallying, positions can change many times during the course of an event. And similar to cycling, where a cyclist in principle can win a race without ever having finished first, this means forcing a shift of attention from the final stage to 'the performance itself which lies at the basis of that result'. What the comments above signal is a desire to experience more the global aspects of a WRC event, not just a mirror of the top five at any given moment. As a result, Hesling writes, the development of the race has a higher entertainment value than the finish (Hesling, 1986, pp. 185-86).

Coverage alternatives

Hesling's textual codes provide us with an analytic grid that makes it easier to understand the main critical responses on these forums. For example, if the producers are willing to listen to the fans, something Viger demonstrates that they are, there is a good chance of making fan-satisfying adjustments to the coverage according to these four codes. Several of the commentators actually invite a dialogue, as the production relation between WRC TV and MotorsTV is unclear to many:

Not sure what quality control Motors TV has before a show is aired, but it might be an

idea to check it better before the rest of us see it. Something has to be done, otherwise the WRC audience is lost for you. But pls explain to us the facts, so we may understand your challenges! (Gordini, Motors TV, thread 3)

This dialogue requires if not an agreement, then at least a sensitivity for the historical elements that, at least according to the forum participants, define the sport. This brings me to the first main response, as it implies a wish for more focus on what I call the storyline – the combination of things pushing the story to evolve – of the WRC. Instead of piecing together elements mechanically, the common claim among forum discussants is that the plot, if we follow Seymour Chatman's (1978, p. 31) elegant separation between *story* (the content of a narrative) and the *plot* (how the narrative is told), has been lost. I introduced some examples of this view above, but, in his comment, another forum participant, combines the principles of transmedia storytelling and the glocalisation of rallying:

No great movie has ever gotten that way without someone to assemble the footage in the cutting room at the end of the day. Every great director from Steven Spielberg to John Huston knew it was a good idea to make the editor your best friend. Since we are talking about a visual medium here, the principles remain the same. If you have the best shots from a stage, the most dynamic footage of a jump, crash, crowd reaction, etc., no matter of the timing of each of those moments is not gracefully assembled into a story that the viewing audience can identify with, want to be a part of, or be pulled into... The WRC is an opportunity. It's like no other sport on the planet. From rally to rally you have the opportunity to immerse your audience in the local culture where each rally takes place. You have some of the most robust street legal machinery on public roads blasting around the world in the most diverse

conditions any sport has to offer. You have multiple cultures working together to make a massive event possible, and in this very troubled world, that should be capitalized on (RallyCat909, Motors TV, thread 1)

In other words, the geographical and cultural diversity of rallies, as well as the very action, provides the WRC with many arenas of action to construct an exclusive story each time based upon on a plot recognisable at all events. Here, it is necessary to maintain and develop a visual agenda, an argument that goes way beyond forum debates. In 2013, Reinhard Klein, one of the most prominent WRC photographers for three decades, bemoaned how the photographic potential of the sport has been sorely underestimated:

It's quite amazing that all the PR people talk about maximum exposure and at the same time we shrink visual exposure. Look at what the Dakar does visually in Argentina compared to what the WRC does. The visual element has no lobby in this sport. Why does the tourist industry of Sardinia not insist on running a stage so the world can see the actual coastline of the famous Costa Smeralda in the footage, for example? (cited in Peacock, 2013)

Interconnected with the first is the second response, where forum participants provide ideas on how to create a story through suggestions of where to look for narrative elements – in the past. As I will come back on many occasions in this thesis, the tendency to compare the best of the past with the worst of today undoubtedly pushes the nostalgia button here as well:

In short.... the WRC has problems MUCH larger than Motors TV coverage which is actually incredibly easy to fix. The greater problem is keeping 'Non-rally experts'

away from a sport they know nothing about and bringing back in people who actually remember what rallying was like BEFORE the year 2000, 1990 and even 1980.... With the technology available today, it should not be a problem at all to create a level of coverage, a type of product and an EXPERIENCE, that the WRC has been lacking for nearly 10 years.’ (RallyGuru, Motors TV, thread 3)

I think this quote represents one significant take on the media glocalisation discussion we had earlier in this chapter. It is not about whether the cars have 1.6 litre or 2.0 litre engines, or whether the amount of on-board footage is more or less than 50 per cent, but whether the epic nature of rallying is defining its media coverage. Forum discussions like these typify how memory – learned or lived – on this ‘epic nature’ works in two ways. On the one hand, it entails effects that condition the future, on the other, it is a tool that orders, reconstructs and interprets the legacy of the past, writes Paolo Jedlowski, ‘with expectations and hopes also helping to select what best serves the future’ (Jedlowski, 2001, p. 30). Exploiting this relationship therefore means combining the global and technological media developments with ‘the local angle’, not only as contemporary diversity, but also historical diversity. Elsewhere, this relationship is not hard to find. In Cardiff, where I did fieldwork on the media production, what I call ‘cultural heritage artefacts’ (which I will discuss in Chapter 8) were even on display.

Behold the past, support the future



Outside the local radio broadcaster, right next to the service park at Wales Rally GB 2010, an old rally Saab was put on display. From the looks of it – especially the door number – it could have been the car Erik Carlsson won the RAC rally (later the British WRC event) with in 1960, but was probably a replica. Photo: Hans Erik Næss

The presence of *nostalgia*, discussed in Chapter 2 as a key integrative mechanism of the WRC narrative, becomes apparent on these forums as it creates ‘a romance with one’s own fantasy’ (Boym, 2007, p. 7) in addition to being a popular way for people to derive private pleasure from recounting collective sport narratives that have helped them define who they are as members of a group (Duquin, 2000, p. 484). The apparent contradiction of looking backwards in order to move forward in terms of coverage, for example, is pointed out by one of the commentators:

There is kind of a paradox around here in that most agree something drastic needs to change in the WRC regarding capturing footage but most here seems to revel in the “good old days” without much regards as to what it will take to make the WRC appealing to Generation Z. (olschl, Motorsportforums)

However, as investigated in the previous chapter, the question is whether one should cater to the lifestyle desires of new generations, at least in its categorical form. Furthermore, nostalgia is evoked not only by certain cars or drivers from the past in an elegiac sense, but in a positive direction by other relationships that form the identity of the sport. Historian Svetlana Boym makes a highly interesting claim in connection with this discovery: ‘a cinematic image of nostalgia is a double exposure, or a superimposition of two images—of home and abroad, of past and present, of dream and everyday life. The moment we try to force it into a single image, it breaks the frame or burns the surface’ (Boym, 2007, p. 7). Promotionally, going ‘back to the future’ is neither as crazy, nor paradoxical as it sounds.

The final main response concerns a discussion of how the WRC has been caught up in external factors, like the cloverleaf format, introduced by the promoter around 2000 to make the championship more TV- and spectator-friendly:

The fans and competitors are clearly sick to death of this “clover-leaf” format of Rallying that was introduced by the money merchants at ISC who wanted to create racing style arenas where scandalous pricing is charged to stand in a wet field!! THIS IS NOT RALLYING... Bring back the days of friends piling into a car together with maps and getting to as many stages as they could...’ (RallyGuru, Motors TV, thread 3)

While some found the new format – which was followed by the single service area in 2005 – a much-needed simplification of access and event structure, others claimed that this homogenisation of format for the sake of television deprived the WRC of its sporting variety. FIA’s General Manager of the WRC, Michèle Mouton, claimed in an interview I did with her that this transformation had been the most decisive one in the history of WRC:

It was done to help the media, television in particular, and for sure the spectators so it was easier for them to follow. The rallies today are maximum 1500kms long with 350-400kms stages at maximum. 30 years ago there were lasting a week night and day with 3500kms long and 1000-1200kms of stages!’⁴²

A big part of the format change was, as mentioned by Mouton, the shortening of the rally stages, with the result that they became more like sprints than endurance events, affecting both the development of cars and the way they were driven. Picking up on this, another user commented:

I've been moaning about the abbreviated “central service” based format for years now to anyone that'll actually listen. Reuse of stages and shortened rally-stage distances make me sad. It's stripped the soul from WRC. I've been following the WRC for around 18 years now and for me 2001 was the last year of a proper championship...and even then it was on the decline. Bring back the epic nature of rallying! Safari rally anyone? (OldSchoolWRCFan, Motors TV, thread 3)

Again, this view was far from exclusive to the forum debates. Two motorsport historians described the change from Group B to the subsequent Group A (which lasted from 1987 to

1997) this way: ‘Suddenly, the bubble had burst and we were left with a limp, whinging little machine that had about as much charisma as a wet fish (...) there was no wheelspin, no sideways scrabble for grip, no life-threatening moments, and certainly nothing to make you hold your breath’ (Campbell and Campbell, 1995, p. 94). Yet, alongside technical innovations making the cars more racing-like in handling in contrast to the drifting driving styles in the past, it was indeed certain that a WRC car in late 2000s at speed had become something different visually than when Roger Clark, a British rally driver, made his impact on the WRC stages in the 1970s: ‘I don’t care how far sideways I am. As long as I am not actually looking out of the back window, I should be able to get the car back in line.’ (cited in Zuehlke, 2009, p. 30). What originated as actions taken to ease the production of rally media in effect made some groundbreaking changes to the entire sport.

Negotiating the past with the present

For many online forum commentators, these debates are about the very essence of rallying. Quotes like those included above illuminate why tradition allows us, in the words of Paul Ricoeur, to make sense of sport ‘dialectically through the exchange between the interpreted past and the interpreting present’ (Ricoeur, 1984, p. 121). Promotionally, this prosumerist logic is of major importance if connected to image differentiation, discussed in the previous chapter, which makes it possible to ‘establish the product’s character and value proposition; it conveys this character in a distinctive way; and it delivers emotional power beyond a mental image,’ even literally speaking (see Kotler, 1994, p. 178). In our analysis of forum debates, we have found that it is not about HD coverage or not, but whether the coverage includes the narrative characteristics of the WRC as a symbolic community. This repertoire of narratives

available for appropriation, Margaret S. Somers notes, 'is always historically and culturally specific' (Somers, 1994, p. 630). My UK informant Philip, for example, said it like this:

There have been many major changes to the WRC all of which apart from the introduction of Group A, which was introduced on safety grounds, were planned with the aim to increase and improve the exposure of the sport to the wider public. Whilst Group B succeeded in this aim, other aspects of the sport were overlooked hence the rapid introduction of Group A. Since the Group A era although the cars and the events have both been changed, neither have been successful in their aim to make the sport more popular or more competitive. Indeed they have had the reverse affect, largely, in my view, because they have made the sport sterile; they have removed the key aspects which first attracted me to the sport.

As a result, we are drawn back to the comment on sport and nostalgia by Sheranne Fairley and Sean Gammon:

bygone sporting events experienced by the spectator take on a more noble and honest quality. For many, sport "back then" represented the way the game was originally meant to be played; the players were real personalities whose abilities were "God-given" as opposed to vital training and dietary regimes that the current "manufactured" professionals adhere to. Such debasing of the present is not new as each generation juxtaposes a reconstructed past with an inferior present and an even poorer future (Fairley and Gammon, 2005, p. 185).

Simultaneously, it must be said that many forum commentators condemn the coverage although they seem oblivious to how it is produced. Not everything that's bad about media production can be blamed on the FIA's or the other promoters' less successful attempts to reinvent the sport. Above, we learned that how the material is produced, edited and used by external broadcasters, including local reportages and commentators, is also part of the impressions people get from the sport. During Rally de France-Alsace 2011, I watched the local TV channel 'Alsace 20' spend its entire evening rally programme lamenting the early exit of Sébastien Loeb. Meanwhile, the rally had got very intense as only a few seconds separated the top three drivers for the next day. And, let's not forget, media and the real deal are two different experiences, says Philip, one of my informants:

I'm not sure you truly can capture the essence of the sport until you actually visit a stage; TV can't convey the anticipation, the danger, the smell, the spectacular scenery or the emotion that the sport provides. That has been the problem with the WRC over the last ten years. By trying to put the media aspect first it has ended up taking away some of the pure essence of the sport.

Regardless of who's providing the footage, this discussion centres on something British TV sports commentator Steve Rider discusses in his 2013 book *My Chequered Career*. Looking back at 35 years of reporting, he claims that broadcasters still have not got a grip on rallying: 'The challenge for television, then and now, is also to add that ingredient and portray rallying in a far more competitive tone, and not just as a series of disjointed "up and past" shots linked together by prolonged "in-car" sequences' (Rider, 2013, p. 94). As discussed above, the production unit of WRC TV did in fact try to include some of the desired elements many commentators think have disappeared from the sport. Nick Atkins, head of WRC TV, whom

we met in the beginning of this chapter, underlined to me in Cardiff, very analytically, that to ensure global spectator interest and fulfil their global promoter duties they are always on the look-out for diversity. Even though the formats may be standard, the package is tailor-made for every event to make it unique and the WRC series as pluralistic as possible.

To make this happen, Atkins – who says that over the past years, he has urged his team to make this a more explicit and more imaginative element of media production – and his crew talk to local organisers, teams and others to get recommendations on ‘the event signature’. This can be the bonfire parties in Sweden, or the noisy crowds of Argentina. Sometimes WRC TV was also approached by local authorities wishing for footage of national monuments and local tourism boards often takes part in organising the rally – something that is particularly important for so-called ‘candidate events’, that is, events which want to become part of the WRC calendar through a cumbersome process of test runs and managerial supervision from the FIA.⁴³ In 2010, for example, the opening ceremony of Rally Turkey was held at Sultanahmet Square, between the famous Blue Mosque and Hagia Sophia, as well as being explicitly linked to Istanbul’s status as European Capital of Culture (a title annually awarded by the European Union).

All this is part of the planning process, according to Atkins, emptying his cup of coffee. ‘For each rally we hold editorial planning meetings in the weeks before the event to discuss ideas for stories and features related to the USP [unique selling point] of an individual event, that is, it’s characteristics, terrain, driving and mechanical demands, and editorial stories around the championship, drivers, mechanics, and cars. We then arrange interviews, plan filming for these stories and features and also send a two man recce team to each event to drive the stages and set up camera positions for our crews.’ Their choice of what to combine among these varieties is based, according to the PR Manager at WRC TV, Steve Webb, on four elements: ‘The first is great action, like the big jumps of Rally Finland or really fast

sections. The second is where the drivers might have problems, for example a tricky bend, or a rocky section, creating a bit of drama. The third is the unique character of each event like rocks and ruts in Greece. The fourth is logistics of getting the camera discs back to the production in time to make TV programmes.’

Still, it seems like many WRC fans, in this case represented by forum participants (who admittedly are most likely to be among the least satisfied within the community), are dissatisfied with the dramaturgical encapsulation of the sport. Picking up on the discussion on glocalisation above, one reason might be that WRC TV’s application of glocal perspectives only concerns *today’s* organised diversity. Nostalgically invoked ways of depicting the coverage, on the other hand, could, as several forum participants mention, retrieve its glocal identity despite the fact that past and the present media coverage is nearly incommensurable. The reason, according to Paul Connerton, is that ‘we experience our present world in a context which is causally connected with past events and objects, and hence with reference to events and objects *which we are not experiencing* when we are experiencing the present’ (Connerton, 1989, p. 2, italics added). Rally media is not alone in struggling with this. In their analysis of football, sociologists Richard Giulianotti and Roland Robertson emphasise the multiple faces of clubs such as Real Madrid and Manchester United. On the one hand, they are institutions where local ties are manifested in dress, songs, flags or folklore. On the other hand, they are world communities of followers who, in the authors’ view, ‘relativize themselves into specific cross-national preferences for certain players’ (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2004, pp. 549-50).

To cope with this conflicting nature of deterritorialised kinds of globality and home players that personify the local particularities of the club, football media ‘evinces a postmodern, “schizophrenic” nostalgia, notably by conflating past and present football images in football discussion programmes and adverts’ (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2004, pp. 548).

Without irony, this produces the possibility of scorning the 'European' Brazilians of the 1974 World Cup but worshipping the same national team from 1982 and using both teams as yardsticks for today's players. Similarly, the awareness of the golden highs of the WRC may be blocking any attempt to positively reimagine the championship, as it works simultaneously as a response to the current coverage and as an expression of how rallying should be. Celebrations of the past contribute heavily to this process, as demonstrated by the image below.

The return of the beast



In 2013 Walter Röhrl's Group B Audi S1 rally car was used on 'Col de Tourini' to celebrate the brand's rallying history on one of the most mythical places in the history of the WRC. In the background we see Hotel des Trois Valleys (see Chapter 6). Photo: Audi AG

Although many voices in this thesis point to Group B as the ultimate era of rallying, I want to underline that this view on history is far from undisputed. Even a much-maligned era like the second half of the early 2000s managed to produce some good memories. Sandra put it this way:

Forget the era of the Group B monsters: too many spectators and participants killed, the cars broke down too often and, like Formula 1 cars, you cannot go into a car dealer and buy anything like them. There were several occurrences from 2005 to 2009 which were very thrilling, to mention just a few: the epic battles between Sébastien Loeb and Marcus Grönholm; in 2007 on the final stage of the WRC Germany Rally when François Duval's demonstration of driving skill in that old Xsara made us spectators scream; in 2008 the way Sébastien Loeb won the Finland Rally; in 2009 Mikko Hirvonen's snaking Ford Focus in the dust as he headed the field at the beginning of the Portugal Rally.

Conclusively, I think the sociological function of nostalgia and its relation to promotional concerns runs deeper than the mere coverage of the sport, especially if we consider an important element in any narrative constitution of identity, according to Margaret S. Somers: 'it has a history, and thus must be explored over time and space' (Somers, 1994, p. 626). In the next four chapters, this is our mission.

Conclusion

Through conversations with Nick Atkins and the others at WRC TV at Wales Rally GB 2010, I have in this chapter investigated some of the basic reasons why an official media producer is

needed: the very complexity of the operation and the need for a coherent production. What seemingly has been less of a pivot in the various promoters' strategies, and presumably the following media production, is the combination of the need to include a variety of media and the glocalisation of sports. Promotionally, this is worrisome because the media's production of memory 'can be dealt with as a medium (between the past, the present and the future) and it can be observed as something that is mediated in culture by means of different mediums (both material and immaterial, both technological and "traditional")' (Võsu, Kõresaar, and Kuutma, 2008, p. 249).

If we throw the highly significant emergence of a strategic sporting glocalisation into the analysis, which has been lost (or never found) according to some online forum participants, we have discovered that even if media producers keep up with the development technologically, the coverage itself can produce ambivalence due to disagreements on substance. In the bigger context, as the next chapters will support, these online forum discussions are but one sign that a cultural phenomenon like the WRC 'works' only if it is, as Michael Schudson puts it, 'relevant to and resonant with the life of the audience' (Schudson, 1989, p. 167). Schudson elaborates on this concept of *resonance* as follows: 'what is resonant is not a matter of how culture connects to individual interests but a matter of how culture connects to interests that are themselves constituted in a cultural frame' (Schudson, 1989, p. 169). This mirrors my argument from previous chapters where I discussed why, and on which cultural foundations, the promoter should engage more profoundly with the WRC community.

Coupled with the promotional conceptualisation in Chapters 1 and 2, emphasising the negotiable meaning of sports, this begs the question of how to explore this resonance further on the WRC's promotional arenas – places where rallies are organised, the spectator culture, the cars and the teams who produce them, and the WRC drivers. By engaging further with the WRC community, as Anthony P. Cohen says, 'by seeking to capture members' experience of

it', rather than what it looks like from the outside (Cohen, 1985, p. 20), we might get closer to the group identity that is so important in sport than through surveys, statistical indexing or data mining.⁴⁴ Additionally, to include a more broad view on the history of the WRC – or, rather, the way it is told and communicated in parts of regulatory regimes (like Group B, Group A, and so on) – is essential to understanding its promotional arenas. As I have touched upon in this chapter, and as I will explore further in the next chapter, the sense of place helps define the WRC as it is inextricably tied to the event – for the rest of the year, it is usually just a spaghetti bowl of ordinary roads. Few other rallies illustrate this better than the Rally Monte Carlo and that is where we will be heading next.

Chapter 6: The sense of place

Introduction

The second promotional arena of the WRC is place. While teams come and go, many places have a long history of drama and action that makes them eligible for an elevated position in the sport's collective memory. By recapitulating Rally Monte Carlo's history in the context of the development leading up to the establishment of a world rally championship in 1973, I will look at how place identity is understood in times of sporting transformation. Human geographer, Edward Relph notes in *Place and Placelessness* that 'identity of place is comprised of three interrelated components, each irreducible to the other – physical features or appearance, observable activities and functions, and meaning or symbols (Relph, 1976, p. 61). On one hand, an entangled view of place like Relph's is well recognised as a cultural asset in the WRC community. In an interview I did with him David Richards, one of the main architects behind the new promotional strategies that emerged around 2000 (see Chapter 4), put it this way:

I believe it is possible for the WRC as a global brand to sit alongside individual events that have their own national identity. In fact, I believe it is important that national events retain their own identity, as this is one of the key attributes of the WRC as opposed to many other sports which take place in a consistent environment.⁴⁵

On the other hand, there are reasons to believe that the sense of place as a promotional feature is inadequately explored. A modern WRC season, as stated in Chapter 1, consists of 12 to 14 events, subject to a two-year contract issued by the FIA. While these events obviously take

place in a set of different localities, we also need to acknowledge how the meaning and importance of them is accumulated over time, in a diversifying relation to other WRC events, and is characterised by a special kind of social life. Discussion about the composition of the calendar is therefore a delicate matter because places first become meaningful with some sort of collective identification when they are ‘interpreted, narrated, perceived, felt, understood and imagined’ (Gieryn, 2000, p. 464-65). While traditional rallies use this understanding of place as an argument for not being excluded (without them, it would not be a proper championship, would it?), new events use it as an argument for being included (how else would they become part of the WRC community?). This begs the question of how what human geographers call the sense of place is constructed and why it matters so much to the WRC community.

The full Monte

‘Landslide’, Patrice says to me. He is driving the car in front of us on our way from the picturesque little town of Sospel up towards Col de Turini. Otherwise a sleepy mountain pass at 1607 metres above sea level, it is also the most famous spectator venue of all in the WRC. Taking the opportunity to camp overnight, in its heyday, as many as 30,000 spectators turned the otherwise quiet little village junction into a big theme party.

‘Landslide?’ I ask, hesitant to believe him.

His gentle looks starkly contrast with the Belmondo-like gruffness of his reply – *connerie!* (bullshit!). Just a few kilometres from Col de Turini, the traffic had been halted by a truckload of policemen with silver reflectors and rally marshals in yellow fluorescent vests. Behind us, through the pitch black, I could see hundreds of headlights from other cars down the zigzagging road; hard left, a short straight, a hard right, flat out for a 100 metres, then hard

left – and so on. I am standing on one of the most famous special stages in the world that runs from La Bollene via Col de Turini and down to Sospel (or the other way around).

Although it did not become part of the Rally Monte Carlo until 1961, fifty years after the first edition of the rally was run, the special stage still reigns supreme among the challenges of world rallying. Once described by Ari Vatanen as ‘the queen of tests in the king of rallies’ (Vatanen and Väisänen, 1988, p. 165), it requires drivers to start from the bottom before they edge their way up the mountain, encountering a variety of conditions such as dry tarmac, wet tarmac, rain, ice and finally snow at the Col de Turini, before they have to do it all in reverse down the other side of the mountain. It is twisty and narrow, with many sharp bends, and you have the mountain on the inside and the cliff on the outside. Low brick walls are the only thing that separate you from the drop, and they are hard to see in the dark. Along the 23 kilometres of road, drivers should not be surprised if they hear an orchestra of horns play ‘La Cucuracha’ or the theme from *Star Wars*. Voices shout in French, Italian and German. To make the conditions even more difficult, spectators shuffle snow onto the road.

Now, however, at night, in torrential rainfall, the day before the Rally Monte Carlo 2013 is going to race from La Bollene via Col de Turini and down to Sospel, it seems unlikely that we are going to get anywhere for a while. I try to get an overview of the situation, but never have glasses been so useless. Out of nowhere, a policewoman with thunder in her eyes suddenly instructs both Patrice and us to back up an even narrower road, as the few metres of road have been temporarily transformed into a turning-point. Then other cars start to back up and almost crash down the ravine as the irascible *gendarmérie* tries to disentangle the jam, with one officer instructing the drivers to go in one direction and another officer doing the exact opposite. It would have been funny if we hadn’t been trying to get to one of the most mythical places in the entire WRC. A moment later, I see Neil Prunnell, Director at Rally Travel (an agency that provides spectator tours to rallies) and our man on the ground,

speaking calmly with the police. Then he speaks into his cell phone, and without warning, we are told by Neil to get back into the cars in a hurry. Running past us outside the car is Patrice, grinning like a child on Christmas day. Inside the car, we understand that there was no landslide. It was just a roundabout way of telling people that there was too much traffic on the road up to Col de Turini, and that only those with proper accreditation could pass.

On my way up the hills, the corners, the many camper vans parked besides the road on the edge of the cliff and the amazing festival mood among the spectators from bottom to the top, remind me of why this rally is so special. Launched in 1911, run more than 80 times since and taking place along the French Riviera and in the Alps above Monaco, the Rally Monte Carlo has a long history of drama, glamour and spectacular scenery. Until 1996, when the tradition ended, it even epitomised the meaning of the word *rally* (which dates back to Medieval times) in that competitors raced from all corners of Europe to meet in Monte Carlo to celebrate the end of a ‘transcontinental thrashing’ in their vehicles (see Rothman, 2013). Its fame, however, does not guarantee inclusion in the WRC. Although celebrating its centenary year in 2011, now part of the Intercontinental Rally Championship (IRC), an entirely commercial enterprise initiated by SRW Ltd, promoted by Eurosport and sanctioned by the FIA, that ran from 2006 to 2012. The loss of this prestigious event was considered a serious blow to the WRC’s rank as the world’s toughest motorsport.

The reason for the rally’s estrangement from the WRC calendar, enforced or not, was simple: FIA’s standardised event itinerary, introduced to make the WRC events more predictable, less costly and commercially more effective, was seemingly not compatible with that of the *Automobile Club de Monaco* (ACM), the organiser of Rally Monte Carlo, or with their philosophy of rallying. A standardised *format*, much discussed in the previous chapters, also led to criticisms of a standardised *experience* of the rallies. Questioned about the issue, Malcolm Wilson recalled, ‘Back in the old days, for instance RAC Rally 1979 [the British

WRC event], there was a day-night-day rally, one night's sleep, and on it again. Nowadays' it's much more strict.'⁴⁶ Michèle Mouton, when asked the same question, was even more unenthusiastic': 'Today the stages are maximum 25kms long, the cars very reliable and nothing happens, there is no stories to say...'⁴⁷. I think Mouton is exaggerating a bit, but her feelings reveal something important about the lack of entertainment many WRC events display.

When he returned to the WRC scene on Rally Germany 2002 after a long absence, twice WRC world driver's champion Walter Röhrl (1980 and 1982) was impressed by the show the organisers put on. But, like Mouton who was once his fiercest rival for the WRC title, he did not like how the competitive side had developed into a sprint rally as a result of the event standardisation:

Rallying has lost many things that were once an important part of the sport. It is no longer necessary to nurture your car, to save the tyres, to shift gear cautiously, or to put in work to learn the roads. Rallying used to be a test for man and machine. It used to be about speed, durability and also intelligence. But today, such complicated things would probably only disturb the running of the show. I am really wondering where the real art is today, apart from running flat out for a short time (Röhrl, Müller and Klein, 2002, p. 237).

Rene Isoart, General Commissioner of ACM, seemingly shared Röhrl's view. In fact, Isoart was sure that the move from WRC to IRC, somewhat ironically as the latter was far more commercially founded than the WRC, opened the way for a return to the historical kernel of this 'old school rally':

We can recreate the atmosphere of night stages, take three service parks, run the rally in the week, everything is possible. The pleasure is not the same in the WRC, the atmosphere is less special, the magic is lost and there are fewer of our old friends here. This rally has existed for a long time – before the WRC was created (cited in Salter, 2008).

Moreover, it also bade good riddance to the commercial restraints of the WRC and guaranteed first-class coverage courtesy of Eurosport, said Isoart. He was not alone in this opinion and the exclusion of ‘the Monte’, as it is called, fired up the debate about whether the WRC was forced to give up on its heritage to satisfy the desire for profit which had been evident since ISC’s media reform around 2000 that we explored earlier. In a bigger context, this debate goes beyond quarrels about event itineraries. To me, it was a sign of how the localities of WRC rallies embody and secure otherwise intangible cultural norms, identities and memories (see Gieryn, 2000, p. 473).

When spectating the Rally Monte Carlo, as I did in 2013, it is easy to spot the connection between history and social relationships if we zoom in on particular special stages. Apart from Col de Turini one example is ‘the greatest WRC drive ever’, in 1985, when Ari Vatanen defeated ‘the master of Monte’, Walter Röhrl, who had won the rally four times before in four different cars. Prior to the rally, the French manufacturer had invested vast sums of money in developing a car that could take on the Audis and Lancias (see Chapters 6 and 7). In addition, French media was overjoyed with the anticipation of victory and almost the entire event was broadcast on national TV. Current FIA President Jean Todt, at the time team manager of Peugeot Talbot Sport, recalls: ‘At the outset of the Monte Carlo Rally, we were among the favorites to win. The 205 had become the darling of the French public. We could not afford to disappoint them’ (Todt and Moncet, 1985, p. 94). Vatanen, on the other

hand, was slightly more sceptical after his co-driver Terry Harryman had made a management mistake during the rally that got them a time penalty. Eight minutes behind first place is a lot, even in an unpredictable rally like the Monte Carlo as the weather conditions may change rapidly.

But he refused to give up and got support from Röhrl as Harryman's mistake really was not an attempt to gain time. Without getting into specifics, the penalty was too harsh and was the result of a complex and rather stupid set of rules issued by the organisers which had no direct connection to the circumstances of Monte Carlo, as they were originally made for Safari rallies. Röhrl said to Vatanen: 'I don't want rallies to be judged like that. That's not sport. I want to see who drives the fastest in the special stages' (cited in Vatanen and Väisänen, 1988, p. 153). As Röhrl was later to remark:

Personally, I didn't like getting the lead this way. I would have put the car into a rock rather than win against Ari like this. I secretly hoped that something would happen that would bring Ari back to the front again. And so it turned out. I think everyone was worried now that Röhrl would be ranting because he had problems on that mountain. In fact I was really quite pleased that this particular victory got away from me (Röhrl, Müller and Klein, pp. 174-75).

Either way, with fresh stimulus, Vatanen, after having initially given Harryman a telling-off, later said to him: 'Now we're really going to drive' (Vatanen and Väisänen, 1988, p. 154). Tyre choice, as always at the unpredictable Rally Monte Carlo, became crucial. Two members of the Peugeot 'ice crew' (those who drive the stage in advance to note the conditions), Fred Gallagher and John Haugland, advised Vatanen to opt for 'slicks' (smooth racing tyres) rather than the studded ones that Röhrl had chosen. It worked. Vatanen and Harryman set the fastest

time and the chase was on. Steadily, the gap was closed. Vatanen was second, behind Röhrl, meaning that the Finn would be chasing the German in a literal sense also. Vatanen's moment of truth came at the Sisteron–Thoard stage (also known as *Le Juge de Paix* – Justice of Peace). Again, he decided on a different set of tyres from Röhrl, medium studs. 'If I wanted to catch up with Walter and win, it was here that I had to do something,' Vatanen recalls (Vatanen and Väisänen, 1988, p. 168).

On that stage, Vatanen went 'flat out' (meaning that you drive at the *very* limit) and caught up with Röhrl who skidded all over the road, having selected the wrong tyres. Vatanen, by contrast, was able to pass him and carry on at race speed because of the right tyre choice. Realising later that they would win the Rally Monte Carlo in a French car which had fought back after having been more than eight minutes behind the leader, the Peugeot team was jubilant. Vatanen became a superstar in France, as it was the first time in 53 years that a Peugeot had won the rally. According to Jean Todt, it was the stuff that legends are made of: 'Never had there been such a battle, no rally had ever seen such a spectacular outcome. But I was thinking of Ari. Never had a driver performed so magnificently. He was truly one of the greats. From that day onwards, I was in his debt' (Todt and Moncet, 1985, p. 96).

Walking along the 36.7 km stage twenty-seven years after Vatanen's masterful display and waiting for the first car to come, I discovered that it is physically very similar to other stages in the Rally Monte Carlo: hill climbs and narrow passes, twists and long stretches, all combined in typical Monte diversity. Because this is a stage with a dramatic history, vigorously played up by the media beforehand, it is far more popular than many other stages and thus invigorates the theoretical concept of place discussed above.

On Sisteron-Thoard, 2013



Driver's World Champion in 2013, Sébastien Ogier, on his way to second place overall in the Volkswagen Polo WRC R, following the tracks of his predecessors. Photo: Hans Erik Næss

Although the crowd was nowhere near the estimate of 20,000 people that had been mentioned in the local press. There was lively anticipation among spectators about this particular stage after its absence from the rally scene since 2002. I will come back to Rally Monte Carlo 2013, and Col de Turini in particular later in this chapter, but I think that we have already discovered how certain WRC rallies exemplify the way in which place-evoked emotions are often the product of 'repeated place interactions and experience' (Kyle and Chick, 2007, p. 211), and yield what human geographer Yi-Fu Tuan has referred to as 'the steady accretion of sentiment over the years' (Tuan, 1977, p. 32). This leads me to the history of rallying and how the Rally Monte Carlo is a quintessential part of it.

The beginning of rallying

Before the first Rally Monte Carlo in 1911, people had explored the art of racing in many different ways already. On 21 January, 1907, the French newspaper *Le Matin* published a go-getting advertisement on the front page. Eschewing the challenge of the racetrack, it pronounced instead a daring trial to ‘manufacturers of France and abroad’:

Is there anyone out there who agrees to go this summer from Peking to Paris by automobile? This man, this man of bold courage, brave whose car has perhaps a dozen people for viewers, deserve the truth that bears his name to the four cardinal points of the earth.⁴⁸

Its timing was not coincidental. Although motor vehicle development was in its infancy, Europeans had already been thrilled for more than a decade by the daring adventures of the modern drivers of the ‘horseless carriages’ covering vast distances. Back in 1894, the Paris-Rouen Horseless Carriage Competition (*Concours des Voitures sans Chevaux*), sponsored by another French newspaper, *Le Petit Journal*, attracted considerable public interest and entries from leading manufacturers. Not even a number of fatalities among participants in these races, and the subsequent wave of criticism from, among other sources, the French Parliament, kept these events from growing in popularity and introduced many of the features found in later rallies: individual start times with cars running against the clock, rather than head to head; time controls at the entry and exit points of towns along the way; road books and route notes; and driving over long distances on ordinary, mainly gravel, roads, facing hazards such as changing weather, robbers, corrupt officials and wild animals.

Some of these rallies were extremely popular – during the Paris-Madrid race of 1903, pictured above, more than three million people lined the road to Bordeaux alone (Adair, 1998, p. 125). They were also dangerous: in the Paris-Madrid race in 1903, six drivers were killed and many spectators wounded (Turner, 2002, p. 25). Despite the excitement and fear these globetrotting adventures engendered, entertainingly told in Allen Andrews' *The Mad Motorists* (Andrews, 1964), it was not rallying as we know it today. The term rally was in fact rarely used before the 1920s, and as a branch of motorsport, its first use was probably at the first Rally Monte Carlo in 1911 (Robson, 1981, p. 7), which had 23 entrants and took place along the French Riviera in the Principality of Monaco and south-east France. The first Rally Monte Carlo was organised by a group of wealthy locals who formed the *Sport Automobile Vélocipédique Monégasque* (SAVM) and bankrolled by the *Société des Bains de Mer*, the operators of the famous casino who were keen to attract wealthy sporting motorists (Louche, 2001, p. 25).

Inspired by the neighbouring city of Nice, which had organised several road races with great success, one SAVM member, Gabriel Vialon, suggested at a meeting in December 1909 that a motor rally should be held to improve trade in the winter months. And not just any rally, but one in which competitors should be invited to converge on Monte Carlo from distant towns and cities (see Robson, 2007). For many reasons, the idea of holding a motor race on the streets of Monaco was too early. No such event had yet been run anywhere in Europe. Instead, SAVM – which in 1910 became affiliated to the *Automobile Club de France* (more about that below) – contacted automobile clubs all across Europe in order to test interest. The reception was rather modest at first, with 23 entrants in the first year, but in 1912, the number of participants had risen to 87. According to sociologist Sarah Redshaw (2007, p. 127), 'car racing was pursued with enormous enthusiasm and despite the carnage it created, it became

the model of excellence in cars and driving.’ From early on, manufacturers used these races as technological showrooms (Hope-Frost and Davenport, 2004, p. 16).

Even so, it is no exaggeration to say that Rally Monte Carlo struggled in its early lifetime. The strange habit of the organisers of deciding without reference to anyone else which crew had done well, sloppy organisation in general, bad publicity and the withdrawal of financial support all made the future of Rally Monte Carlo uncertain. And when World War I came in 1914, many believed it was the end of it. It may actually have been so if the car had not been well on its way to becoming deeply embedded in broader societal changes in Europe and the US at the time (Laux, 1976; Flink, 1988). According to sociology professor, John Urry (2000, pp. 57-58), we need to see the modern car in a number of interlocking dimensions with roots from this period:

- as the quintessential manufactured object produced by the leading industrial sectors and the iconic firms of twentieth-century capitalism. Many of the world’s leading corporations are either manufacturers of cars or petroleum products;
- as the industry which has generated the key concepts, ‘Fordism’ and ‘Toyotatism’, employed in understanding the development of, and changes within, the trajectory of contemporary capitalism;
- as the major item of individual consumption which provides status to its owner through the sign-values with which it is associated;
- as part of a machine-like complex constituted by the car’s technical and social inter-linkages with other industries, including parts and accessories, roadside motels, suburban house building, advertising and marketing, and so on;

- as the single most important environmental outcome of the exceptional range and scale of resources used in the manufacture (and use) of cars, roads and car-friendly environments;
- as the predominant form of ‘quasi-private’ mobility;
- as the dominant culture that organises and legitimates sociality across different genders, classes, ages and so on, while also providing potent artistic images and symbols.

The car, in short, was becoming a mass consumer object and a pop cultural icon, (certain rally cars can be seen as cultural heritage artefacts, something which I will come back to in Chapter 8). In addition, as briefly mentioned, motorsport played a significant part from very early on as a showroom of technology, design and brand qualities. In his masterful review of the emergence of international motorsport historian Eamon Cofaigh underlines that the, ‘turn-of-the-century city-to-city races provided stern tests for these early vehicles while simultaneously providing an advertising platform upon which manufacturers could display their models, albeit to an initially reluctant public’ (Cofaigh, 2011, p. 191). Historian James M. Laux (1976) also points out that the French automobile industry’s physical proximity and easy access to the Paris-based media made it possible to widely diffuse positive cultural images of the car.

This new and increasing role of motorsport in society brought the need for better organisation of its branches. Among the French aristocracy, keen motoring fans, initial attempts to codify motorsport were made. Two members of *Jockey-club de Paris*, a gathering of the elite of nineteenth-century French society, formed two-thirds of the founding members of the *Automobile Club de France* (ACF) in 1895. Above, I noted that SAVM, as the main force of Rally Monte Carlo, became affiliated with ACF in 1910. Furthermore, the FIA’s

headquarters was located next door to that of the ACF at 8 Place de la Concorde in Paris (until parts of it moved to Geneva in 1999) and had, until 1963, the same presidents as that of the ACF. The creation of the *Association Internationale des Automobile Clubs Reconnus* (AIACR) in 1904 may be seen as the logical development of a governing body for automobile clubs. This predecessor to the FIA, which came into being in 1947, was essentially the body with which the ACF organised its international races (Cofaigh, 2011, pp. 192-93).

Furthermore, the structure of events became standardised. American journalist Gordon James Bennett (1841–1918) would play a significant role in the promotion of international motorsport. Bennett was born in the Alpes Maritimes, France and was the son of an Irish-American mother and a Scottish-American father who owned the famous *New York Herald*, the leading American newspaper of the day. When he took over the reins from his father in 1866, he was 25 and keen to spread the family firm abroad. Gordon Bennett began publicising his Herald with a series of publicity stunts, such as Arctic and African expedition sponsorships, predecessors to the Citroën ‘raids’ of the 1920s and 1930s (a venture they would recommit to in the 1990s before turning to the WRC). Bennett moved to Paris in 1877 where he established the *Paris Herald*; he was, therefore, in France at the birth of the car and was ideally placed to take advantage of its societal growth. His aim in announcing the inauguration of his *Coupe Internationale* was to expand motor sport into an international phenomenon (Cofaigh, 2011, p. 196).

The combination of standardisation of rules, entrepreneurial skills and a natural sense of the newsworthy would prove a successful formula for promoting motorsport. The Gordon Bennett Cup (1900–5), as it was called, consolidated the French method of organising racing. The initial race was in France but, by stipulating that the winner must host the following year’s event, he opened the door for other nations, in time, to establish themselves in motor racing. The race also provided a focal point to develop this growth. In Eamon Cofaigh’s view,

‘Bennett’s cup acted as a catalyst for motor sport development as it evolved into a phenomenon visible on the world stage’ (Cofaigh, 2011, pp. 197-98). French manufacturers, who dominated the Gordon Bennett Cup in its early years, were, however, ‘incensed by the nationalistic format of the race’. In their view, the international set-up prevented a contest between the best cars and drivers. As a result, they came up with their own racing format – the *Grand Prix*, a battle between the best drivers and a contest between leading manufacturers (Adair, 1998, p. 126-27).

Even if Bennett focused for the most part on circuit racing, this development in motorsport against purely national formats both influenced, and was influenced, by Rally Monte Carlo. As already mentioned, it faced total collapse when World War I came. But in 1923, fronting SAVM’s rivalry with the Nice Automobile Club and their motorsport innovations, the 19-year old Anthony Noghès, son of the SAVM President, laid plans for a complete revival of the Monte. Most importantly, he introduced a new element of driving competition in the form of a hill-climb speed test. Noghès also provided the entrants with standardised road books, and the following year, he made sure, through a variety of changes, once and for all that ‘car and driver performance would count for more than the style, comfort and price of the chosen vehicle’ (Robson, 2007, p. 19). In the meantime, criticisms were voiced against the circuit racing formats, which in one critic’s view had done little to develop the car other than to ‘make it go round in circles’ (Adair, 1998, p. 129).

While I have found no direct links between this general critique and the revitalisation of Rally Monte Carlo, it is nevertheless reasonable to believe – due to the still-small European motorsport community, the growth of the car as a multifaceted social object and the media’s interest in its technological developments – that this debate inspired Noghès and motorsport competitors across Europe. Popular magazines and specialised publications like *Autocar* in the UK, *Motorwagen* in Germany and *La Locomotion automobile* in France fuelled the

public's fascination for car races, alongside the fact that virtually no development of importance in automotive technology went unnoticed in newspapers of the day (Laux, 1976, p. 33; Flink, 1988, pp. 13-14). In particular, the mountain roads, where competitors could face snow, ice, rain, dry tarmac and fog (several of these elements at the same stage), were essential in making it a true competition. The *Autocar's* sports editor, S.C.H. 'Sammy' Davies, who drove the Monte several times, described it like this in 1928:

To get some idea of the corners, think of the sharpest hairpin bend you have ever negotiated, make it a little sharper, give it a gradient of 1-in-8, then lift it 2000 feet high on the side of the mountain, and then on the sheer side of it place a wall about eighteen inches high, usually with a broken gap just about where you would go through if anything went wrong with the brakes. Then repeat that hairpin every 150 yards for about five miles at the time (cited in Robson, 2007, p. 30).

Motivated by the Rally Monte Carlo, numerous variations on the alpine theme sprang up in Austria, Italy, France, Switzerland and Germany. At this point, rally cars were becoming more specialised, using studded tyres and extra driving lamps, and the whole idea of rallying spread across Europe, most notably to Great Britain, where the first RAC rally (later a WRC event) was held in 1932. Rallying had no European or World championship to fold into, but consisted of single events like the Monte, the RAC and Belgium's *Liège-Rome-Liège*, officially called *Le Marathon de la Route*, which began in 1931. Despite introducing ideas like slow-driving tests, an element of almost 'Byzantine complexity', in motorsport historian Graham Robson's view (2007, p. 43), the Monte was still a highly popular event in competition with the newcomers. In the 1930s, helped by the tough winters, it became the

premier European rally, attracting 300 or more participants (see also Louche, 2001, pp. 44-79; 377-84).

History on site

In the bar at Hotel des Trois Vallees, conveniently located by the roadside to the Col de Turini, I discover how parts of this history are kept alive, 102 years after the first Rally Monte Carlo was run. Under the discreet auspices of manager Laetitia Munoz and her family, the little alpine hotel has, for many decades, become home to thousands of pieces of WRC folklore. What's more, every time the Rally Monte Carlo is part of the WRC, this, together with two other small hotels at this junction, is the perfect venue to catch the most mythical of all Monte stages: the Moulinet-La Sospel, or, for those in the know, Col de Turini. During the rally, people who want to witness history invade the hotel. The atmosphere is electrifying; conversations buzz, everybody seems to be talking to each other, the soft heat inside is a welcoming contrast to the snow and cold weather outside, and the *vin chaud* is flowing from large barrels (in English the drink is known as mulled wine, something you'd find all over the world, but here it consists of *vin rouge ordinaire* mixed with sugar, cinnamon and lemon and heated up).

I was told by Nicolas, one of the seasoned guests in the bar that, until the 1990s it was usual for the drivers to come in and have a coffee – or a sip of *vin chaud* – during *recce*. Midway through the conversation Nicolas complained, however, that little of this kind of informality between drivers and the place remained. The closest thing was the table reservation for the night in the hotel restaurant by Severine Loeb, the wife of nine-times WRC Driver's champion Sébastien Loeb, and her group.

Inside Hotel des Trois Vallees



Many decades of Rally Monte Carlo history can be seen at the lobby of Hotel des Trois Vallees. Photo: Hans Erik Næss

I remembered being told a similar story by Ari Vatanen, who is frequently featured on the memorabilia walls, as fraternising with the locals in his competitive days was quite common:

In the 1970s and 80s, there was more socializing between teams, and between us drivers and people living in the places we were. Servicing in people's yards was not unusual, often with a subsequent invite for coffee. In those days recce could last for three days, and during that time you got to know the local community in a way that today's recce arrangement don't allow for.⁴⁹

When asked in 2013 what he thought about the WRC today, Massimo ‘Miki’ Biasion, double driver’s world champion 1987-88, shared a similar opinion. ‘The drivers don’t have any contact with spectators like we used to have when we stopped for service between stages. In those days, we met the fans at the service, but now the drivers are more like Formula 1, they are superstars and they have lost the contact with the fans. I think there is less passion, less chance of an autograph, things like that’ (cited in Widdows, 2013).

Col de Turini 2013



Five or six hours before the stage start: The cars enter from the left, having raced up the mountain from Moulinet, to pass the stretch towards the Hotel des Trois Vallees (from where this photo is taken), before they head down to La Sospel. To the left of the rescue vehicle in the middle of the picture was the Volkswagen VIP grandstand, an area formerly used by ‘ordinary’ spectators. Photo: Hans Erik Næss

Although Biasion may embellish the superstar bit (see Chapters 7 and 9), ten metres from the hotel, I discovered evidence of what he and Vatanen were talking about: the huge hospitality arrangements that Volkswagen had set up, in addition to their VIP grandstand on the straight, with security personnel guarding the entrances to either area. The grandstand area – see the picture above – it used to be the French on the one side (cheering for Peugeot and/or Citroën) and Italians on the other (cheering for Fiat or Lancia) engaging in a traditional ‘snowball war’ against each other.

Although it is perfectly reasonable from a sponsor-pleasing point of view, it is not difficult to understand why the takeover of a traditionally spectator area – a similar hospitality area, by the way, was put up in Argentina at the La Rosa stage (see Chapter 4) – evokes heated discussions. Spectators are, as I will discuss in the next chapter, the lifeblood of rallying as they charge places with meaning through a particular sociality. What’s more, as spectators, they claim ownership of many of the famous places in the WRC because they, at least in their own view, made them what they are. At the Rally Monte Carlo 2013 this conflict was highly visible. When the VIP stand started filling up with people, they were bombarded with snowballs and obscenities from the spectators on the other side. Among the profanities, a loud, chorus of ‘*punheta, punheta*’ (Portuguese for ‘jerk off’) was heard again and again, accompanied by an unmistakable hand signal.

One could argue that this ownership versus sponsorship debate is nothing but sweetened wistfulness from the traditionalists. Others, like Sandra, a British informant of mine, thinks that the openness between drivers and fans is like it always has been – but with some important ‘buts’:

I spend a lot of time in service parks, during the recce or at regrouping, listening and talking to drivers, co-drivers and team members. This is an important point about

rallying – the ability to get face-to-face with these heroes and talk to them, but best of all is when they are away from the fan crowds, far from the media and watchful eye of some public relations person, leading to wonderful, sometimes hilarious and unbelievable situations.

Occupation of traditional spectator points like the main straight on Col de Turini, however, is not merely about messing with the glory days, or at least what people remember of them, it is also out of keeping with the promotional quality of the Rally Monte Carlo, which is manifested in everything that has customarily been a part of the Col de Turini: bonfires, flags, the smell of barbecued sausages, the shouting games; it's all part of the reason why so many defy its remote location to be at the WRC's most famous spectator point. Writing in 2012, John Davenport captured this atmosphere – and its passing – very well:

The smoke from the fires was less than usual. The same could be said for the snow that scarcely provided banks large enough for the spectators to stand on for a better view of the cars. A light, almost balmy breeze, was easily dissipating the aroma from the barbecues. In fact the summit of the Col de Turini did not possess many of the factors that has seen it become the most famous location for rally spectating and photography in the world. But on this occasion, there was one thing that was far better and bigger than normal. There was the biggest crowd of spectators ever seen at this legendary venue (Davenport and Klein, 2012, p. 9).

If not entirely similar to its heyday, it was still a party in 2013. Five hours before the de Turini stage start, spectators have already lined up in hundreds to prepare for the action. Revved up by cold (many of them were conspicuously badly equipped for a winter rally) and following

two days of close competition in classic Monte circumstances – a changeable blend of snow, tarmac, slush and rain – they are anticipating the final stages with an incredible level of happiness. Munching grilled *merguez* (a sausage typical of southern France) and taunting the ‘*flics*’ (the scornful name for the zealous police force that safeguards the stage), wedging in the occasional story about back in the day (all countries have them), it was a telling example of how places get their meaning through social interaction. It is chilly, around zero degrees, and the weather forecast predicts more snow. But to those lined up in the hill, neither cold nor snow matters. Examples of this were plentiful: the riff from White Stripes’ ‘Seven Nation Army’ never seems to go out of fashion. Neither do loud air-horns, chants, drinking wine straight from the bottle, playing with fireworks and flares in all colours, oversized campfires or the occasional chainsaw (!) rocker; all tools for making as much noise as possible when the cars drift through this tiny pass. Inevitably, to understand further why the traditionally quiet site of Hotel des Trois Vallees has become neighbours with one of the most impressive hospitality programmes ever seen in the WRC, we need to continue the historical investigation of rallying after 1945.

The need for speed

Although Monte Carlo as an event did not develop as a blueprint for modern rallying, except in the very literal sense of offering the word ‘rally’ (as competitors gathered from all over Europe), I am convinced it was a greenhouse of ideas on what the sport should be when rally organisers elsewhere in Europe began holding events again after the Second World War. In addition, two innovations would be crucial. As a consequence of the growing popularity of rallying in Scandinavia, where motorsports had a reputation of putting speed in front of stamina – and the absence of speed limits on some roads in Finland – the *specialsträcka*

(Swedish) or *erikoiskoe* (Finnish), or *special stage* (British) was invented in the 1950s. That meant shorter sections of route, usually on minor or private roads, predominantly gravel or snow in these countries (on frozen lakes), away from habitation and traffic and which were separately timed. Combined with the elevated status of what would become event classics in the WRC history (the Rally of the 1000 Lakes, aka Rally Finland, was launched in 1951) these at long last provided the solution to the conflict inherent in the notion of driving as fast as possible on ordinary roads. This idea spread to other countries, and made the competition element of rallying abruptly more demanding on both drivers and cars (see Tunberg and Haventon, 2000).

The other innovation occurred in 1953 when the FIA established the European Rally Championship (ERC), three years after the World Championship in Formula 1 was established. It consisted of ten events, including the Monte Carlo, and for each driver, the best four results counted. Almost all kinds of ‘Grand Touring Cars’ were acceptable for entry. Since the cars were still relatively unmodified, and drivers more or less unsalaried, it was cheap for manufacturers to lend them to private individuals and still enter as a team under the factory name. Promotionally, it was nothing to hooray about. As Henry Hope-Frost and John Davenport (2004, p. 21) put it: ‘The whole thing was not much more than an extension of the press fleet.’ Over the next decade, however, the championship strengthened the public appreciation of rallying to such a degree that the first proper works teams – that is, professional teams – arrived in the early 1960s. Unlike previous years, the manufacturers now entered cars based on volume models, but equipped for rallying, such as the Saab V4 and the Mini Cooper, introduced in 1960 and 1962. Because these cars brought rallying closer to ordinary people, interest grew and made way for more thorough changes in the sport’s marketing profile.

Even though rallying did not become part of the general sports programme until commercial broadcasting was introduced in 1955 (and then only a minor one), David and Amanda Campbell, both motorsport historians, note that, ‘by the sixties rallying had changed from a preserve of the amateur to a more serious undertaking as manufacturers began to realize the marketing implications of their success’ (Campbell and Campbell, 1995, p. 20). Partly as a consequence of the introduction of speed tests, this popularity grew because it was no longer sufficient to be wealthy in order to win rallies (although it did help, and still does). You also had to know how to drive fast on a variety of surfaces and be generous to a larger public (not just your beneficiaries). David Hassan writes that ‘despite the original impetus emerging from the bourgeoisie, very quickly the history and development of motor racing became democratised’ (Hassan, 2011b, p. 319). With that, new drivers arrived without noble manners. Nicknamed ‘the first superstar in the world of rallying’, Swedish driver Erik ‘on the roof’ Carlsson (a pun on a funny character from Swedish author Astrid Lindgren’s books for children) is one example. Ebullient, a great story-teller and a big man in a small car for which he had a great passion, Carlsson was pivotal in linking the SAAB brand to the underdog position, one who could take on the big boys and, despite having much less power and money, beat them in style throughout the 1960s (see Jarnhammar, 1999).

Unfortunately, the FIA was also slow to profit from this development in which commercial opportunities abounded. With the exception of Saab, perhaps, there was still seemingly little synergy between the growing crowd rally had begun to attract and the promotional potential it harboured. In his 2005 biography on David Richards, motorsport author Alan Henry wryly remarks that, ‘if you had asked a team manager what his “target audience” was three decades ago, he would assumed you were talking about archery’ (Henry, 2005, p. 19). Reputedly, the BMC, who built the iconic Mini Coopers, spent £10,000 on preparing for the Monte Carlo rally of 1966 – a fortune in those days – but the

coverage-to-cost ratio, to use a modern term, was not taken very seriously by the sport's governing body.⁵⁰ Besides almost leaving the sport on its own as far as promotional strategies were concerned, the regulations were too complex for other than the core fans to follow. And in contrast to the Olympic Games or the World Cup, spectacles competing for the same attention, there was still no world championship. FIA's idea of awarding titles to all the car groups, adding ever new rallies to the calendar and separating the drivers' from the constructors' events, meant that the value of a single title was diminished and the efforts of even works teams was fragmented.

On the receiving end of a good deal of criticism, one would imagine that the FIA would simplify things. Instead, they did the contrary. In 1969, they created a new championship called the International Rally Championship for Makes (IRCM). The new creation was not well received by the works teams, not least because the ERC ran alongside the new IRCM and occupied 'a slightly inferior position' which it kept for more than three decades until it was revamped in 2014 (see Hope-Frost and Davenport, 2004, p. 35). To make matters even worse, the FIA – in an attempt to meet the growing popularity of rallying in Europe and mollify the organisers of traditional events like the Monte – expanded the ERC to no fewer than 22 events, at a time when the main criticism was that there were too many events already. It seems as though the FIA and the sport itself were diverging in terms of development. Factory teams were ready to make larger investments, cars became more specialised, drivers became more professional and events could no longer be arranged without at least some knowledge about PR, local authorities and the championship regulations. If rallying was going to reap the benefits of this development, it needed a FIA-sanctioned World Rally Championship supported by the manufacturers. In 1973, it got one. And the first ever WRC rally was held in Monte Carlo.

WRC rallies as events

Soaked because of the rain and impatiently awaiting the podium finishers of Rally Monte Carlo 2013 on Place du Palais Princier in Monaco beneath the sand-coloured Genoan towers, alongside approximately a thousand others, I chortle while admitting to myself that Monte Carlo is a special place in the WRC for so many reasons.

Honorable facilities



In front of the Prince's Palace of Monaco at the prize ceremony. Photo: Hans Erik Næss

It is so interlinked with the rally and the history of the sport that even the Prince's Palace is part of the show. Yet, several other 'classic' WRC events have a similar status, especially in their home countries. That means events new to the WRC have to compete both with senses

of place that have emerged prior to the sport's use of a location, and with WRC events where a sense of place is already established. Sociologist Thomas F. Gieryn points out that: 'The formation of emotional, sentimental bonds between people and a place brings together (in yet another way) the material formations on a geographic site and the meanings we invest in them. This does not usually appear from one-off experiences, but from repeated rituals of place construction' (Gieryn, 2000, p. 481). The issue gets even more complex since modern WRC rallies are not only about the action, traditions and scenery, but also about the larger social circumstances these rallies take place within.

Among these circumstances, we find the reinvention or framing of WRC rallies as sporting *events* as a way to ease possible tensions between conflicting senses of place. We may define events as cultural (including commercial and sporting) happenings that have a dramatic character, mass popular appeal and international significance (Rochem, 2000, p. 1). These events, furthermore, have ramifications for other areas of society like the economy, local culture, tourism and the environment. Location of these events, finally, is accompanied by competition with other events to host 'ever more spectacular, exotic and titillating attractions' (Gotham, 2002, p. 1737). To a varying degree, all these elements are involved in any modern WRC event – be it the classics or the 'newbies' – and brings the question of promotion to a new business level, says Simon Long in an interview I did with him in 2013:

Traditionally it is true that events have tended to operate on their own in terms of marketing and promotion. The inception of the new WRC brand 10 years ago, when the current logo was developed, was the first time a corporate identity and brand proposition had been developed for the sport. Now we're working with the event promoters to ensure they deliver consistent marketing messages reflecting the WRC brand guidelines. Events are now required to submit business plans that include

sporting and marketing and promotional plans looking three years ahead and they are required to meet certain criteria around media, press and promotional activity. If they do not reach that standard the likelihood is that they will not have a place in the calendar going forward. So it's a very different way of working with the events now compared to before.⁵¹

Long gives us several of the keys as to why WRC rallies now should be seen as something more than mere sporting competition. Ever since the introduction of the cloverleaf format around 2000, it has been an unspoken premise that the service park – the area where teams park their trailers, service their cars, and do different hospitality gigs, all in full public view – should have a location which combines leisure activities (read tourism) and sport, benefitting both local businesses and participants. In many ways, it is the most direct expression of the legacy from the X-games (a now-famous sporting event invented by American TV channel ESPN in 1995) which set the standard for how to condense a lifestyle sport into a rallying theme park. I will come back to this when considering how other action sport events seek to combine focus on individual athletes with promotion of the sport, but suffice to say, as Sean O'Connor underlines, a modern WRC event is significant for a large number of stakeholders:

...for the WRC organisers showcasing of the event as an exciting and developing sport. For sponsors of competing teams and participants and venue sponsors it is a return on investment, delivering value for money and earning revenue. For spectators it is the search for an enjoyable and rewarding experience to replicate in common with others and for volunteers search for social capital to accrue to bank within the event or use for other purposes (O'Connor, 2010, p. 69).

In this balance between mass appeal and pleasing the devotees, most attention has been turned to economics. A handful of studies confirm the economic rationale behind the transformation of WRC rallies into events. A study of the British WRC event in 1998, the Network Q Rally of Great Britain, claimed that it pumped £11.1 million into the local economies, £6.7 million or 60 per cent of it from outside the impact area. Most of it benefited local hotels and restaurants, as well as the organiser of the rally (Lilley and DeFranco, 1998, p. 1). At the same rally in 2001, using a different methodology, it was claimed that over £5.3 million was spent during the event by spectators, teams, and accredited personnel (Jones and Jarman, 2002, p. 15). In 2000, a research report on the financial impact of Rally Australia estimated a total of £3.4 million expenditure stimulated in Western Australia as a result of the event (Jones and Jarman, 2002, p. 15). In connection with Rally Ireland 2007, it was estimated that it generated at least €39.1 million of additional spending (Hassan and McCulloch, 2007a). Similar findings are presented by other WRC events or associated research partners as they seek to justify themselves by adding something of value to the community and not just a fun show – despite variable methodological reliability (Dredge and Whitford, 2011, p. 485).

But, as I will argue throughout this thesis, the arrival and disappearance of WRC events are as much about value for money (VfM), that is, a broader analysis of qualities one gets in return from investments, as they are about strict cost-benefit ratios. In their 2007 comparative study of six WRC events, David Hassan and Douglas McCulloch, for example, note that deciding whether an event is worthwhile economically raises a lot of problems: ‘It is simply not possible in every context to establish money amounts in an acceptable way, and it is certainly not desirable here’ (Hassan and McCulloch, 2007b, p. 31). What’s more, organising a WRC event requires practice. Take Patrick Suberville, for instance. Through a decade as Rally Director of Rally Mexico, an event which in Martin Holmes’ view has become one of the deepest-rooted events of the new arrivals in the WRC since 2004 (Holmes,

2014, p. 70), Suberville has learned two lessons which other events wanting to get into the WRC should note clearly: first, treat the locals well. In the late 1990s, in a country, and a city, where no one had any experience of the scale and scope required to organize international rallies, Suberville and his partners in developing a Mexican WRC event had a long way to go:

They had no idea that international rallying existed or what the impact could be. You cannot immediately come up to people and say we need this, this and this. They look at you like you are from another planet. This actually helped us focus on the other opportunities of running the rally. After four or five years we have all got to understand that the direct benefits to the event to Leon, to the hotels, restaurants, bars and so on but there was more to offer for the people (cited in Holmes, 2014, p. 72).

Lesson number two is to integrate the wider WRC community. In fact, Suberville underlined in 2014, that the evolving relationship between promotional sagacity and a sporting challenge so vital to the identity of the sport has been a source of sustainability since it gained WRC status in 2004.

The reason for the relevance of this view is simply that the cultural affection people have or gain with certain places in the WRC world is worth more, or has a different currency, as it were, that defies the use of numbers. With this in mind, it still seems that some WRC organisers have not capitalised on the important link of place and tradition in sporting culture and event management. The service park at Rally Sardinia in 2011, for instance, was anything but enchanting. In 2007 Simon Long had claimed:

the Service Park needs a re-think, too. There's no reason why we can't take the best aspects of an outdoor rock concert and something like the Le Mans 24 hours to create

a car-themed festival atmosphere. We could hold events around the midday service, but the evening should be when the fun really kicks off with a full range of entertainment and a party atmosphere.⁵²

Four years later, walking around the service park at Sardinia, the hub of the Italian WRC event in 2011, I could, in principle, have been anywhere. True, these parks are different from one another; they can be small and chaotic, like in Wales, big and historically oriented, like the one at Rally Finland, or dominated by single actors like ‘Loeb events’ (the agency founded by Sébastien Loeb’s wife Severine), like the one at Rally de France-Alsace. Yet research on spectator satisfaction at Rally Finland in 2011 and 2012 confirms the unexploited potential of event organisation. Regardless of gender or level of commitment to rallying, spectators were most satisfied with the atmosphere in the special stage and least satisfied with things like the selection of food for sale (Mehto and Takala, 2012, pp. 37-38; Laitinen, 2013, pp. 33-40). Even though the overall satisfaction level with this particular event was high, which produces a strong motivation for recommending the event to others, we should see any source of dissatisfaction as a threat to the event.

If the event angle is to be upheld, the service park is part of the solution. At Rally Sardinia, the official programme promised ‘an enchanted place’.⁵³ Especially prominent in this message is the Costa Smeralda, where the town of Porto Cervo was created in the 1960s by the Swiss-born and Kenya-raised Prince Karim Aga Khan, Imam of the Ismaili community (a branch of Shia islam), who was fascinated by the beauty of this stretch of Gallura. Since then, Porto Cervo has become a hub of luxury tourism and VIPs, of trendy pubs, fashion boutiques, restaurants and yachts, as well as of the meeting place of the international jetsetters – and, of course, as the base for the Italian WRC event.⁵⁴ It was for reasons like these that Enrico Gelpi, President of the *Automobile Club d’Italia* (ACI), the organiser of the Italian

WRC event, said in April 2011 that, ‘the event is a strategic opportunity for the island’s tourism’.⁵⁵ According to its own statistics, at the 2009 edition of the rally which took place in May, a low-season period, event attendance at hotels passed 62,000, generating an increase of 100 per cent compared to the first edition of Rally Sardinia in 2004. Its economic turnover was estimated to be more than 11 millions euros.⁵⁶

These official numbers suggest an opportunity to display the island in a different way from just showcasing the glitz and glamour of Costa Smeralda. At the service park, there was very little indication from the WRC event to remind me that I actually was on Sardinia. The music played on the official promoter’s WRC radio was the same Top 20 hits as everywhere in Europe or the US. I wondered, for instance, whether the organisers had thought about the possibility of offering local cuisine like *Burrida*, dogfish and nuts, typical of Olbia, rather than the tasteless pizza (which probably would give any dedicated Italian chef a heart attack). Or if they had given any thought to the fact that every *mercato sivile* in Sardinia’s cities – a kind of bustling farmer’s market – attracts thousands of people because of their great variety and high quality food. Last, but not least, the absence of well organized after parties weaken the status of WRC rallies as events. In my view, these parties would entice people to come and meet other fans and have a taste of the local specialities while listening to live music, a combination of experiences that at Rally Sardinia could have been offered at the Piazza Margherita, the main square of Olbia.

But there are also examples of rally organisers who have successfully intertwined the multiple demands generated by the service parks and the event itself. As one of the most dedicated ‘new’ organisers of a WRC event – the first event was held in 2002 – Rally Germany has, from the beginning, been very alive to the manifold event possibilities of a WRC rally. The focus has been on the spectator and the total experience of the rally, including wine tasting and other activities. In 2011, event organisers received the

Neumagen-Dhron *Weinförderpreis* (Wine Promotion Prize) from the city council of Neumagen-Dhron for having made the Mosel wine region world famous.⁵⁷ Event director Armin Kohl has, in addition, been credited with improving access, catering facilities, continual information services and sanitary facilities – actually cited as one of the reasons why there is a significantly higher proportion of female spectators there than elsewhere: 22.4 per cent at Rally Germany in 2007 compared with the average 10 per cent (Hassan and O’Connor, 2009, p. 717). I will come back to the spectator culture of rallying in Chapter 7.

The environmental concern

At Rally Monte Carlo no one speaks about – at least not out loud – the environmental concerns. Yet, that is the one issue that really challenges the sense of place in the WRC. At a time when the environmental threat has risen to the top of global politics, it is natural that a polluting sport like rallying has received a lot of negative attention. According to geographer Paul Tranter and communication researcher Mark Lowes, motorsport can have a major impact on the ecosystem: ‘Motorsport events (and their associated corporate interests) can be seen as representing many of the attitudes and behaviours that will need to be changed or abandoned if the world is to have any hope of providing a livable future for the human species (and several million others)’ (Tranter and Lowes, 2009, p. 73). Despite being a bit simplistic in their analysis, they point out a growing challenge to organisers of WRC rallies, not to forget the FIA, which has received little care in the past. Now, conversely, according to Greg Dingle (2009, p. 89), another researcher discussing the same topic, motorsport managers have no choice: ‘Overt marketing of carbon-intensive sport and associated spectator and audience consumption is inconsistent with the growing global awareness of the environmental problems facing humanity.’

Whereas the FIA have put this on the agenda through various campaigns since its World Motor Sport Council (WMSC) created the new Environmentally Sustainable Motor Sport Commission in 2008,⁵⁸ event organisers have worked more hands-on to downplay the environmentally dirty image of motorsport. One example is the British WRC event.⁵⁹ It became carbon neutral in 2008 – meaning that the CO₂ produced by the event has been reduced to ‘net zero’ (every one tonne of CO₂ is ‘neutralized’ by one tonne saved somewhere else in the world). Furthermore, a study found that the rally cars produced five per cent of the total CO₂ emission generated by rallies whereas travel to and from the event by spectators, teams and the media was responsible for 79 per cent. Another example came at Rally de France-Alsace 2011, where the French Motor Sports Federation (FFSA), claimed that, ‘right from the launch of the operations linked to the organization of the 2011 Rally France-Alsace, the FFSA has involved all the bodies looking after the protection of the environment.’⁶⁰ As an example, they refer to a carbon evaluation of Rally France-Alsace conducted in 2010, which found that it generated 2,700 tons of greenhouse gases, the equivalent to no more than two round trips by Airbus between Paris and New York in terms of CO₂ emissions.

More ingrained than global climate change, however, is the local disruption of communities caused by WRC events. Here, the Australian WRC event in Northern Rivers Region, New South Wales (NSW) 2009, stands out. Although Australians have a history since the early 1990s of campaigning against motorsport events on environmental grounds (see Fredline, 2004), the 2009 event brought to the fore other aspects of community cohesion and local democracy as well. Seemingly, the organisers’ commitment to the economic benefits of the rally to the NSW public sat uneasily with local community values and expectations (Dredge et al., 2010, p. 23), according to responses from the No Rally Group and 7th Generation, and generated a storm of protest because it was staged in ‘a contrived space, controlled and manipulated by special legislation and the actions of the event organiser’

(Dredge and Whitford, 2011, p. 491). Gordon Moyes, at the time a Member of the New South Wales Legislative Council, summarised the opponents' political view well in a parliamentary session on 17 June, 2009: 'If the rally proceeds, it is an insulting imposition on the locals by external parties with truly alien values who are apparently such arrogant people that they will not take the broad hint that they are not wanted.'⁶¹

Two years previously, the company, Events NSW, entered negotiations with the Confederation of Australian Motor Sport (CAMS) for the entire Australian round series to be based in Northern NSW. After almost a year of 'closed door meetings' (Dredge et al., 2010, p. 11), it was officially announced on 10 September 2008, that the event would be staged in the Northern Rivers region of NSW every second year until 2017, with an option to extend the arrangement for a further five events. The headquarters of the event would be in Kingscliff and the majority of competition activity in the ensuing five rallies would take place in the Tweed and Kyogle Shires, with the first of the Repco Rally Australia events occurring on 3-6 September 2009. According to the study, residents of Tweed and Kyogle Shires were informed only through the media and by a letterbox drop that was carried out as the announcement of the event was being made. The reason was 'confidentiality agreements' and, despite the initial excitement voiced by the General Manager of Tweed Shire, Mike Rayner, an acrimonious debate soon broke out, not only because Rayner was a member of the board of Rally Australia, and thus subject to accusations of conflict of interest, but because of the vaguely documented promise of economic benefits – a staggering \$100 million over five events and the touting of the rally as a cost-effective way of showcasing the region to the world (Dredge and Whitford, 2011, p. 489).

Apparently unaware of the latent resistance from the community, the organisers suddenly faced protests from environmentalists concerned about everything from noise monitoring and wildlife preservation, to carbon emissions and cultural heritage. Despite these

protests, the rally was run and while evaluations are not yet conclusive, they show a mixed picture. Economically, after four days of rallying, one report argued that ‘given that the country town of Kyogle has few businesses that operate on weekends, the direct trading profit in real terms may in fact be quite small’ (Dredge et al., 2010, p. 23). Research by Joanne Mackellar comes to a slightly different conclusion and even argues against the claim that it was a mainly top-down operation: ‘the planning process also involved consultations with land owners, indigenous groups, community groups and a series of public meetings’ (Mackellar, 2009, p. 6), and suggests that the economic benefits were significant. She also includes that the rally was viewed as a necessary boost to the local economy since, as in many rural areas of Australia, economic and industrial setbacks have affected the towns forcing many to make the choice between leaving them in search for work or staying unemployed (Mackellar, 2013, p. 1151).

Table 6.1. Costs and Benefits from the 2009 NSW Rally Australia

| Main themes of the research | |
|--|------------------------------------|
| Costs | Benefits |
| The division of the community | Economic boost |
| Mismatched needs and provisions | Future opportunities/tourism |
| Brand incongruous to eco-tourism | Social interaction |
| Environmental concerns not listened to | Social excitement |
| Sense of powerlessness of processes | Community groups income & activity |
| Poor communication | Pride |
| Lack of community consultation by governments | Opportunities to learn |
| Intimidation of protestors, workers and public | |
| Disruption to lifestyle | |
| Minority not being heard or acknowledged | |

Source: Adapted from Mackellar, 2009, p 49.

Statistically, Mackellar notes that as much as 84 per cent of the community believed that it had benefited from the event, and nearly the same percentage agreed that the benefits outweighed the costs of the event (Mackellar, 2013, p. 1155). Around half of the businesses in

Kyogle Shire directly benefited from the rally, specifically those in tourism and retail and 66 per cent suggested that Kyogle would receive positive flow-on benefits such as tourism and promotion. Further, 80 per cent want the event to return, against 17 per cent who do not. The rest were unsure (Mackellar, 2009, p. 48). On the other hand, the social costs were greater than they should have been, as Table 6.1 above shows.

Although only a third of Mackellar's respondents felt the community had suffered from conflict or division due to the rally, and three out four would like to see a return of the rally, her and others' findings on Rally Australia are indicative of the multiple sense of place evoked by environmental and community concerns. Garry Connelly, the FIA representative at CAMS who was also Chairman of the Organising Committee, later admitted they had little idea of the full extent of the Australian challenges they were about to face. But as the magnitude of the opposing forces became clear – as letters, protests and even lawsuits began to arrive – CAMS and the organisers took matters into their own hands for future events: 'We decided the best strategy would be a fully proactive one, by always keeping a step ahead of every environmental issue and making sure to leave no gaps in our green approach' (InMotion, 2009, pp. 58-59).⁶² Eventually, the effort paid off. In 2013, Rally Australia became the first motorsport event in the world to receive an environmental award for Achievement of Excellence (where a stakeholder meets best practice in every area of the programme).⁶³ The flaunt? The prize was awarded by the FIA Institute.

Place and promotion

Back at Col de Turini, it is now 23.00 at night and I look down at the stage from my hotel window at Les Chamois. As there are more police cars with their cherries on than fans outside, mainly because adverse weather and too many spectators in the road forced the stage

to be cancelled, it may not be quite like the glory days with thirty thousand spectators going bananas throughout the entire night. Nevertheless, in its 81st edition, hosting the first rally of the WRC's 40th anniversary season, the Rally Monte Carlo has been a sensual explosion. It was a display of what Greg Ramshaw and Sean Gammon label, 'immovable intangible sport heritage' because the social interaction, manifested in songs, traditions, memories and 'rituals', that makes the location special exists only as long as the rally exists (Ramshaw and Gammon, 2006, p. 234). It was the opposite of the atmosphere of many service parks and even rallies haunted by placelessness – sites with no emotional ties (Relph, 1976, p. 143). Historically, place-evoked emotions on change are therefore common in the WRC. Especially, as I suggested earlier in this chapter, since it is not only Monte Carlo that has cultural links with rallying. Sandra, one of my British informants, summarized this philosophy with clarity: 'Each country gives each rally its own special atmosphere.'

Apart from Monte Carlo one example came when the Safari rally, which used to be held in Kenya, was removed from the calendar in 2003. There was almost a collective sadness manifested in blogs, magazines and books across the WRC community. As an endurance event lasting for more than 5000 kilometres, on mostly public roads encountering local wildlife, the gruelling forces of nature and political unrest, it had built up a mythology as one of the classic WRC events. In 1999, Roger Barnard wrote in *African Business* that the Safari rally was in real danger. Against the backdrop of Bernie Ecclestone's suggestion to make the WRC more TV-friendly by introducing more compact events, Barnard was in no doubt that 'sentiment and tradition will be sacrificed if necessary to make the product more commercially successful' (Barnard, 1999, p. 35). Yet, despite the exit of the Safari, neither money nor a set format is everything. In 2005, Prince Feisal Al-Hussein – the chairman of Jordan Motorsport – claimed that a WRC rally held in Jordan would generate \$20 million during the rally week alone.⁶⁴ Less impressed by the exuberant anticipation of the organiser,

Olivier Quesnel, former team principal of Citroën Racing, commented after the rally that the money was worth little if there weren't more spectators around.⁶⁵

On a championship level, one could therefore say that the WRC's history is its own 'enemy'. Sandwiched between taking advantage of history on the one hand, and the event-induced need to create a new spectacle on the other hand, in addition to considering non-rally elements like environmental and cultural issues, it seems from this investigation that deciding upon the WRC calendar is the single most difficult issue of all. Questioned about the importance of place and heritage in 2009, Morrie Chandler, WRC Commission President 2006-11, answered:

This is still being discussed. We've put it to one side because it is very difficult to choose which of the six or eight rallies which are seen as the backbone of the WRC we should keep year after year. Some of the events are pristine in all respects and it would be good for the WRC to have them in every year, but equally there are two or three which are very, very good events but which haven't been around for quite so long. If it becomes apparent during 2009 or 2010 that the rotation system isn't working the way we planned, then we have alternative plans in place which we can go back to. A mix of permanent and rotating events, or maybe a slightly larger calendar are just two of the options.⁶⁶

Based on the findings in this chapter, it seems like the mix of permanent and rotating events can be a constructive idea. One suggestion is a compromise where the two-year rotation system is kept for half the rallies (the newbies) while the other half (the classics) would remain the same for at least five years. If combined well, with particular emphasis on sporting heritage, local interest and promotional possibilities, this could be a cost-saving opportunity to

cement some of the classics of the sport – hence satisfying the traditionalists – while also maintaining the search for new markets, commercially or sportingly (ideally both) relevant to the WRC. That way, manufacturers would have a timespan with a predictable structure to adapt their marketing strategies to different markets like the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China) in particular – an opinion already voiced by Michele Mouton in 2011 (see InMotion, 2011, p. 54).

Besides providing the ‘traditionalists’ and the ‘modernists’ with a bridge on which they could meet, the rallies are what supply the WRC with something to use in the promotional mix, namely, the kind of differentiation we talked about in Chapter 4 – the qualities that set a sport apart from every rival experience. Enthusiastic spectators you can find in any sport, cars appeal to fans in other motorsports as well, and in rally-cross, the WRC has a serious contender in terms of action. But the places where rallies are driven are unique to the WRC. In this process, ‘the invention of tradition’ takes time. Rally Finland (see Chapter 7) has gained fame because of its high speeds, numerous jumps and massive spectator turnout. On the Ouninpohja stage, for instance, there are 169 jumps over 33 kilometres, while average speeds of more than 130 km/h are achieved on narrow forest roads. Colin McRae described it like this:

You get a fantastic buzz when you are driving it well because it is so fast and the jumps are so spectacular. It must be almost as good for the spectators, as the cars launch themselves over the crests. Finns are mad keen on rallying and are as enthusiastic as they are knowledgeable (McRae and Allsop, 2001, p. 232).

This reputation did not come overnight, though. Its foundations were laid as far back as 1950 when it became a qualifying event for the Rally Monte Carlo. Nine years later, it became a

qualifying round of the European Rally Championship. The next step for the event was its inclusion in the Championship for Manufacturers in its first year in 1973. Similarly, several other rallies did not become classics right away. Simultaneously as we need to take into account that the promotional circumstances have changed since the 1960s, it is thus unfair to demand from new rallies that they become ‘classics’ in a much shorter timespan.

This brings us back to the beginning of this chapter, where I discussed a row between ACM (the organiser of the Rally Monte Carlo) and the FIA, which featured many of the characteristics mentioned above, and which led to the event’s three-year absence from the WRC. I get a final indication of the importance of place itself when I catch up with Terry Jr, an American motorsport aficionado, in the bar after the Monte is over. He and his father, Terry Sr have experienced several racing events in Europe, among them F1 races and the famous *24 Heures de Le Mans*, but this is their first WRC rally. Safely sheltered from the pouring rain outside, we talk about the history of this particular event and I understand that it is not coincidental that I met them here:

We chose the Monte because of its legendary status in rallying history and the inclusion of the famous Col de Turini. We were also drawn to the varying terrains of the Monte which would allow us to see the drivers in changing conditions. Finally, we were excited about the opportunity to stay at the Hotel des Trois Vallees and then visit Monaco for the finish.

I found father and son particularly interesting because the US has never been a big market for the WRC. This is partly due to high costs of market entry (O’Connor, 2004, p. 138), which made the ISC choose other target markets after the media reforms in 2000, but also due to traditionally low public interest in the WRC compared with other motorsports like NASCAR.

Three WRC events were run in the US between 1986 and 1988, with relatively little impact on American motorsport consumers. And while American Ken Block did some events between 2007 and 2013, coming seventh as best, his name is more closely associated with action sports, the Gymkhana stunt videos and the DC Shoes company, which he co-founded.

Yet, as Americans, the Terrys illustrate why the sense of place is a promotional asset. As evidenced in other studies of sport their motivation shows how the narratives conjured by a locality can be an integral part of a destination's heritage, and, as Greg Ramshaw and Sean Gammon point out (2006, p. 236), 'invariably some tourists will choose to visit locations associated with a distinct sporting past and sporting culture.' Especially, but not exclusively, when it comes to Rally Monte Carlo, with its status as the birthplace of rallying and the WRC, such an approach demonstrates that places are 'created and maintained through "the fields of care" that result from people's emotional attachment' (Kyle and Chick, 2007, p. 222). Converted into narratives these emotions are shared, refined and embellished among the members of the WRC community, regardless of where they come from. In other words, stories about the Rally Monte Carlo become part and parcel of what I in Chapter 1 termed the WRC's narrative constitution of identity.

Conclusion

Whenever a 'classic' rally is removed from the calendar (Monte Carlo, Safari rally, Rally Finland), this is followed by strong accusations from the community against the FIA for removing the sport further away from what made it popular in the first place. In this chapter, we have discovered how and why this affection for place and rallying matters promotionally to the WRC. The reason is the impact the combination of dramatic scenery, famous stages, accumulated history and folklore about spectator life has had on the WRC community.

Unlike, say, the Olympic Games, WRC rallies don't require large infrastructural investments, and, like the travelling circus it is, it packs up and goes when the rally is done.

Because the sense of place has to be reconstructed at each rally each time it is held, it takes time to establish traditions, customs and identity. As we have seen from various examples with Rally Monte Carlo as key case, one reason for this is that when a group of people is integrated into a place, it transforms it in its own image, but at the same time 'it bends and adapts to the material things that resist it', so that 'the place bears the stamp of the group, and vice versa' (Halbwachs, 1950/1997, pp. 186 and 195; cited in Truc, 2012, p. 150). Conversely, in other cases where there is a local conflict, as demonstrated in this Chapter with Rally Australia, the promoter cannot avoid considering the various senses of place that already exist and that are important to people. Especially when it comes to environmental concerns, which undoubtedly will become a growing issue in the years to come, there is a latent resistance to polluting sports like rallying which will affect its promotional value if it is not taken into account in the selection of events.

Finally, while the history and traditions of some events, most notably the Monte Carlo, make this 'stamp of the group' easier to communicate to the WRC community, group identity goes way beyond being a mirror of the meaning of place. Mario Fidelibus, the CEO of Receptive Events and Tours Organization (RETO), an Argentinan rally travel agency, was for example convinced that Rally Argentina is a unique event because of its spectators. But he emphasised its distinctively *cordobese* character: 'Attempts to move the rally to other provinces than Cordoba have been bad, especially when trying it in Buenos Aires.' As a result, the next chapter will explore the spectator culture of the WRC and subsequently demonstrate why it must be added to the analysis of the championship's promotional qualities.

Chapter 7: The spectator culture of rallying

Introduction

The third promotional arena of the WRC is its spectator culture. People who follow the WRC, be they hard-core fans or casual viewers, invest emotions, time and money in the sport.

Primarily based upon fieldwork in Finland and Argentina, the aim of this chapter is to find out more about who they are and how they acquire the taste for it. CEO of former WRC promoter North One Sport, Simon Long provides me with a place to start: ‘This isn’t a circuit race with rockets on wheels. This is real cars on real roads in some fantastic locations that we can all relate to. Our spectators get up close and dirty.’⁶⁷ Apart from the so-called ‘super special stages’ (SSS) that take place at football stadiums, city centres and other TV-friendly areas, a WRC rally takes place on ordinary roads that are closed off during the rally known as ‘special stages’.

These roads can be both close to large cities and far into the mountains, woods, deserts or other remote areas. Spectators thus need to negotiate all kinds of weather, temperatures and scenery. Some spectator points are very famous and gather tens of thousands of spectators each year, while others are never known as anything but a bend in the stage. Most travel there by car or bus, park in designated areas for the occasion (often a field), and walk the rest of the way until they find a good spot to watch the action. In the past, you could in principle, stand anywhere, even in the middle of the road, but today, the safety arrangements are much stricter and there are ribbons to fence off the most dangerous areas. Because of this range of access options and localities, WRC spectators are, as a group, as in any other spectator sports, characterised by a particular social dynamic and culturally influenced behaviour.

To unpack what this means, I start this chapter with a review of the WRC’s

breakthrough as a global sport in the period of 1973-86, as this also sheds light on the positive and negative sides of the emergence of a rally spectator culture. Then, I move on to examine who today's spectators are, filtered through analytical concepts like class, nationality and gender, before I turn to what people appreciate about spectating rallies and the implications that has for promotional fan profiling. Finally, I end with a brief discussion of how spectators can be engaged to share their experiences, in particular in the form of narratives, as these are valuable as promotional spadework in the context of the transmedia storytelling and glocalisation of sports investigated in Chapter 5.

Up close and dirty

'Damn mosquitos!' Rickard does not even try to sugar-coat his contempt for the little flying devils that occupy the Finnish forests. Together with Mathias and Nicklas, we have walked for an hour and there is still no sign of the spectator-designed area on SS 3, Jukojärvi. It is the second day of Rally Finland 2010 – in its 60th edition – and we are walking with sun-kissed arms and sweaty foreheads on a narrow trail into the forests. The heat is staggering and thick as gravy, reputedly because of some Russian forest fires which are out of control and heating up the whole of Finland, too. During the hike, we witness what Mathias calls the worst aspect of rally culture; woozy, shirtless young men much more eager to reach the bottom of their Vodka bottles than to see the cars. Luckily, many rally organisers have become very strict when it comes to marshalling the spectators. At this rally, red and white do-not-cross-tapes are everywhere. However, spectator concern can be too forcefully policed, like at Rally Monte Carlo (see previous chapter), and I could hear that many were unhappy with this 'animal husbandry' at Rally Finland, especially when they compared it with the old days. Or

as Jonkka, one of my Finnish informants said: ‘If people decide to be idiots, it’s their own fault!’

This infringement on the freedom of spectators stands in contrast to the selling point of any WRC event. Given that it is a so-called ‘distributed event’, that is, divided into separate parts held at different geographical locations at the same time or in a sequence where spectators can only view portions of the event (Nilsson, Nulden and Olsson, 2005, p. 273), the access options are vast. For example, the itinerary from Rally Monte Carlo 2014 looked like this:

Figure 7.1. A WRC event itinerary (Rally Monte Carlo 2014)

| ITINERARY | | | |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------|------------------|
| Stage | Name | Distance (km) | First car |
| DAY 1 – 16.01.2014 | | | |
| SS1 | Orpierre – St Andre de Rosans 1 | 25.49 | 07.28 |
| SS2 | Rosans – Ste Marie – La Charce 1 | 17.98 | 08.16 |
| SS3 | Montauban Sur L’Ouveze – Laborel 1 | 19.34 | 09.49 |
| SS4 | Orpierre – St Andre de Rosans 2 | 25.49 | 13.32 |
| SS5 | Rosans – Ste Marie – La Charce 2 | 17.98 | 14.20 |
| SS6 | Montauban Sur L’Ouveze – Laborel 2 | 19.34 | 15.53 |
| DAY TWO – 17.01.2014 | | | |
| SS7 | Vitrolles – Faye 1 | 49.03 | 08.48 |
| SS8 | Selonnes - Breziers | 22.68 | 10.41 |
| SS9 | Vitrolles – Faye 2 | 49.03 | 13.04 |
| SS10 | Sisteron – Thoard | 36.85 | 14.32 |
| SS11 | Clumanc - Lambruisse | 20.77 | 18.00 |
| DAY THREE – 18.01.2014 | | | |
| SS12 | La Bollene Vesubie – Moulinet 1 | 23.40 | 14.48 |
| SS13 | Sospel – Breil Sur Roya 1 | 16.55 | 15.41 |
| SS14 | La Bollene Vesubie – Moulinet 2 | 23.40 | 20.12 |
| SS15 | Sospel – Breil Sur Roya 1 | 16.55 | 21.05 |

Source: Adapted from www.wrc.com

What figure 7.1 shows is the two locations between which each stage of the rally is run during the three days of the event (on wrc.com, from where this table is adapted, one could click on the stage and get additional information), as well as when the first car is about to start. Transferred to a map, these locations make a pattern of geographical dots criss-crossing the southernmost parts of France. Spectators can then pick and mix viewing points anywhere along the 380 kilometres of rally roads. For safety reasons, these roads have been increasingly marshalled since the end of the rowdy Group B era, which lasted from 1982 to 1986. Until the late 1970s I was told, spectator culture was quite civilised. Mainly, it was composed of grown men travelling discreetly into the forests and mountains, some with tents, and returning to the pub for a pint and some discussion afterwards or the next day. With Group B, this all changed. Vividly captured by a journalist in *The Glasgow Herald* in 1986, spectators were as wild as the cars:

‘Unlike Grand Prix tracks, with their steel barriers, catch-link fences, deceleration run-off areas and attendant medical, fire-fighting and rescue equipment, the world’s forests, mountains and jungles provide a virtually uncontrollable battleground where the freedom of spectators has been an integral part of the sport.’⁶⁸

Sadly, spectators who came in hundreds of thousands to see the new Group B cars, very up close and dirty, misused this new freedom. While on many occasions, it became a fantastic show, equivalent to the Rio carnival or Pamplona bull race, at other times, they had no concern for their personal safety but bore dirt, snow, dust and bruises from stones as ‘badges of honour’, which demonstrated their total dedication to the sport and proved that they were there. From pictures of this mania, it looks like the ideal was to play ‘chicken’ with the WRC cars to get the best photo or the closest feel of sound and speed. Naturally, this has had an

impact on what constitutes the real spectator culture of the WRC. By the standards of the 1980s and early 1990s, motorsport journalist Patrick McCullagh (2012) recalled that, ‘today’s rally spectators are a bunch of “wet blankets” or “big girls blouses”, because back then they were not just standing watching the stage – they were part of it!’

Tragically, the once-fantastic atmosphere spiralled out of control, ending in fatalities among drivers and spectators. Most serious was the accident at Rally Portugal in 1986, where local driver, Joaquin Santos, lost control over his Group B Ford RS200 and plunged into the massive crowds, killing three and injuring more than thirty people. Despite its fatalities, Group B is often considered ‘the golden age of rallying’ for its revolutionary technology, wild power outputs from the cars, inherent danger evoked by gruelling long rallies, flamboyant drivers and euphoric spectators. Alejandro, one of my Argentine informants, thinks there is a real difference between now and then: ‘It was more exciting, plenty of adrenaline. I remember the night stages, waiting with my friends around a big fire to keep us warm.’ Nicklas concurred and underlined: ‘In those years technology and development became extreme, something which has continued up until today.’ This widespread affinity for Group B is not coincidental. Both its cars and the political prelude are important to understand the effect this era had on the sport and its spectators.

The golden age of rallying?

As I explained in Chapter 1, the WRC was established in its current format in 1973. Unfortunately, the FIA’s attitude to it lagged behind the development of the sport itself. The reason was that there was still no championship title attributed to drivers. At this point, in the mid-1970s, television coverage increased, sponsors began to take notice of the sport and rally drivers had begun to make something of themselves outside the car. As they were no longer

aristocrats and the wealthy, but farmers, mechanics, salespeople and so on with a distinct sense of contact with the spectators, the sport further affirmed its relationship with a certain kind of spectator. As a result, after running the IRCM from only 1970-72, the World Rally Championship for Manufacturers (WRC) came into being in 1973, the inaugural event being the 42nd Rally Monte Carlo. For some enigmatic reason, as said, there was no World Driver's title. The lesson was finally learned from similar developments in Formula 1, where a Driver's World Championship was established as early as 1950, provoking two motorsport historians to write: 'it took the FIA some six years to redress when it should have taken them six minutes' (Hope-Frost and Davenport, 2004, p. 40).

It is in the light of this remark that we must understand the same historians when they write that, 'for prestige advertising and model endorsement, the Manufacturers' title was very important, but it is stories about people that sell newspapers and magazines' (Hope-Frost and Davenport, 2004, p. 40). As motorsport historian Peter Collins pointed out, to manufacturers, 'the publicity and marketing potential attached to the newly announced rally series was substantial' (Collins, 2008, p. 8). But even with all the signs pointing to a much-needed rethink of the WRC already in the early 70s, the FIA did not get around to establishing a World Rally Championship for Drivers until 1979. Something called the FIA Cup was set up in 1977, but never gained prestige as a real world rally championship title and was abandoned in 1980 in favour of a World Championship title for WRC drivers. Political bickering of this sort seems to be the FIA's bugbear and the 1980s were the halcyon days of it. In John Davenport's chronicle (Davenport and Klein, 2012), it all started in October 1978 with the election of Jean-Marie Balestre as President of what at the time was called *Commission Sportive Internationale* (CSI) of the FIA.

Balestre was a very ambitious man and wanted to rejuvenate the relationship between motorsport and commercial arenas. Aware that rallying and racing with 'normal' cars were

the main areas in which manufacturers used motorsport as showrooms, he took great steps to revise the famous Appendix J to the FIA's Sporting Code, the appendix which 'contained all technical rules governing the classification into which vehicles could be admitted for the purposes of motorsport' (Davenport and Klein, 2012, p. 12). At this time, in the late 1970s, these rules had basically been the same since 1966. The FIA classified cars into six groups where Group 2 cars (cars with a minimum production run of 1,000 in 12 consecutive months) and Group 4 cars (special models with minimum production of 500, reduced to 400 in 1976, in 12 consecutive months) were accepted in WRC events. As this homogenisation gave scope for extensive ingenuity, there was no real consensus on what kind of modifications could be done. What's more, they affected manufacturers differently.

This situation made no sense to Balestre or his Technical Commission President, Curt Schild, and they wanted to make it simpler and more consistent with the sport's origins. Manufacturers, on the other hand, 'wanted rules that suited the cars they sold' – which obviously had changed since the inauguration of the championship – or which gave them 'a free hand to do something else' (Campbell and Campbell, 1995, p. 41). In the end, what came out was as complex as the previous situation, if not more so, but the original suggestion was reasonable enough. There were to be three groups for competition cars: A, B and C, where only the first two had to be production-based (group C was intended for circuit racing). Group A was meant to include tuned mass production cars (in quantities of at least 5,000 a year), while Group B was seen as the specialist version of rally cars with only 200 units built per year. At this time, there was a major reorganisation of the FISA as the *Bureau Permanent International des Constructeurs d'Automobiles* (BPICA) was formed from nominees from each national car manufacturer's organisation. A manufacturer's representative, Philippe Schmitz, was drafted on to the FISA Executive while selected manufacturers sat in on

specialist committees such as Technical, Endurance and Rally (Davenport and Klein, 2012, p. 16).

Around this table, there were intense discussions on the new Appendix J groups, and only after four months, in January 1980, were BPICA's acceptance of the original groupings passed on to the FIA. When this was settled, the debate on detailed regulations began. While the numbers were agreed, it was also agreed by FISA that the new groups should allow evolutionary models – and the standard was that only 10 per cent of the quantity required for the group should be needed to grant an ET (Evolution of the Type). If, for example, Audi made 200 road-going editions of their 'ordinary' Group B car, the Audi S1, to satisfy FIA's production requirement, only 20 such road cars of a re-engineered model of the Audi S1 had to be built to qualify as an Evolution model eligible for WRC the next season. This was in fact going to be true for the Group B cars. Manufacturers were given the impression that the new rules would operate from 1982 onwards.

Some, among them the Ford team, which had been notoriously starved of funds (Robson, 2008, p. 54; Collins, 2008. P. 16), saw the announced Group B as leading to escalating costs. To others, Group B was the opportunity of a lifetime. The Italian Fiat corporation which owns Ferrari, Lancia, Fiat and other makes, thought of this as a way of specifying their product line-up. Before Group B, Lancia was one of the manufacturers chiefly responsible for introducing flair and fantasy to the WRC. The Lancia Stratos (first introduced in the WRC in 1976) was 'a car born for one specific purpose and not only was it totally successful, it was a turning point on the roadmap of rallying in general' (Collins, 2008, p. 10). After reaching the technological limits of the Stratos, and in addition recognising that their opponents participated with cars that belonged in a different segment, Fiat themselves wished to emulate Lancia's success and capitalise on their newly formed rally team by partnering with the recently acquired tuning specialist, Abarth. By grabbing three world

champion titles for makes 1977, 1978 and 1980 using a conventional rally car – the Fiat 131 – they extracted the maximum out of the old Group 4 regulations.

With the new Group B rules, the game changed. Part of the motivation for change came from Audi's success. In 1981 (two years after FISA had almost silently overturned the rule banning four-wheel-drives in WRC), Audi gave the world a preview of what really was to come, something that would change the sport forever. From being a rather anonymous manufacturer, it suddenly burst on the WRC scene with its bawdy Quattro model. Because few other companies were ready to produce 400 cars in what was then a radical format – the combination of turbo-charged engine and four-wheel-drive was new to ordinary cars – Audi soon began to make its mark. Other manufacturers, however, were not too impressed. In their eyes, it was too technologically advanced and difficult to drive and its success was predicted to be short-lived. According to Peter Collins, Audi's assault on the WRC title 'generated much discussion over whether all-wheel traction would actually be the magic ingredient that teams would require to win rallies in the future' (Collins, 2008, p. 17).

Nevertheless, it pushed Lancia to speed up the development process, and in that process, it was decided that 'it was far more important to go with proven principles rather than experiment with unknowns' (Collins, 2008, p. 18), such as all-wheel-drive. As far as the new rules were concerned, in the autumn of 1980, there was still no decision on further Group B details. This annoyed both manufacturers and fans, since under two years was seen as too little time to develop competitive rally cars and integrate them into the ordinary car strategies of various manufacturers. To car magazine *Autosport*, further delays would be 'a recipe for suicide on purely economic grounds' (cited in Collins, 2008, p. 20). Despite the FIA's hesitation in finalising all the elements Group B, however, Fiat made the decision to stick with Lancia for its assault on the WRC in accordance with an already-agreed timeline and

develop a car that would be on the start ramp on what would eventually be Rally Costa Smeralda in 1982.

At the same time, FISA representatives in Paris were, according to Peter Collins, 'busy making sure everyone was totally confused and unable to relax and stabilise their plans, by not only coming up with even more proposals, but by doing it ahead of the date it had planned to announce its final decisions' (Collins, 2008, p. 22). A year or so after publishing the new 1982 regulations, when various manufacturers had begun to take interest, the message from FISA suddenly changed: Group B cars could not take part in the WRC. In October 1980, the FISA Executive voted 9 to 3 to ban Group B from the WRC (Collins, 2008, p. 23). This was a surprise to everyone, as the consensus for the last eighteen months had been that Groups A and B should compete for the WRC from January 1982. Manufacturers such as Ford and Fiat were very upset and the BPICA called the decision 'a catastrophe'. It turned out that the Executive had been influenced by countries with strict traffic laws who were afraid that the use of Group B cars would get rallying banned (Davenport and Klein, 2012, p. 19). So the Executive reversed its initial agreement. Uproar followed and led to consideration of the decision in the Plenary Committee of the FIA, which ratifies all FISA decisions, and where it was refused immediately. Instead, the Committee told the Executive to reconsider its view – which it did, in December 1980.

At this point, the WRC was running out of time and there was a strong possibility that the entire championship would become a mockery. But after the FISA-FOCA war cooled off with the first Concorde Agreement in 1981, Balestre realised the necessity of having the manufacturers on his side. Lessons learned from the FISA-FOCA quarrel helped get the WRC back on track, even though Ford withdrew from the WRC and did not re-enter until 1986. As a compromise, the FISA concluded that Group B would be accepted in the WRC from 1982 onwards and that it would rule exclusively from the beginning of 1983. 1982 would therefore

be a transitional year, where former Group 2 and 4 cars could participate on WRC events. At a meeting in Casablanca, Morocco, in May 1982 the regulations were finalised with the addition of a guarantee of five years stability, 'ie no material change in the regulations or entry to the WRC for Group B, starting on January 1, 1983' (Davenport and Klein, 2012, p. 20).

It was like igniting a box of fireworks. The rule changes made WRC wilder than ever. According to motorsport historian and journalist John Davenport, who also took part in the engineering development of the MG Metro 6R4 Group B car, the new regulations created 'an amazing surge of interest in rallying. The crowds that attended rallying round the world were suddenly swelled by new fans attracted by the sight of powerful cars that there were difficult to drive being driven by the best drivers in the world' (Davenport and Klein, 2012, p. 237). Two other historians describe it like this: 'The spectacle of powerful, purpose-built, quirky cars tackling special stages was irresistible – spectator interest rocketed, and so did the standing of WRC' (Hope-Frost and Davenport, 2004, pp. 54-55). Spectators flocked to experience these 'Formula 1 cars for the road,' as they were called, and according to eyewitnesses 'it was a pretty spectacular first appearance (...) almost too much to bear (...)' Spectators everywhere, either watching the stages or at frantic service areas, experienced sensory overkill' (Campbell and Campbell, 1995, p. 83).

Across Europe and Japan,' add Campbell and Campbell (1995, p. 83), 'designers, engineers and team managers were designing, refining, testing, inventing, introducing. It was a heady time of mechanical and engineering decadence.' A space-frame of steel tubing covered by panels of composite material, all powered by a turbo-charged engine mounted in the middle of the chassis was the typical configuration during this era. Clearly, these cars were very demanding on the drivers. Without any of the comforting elements that helps today's drivers, who in addition are physically better prepared, 'they had to be driven like

they were stolen,' as one of the rally fans on the ferry to Rally Finland 2010 told me. Driver's world champion in 1980 and 1982, Walter Röhrl was only one who claimed that they pushed the limits of rallying. 'The potential of such a Group B car could only be fully explored by someone who already knew ninety per cent of the stages by heart. Everything went too much fast to leave time for analysis' (Röhrl, Müller and Klein, 2002, pp. 179-80). Henri Toivonen, who drove perhaps the most demanding car of them all, the Lancia Delta S4, and eventually lost his life in an accident at Rally Corsica, said that 'I may have won the RAC rally with Lancia, but I just did not know how to drive it, it seemed to have a mind of its own.'⁶⁹

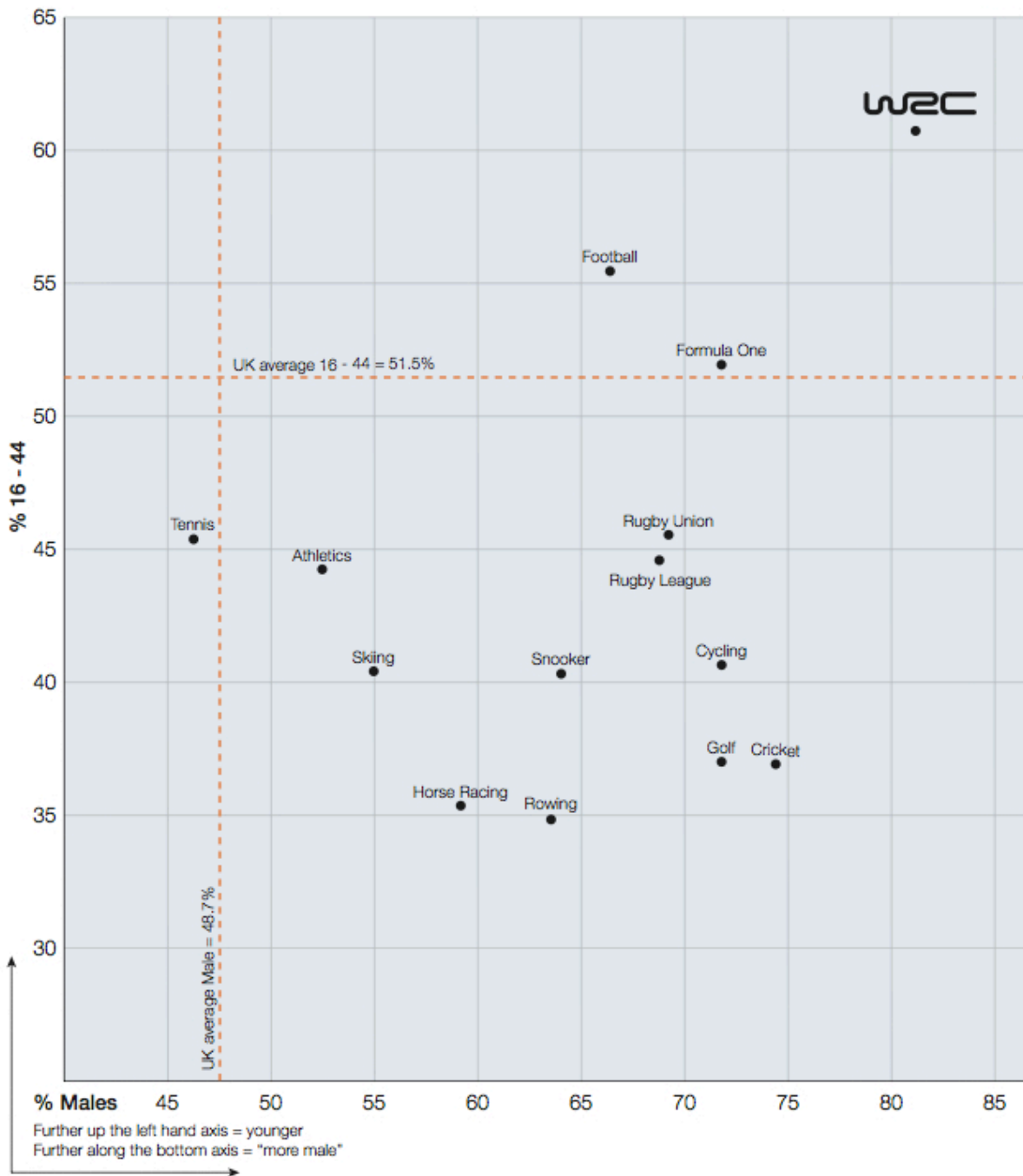
Alas, things soon got out of hand, mostly due to an indistinct attitude towards spectator safety among both the organisers and the FIA. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the idea of getting 'up close and dirty' was taken too literally. 1986, what would eventually be the final year of Group B, was a year of tragedy with several fatalities, both among drivers and spectators. But instead of pointing the finger at the organisers of certain events with a reputation for dangerous spectator behaviour, the FIA banned Group B completely at the end of the 1986 season. Almost overnight, the WRC hibernated. Few of the Group B manufacturers found the new regulations, called Group A (although different from the previous Group A regime), especially attractive. Of the previous Group B manufacturers, only Lancia continued to run the full season of 1987, although ten other manufacturers took an interest in certain events, especially in countries with important sales markets. In sum, many experts seemed to think in line with what was written in *The Glasgow Herald* after Toivonen's and Cresto's accident, 'International car rallying is in danger of hurtling up a blind alley.'⁷⁰

Class and nationalism

I will come back to the aftermath of the scrapping of Group B in the next chapter, but judged by visual evidence of the 1980s and 1990s (there were no fan profiling at that time, for the simple reason that there was no official promoter until the early 2000s), the WRC seems to have carried its core demographic fan base from then to the present day – and with that, a blueprint on what constitutes the authentic spectatorship in the WRC. Recent statistical profilings of the WRC's fan base also confirm that demographically, rally fans stay the same. At the German WRC event in 2002, prior to the partnership between TNS Sport and the ISC, it was revealed that the majority of the visitors was male (82 per cent) and relatively young: on average, the rally visitors were 31 years old, while the 19-25 age group alone accounted for a third of all the fans.⁷¹ A year later, International Sportsworld Communicators (ISC) partnered with research company TNS Sport for the purpose of 'unlocking insights into our fan-base will allow us to target them more effectively as well as understand why certain fans of other sports may not be tuning in to the WRC' (WRC Fact book, 2005, p. 2).

Their main instrument was a questionnaire to which 5,642 people responded. In statistical terms, the championship's fan base of 2003-4 came out as quite homogenous and mirrored the findings from the German WRC event: young (18-44), European-based and male (WRC Fact book, 2005, p. 24). Similar figures are repeated in later fact book editions. In its 2005 edition, a UK case study, based on 24,000 respondents and conducted by TNS Sport, showed that WRC audience in the UK was the youngest and most male of all peer sports. In its 2009 fact book, the promoter (which publishes these books) says that 90 per cent of the WRC spectators are males between 16 and 34, of which 65 per cent was from a European country (WRC Fact book 2009, p. 24).

Figure 7.2. WRC Audience Profile – UK Case Study



Source: Adapted from WRC Fact book, 2005, p. 25.

Furthermore, the TNS surveys have shown that rally spectators mainly belong to the so-called ABC1 category (WRC Fact book, 2010, p. 12). This social grading stems from a system of

demographic classification used in the UK and, while its shortcomings are well known, it is widely used for market research (see Wilmhurst and Mackay, 1999).

Table 7.1. The demographic classification of WRC spectators

| Grade | Social class | Chief income earner's occupation |
|-------|---|--|
| A | upper middle class | Higher managerial, administrative or professional |
| B | middle class | Intermediate managerial, administrative or professional |
| C1 | lower middle class | Supervisory or clerical and junior managerial, administrative or professional |
| C2 | skilled working class | Skilled manual workers |
| D | working class | Semi- and unskilled manual workers |
| E | Those at the lowest levels of subsistence | Casual or lowest-grade workers, pensioners and others who depend on the welfare state for their income |

Source: Market Research Society (<https://www.mrs.org.uk>), Wilmhurst and MacKay, 1999; WRC Fact book, 2010, p. 42. Note that the grades are often grouped into ABC1 and C2DE and these are taken to equate to middle class and working class respectively.

These statistics are, as already noted in the case of the German WRC event above, supported by external research. In their 2007 study of six WRC events, David Hassan and Sean O'Connor found that 8 out of 10 spectators were males under 35 years of age (Hassan and O'Connor, 2009, p. 716). Despite this quantitative locating of rally spectators, Tim Barkey (2012), formerly marketing director for North One Sport (the official promoter of the WRC), wrote in 2012 that 'there is little understanding about who the fan is, what they love about the sport, and how this varies by region. No insight = no way to write a strategy.' Barkey is here in line with sport researchers Bob Stewart, Aaron C.T. Smith and Matthew Nicholson who write that 'while sport consumer typologies can be theoretically sound by encompassing a full spectrum of beliefs, meanings, and behaviors, their ultimate value comes from capturing real consumer experiences' (Stewart, Smith and Nicholson, 2003, p. 214).

Quantitative profiling undoubtedly has its benefits in other, less researched areas of the WRC (at the time of writing such a fan survey is conducted by Sport Business School

Finland in cooperation with WRC Promoter GmbH). Fundamental to event managers of a sport firmly grounded in what I referred to in chapter 1 as the experience economy, for example, is the functional motive of expectations. The level of satisfaction of any sport consumer is directly linked to what he or she expects from it (Güngör, 2007, p. 13), given that a certain level of involvement is present (Babin and Harris, 2011, pp 253-54). Sports economists have demonstrated that managing sports consumers' expectations can substantially increase satisfaction or reduce dissatisfaction (see Greenwell, 2007). In her study of attendance at Rally Finland 2012, interviewing more than 1000 fans (of whom 25 per cent were female), Anne Meuronen underlines that, 'observing the reasons to arrive to the events makes it possible to develop events to more female friendly direction in order to attract more customers and to keep the ones that are already attracted by the event' (Meuronen, 2013, pp. 67-68). Proper attention to this field may therefore increase the number of female fans.

In the context of spectator culture and what people appreciate about the sport, however, I argue that we need to broaden our understanding of the fans in other ways. Though it seems like the crazy days of Group B is spoken of with awe in many motorsport milieus, there is more to spectator culture in the WRC than die-hard devotees – usually young working-class males – with a poor sense of risk calculation. Statistically class, age, gender and nationality can of course be used to profile the WRC's spectator pool if these categories are used as objective descriptions of social stratification. But ethnographically, and especially to my informants, these categories – with the exception of gender, as I will come back to below – did not matter very much in whether they felt included in the spectator culture and whether they had a good experience.

To most of them, the culture of rallying is more an expression of how people come together through what social psychologist Tom Shibutani names 'loosely connected universes of special interest' (here he mentions sports, stamp collectors, and the world of women's

fashion), than of given categories (Shibutani, 1961, pp. 135-36). Many of those who would objectively fit as working-class spectators at WRC rallies also *felt* middle class when asked. Nicklas put it like this: 'I grew up in a working-class family, but consider myself middle class. I earn well enough to do what I want and can travel like this without having to save up money.' Mathias, similarly, said that he would describe himself as middle class 'because it seems like I belong there'. Others contravened the hackneyed affiliations 'the working-class male' evokes (see Russon and Linkon, 2005). One day, they could joke about the greasy car wash dude as they indulged into technical details and genital humour, while the next day, they could talk almost therapeutically about the value of friendship or impress a waiter in a high-end restaurant with knowledge about which bottle of Chateauneuf du Pape would match the roasted lamb.

In the light of this, one could ask whether rally spectators contrast with the widespread image of motoring youths as bearers of masculine identity, sub-cultural independence and working-class ambience (see Redshaw, 2008). One sociologist combining these perspectives is Heli Vaaranen and her research on *Kortteliralli*, illegal street racing in Finland. It is one of the most thorough studies of motorsport culture within what she calls 'the social order of a motorsports-loving nation' (Vaaranen, 2004, p. 91). Vaaranen, 'a former street-racing girl,' did ethnographic fieldwork among predominantly male street racers in the Finnish capital of Helsinki. Here, 'buying a car with their own money was a source of pride as well as a sign of independence and maturity' (Vaaranen, 2004, p. 93) To her, this was not merely a leisure activity; rather, through a variety of identity construction strategies, street racers aspire to create and to belong to a distinct sub-culture:

The street-racing youth used their cultural performance to create nighttime counter-experiences for their daytime experiences of lost opportunities. This

counter-experience became “a room of his own,” it defined a street racer’s masculine identity, and it functioned as a coping strategy to fight exclusion (Vaaranen, 2004, pp. 93-94).

On the one hand, Vaaranen’s analysis catches important social dimensions of being a street racer. For instance, she writes that ‘subcultural capital serves as a boundary marker to other groups,’ as well as pointing out that ‘class and economic boundaries were already internalized by these street racers, needing no further emphasis’ (Vaaranen, 2004, p. 98). On the other hand, her focus on the emotional experience of sub-culture membership helps continue the image of ‘petrol heads’ as masculine, risk-driven outcasts.

In my opinion, rally culture only partly reflects Vaaranen’s research, especially in the way it builds upon sociologist’s Dick Hebdige’s work on sub-cultures (1999, p. 441), which ‘cobble together (or hybridize) styles out of the images and material culture available to them in the effort to construct identities which will confer on them “relative autonomy” within a social order fractured by class, generational differences, work etc.’ In line with Hebdige’s argument, rally spectators as cultural groupings form in, and are formed by, communal and symbolic engagements. But when it comes to relative autonomy and the political implications of identity independence, rally spectators as a group do not fit into Hebdige and Vaaranen’s analytical typology which ‘implies that the primary agent of cultural activity is the ruling class’ (see Ryan, 1989, p. 18). Neither do they use the forest – or wherever they spectate a rally – as venues of escapism, like Vaaranen’s informants do because of their opposition to social hierarchies:

On the streets, it was payback time. The street-racing youths went into this micro-level collective action of payback time by manifesting their youth, their desirability, their

subcultural capital, and their 'erlebnis'. This manifestation was a necessity for them to save their sanity, since their class location, age, occupational role, and gender were constantly run over by the economic and symbolic power of the dominant structures (Vaaranen, 2004, pp. 99-100).

In rallying, by contrast, I argue that the spectators come together not as a result of opposition (and the somewhat melodramatic theatricality that comes along with it), but of fascination. A similar explanation accounts for why the deeply embedded link between sports and nationalities, found in studies of football, baseball, rugby and cricket (see Maguire, 1999), is not evoked among rally spectators. On the surface flags, accessories like Viking helmets, which Norwegian fans sometimes carry, or the use of words like *sisu* (a Finnish term for 'guts', here exclusively applied to the most determined drivers and an explanation to why Finns have been so successful in rallying), in addition to rituals like the snowball fight between the French and the Italians at Col de Turini (see previous chapter) seem to signal nationalistic tendencies.

I find that this visual nationalism serves decorative purposes rather than political ideologies at rallies. In practice, as I will come back to below when discussing motivations for attending WRC rallies, it matches the findings in research on lifestyles that form around unique ideologies of consumption prone to cross national boundaries and cultural contexts (Stratton, 1985; Schouten and McAlexander, 1993; Klein, 1993). While certain drivers have become national heroes to their fans, other groups have been far more concerned about drivers' nationality than the WRC community. Several drivers – among them Petter Solberg and Sébastien Loeb – have received harsh criticism because they lived abroad and yet donned the Norwegian or French flag when winning rallies or championships. Shortly after Solberg moved to Monte Carlo in 2003, thereby swapping the formidable Norwegian tax rates for the

Monegasque system which doesn't levy personal income tax, a politician who later became Minister of Trade and Industry argued that, 'if Petter moves back home his children will use Norwegian schools, hospitals and welfare services. It is only fair that somebody with such wages also contributes to paying for this.'⁷² Likewise, in 2011, a string of academics and others concluded in the newspaper *Dernieres Nouvelles D'Alsace* (DNA), local to the area of Rally de France-Alsace, that it was an environmentally destructive event 'glorifying an expat tax refugee' (Loeb lives in Switzerland) (Bugeaud et al., 2011).

Beside the fact that the nature of this relationship between sport, nationalism and identity generally differs greatly according to the political context and is utilised for different purposes (see Bairner, 1996), another reason is that there is a large influence of transnationalism in the WRC. Motorsport journalist John Davenport's recollection of the Rally Monte Carlo in 1986 is telling in this respect: 'Unlike at a football match, where the supporters of rival teams are kept apart, here the Italians were mixed with the French, the Germans with the British, and the Spaniards with the Scandinavians' (Davenport and Klein, 2012, p. 9). And even though some fan clubs or fans' expressions are strongly centered on the nationality of a driver, Mathias emphasised that in the WRC, people often cheer on particular teams or cars rather than nations: 'On a rally you are aware of that it is an international championship because it includes the best drivers and the best cars. Anybody can relate to different cars and therefore it does not really matter which nationality the driver has.'

Alejandro, my Argentine informant, added to the discussion that, 'the big difference [from football fans] is that rally fans are more educated on how to behave. You will find that Ford fans, Citroen fans, Subaru fans, Loeb fans, Hirvonen fans can all enjoy rally together without fighting.'

The gender issue

More central, as said, is the male dominance within the WRC community, which raises questions about the gender dimension of the sport. As mentioned above, the percentage of female spectators is low compared with men, but no real research has been done to explain why, or to what extent their motives for spectating may differ. One reason may be the generally chauvinistic view of women in car cultures, motorsport and how media reinforces this image (see Lumsden, 2010). According to Eileen Kennedy, gender usually appears ‘not as a discrete element in the televisualization of sport, but as central to the disparate ideological themes around which the sport’s narrative is constructed’ (Kennedy, 2000, p. 61). In her 2000 study of these themes in Formula 1, Kennedy argues that in the glamorous backdrop to the sport which features yachts (in Monte Carlo, that is), champagne and beautiful women, the latter are essential in providing that glamour as well as sexually lionising the male racing driver hero in his quest for victory (Kennedy, 2000, pp. 65-67). Beverly Turner’s book, *The Pits*, a behind-the-scenes documentary of her year as member of UK broadcaster ITV’s Formula 1 coverage team in 2003, bears out Kennedy’s conclusions: women, in Turner’s view, are not accepted as anything other than ‘pit babes’ (Turner, 2004).

Notwithstanding the predictable criticism of Turner – a former model – as someone who did not know what she was talking about (comparisons with personalities like Monisha Kaltenborn, Managing Director of the Sauber F1 team, or Judith Griggs, former Chief Operating Officer of Allsport Management, the company that sells and manages all of the advertising rights associated with F1 and often mentioned as Ecclestone’s successor, were often invoked, see Rys, 2011), there is a lot of uncovered ground between the Playboy image of grid girls and the noticeable presence of females in motorsport’s elite positions. Speaking to me about this, Michèle Mouton’s thoughts are well worth consideration:

Either has the same ability to be talented; that is not something specific to men. It is more that not enough women are trying, or not being given the same opportunity and the same equipment. I was lucky enough to be in teams where I always had the same car as my teammate, and this I'm sure has helped a lot and given me the extra motivation to reach a man's level.⁷³

Compared with circuit racing like Formula 1, Mouton points out a significant difference. In rallying, cars go through the stage separated by intervals of two or three minutes, whereas in F1 racing, you have shared start, meaning that you have a lot of cars close to your own, and thereafter have to fight around the track for a number of laps. Mouton said:

On a circuit you are in direct confrontation with men and there is always the chance that, rather than letting themselves be beaten by a woman, the men will push you out! In rallying it is different. You are fighting against yourself and against the clock, so it is much easier. I never had any problems like that. I was able to build up my speed and get closer and closer to the top (cited in Rys, 2011, p. 29).

One much debated exception to this was her run-in with Walter Röhrl. Towards the end of the 1982 season, Röhrl was not happy. He had his clashes with the Opel Rothmans team (which was very dedicated to their commercial responsibilities), and was very frustrated with the lack of a suitable car in which to battle the Audi Quattro's. Realising that the Driver's title might go to Mouton, he reportedly said at the Acropolis Rally that, 'it would be the worst thing for our sport if a female becomes world champion.' Moreover, 'she drove a car which even a monkey could win rallies with.'⁷⁴ Finally, Röhrl was quoted as saying: 'I would have

accepted second place in the championship to (Hannu) Mikkola, but I can't accept to get beaten by Michele. This is not because I doubt her capabilities as a driver, but because she's a woman.'⁷⁵

Twenty-five years later, Röhrl attempted to rectify this situation in his autobiography. His recollection of the 'war' between him and Mouton in 1982 was blown out of proportion by the press. Röhrl insisted that his comment was misinterpreted and, instead, claims to have said: "I can only tell you this: if anybody beats me for the World Championship title, it will be a disaster." So how did the press interpret my answer? Röhrl hates women who are good drivers. Its sickening' (Röhrl, Müller and Klein, 2002, p. 136). Then, confusingly, Röhrl adds: 'Of course, I am not happy to be beaten by a woman in a sport like rallying in which male drivers generally dominate,' then, before he ends the discussion, adds: 'Mouton was a sensation for our sport in public. Indeed, it would have been great for all of us if she had won the World Championship title' (Röhrl, Müller and Klein, 2002, p. 136). Whatever he said or did not say, or his actual views on women in rallying, circumstances have now changed. Tony Mason, an experienced motorsport journalist, and Stuart Turner, Director at European Motorsports at Ford at the time, wrote in their 1991 book *Rallying!*, 'we use "himself" throughout the book for brevity incidentally, but it could just as well be herself' (Mason and Turner, 1991, p. 7).

Even historically, it seems like the rally community is more open to female participation than other motorsports. French motorsport enthusiast Jean-François Bouzanquet has a chapter in his 2009 book *Fast Ladies* on the 1950s entitled 'the rally years'. The book itself emerged from Bouzanquet's discovery of a shoebox full of mementoes belonging to former French driver Simone des Forest, who was a rally driver in the 1920s and '30s who won the 1934 Rally Monte Carlo with her female co-driver. Also covered at length in the book is the above-mentioned Mouton, who, in her role as President of FIA's Women and

Motor Sport Commission, has made several efforts to recruit more women into rallying. Here, we find the launch of Women in Motorsport Ambassadors in 2009, according to Mouton a group of ‘renowned females who can help promote our messages around the world and encourage the participation of other women in to the sport.’⁷⁶

Amid those ambassadors is the Australian rally talent Molly Taylor. In 2011, she was asked what it was like to be female in a male-dominated sport: ‘To be honest, I have grown up with my Mum as a role model so never saw myself as any different to the other competitors. We are all doing the same thing and I have always believed if you are dedicated and professional, people will focus on what you are there to achieve’ (cited in Rothman, 2011, p. 10). Roughly around the same period, South African rally driver Stefanie Botha expressed a similar explanation on why she got into rallying. ‘My dad has been racing and rallying ever since I can remember. It's always been a family activity. My grandmother would not miss a rally and my mom would make sandwiches and bring coffee and, in later years, my sister, my friends and I cheered him on with all our might.’⁷⁷ Taylor’s and Botha’s answers are interesting in that they reveal that it was socialisation into the sport through family interests, and not gender, that affected their choice of sport – an explanation many male drivers, too, emphasise in their autobiographies (see Chapter 9).

From my fieldwork, where I noticed a significant amount of families spectating the events, I argue that it is reasonable to find the same pattern among the spectators. What’s more, reflections like those above also fit the main explanation for female spectatorship. Leaving the most radical feminist theories aside, they are to a large degree socialised by the company of males into becoming sports fans (Farrell, Fink and Fields, 2011, p. 193). A British informant, Sandra, said it like this:

My addiction to this sport started when I read old motoring magazines that belonged to my father. There were absolutely fascinating accounts of the Midnight Sun Rally, Rally of the Thousand Lakes, Acropolis Rally, Monte Carlo Rally, Tulip Rally, Safari Rally, etc. and the road-racing style long-distance events such as the Liège-Rome-Liège and Targa Florio.

For those without such introductions to the sport the socialisation process, in which a multitude of factors influence people's behaviour and motivation for attending various sports, there is potentially a 'handicap' for women in terms of rally interest. Although evolutionary psychologists have proved that primates of either sex prefer stereotypically masculine or feminine toys (cars vs dolls) (Hassett, Sieben and Wallen, 2008), social scientists have more forcefully demonstrated the parental cogency of conforming with conservative gender roles, most notably when it comes to boys (Kane, 2006), as they are encouraged to participate in specific sports based on what is deemed appropriate to their gender (Schmalz and Kerstetter, 2006). Gender differences among motorsport fans could therefore simply mirror the lopsided sport consumption patterns found elsewhere in society, in addition to the fact that women spectate sport less than males overall. And when they do watch sport, studies seem to align on the claim that men's sport gets most attention (see Hall and O'Mahoney, 2006; Farrell, Fink and Fields, 2011).

That said, fan surveys of the F1 (see FOTA, 2010) speak of increased interest among women, as well as what I call normalisation of attendance (which takes account of spectators beyond just the aficionados you find in all sports, regardless of gender). Similarly, NASCAR had 40 per cent female fans in 2010, compared with 24 per cent in 2007 (Buchanan, 2009; Farrell, Fink and Fields, 2011, p. 190; Odland, 2012). Later in this chapter, I will disclose why those females who follow the WRC as well, or rallying in general, are not that different

from males in terms of attendance motivation. Statistics, however, may hide some notable facts. While rally organisers officially welcome female fans to an increasing degree, as exemplified by Rally Germany in the previous chapter, there is also the possibility that their cultural integration does not follow suit. That means that even if the statistics display more female fans, it is not certain that they are included in the narrative hang. As evidenced in another study of talk about sport, such as statistics, technicalities and relations between various actors, men consider themselves bearers of authority to such a degree that they feel superior in the socialisation process (Farrell, Fink and Fields, 2011, p. 196).

Women could be therefore socialised into sports by the same motivational elements as men, the study concludes, but ‘not viewed as equals in discussing it’ (Farrell, Fink and Fields, 2011, p. 196). Linda who comes from the US, and who also follows other motorsports, bears out this interpretation: ‘Many men who are already established within the sport and media circles tend to be a bit rude or condescending to us. I thought everyone would be on board to promote the sport and we would be one big happy family. I was very naive!’ Sarah from New Zealand had similar, if not quite as bad, experiences as Linda:

Being a female in a predominantly male sport definitely has its advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, I can attribute some great memories to being female and therefore standing out among a sea of male fans. On the other hand, females can often be ostracised and it can be hard to get people to take you seriously. This is where a strong drive to prove yourself, your knowledge and your passion for the sport is needed. Then again, hilarious encounters such as almost being kidnapped by merry Norwegian fans dressed as Mexicans during the 2014 Rally Sweden will always make a good story!

A UK fan, Sandra, said that she had mainly good experiences of being a female rally fan, yet there were always some minor issue:

Spectators are usually puzzled or amazed by the fact that a female could be so interested in cars in general and rally sport in particular. I am normally overwhelmed by the generosity, hospitality and invitations by the mostly male spectators and seldom leave a rally without a gift from someone. If I arrive too late at a stage to be in the front row for the best view, the men take pity on me because I am so small and push/pull me to the front, haul me up a hill or eagerly make room for me to stand on a bench so I can see properly. Organisers are often fooled into thinking I am someone special as a female alone, so I gain access to where I shouldn't.

Rosemary from Ireland, who in addition to spectating rallies had also been involved in the organisation of the Irish WRC events in 2007 and 2009, had an even more positive story to tell:

Male colleagues always support me hugely and “mind” me. I have been COC for a stages rally in Ireland some years ago and my team mostly male were fantastic. For the last year I was convenor of the Safety Group for Motorsport in Ireland and I was and am the only female member of the group. I honestly cannot recall bad experiences, when I started in the sport first I did find it difficult as at meetings I had no female company or very little female company but that no longer bothers me. When I was Chief Marshal for Rally Ireland I had a committee of about 6 coordinators all working with me – all male – and a team of 2,500 marshals male and female from all over Ireland.

From another point of view, as one who has extensive co-driver experience in rallying, Nathalie from Canada was quite philosophical about it:

I don't think I have had any negative experiences as a female. I have a very strong personality, but I consider most of the guys I compete against to be my friends ... and the same goes for the females that I compete against as well. We've all earned our particular levels of respect and I think I give it and receive it when and where it's due. Other than that, it's a little more challenging for us girls to pee out in the woods ... but we also tend to weight less so ... like everything in life, there are pros and cons.

Several of my informants emphasised the need to prove yourself worthy – and thus moderately supporting the conclusion from the above-mentioned study where females were admitted on a formal, and not cultural, basis only. A Mexican fan, Karina, said that 'it was easy in the beginning because you have more access than a man.' But she also clarified how the road to acceptance could be problematic:

The thing is when you take the sport seriously, being a girl in this sport is a challenge. You must show to everybody that you really love the sport and not the drivers, something not everybody believes. You must show respect and that is the only way everybody will take you seriously, that you really can understand this. Of course you have to study a lot and be ready for the pressure, but the result is incredible. Because when you decide to be a rally girl, you really don't care about the sweat, the dust, the sun, the food, you are there just because you love the sport and you are so passionate.

As a girl, I must to say that most of my experiences are good. Rally changed my life in all senses. Now it is just part of my lifestyle.

While there is absolutely no reason why admission to a sporting culture should be more of a challenge for females than males, and while the number of bad experiences for female spectators in a male space is significant, Karina's story exemplifies how the narrative identity of the WRC – the very core of its promotional qualities – is not an insurmountable barrier to females. Actually, as emphasised in the beginning of this chapter, several informants referred to a far more disturbing factor that destroys the harmonious sense of community – even if the two sometimes link. Sandra, for instance, told me a story about her visit to Rally Germany in 2013: 'I found myself surrounded by drunken Belgian fans of Thierry Neuville. I looked around and was really the only female at that hairpin. They were too loud, a great nuisance and nearly spoiled my rally fun.' While most spectators seem to think that bringing a couple of beers in your backpack is OK, they consistently agreed that unpleasant conduct from intoxicated spectators constituted a real hazard to the values of the WRC's spectator culture.

Similarly, political unrest, either domestic or international, influences the atmosphere of rallies in different ways. Because of the enormous crowds in Argentina – unofficial numbers say about a one and a half million spectators – an army of policemen is monitoring the event, the traffic, safety control issues and the behaviour in general. They are for the most part friendly, but also very rigid – sometimes plain bullies. Equally, the spectators are quick to aggressively chant their discontent if they think the police are being too strict when preventing people from crowding in dangerous places. As briefly discussed in Chapter 4 I did not dare to ask anyone about it, given the extreme sensitivity of the issue. But I could not help speculate that this animosity against the law was rooted in the dictatorship that ruled Argentina well into the 1980s. During what was later named 'the dirty war', beginning when

Isabel Peron was ousted by a military coup in 1976 and lasting until 1983, the state police made illegal arrests, tortures, killings and forced ‘disappearances’ of more than 10,000 people. To this day, many people are still missing, and members of *Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo* (Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo) still demonstrate in front of the Casa Rosada presidential palace in Buenos Aires each Thursday to remind the power holders of those not yet accounted for (see Ardeti, 1999).

A promotional typology of WRC fans

Based on our findings so far, I think Mathias summarised it well: ‘Spectator culture in rallying emerges from the general fascination people have for the sport, their shared interest and how these interests are communicated and circulated.’ Sociologically put, this indicates that we should focus on the generative effect from relations between different actors in a group, rather than granted categories (Shibutani, 1961, pp. 22-23). Now that we have discovered a bit more about who the WRC spectators are, and how they form a culture even in its temporal fragility, it is therefore time to pay attention to what they appreciate when spectating the sport. Value-creating experiences in sport, sport scholars apparently agree, come from the atmosphere of it. Usually this atmosphere is stimulated by three factors: the organiser’s event management, other spectators and the sporting action (Uhrich and Königstorfer, 2009). Ethnographically, for the spectator, all these elements first come together before a single car has run. Let me use a brief excerpt from my fieldnotes from Rally Finland 2010 to illustrate this.

GRR-ANG-JKK-BROOOM-POP-KOPOP-IIII-PIIU-BRROOM! I can hear him! He’s coming! People exchange looks; this is it! Deep inside the intensely hot,

mosquito-infested Finnish forests we have no visual on the first car on the road, which is Sebastien Loeb in his C4, but we can definitely hear the car from a distance; engine growls, rocket bangs from the exhaust and the machine-gun-like effects from gravel being shot into the forest from tyres spinning all mix as a symphony of speed, where the attention to the sounds transform the faces of the spectators from relaxed campers to light bulbs electrified by expectations – it is always something special about the first car on a WRC rally, similar to the song which opens the concert with your favorite artist. I can see it in their eyes – this is gonna be awesome! Loeb comes closer, and by the amplifying of sounds we can feel that he is approaching the chicane where we are placed. It is the first real stage of Rally Finland 2010. Soon, the entire mood among the spectators change even more, and people pull forward their pocket cameras and lean over the tapes to get the best view possible. Everybody looks at each other and gives thumbs up and broad smiles. And when Loeb finally races into the corner and passes us at maximum speed we are up close and dirty, sprayed with gravel and covered in fumes, happy as hell.

Afterwards, having thought through this situation and experienced it several times elsewhere, I realised that the buzz building up to Loeb's arrival was as electrifying as at his passing, if not more so. At every WRC event, before the rally cars appear, three so-called zero cars (with the numbers 0, 00 and 000 on the door) drive through the stage at progressively high speed to check that the safety arrangements are in order. When the 000 car has gone by, the excitement among spectators increases almost physically, regardless of which rally you attend. And the whistle is blown by the race marshal – the universal signal of that a car is coming – the spectators fall silent while the roar of the engine rises into crescendo. It's now a matter of *what is about to come.*

At Rally Monte Carlo 2013, I observed a telling example of this. Having heard the car several kilometres away, it suddenly appeared on the mountainside on the Sisteron-Thoard stage at Rally Monte Carlo 2013, reputedly the scene of ‘the best WRC drive ever’ in 1985, according to the tour organizer. Sebastian Ogier suddenly blasted past us like he had stolen the car. Terry Hall Sr, a jovial American in his best age who had made the trip with his son Terry Hall Jr from the US to Rally Monte Carlo, their first-ever WRC event, was obviously impressed, not only by Ogier, but also the French Alps and the sociality of the spectators.

‘So, girls, whaddya’ think?’ inquired Terry Sr of the two German women in our little group.

‘Good.’

Hall senior chuckles and thinks the low-key response was way below average.

‘Good? You’ve got to say YEAH! That was AWESOME!’

Hall’s attitude reflects what the WRC has to offer if promoted through the more precise promise of a unique experience where history, cars, socialization, scenery and culture are reciprocal parts of the sporting corpus. Native to a country with no tradition of WRC exposure (except the events 1986-88 which almost no one knew about), the Halls chose Rally Monte Carlo exactly because of its influential history and famous settings like Sisteron-Thoard. It was not the speed per se that impressed Terry Sr – his yellow Chevrolet Corvette parked back home in the US has more horsepower than Ogier’s VW Polo WRC car – but the fact that his experience of the sight and sound matched the anticipation he had of it, and the spectator experience in general.

In Argentina, on the other hand, it was a total stranger on the San Augustin-Santa Rosa stage that made this thought spring to my mind.

‘*De donde eres?*’ (Where are you from?) His nasal voice comes apparently from nowhere, then suddenly he is standing right beside me. An Argentinian rally fan I do not know.

‘*Eh, soy noruego.*’ (I’m from Norway)

‘*Noruego?* Petter Solberg! Crazy!’

After learning I’m a fellow countryman of the World Champion of 2003 and, to many, one of the most popular drivers in WRC history, the Argentinian rally spectator lights up a big smile and promptly offers me his special blend of the national rally drink, Fernet and Coca-Cola. I take a sip of the drink from the 1½ litre Coca-Cola bottle that is chopped in half and melted on the edges to avoid cutting your lips, salute my new friend and check my watch: it is minutes before the first car is due to start on the San Augustin-Santa Rosa stage of Rally Argentina 2012, just outside the beautiful town of Villa Carlos Paz. My new friend is one of many thousands of die-hard rally spectators. By camping overnight they have got the best view and turned the otherwise anonymous *pampas* into a huge festival with tents, caravans, *asados* (barbecues), music, trumpets, fireworks and singing. Everywhere, people with bloodshot eyes and worn out *churros* (Argentinian beanie caps) in all colours are carrying thermoses and drinking *mate* and the many sellers of sausage and cheese are strolling endlessly up and down the landscape. We are in this together. No fighting, no eyeballing, no turf wars. Just sheer noise and the smell of grilled meat, adding up to a higher unit of excitement on this short, intense stage, famous for its big water-splash. And every third minute my new friend asked if Petter was coming soon.

The San Augustin-Santa Rosa stage, Rally Argentina, 2012



Water splashes and hoards of cheering people. That's Argentina for you. Photo: Philip Hammond

But it is not only in Finland or Argentina that the wait is a cultural phenomenon in itself. Given the itinerary of WRC events, as set out at the beginning of this chapter, this wait and its spatial circumstances create plenty of time and space for interaction. Moreover, this interaction mode enables people to form collective identities that are ephemeral and to 'participate in rituals of solidarity that are grounded in common lifestyle interests and leisure associations' (Arnould and Thompson, 2005, p. 873).

Among these 'rituals', gathering around the bonfire probably the most global. Alejandro, for instance, remarked: 'I grew up watching rally with my father. After that, I began camping in the mountains and waiting for the cars with my best friends.' Everywhere I have been, in fact, I have come across variations on this 'camping' theme; friends or families, carrying backpacks with foldable chairs, thermoses, food supplies, coffee mugs and the like – these are necessities when spectating a rally, at least in the remote areas of it. Some have tents

and impressive cooking arrangements while others use Mother Nature for bed, toilet and breakfast. Sprung from this collective fondness of making rally spectating into a day out, my ethnographic material reveals that, similar to what earlier research on sports communities shows, 'the camaraderie that develops and exists between like-minded participants is an important part of the experience' (Fairley and Gammon, 2005, p. 190). Yukari, a female Japanese rally fan, gave me a good example of this:

Fans in rally are very open-minded and even funny. Though sometimes I come to the stages alone, I have never felt lonely. There are always many fans and I can talk, eat and drink with them. In the shakedown of Rally Monte Carlo 2013, I was standing alone in the snow when some French guys next to me gave me some bread and ham. Even though it was freezing it was the best breakfast ever!

A very similar experience came from another female rally fan, Canadian Jennifer:

All spectators are genuinely into the sport itself and not about picking sides. If you think about team sports like hockey or soccer, you get huge divides in the fans...so much so, they become nemesis'. But with rally, people seem to cheer on every car that goes by. It's not about choosing sides. I remember trekking through the forest at Rally Italia Sardegna trying to find a better spectating spot. I was offered homemade sausage from some people who were camped out in the bush with demijohns of wine, a camper, propane stoves and a huge pot of pasta.

In my view, this camaraderie is generally reminiscent of what two researchers on sports travels called 'the process by which individuals momentarily neglect their differences' and

‘accept each other as social equals’ (Fairley and Gammon, 2005, p. 191). In this sociality, place has a primordial meaning, as discussed in the previous chapter, because this interaction process is tied to *being there*. Even when a particular place is experienced differently by different individuals, these different views help form a spectator culture similar to the one found in motorcycle cultures, that is, ‘shared ritualized experiences can help to moderate these individual micro-level differences and construct a common history, heritage, and understanding, while preserving some individual differences in experiences’ (Austin, 2009, p. 73). Complying with the natural surroundings of the event, as it were, is a good way to access the characteristics of the WRC’s spectator culture.

Nearly all of my informants which were not formally interviewed – male or female, spanning countries like Argentina, Canada, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, the UK and the USA – emphasised how the positive atmosphere of rallies derived from the blend of nature, culture and sport. Linda from the US said:

I like the fact that it is so laid back. We can chat with the drivers and crews. I also like the fact that I can bring my lawn chair and a picnic lunch and have a good time with a group of friends. I’m not having to sit in hot stands surrounded by strangers at a racetrack.

Karina, from Mexico, put it this way

Rally is a noble sport that instantly conquers you; the drivers trying to reach their goal as the fans wait in hours in difficult circumstances just to see the cars. After you fall in love for rallying it becomes a feeling that is always with you that only crazy people

like yourself can understand.

Others, like Sandra, emphasised the combination of travel and entertainment, often by herself, but that did not make it less social:

I have visited WRC rallies in various countries, including ones outside Europe, mostly travelling and organising everything alone. It is quite exciting to end up in the same hotel as the rally teams and/or media, and I have even found myself in the breakfast room alone with a driver who went on to become WRC champion. I spend a lot of time in service parks, during the recce or at regrouping, listening and talking to drivers, co-drivers and team members. This is an important point about rallying – the ability to get face-to-face with these heroes and talk to them, but best of all is when they are away from the fan crowds, far from the media and watchful eye of some public relations person, leading to wonderful, sometimes hilarious and unbelievable situations.

Similarly, Rosemary felt that part of the fascination of rallying was the possibility of travel:

The motorsport community is small in Ireland and when you go to events it is like meeting friends every time. I really enjoy travelling to WRC as I get an opportunity to see the real country. For example in Portugal and Spain the stages take you out the country to the rural areas, where you get the opportunity to taste the real culture of the countryside. Finland is probably the best; I love the scenery lakes and lakes and also the smell of the fresh air in the woods but mostly of the sound of the cars in the distance and as they approach through the trees.

Besides pointing to the community as a source of attraction, Rosemary's explanation mirrors Philip's reason for going to Rally Argentina.

I like to combine rallying with traveling. Rallies are often held in very scenic locations so it is a great way to see the country as well. Rally Argentina is well known for its scenery and its fan so it was high on the list to visit. I also enjoy walking and exploring the great outdoors. Rallying therefore allows me to combine these interests.

Our findings, ending for now with Philip's comment, direct us to profile WRC fans differently than has been the case in the past. Admission to the spectator culture of the WRC, and therefore the chance of a good experience, depends not primarily on class, nationality or age, but whether you spectate with 'proper' motivation and comply with the nature of the sport (walking, waiting, being outdoors) and, to a lesser degree, the event signature. In addition, if you manage to socialise on the basis of your narrative knowledge about the WRC, your chances of being invited into other groups than your own (even if you are by yourself) rises dramatically as any given person is both 'administrator' and 'guest' in this cultural dynamic. In addition to my findings, research on both male and female motorsport fans, for example, a study of spectators at Rally Finland 2011, has shown that the love of the sports action, enjoying the atmosphere and social factors such as group affiliation, were highly important influences for attendance (Dietz-Uhler et al., 2000; Roy, Goss and Jubenville, 2010; Mehto and Takala 2012, pp. 47-48).

Fan experiences explored in this chapter, consequently, indicate that an adaptation of fandom *typologies* might be a relevant way forward as it 'challenges the view that sport consumption can be reduced to a narrow set of homogenous traits' (Stewart, Smith and

Nicholson, 2003, p. 206). If we include findings from previous chapters, most notably how people and places can be positioned along the traditional-modernist axis within a promotional culture, I would argue that many actors in the WRC community display type 1-fan characteristics described in Table 7.2.

Table 7.2. Dualistic fan typologies

| Type 1 fans | Type 2 fans |
|-------------|-------------|
| Old | New |
| Genuine | Corporate |
| Traditional | Modern |
| Expressive | Submissive |
| Irrational | Rational |
| Symbolic | Civic |
| Die-hard | Less-loyal |

Source: Adapted from Stewart, Nicholson and Smith, 2003, p. 207.

In fact, the very research topic springs from this dualism as it has been the central dimension to the promotional debacles of the WRC. But while this dualism captures the essence of the promotional quarrel of the WRC, it does not necessarily grasp the broader variety of WRC spectators, and hence, such a dualism may not serve us well in the long run. I will come back to this claim in Chapter 10, but because both sport consumer research in general and the ethnographic material on WRC spectators above demonstrate that it is impossible ‘to describe the archetypical sport consumer’ (Stewart, Smith and Nicholson, 2003, p. 211), I argue that to look at their behaviour from a number of fandom perspectives is more fruitful than resorting to dualisms. One reason is that the fan base is changing with generations and regulations, and with that the promotional measures taken to keep the spectators coming back. Director of Marketing & PR at Hyundai Motorsport, Stefan Ph. Henrich, is thinking along the same lines. ‘We support any ideas on regulations or event formats that will improve the commercial benefits of participating in the WRC,’ Henrich says. ‘If that means losing five per cent of the

hard-core fans, it does not have to be that bad as it probably will be countered with a 20 per cent influx of new fans.’ Table 7.3 shows such a typology developed by three Australian management researchers (the row on the right has been added by me) where the exploratory significance is much higher than in Table 7.2.

Table 7.3. Multidimensional Approaches to Sport Consumption

| Cluster type | Differentiating behaviours | My conclusions based on fieldwork among WRC spectators |
|-------------------------------|--|--|
| Underlying motivations | Escape (to a less stressful ‘sports-world’) | Most rallies |
| | Eustress (excitement, and entertaining event) | Those with extraordinary scenery, like the Safari Rally |
| | Social interaction | Those with extraordinary spectator cultures, like Rally Argentina |
| Emotional attachment | Obsessive attachment and strong commitment | Some drivers and (quite rarely) teams |
| | Moderate attachment and conditioned commitment | Some drivers (as in ‘they are good guys, but impossible to separate from each other’, see Chapter 9) |
| | Slight attachment and fragile commitment | Those rallies that does not comply the WRC’s traditions, for instance Rally Jordan (see Chapter 5) |
| Identity | Team used to confirm self-concept | To some degree, the Germans and the Volkswagen team |
| | Team used to confirm civic and communal pride | Not teams, but drivers from ‘my local area’ is often highly valued |
| | Team used to confirm social or cultural identity | The French and Citroën, especially at Rally de France-Alsace |
| Loyalty | Loyalty through game attendance | Most rallies, especially ‘the classics’ |
| | Loyalty through displaying team colours | Most rallies, especially in those cases where manufacturer teams race on home ground (like Citroën in France) |
| | Loyalty through chatter and conversation | Most rallies, especially those known for their spectator sociability |
| Connective focus | Team is primary connection | Occasional, but in return strongly expressed |
| | Sport or league is primary connection | Universal |
| | Player is primary connection | Widespread, especially as motorsport interest in one country coincides with the presence of a driver in a WRC team (‘the Solberg effect’ as it was called in Norway) |
| Overt experiences | Rational: strategic analysis | Not existing |
| | Symbolic: gestures, ceremonies and rituals | The scenes at Col de Turini or Colin’s Crest (a jump during the stage) at Rally Sweden |
| | Social: play and social integration | Shouting games |

Source: Adapted from Stewart, Nicholson and Smith, 2003, p. 211.

In Table 7.3, we see how the relationship between the elements of value-creating experiences described above unfolds into analytic categories. Efforts by the organiser, the spectator culture at a given rally and the action itself is mixed and then portioned out in different events as various components to these experiences. While ‘overt experiences’ have a prominent place as a cluster type in Monte Carlo and Sweden because their ceremonial element plays so vital a role in the sport, the cluster type of ‘identity’ was particularly noticeable in France because of Citroën’s popular French driver Sébastien Loeb. And while atmosphere (here: shorthand for the blend of nature, culture and sporting action) seems to unify people in all categories and dimensions on what is appealing about the spectator life of the WRC, it is either enriched or devalued by different stimuli or the lack of them. The main inducements to a good atmosphere are a good wait, coming from laid-back socializing, barbecues and rally talk, as well as the feeling of being taken care of by the organiser in the sense of providing spectacular viewpoints and, in the end, the priceless value of high-octane drives through the stages.

A word on method is needed, though. These findings do not mean that one kind of homogeneity (statistical) can be replaced by another kind (typological) when viewing WRC spectators as a group. Sociologist Geert Hofstede rightly writes that:

whereas typologies are easier to grasp than dimensions, they are still problematic in empirical research. Real cases seldom fully correspond to one single ideal type. Most cases are hybrids, and arbitrary rules have to be made for classifying them as belonging to one of the types (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 15).

Like most modern sport entertainment offers, WRC events in 2014 need to cater to multiple audience types and thus to multiple expectations of what the show has to offer (Mackellar,

2014, pp. 7-8). Yet my investigation has enabled a diversification of WRC spectators while at the same time demonstrating what forms them as a group. While it is impossible to account for all its diversity, narratively as well as geographically, typologies of WRC spectatorship are still a productive way of saving the most cherished parts of people's experiences while not denigrating commonalities. In my view, this touches on a key argument from the discussion of symbolic communities in Chapter 1, namely, that commonality in Anthony P. Cohen's view need not imply uniformity:

It does not clone behaviour or ideas. It is a commonality of forms (ways of behaving) whose content (meanings) may vary considerably among its members. The triumph of community is to so contain this variety that its inherent discordance does not subvert the apparent coherence which is expressed by its boundaries (Cohen, 1985, p. 20).

For promotional fan profiling these are essential insights, not only by illustrating the relevance of a typological approach to sport consumer experiences, but also because none of the tables include the format in which these sport consumer experiences are spread after people have been to WRC rallies: as narratives. How people in the WRC community recollect their memories of the sport, and why these have become memories to begin with, is an important ingredient of the promotional methods in Table 2.1 as well as constitutive to the WRC's sporting identity. Even current FIA President and former Peugeot Talbot team boss, Jean Todt, wrote in the programme for Rally Finland 2010 that, 'this country is widely regarded as the spiritual home of rallying and winning here is considered one of the most sought after achievements of our sport. Rally Finland also holds a special place in my heart, as it was the first rally the Peugeot 205 Turbo 16 won, driven by Ari Vatanen and Terry Harryman back in 1984, when I managed Peugeot Talbot Sport' (Todt, 2010, p. 9).

Similarly, in this chapter, we have seen that in lieu of a meta-source (read epic) to constitute the WRC's narrative identity, earlier explored in Chapters 5 and 6, personal accounts of spectator experiences, as elsewhere, have, according to Gary A. Fine, 'come to dominate narrative discourse (Fine, 1995, p. 135). Jennifer from Canada recalls her first close encounter with the WRC as 'monumental':

...in 2008 during Rally Italia Sardegna when Loeb came screaming down the gravel road and took the turn sideways right in front of my eyes and in a flash he was gone and out of sight; leaving us in a pile of dust. It made my heart race, my face beam and the hairs on the back of my neck stand up. I knew from that moment I was hooked.

Lastly, Philip gets to tell his story:

I can still remember my first visit to a WRC event with my Dad when I was 14, 15. Standing with thousands of others in Chatsworth Park waiting for the cars to go past. Surely I should have been bored by all the waiting, but even then I was mesmerized by the sport. Argentina goes down as the best overall trip because of the atmosphere, the passion, the scenery and the amazing hospitality. However, the best, most memorable, spectating moment has to be the Col De Turini. Just because it is the most iconic place within the WRC calendar. It is such a special place and because it attracts previous stars of the sport to spectate along side fans – it really does make you feel part of the sport.

Memories like these are, however, not just individual interpretations. Because they are storied on the basis of a certain script, an otherwise loosely connected set of groups and individuals

are shaped into what sociologist Lauren Richardson calls a ‘communally sacred world of experience’ (Richardson, 1990, p. 127). Structurally, this script is easy to explain. In these stories, there is always a point of creation which links the first spectator experience to the self. While Philip was 14 or 15 when his fascination began, for Sarah, this point was much earlier – she attended her first WRC event just weeks after she was born. No wonder she put it this way:

Rallying has been a large part of my life since I can remember. From walking up and down the WRC service park seeing names like Tommi Mäkinen, Carlos Sainz and New Zealand’s own Possum Bourne, through to picking up a helmet at age 13 and competing in a Datsun Sunny in club events.

This point of creation, moreover, usually evolves into a story of how one got socialised into becoming a WRC fan and the subsequent experiences one has gathered over the years. As demonstrated by studies of sport consumption elsewhere, stories, visualisations and folklore act to socialise newcomers into the group, as well as to reinforce and strengthen the nostalgic recollections in the minds of those who are telling these stories (Fairley and Gammon, 2005, p. 192). Philip’s memory was one example; Sarah’s story is another one:

The memory which kept me hooked on the sport and spurred my career choice was during the now second-closest WRC finish in history: Rally New Zealand 2007. I was in my first year of a Journalism degree and while the aim was to work in the WRC full time, it was the first opportunity I had to work in the media centre on an international event. There were a lot of great moments for me during that event, including being invited into the Ford World Rally Team area for lunch, kicking a football around the

service park and meeting some of the drivers. But the final stage of the rally, a short Super Special Stage around Mystery Creek in Hamilton, will always stick with me. I worked with renowned rally journalist Martin Holmes over the duration of the event, a privilege in itself. We had a view of the stage from the media centre on the top floor and Martin had walked down to the final stop control to get the final reactions of the drivers. Those final minutes of the rally, waiting for Marcus Grönholm to finish the stage and the time to see whether he'd beaten world champion Sebastien Loeb with Martin excitedly asking down the phone "Who won!? Who won!?" made me a fan for life.

Such stories, when shared in specific social settings or through social media, gain according to Fine 'their power through their discursive immediacy and from the power of personal connection between narrator and audience' (Fine, 1995, p. 137). In combination with the emergence of 'the ecological mode of communication' and 'transmedia storytelling', as explored in Chapter 5, these 'prosumerist' categories derived from a narrative community intermingle on social media in particular and enable the consumers themselves to become narrators. In my view, these stories therefore have tremendous promotional value since my informants personify and concretise spectatorship in the WRC. Business consultant James T. Noble (2013) uses Google Apps for Business as a successful example of how to engage the community. Featuring a photo collage of satisfied customers, one can click on either one of them. Then a window pops up with a video where a business owner gives positive testimonials by sharing his or her own unique stories. Hence, if the narrative plethora of WRC spectators can be engaged by the promoter through such campaigns, it could do a great deal of marketing legwork for the WRC Promoter GmbH.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we began by exploring why spectator culture of the WRC as a phenomenon emerged with the Group B cars. Hence, the idea of what constitutes a real spectator, taking the ideal of being up close and dirty way past sanity has affected the narrative of what spectating a rally should be. Fables like these, however, rub against the ISC's spectator profiling as well as related studies in the early 2000s onwards that proved that there is more to spectator culture than young male working class die-hard aficionados. To enhance this understanding further, I argue that we need to unravel the statistical categories because they hide a socio-cultural pluralism which is necessary to promotional work. By dismantling these categories to find out what cultural diversity they hid, and reconstructing them as motivations for spectating, I came up with an alternative view.

Events naturally differ in terms of key attraction, as showed in Table 7.3, but as a whole, I found that both males and females appreciate the blend of unforced socialisation, scenery, cultural vibe and sporting action – regardless of the event – as the main elements to a good experience. One reason why these universals are positively emphasised by my informants is that the requirements for participation are nowhere near the usual 'border control' found in other sport studies. This is not to say that disintegrative factors do not exist. While class, nationality and gender are not decisive to cultural access, there is a danger of underestimating the practical subtlety of these categories. What people say, and what they do, are two different things. In terms of gender, official measures taken to offer an atmosphere more appealing to women risk clashing with the cultural 'lingo' that is necessary to acquire if one wants to be a part of the narrative community. It's imperative to do something to improve the chance for women to take part in discussions and conversations about rallying without being scorned, although it can be argued that this something the promoter has no

responsibility for. However, in order to attract more spectators, it is possible to engage women to enter the stages on their own terms, not just those decided by males.

Having said that, research for this thesis has found little evidence of the commonly sexist or nationalistic attitudes found in other motorsport cultures. As a result, apart from the yet unresolved gender issue, the relevance of seeing the WRC as a symbolic community is demonstrated. People are participating in the spectator culture by complying with the characteristics of various events, making it a day out including ‘rituals’ like barbecuing (the Argentinian *asado* is particularly important here) and socialising freely while the rally is on. For these reasons, this chapter also reveals why the promoter should develop sport consumer typologies that empirically take into account the ethnographic diversity and narrative proficiency of spectators, rather than using categories like class or nationality – simply because they don’t reveal much of who spectators are or what they appreciate about the sport.

Chapter 8: The legacy of WRC cars

Introduction

The fourth promotional arena of the WRC is cars. While the Gordon Bennett Cup at the beginning of the 20th century already signalled ‘that the sport was becoming, to an even greater extent, an arena in which constructors marketed their products’ (Cofaigh, 2011, p. 198), today’s WRC teams more than ever act as live showroom for manufacturers. With fieldwork at M-Sport, the company that ran Ford’s assault on the WRC 1996-2013 as my point of departure, this chapter therefore aims to discuss how teams adapted their promotional affairs to the dramatically changing commercial circumstances of WRC between 1987 and 1997. Besides exploring the functional differentiation, organisational culture and logistical apparatus that enable the team to travel the world and still remain friends, it will also serve as a starting point for investigating the well-known slogan in motorsport; ‘win on Sunday, sell on Monday’. Or, put differently: does motorsport sell cars?

With particular emphasis on the collaboration between the Japanese manufacturer Subaru and the UK engineering company Prodrive, as perhaps the most successful of all WRC ventures in terms of increased brand awareness and sales enhancement, I discuss why this case offers valuable lessons on how to succeed in using motorsport as profile-raising arena and how cars can make a lasting impact on the sport’s narrative at the same time. In the midst of this, I pay attention to how teams carry, through their cars, a potential to make a cultural imprint on the sport’s legacy. Several car manufacturers have expressed the value of this kind of nostalgia surrounding historical events, like the British Goodwood Festival of Speed. In 2012, BMW’s PR representative, Gavin Ward said that they were there ‘because we build innovative, class-leading vehicles and, as you can see, we’ve been doing it for some

time. People look at your past form as an indication of what you're capable of, now and in the future' (cited in Hall, 2012, p. 98). Similarly, the 2013 edition of the former French WRC event now renamed Tour de Corse Historique (only old rally cars can participate) was described as *une belle histoire de plus* – another beautiful story (Bernardet, 2013, p. 2).

In the WRC community this is common knowledge. *Top Gear*'s Jason Barlow (2013), for instance, wrote this about the rallying legacy of the Subaru Impreza in 2013: 'It's possible that you – or more likely your kids – still play the *Colin McRae Rally* computer game (the PlayStation generation having usurped the *Loaded* lads as Y2K came round). But one thing I can tell you is that in 20 years of doing this job, few cars have delivered the TKO of the Impreza.' So I seek in this chapter to understand the broader forces that make rally fans dream of certain cars and neglect others, as well as the efforts that are behind the making of these cars. All these themes, finally, are seen in the context of the past achievements of Audi and Peugeot during the Group B era, as well as the motives behind the most recent entry to the WRC, that is, Hyundai's assault on the championship from 2014 onwards.

Showdown in Sardinia

It is early Saturday morning at the Isola Bianca Service Park in Olbia, Sardinia, in April 2011. The atmosphere is toned down, yet there is the occasional nail-biter. I am drinking coffee from a white paper cup in the hospitality tent of M-Sport, the British company chosen by Ford to run their assault on the WRC titles, next to Morten Østberg, the father of WRC driver Mads Østberg, and David Campion, team manager in Adapta Motorsport (a subsidiary of M-Sport). From here, members of M-Sport, as well as a couple of guests unknown to me, observe the rally. Two hours ago, it was full house. The Østbergs, Raymond Skogli (Mads Østberg's mental coach) and I had driven at full speed from our rented house in the hills above Olbia to

the service park only to discover that we were the last ones to show. When we arrived, my wristwatch showed eight thirty a.m., but the Italian spring was already making the tent into a hothouse. Interaction was focused, yet relaxed. Even though languages heard range from Norwegian to Russian, French and Arabic, the majority speak English and it is, all in all, a very easy-going atmosphere.

Suddenly, it is completely transformed. The first stage of the second leg, in other words day 2, of Rally Sardinia has just started. At this point, both Wilson and his men and Østberg's team, all dressed in team apparel, are paying close attention to the numbers on their computer screens, relieved that the technological problems the organiser had yesterday in providing reliable information updates through GPS tracking systems, seem to be taken care of. They are looking at 'splits', split times, which is the time between intervals on the stage. Introduced in 1998 to add a tactical slant to the rallies, they are now widely used by drivers and team management to adapt the speed during the rally – if you are behind, push some more; if you are in the lead, you don't have to take so many risks when driving. At my side, Morten Østberg has been relieved from some of the tension that he carried with him earlier this morning. So far, it looks good for Mads Østberg, who's Ford Fiesta WRC RS seems to be running as it should. He lies fifth, half a minute after a battling trio of Petter Solberg, Mikko Hirvonen and Sébastien Ogier who in turn are separated by only ten seconds. While less tense, Østberg is still restless wandering back and forth. Meanwhile, Campion is calm and soft-spoken.

Inside M-Sport



No fixed seats at lunchtime. On the screens we could follow the rally evolve. Photo: Hans Erik Næss

In spite of a clearly visible hierarchy, as leaders socialise with mechanics and guests and others, everybody seems to know their place and role in the social fabric. At times, I can't help sensing a kind of dry, laddish wit sneaking into conversation. Spatially, it is easier to interpret the team structure. The main management crew – amongst others, Malcolm Wilson, head of M-Sport – is placed in a huge trailer beside the hospitality area (basically a luxurious tent – later upgraded to a massive mobile home. See image below). While the first floor of this trailer harbours kitchen, toilets and offices, the second floor is reserved for M-Sport senior officials like Wilson. From there, they have access to a variety of communication channels – Internet, telephone, satellite navigation, walkie-talkies – and are able to communicate with the drivers and monitor in detail how the rally progresses. No nude

pictures, dirty coffee mugs or stationary lying around, just a clean, information-oriented operation base. Strangely enough, I can't even see any posters of past rally cars.

In contrast to the vagabond style of the past, modern WRC teams resemble social psychologist Edgar Schein's model of organisational culture, where three cognitive levels are identified. At the first level, we find artefacts. As this includes how members dress and act, as well as 'myths and stories told about the organization' (Schein, 2004, p. 26), they are visible elements in a culture that can be recognised by people who are not part of the culture (but that does not automatically mean that outsiders can interpret the cultural meaning of these artefacts or behaviours). Many of the above-mentioned observations at M-Sport confirm the presence of this level. At the second level, we find espoused values, that is, the organisation's stated values and rules of behaviour. While this is often expressed in corporate philosophies, or moral metaphors such as describing the organisation like 'one big family', it is as much a goal as a current situation. The family metaphor is commonly used both within a WRC team and also within the larger WRC community. Ninni Russo, Lancia's former team principal, once said this about the importance of social bonds to the manufacturer's success – six consecutive manufacturer WRC titles and four driver titles in the period 1987-1992:

Our team, from drivers to mechanics all the way to management and chief engineer, were one big family. We had known each other for years, and had many shared experiences. There was a team spirit ... Thanks to this good atmosphere, we were very creative, innovative and productive. Nobody had to be prompted to do a job, all knew exactly what they had to do (cited in Blaettel and Wagner, 2007, p. 162).

Russo's comment also illustrates the third level of organisational culture, what Schein describes as basic underlying assumptions (Schein, 2004, p. 30). These are the deeply

embedded, taken-for-granted behaviours that nonetheless constitute the essence of culture – ‘the way we do things around here’ – that must be learned and internalised. Speculative as it may be, this could be one of the reasons that non-Europeans in the WRC remain outsiders to the sport, despite the large interest in countries like Argentina and Japan. Argentinian WRC Group N champion, Gustavo Trelles, once commented in the late 1990s on the lack of top non-European WRC drivers that, ‘we don’t understand the European team intellect ... You’re crossing cultural things: as much as we’re European, you’ve got a different way of doing things, you know’ (cited in Williams, 1999, p. 38).

In practical work, these levels intermingle and come together in the service area. Fundamental to this operationalisation of team spirit is the main crib – the temporary building assemblage that houses the team HQ. Two years after Sardinia, I once again met up with Champion on Rally de France-Alsace. Now, M-Sport, as well as the two other manufacturer teams, all had large mobile units which serve as restaurant, conference room, chill-out lounge and technical HQ at the same time. Some would say that the development of hospitality units – both Volkswagen’s and Hyundai’s units are even larger – create an unwanted distance between fans and the teams. Philip said it like this, contrasting it with the enclosed paddock of F1: ‘The sport is more accessible. Although this was better in the old days with manufacturers servicing cars in your local garage forecourt.’

If not exactly like it was in the mid-1990s when normally, the public could wander into a hotel bar ‘and join the fun with the superstars that have just finished the event’ (Campbell and Campbell, 1995, p. 17), I still find an openness between spectators and participants that you cannot find in any other motoring world championship. On Rally Sardinia 2011, for instance, Mads Østberg’s team travelled with nearly 40 guests from Røhne Selmer, the Norwegian Ford dealer. At given slots, they mingled with WRC Academy principal Marc de Jong, Simon Long, and Michèle Mouton, alongside other known WRC

faces who all stopped by to have a chat. Martin Wilkinson, former Event Controller at M-Sport, once described the WRC community as ‘a small world’, elaborating: ‘It’s close-knit. We often stay in the same hotels as other teams, and mechanics do move from team to team, so you’re always seeing old friends and colleagues’ (cited in Allsop, 1999, p. 103).

A travelling VIP-house



M-Sport’s hospitality unit at Rally de France-Alsace, 2011. It is actually a trailer than can be mounted to a lorry and driven away. Photo: Rune Langbråten.

Of course, like in any sport, the house is not open to everybody. Special treatment to invitation-only guests is one way to please sponsors who feel they need to get something in return besides the potential economic reimbursements. With the promotional culture in mind, it is reasonable to think that many companies use the social return of sponsorship of WRC

teams' spending as a way to create corporate identity; they feel they share the values which are at the forefront of sports; an inner drive, teamwork and the positive stimulus of group identity coupled with individual liberties (Bloxsome, Voges and Pope, 2011, p. 134).

The evolution of WRC teams

Observing all this from my corner at M-Sport in Sardinia, while reading about the historical development of the sport in the early 1990s at night in our house in the hills above Olbia, the sport has come a long way since the tragedies of Group B. Apart from Lancia, neither the Group B manufacturers nor spectators found the new regulation regime, called Group A, to their liking. Introduced in 1987, it brought in a lot of safety features but most importantly, a much less powerful engine. Among spectators and drivers the mood was similar, partly because the FIA had imposed a new maximum length of competitive rallying to about 600 kilometres, and the cars that followed did not impress anybody at the time. After his first try in a Group A car, 1986 world driver's champion Juha Kankkunen was in disbelief: 'Oh crap, this is the end of rally. There is nothing in these cars, compared to the B-Group cars!' (Kankkunen and Korhonen, 2009, p. 72). Walter Röhrl also scorned the new regulations and retired from the WRC shortly after the end of Group B, with these words: 'I felt it was pathetic driving these strange cars' (Röhrl, Müller and Klein, 2002, p. 207).

Others, especially Japanese manufacturers, welcomed the new regulations, while some of the former Group B teams did not have a suitable car for the Group A. In 1989, Mike Greasley was already writing in the introduction to *Rallycourse*: 'Will the new decade bring an era of milk and honey? There is a note of optimism in the air. The writing is on the wall – in Japanese' (cited in Campbell and Campbell, 1995, p. 115). Soon, however, Toyota and Lancia with 'their blank cheques and win-at-all-cost budgets' left others behind (Campbell

and Campbell, 1995, p. 126). To attract more manufacturers, the required number of produced road cars was reduced by the FIA to 2,500 before the 1993 season (2,500 of the competing model had to be built in one year, out of 25,000 for the entire range of the model). Another notable change this year was that, for the first time in WRC history, all rounds of the championship counted in terms of points scoring for both the drivers' and the manufacturers' title. Effectively ending the Toyota-Lancia dominance of the past eight years, these innovations led to a turning point. Four makes and seven drivers won WRC rallies that season, including a Subaru Legacy in the hands of Colin McRae (Rally New Zealand). Additionally, the world would for the last time see privateers winning WRC events (Swedish driver Mats Jonsson at Rally Sweden and Italian driver Gianfranco Cunico at Rally San Remo).

A big part of this was what's later been called 'the Japanese invasion' as Toyota, Mitsubishi and Subaru, besides Ford, now had entered full time, in addition to minor teams from Mazda and Nissan. Toyota won WRC driver titles in 1990 and 1992-94, Subaru in 1995, while Mitsubishi won four consecutive titles 1996-1999. Lancia, on the other hand, seemed satisfied with what they had done in the WRC and exited the championship as a manufacturer team at the end of 1992. To many, the 1990s is the real golden age of rallying. After the introduction of WRCars in 1997 and the subsequent couple of years, I think the FIA made their best attempt so far to pair the hearty emotion of the traditionalists with the analytical foresight of modernists. In David Williams' review of the 1999 season, the reason was simple – it was the *championship* that was exciting:

There was no pattern to the season, no outstanding car, no obviously superior tactic, no conclusive illustration or reliability counting for more than speed than vice versa. It was, in short, a triumph for the thinking that underlies World Championship in the late

1990s. To the car manufacturers, the most powerful force in the sport, it has become a much more palatable and affordable exercise than it was five or six years ago and it is therefore becoming a big show. There are plenty of good teams and drivers, and thus plenty of potential winners. The rallies are spaced fairly evenly and almost all the main players turn up for most of them. There is a story to tell, even it isn't televised widely or enthusiastically (Williams, 1999, p. 10).

In the midst of all this, as I will return in the next chapter also, came the realisation that the emerging teams had no choice but to engage with the promotional culture explored in Chapter 4. In 1995, Ford had hired Martin Whitaker, a man with extensive experience in motorsport PR from, among other things, the FIA and Formula 1, to look after the overall communication of the rallying programme. He recalls: 'Ford had almost taken a back seat as far as motorsport communication was concerned and they were looking to try to improve the image of the company within the sport' (cited in Allsop, 1999, p. 13). Narrated by Derick Allsop in his 1999 book *Ford and McRae. Focus on the World Championship*, this had to change, according to Whitaker.

Bringing rallying, and other forms of motorsport, to the attention of the public is, of course, part of the manufacturers' process for selling cars. And rally cars, unlike Formula One cars, bear a very real resemblance, outwardly at least, to road cars. It's a perfect stage – excuse the pun – on which to demonstrate the performance, driveability and reliability of the product. And – this is where it differs from Formula One – in not such a glamorous world, but in a world where, essentially, you can prove all these factors (cited in Allsop, 1999, pp. 14-15).

One of Whitaker's means to operationalise this goal was to rethink the organisation of a WRC team. While Ford traditionally had done everything in-house at a small factory in Boreham, UK, Whitaker found that the benefits of establishing a partnership with an independent sub-contractor with an impressive track record would surpass the contentiousness of taking the operation away from a place full of heritage and a workforce 'accustomed to the routine, way of life, kudos and perks of the World Rally Championship' (Allsop, 1999, p. 15). Above all, it would differentiate the motorsport activities at Ford making them more efficient and, according to Allsop, making Ford's sporting ventures more business-like. As a result, Ford Motorsport agreed with M-Sport, formed in 1979 under the name 'Malcolm Wilson Motorsport', to spearhead the company's assault on the WRC titles for the 1997 season.

The introduction of the WRC car rules in 1997, which allowed for much more freedom in building rally cars than the previous regime (see next chapter), meant that M-Sport was also left with the responsibility of developing a rally car based on the new Focus model. M-Sport is an example of a team structure model designed to cope organisationally with the promotionally new, global context, where the manufacturer provide cars, funding and technical assistance but leaves the engineering of ordinary cars into rally cars and logistical operation to a collaborating company. In a modern WRC team, this means that the team principal is in charge of the overall sporting programme's management. Other responsibilities, as outlined in Table 8.1, are allotted by a team management and then, at events, divided into specialised sub-groups with responsibility for different things in a WRC team.

Table 8.1. The basic structure of a modern WRC team

| Level | Actor | Responsibilities |
|-------------------------|--|--|
| Executive level | Manufacturer (for instance Ford) / contracted partner company (M-Sport) / senior executives (for instance the M-Sport team boss and the Director of Ford Racing in Europe) | Final responsibility for all aspects of the rally team, most notably funding and sporting results |
| Performing level | Drivers and co-drivers | Win the rally, making sure the official documents regarding timing and the like is in order |
| | Personal managers | Taking care of a driver's financial and social well-being |
| | Human performance (physical trainers, mental coaches), video analysts, technical assistants (like gravel crews) | Being of physical, mental and technical assistance in various ways to the driver/co-driver in preparing for an event, while doing it, and during restitution |
| Managerial level | Team management, investor representatives, representatives from the manufacturer, administrative and sporting personnel | Formulating business plans, coordinating team structure, overseeing budgets, on-event planning and management (most notably contact with the event organiser), technical development, and human resources |
| Task force level | Team PR (PR director, information officers, social media) | Copyediting text, communicating with the press and other actors (such as sponsors and VIPs) |
| | Hospitality | In charge of food, drinks, guests, as well as surveying the general atmosphere within the team |
| | Logistics | Moving the WRC team around the world by organising the packaging, shipping, and freighting of all the equipment teams carry |
| | Engineering | Developing and building rally cars, performing procedures of technical and mechanical service as well as coping with the unpredictable punishment cars take when being driven flat-out on roads of various quality |

Although M-Sport operated according to a similar model, it was Toyota Team Europe (TTE) – described as ‘a polyglot organisation, a United Nations of rallying’ from the start in the 1970s (Williams, 1999, p. 52) – and its main man Ove Andersson, that pioneered the team structure that would dominate the 1990s and successfully involved the Japanese manufacturers. In the words of two motorsport historians: ‘Strangely, it was a Swede,

working in Germany who acted as commander-in-chief for the [Japanese] invasion proper' (Campbell and Campbell, 1995, p. 108). According to motorsport journalist veteran David Williams, this changed the face of teams:

In the early 1970s, most manufacturers ran works teams in the truest sense of the term. If they weren't part of a proper car factory, such as Abingdon, they were wholly owned by the manufacturer, like the Ford site at Boreham. No doubt the processes of sub-contracting rally programmes would have evolved anyway, as it has in other forms of motorsport, but it is fair to say that the TTE led the way in rallying (Williams, 1999, p. 53).

Most winning teams in 1990s, in addition to the American-funded (Ford and M-Sport), followed the transnational TTE model: financed by Japanese companies, but run by European companies (Mitsubishi by Ralliart Europe, Subaru by Prodrive, and Toyota by Toyota Team Europe, TTE). Parallel to this development, there were political changes in the FIA. In order to make the WRC grow as a world championship, it needed political support and foresight from its mother organisation. Already in the 1970s, former FIA President Jean-Marie Balestre wanted to run motorsport worldwide, but lacked the skill to exploit the globalisation of rallying and to incorporate the wider political context of societal changes into his work. When Max Mosley won the FIA presidential election of October 1991 by a margin of 43 to 29 (and kept this position until he resigned in 2009), he brought a different perspective into the WRC.

It was clear that a significant part of Mosley's candidate strategy was to gain the support of clubs all around the world, rather than concentrating on the big European clubs, which had traditionally controlled the FIA. Mosley also realised that regional politics was important, as clubs tended to vote with the biggest club in their region. Mexico, for example,

carried the votes of most of the Central American countries and when Japan voted one way, most of the Asian voters did the same (see Seward, 1993). Hence, it was crucial to bring the Japanese manufacturers more fully into the WRC, as well as ally with key people in the Asian region. At times, the politics of this voting game escalated into national disagreements. Nazir Hossein, for example, a controversial Indian motorsport entrepreneur, assisted Mosley in gaining votes from the Asian members of the FIA throughout the 1990s. While Hossein is at the time of writing still in conflict with the Federation of Motor Sports Clubs of India (FMSCI), the official Indian motorsport club represented in the World Motor Sport Council (WMSC), he is also currently Vice-President of the FIA for Sport, chief steward of the WRC and a serving member of the WMSC – for China!⁷⁸

Although having his ‘beefs’ with the non-Ecclestone supported realm of Formula 1 throughout his entire period as FIA president, Mosley made his mark on a range of areas. For example, he set out to adapt the sport to a more ecological approach, even though he had to wait a long time before anything major happened in that area (see Chapter 5). More significant was his wish to take advantage for rallying of the new possibilities for global commercialisation of motorsport. As discussed in Chapter 4, he specifically paid attention to what Martin Holmes, another motorsport veteran journalist, calls, ‘the problem of international promotion of the championship (particularly television) and also how to cater for the demand by new countries for inclusion in the championships’ (Holmes, 1996, p. 32). One new practice was the introduction of the rotation system in the late 1990s in which WRC events were selected on a shifting basis. The intention was to make the WRC a world championship in a more literal sense of the word, and to display the sport in new markets. Then, as in 2008, the exclusion of Rally Monte Carlo and other classic events caused much harm, but on the other hand, it made way for a less Eurocentric world championship – that is, at least in principle.

The WRC car as a cultural heritage object

Just a minute before the cars come in for service on both sides of the hospitality tent as part of different sublets of M-Sport at Rally Sardinia 2011, I observe how the mechanics almost like a marching band are making themselves ready for the challenges today's stages have brought to the cars. Tools are lined up and preparations meticulously made for those exercises that are standard on service. When the cars arrive, they stop at designated places next to the hospitality area.

Servicing to the public



Mechanics servicing Mads Østberg's car at Rally Sardinia, 2011. Photo: Hans Erik Næss

Some mechanics have a specific corner of the car that they work on. They pull off the wheels and inspect the parts behind. If something is broken or worn, they replace it if there's time – even gearboxes and engines. Those mechanics, my observations tell me, combine improvisation, formal training and procedure and display a type of skill resembling what Kevin L. Borg in his *Auto Mechanics* name 'sense-based knowledge' that is hard to describe verbally or to communicate in writing (Borg, 2007, p. 111).

In the meantime, the co-driver is hastily walking back and forth with a pile of papers. In the role of 'office manager' of a WRC car, it is his job to ensure that all paperwork on timing, regulations and the event organiser guides is in order and that he and the driver actually make it to the start (even in the age of GPS, it can be more difficult than it seems). On the stages, the co-driver reads out *pace notes* to the driver to alert him about what's coming next. These pace notes are made during *rece* in concordance with the driver. Besides the formal job requirements, a lot of the role of a co-driver is on the social side, a sort of social 'Jack of all trades', preferably with experience from all the major rallies. In 1999, Fred Gallagher, a highly experienced co-driver who had then partnered world driver's champions like Bjørn Waldegård (1979) and Juha Kankkunen (1986, 1987, 1991, 1993), shared his thoughts on a career beside the wild men of the WRC. More importantly than the 'age of obsessional fitness, diet gurus, feng shui, colonic irrigation', he says, is experience, a sort of cosmopolitan flexibility and the right attitude towards the job: 'We get well paid and have a brilliant time travelling the world. After all, it's not brain surgery, is it?' (cited in Williams, 1997, p. 55).

In the midst of these routines, I notice how spectators are obsessively photographing the cars. Surely, WRC cars are useful to boost the image of a car manufacturer. To many fans, however, certain rally cars signify a lot more than what I later in this chapter will term 'brand fit'. In a broader context, WRC teams are also producing a cultural heritage artefact. To

understand why, we need to realise that in most societies cars are pieces of what anthropologists call ‘material culture’ (see Urry, 2000; Giucci, 2012). Anthropologist Paul Basu uses Malinowski’s classic discussion of the canoe in *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* to exemplify what this means: while it on the one hand can be described as ‘a mere bit of shaped matter’, it has on the other hand, an ethnographic reality because the canoe ‘lives in the life of its sailors’ (Basu, 2013, p. 353; Malinowski, 1922/1984, p. 80). In rallying, similarly, the promotional value of the WRC cars must be seen as materialised culture through both individual expressions (people have favourite cars) and communal property (it is common sense that some cars contribute heavily to defining whether the sport is on a high or in a low) and historical biography.

I will come back to some examples of this below, but in general, the level of contribution to the assortment of ‘rally car classics’ is measured by ‘constructive authenticity’, a view of history that allows for different, and essentially symbolic, interpretations of reality on the basis of people’s projections on to cars (Leigh, Peters and Shelton, 2006, p. 483). ‘I really miss that Audi sound’, Alejandro once said dreamily – and he was 39 at the time – and obviously lots of others feel the same way, as there are plenty of tribute videos on YouTube with the label ‘Group B – Pure Sound’. Amongst other cars that have achieved sacred status in the rallying folklore is the Subaru Impreza. In 1984, after aborting an unsuccessful bid to develop a Formula 1 car, Fuji Heavy Industries Ltd. (FHI), Subaru’s parent company, turned to the WRC. Inspired by the rule changes of Group B, allowing turbo-charged engines and four-wheel drive – both essential features of Subaru cars – FHI was convinced that the WRC could provide ‘a more relevant and affordable motorsport arena to further develop the company’s profile to the consumer’ (Beck-Burridge and Walton, 2001, p. 52). Worldwide coverage, competition with a production model, and ‘borderless appeal’ across cultures were some of the reasons used to justify this move (Beck-Burridge and Walton, 2001, p. 54-55).

Almost three decades and a number of WRC wins later Jason Barlow, a member of the British motor media conglomerate *Top Gear*, wrote passionately of the impact that the Subaru Impreza WRX made on the motor-heads when it arrived the mid 1990s:

Enter the Impreza, stage left. Rally stage left. So ugly it made a bulldog chewing its way out of a wasp nest look like Kate Moss, the Impreza quickly connected with those in the know in three simple but effective ways: it was powerful, it had all-wheel drive so it handled the typically damp British B-road with spectacular effectiveness, and it wasn't that expensive ... Its success soon went viral, and this in an era when word of mouth meant exactly that, and the Internet was still held together with sticky tape ... It was a British thing, too, and even more than that a Celtic thing, thanks to the World Rally Championship and one of its most noted protagonists (Barlow, 2013).

For manufacturers and other investors, who invest millions to showcase their products and brands on the behalf of the thousands of workers at the factories all over the world, Barlow's recollection is beneficial in so far as it provides an understanding of what kind of role cars have in the WRC. At Rally Finland 2010, for instance, the rally had a prelude of classic rally cars which, at least in my ears, received more applause than the current WRC cars.

Profoundly influenced by the celebration of the event's 60th anniversary, my ethnographic experiences from this rally tie in with the three ways that according to Greg Ramshaw and Sean Gammon (2006, p. 237), we can confirm the past: 'through memory (of which nostalgia is but one way of remembering), history (written texts and documents), and relics (objects from the past)'. However, views of cars even convey an idea of sporting *heritage* which differs from both memory (which is part of it) and history, a distinction suggested by David Lowenthal (1998: x): 'While it borrows from and enlivens historical study, heritage is not an

inquiry into the past but a celebration of it, not an effort to know what actually happened but a profession of faith in a past tailored to present-day purposes.’

Colin McRae’s title-winning Subaru Impreza 1995



Photo: B.J. Mullan/flickr.com.

The Subaru Impreza (see image above) may have been an average road car, but dressed in rally costume, it became something entirely different. In one sense, this celebratory affection for certain rally cars exemplifies how associations between the particularly value-laden universe of sports and a product, amplified by the promotional culture in the 1990s, include an awareness that people engage with a cluster of values when choosing their favourite car. Crucial to this insight, which we saw in chapter 5, goes back in the 1920s with the car as an emerging status symbol, is that the concept of a brand according to Martin Beck-Burridge and

Jeremy Walton (2001, p. 7) has been ‘transformed from a means through which to differentiate a product or service, with a derived value, to being a major source of value in themselves’. In the WRC, more specifically, car brand-equity – value added to the product by its brand name (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2004, p. 555) – comes from a selectively historical accumulation of admiration within the sporting community.

If you ask those involved in motorsport, however, especially manufacturers, cultural impact is left between the lines, at least during the competitive years. Instead, they generally explain their participation in terms of enhancing development, elevating brand awareness and gaining publicity. To a large extent, this is expected. As the WRC is about real cars, racing all over the world on real roads, consumer association can be said to be more natural than in any other form of motorsport and thus – if successful – ‘part of the process of differentiation, identifying the product from others that may perform a similar function’ (Beck-Burridge and Walton, 2001, p. 5). David Lapworth, former team boss of Subaru World Rally Team, put it like this in 2007 Discovery Channel documentary, *Engineering the World Rally*, which follows the Subaru team through the 2006 season. ‘To get value out of a motorsport program you need to be seen to be winners. You don’t have to win every rally. But you have to keep your strike right such that you are always perceived to be in the frame, you’re always perceived to be a leading team.’⁷⁹ As engineering trickle-down effects mattered more in the past, because many road cars exceed the technological sophistication and power of today’s WRC cars, enhancing a specific kind of brand awareness is what really matters.

In search of brand awareness

At Hyundai Motorsport GmbH in Alzenau, just outside Frankfurt, Germany, the South Korean manufacturer – which in 2014, is the most recent participant to enter the WRC –

vividly displays its belief in using rallying as technological stomping ground and brand fitness camp. On 8,200 square meters, with technology- and design centres, as well as spotless production facilities, more than a 100 WRC specialists from 17 nations started working together in 2013, preparing for the WRC 2014 season with a 300 million euro budget for the next three years (Foy, 2013). Similar to how Volkswagen explained its entry to the WRC at a press conference at Rally Sardinia 2011, the championship's association with mass-produced cars was vital for Hyundai's choice of the WRC and not other forms of motorsport. In an interview, Director of Marketing & PR at Hyundai Motorsport, Stefan Ph. Henrich, elaborated to me on this in October 2013:

We think that the WRC is the best package of performance and durability. In DTM [Deutsche Tourenwagen Meisterschaft, a track-racing series], for instance, they may race for 40 minutes and that is it. In the WRC, you must survive four days on various stages, as well as driving long liaison stages without braking the car. Therefore the WRC is in line with what we would like to communicate with our brand. Moreover, our customers can identify with the car as it is based on a production model and not some engineering fantasy. Add to this that WRC is the closest experience motorsport has to offer. No big fences separate the cars from the spectators, it is on public roads, which means that you can drive your kids to school one day and actually spectate a rally the next at the very same road! Finally, it is about the competitive environment. Our competitors in the production cars market are similar to the ones we have in the WRC and that makes the challenge potentially rewarding. In any sport the value of winning is judged by the competition you have.⁸⁰

Hyundai's participation in motorsport is based on several aims, Henrich underlines:

Entering the WRC is rather part of a broader development. Over the last decade, three milestones for the company were established: quality improvements, increased production capacity and a distinctive design. While these milestones have been reached there is still a gap in emotion. Hyundai's are good cars, but there are some other ones that are more fun to drive. As a way of closing this gap Hyundai Motorsport GmbH was established on December 19, 2012, in Germany. While our main priority now is the WRC, Hyundai Motorsport is thought to become an engineering platform for commercialization of performance cars. By transferring emotive and performance learning from the WRC car to the production cars, and by that getting some ROI, it is the first step of making the Hyundai Motorsport somewhat similar to what AMG has been to Mercedes – a sub-branch of the company fully focused on performance cars enhancing the emotional appeal of the entire brand.

In this context, Hyundai largely follows the trajectories of Audi and Peugeot. Technologically, Audi's entry to the WRC is interesting because its breakthrough in WRC in 1980 typed the engineering blueprint for any WRC car by combining four-wheel-drive and a turbo-charged engine. Audi had been an unpretentious subsidiary of Volkswagen since 1966, when one progressive engineer, Jörg Benzinger, convinced the senior management of the company to develop a four-wheel-drive system for high performance cars and by that switch the almost invisible image of Audi into a more progressive one. The means to do so would be rallying which, in 1976 when this took place, then-current WRC regulations demanded that at least 400 road cars would have to be built. The problem was that four-wheel-drive – at the time a rarity in the world of ordinary cars – was not allowed in the WRC at the time.

According to Graham Robson, the lobbying efforts from Audi to change this were impressive and show the long-term dedication behind a successful WRC campaign. By first establishing a lobbying relationship with its own motorsport authority, the German Federation, who then took the case to the main governing body in Paris – the FIA – it took them three years to change the rules, and with no complaints. ‘With very little notice’, as Robson puts it (2008, p. 11), the FIA allowed four-wheel drive in the WRC from 1979 onwards provided that they were produced in correct numbers, that was, 400 for Group 4 approval (see Chapter 7 for more about the historical context). Part of the explanation of why there was no fuss about this is the lack of interest in this technological innovation from other manufacturers in the WRC. Neither Lancia nor Opel, two manufacturers with serious aims at the WRC title, said much other than that the car was too big and heavy and that the technology involved was too complicated and too unreliable. That none of them had four-wheel-drive cars in their product ranges, or under development, also played a significant part in their attitude (Robson, 2008, p. 11).

Their technological conservatism would soon be proven wrong. The first real demonstration of the technological advantages of the Audi project at WRC rally came at Rally Monte Carlo in 1981. Works driver and later WRC driver’s champion in 1983, Hannu Mikkola, had built up a lead of six minutes (!) on the first six special stages before he crashed out of the event. A couple of weeks later the Audi team, which organised a very impressive infrastructure around its works cars where no efforts were spared to include the best support possible, relocated to Rally Sweden. Now, they won. Throughout the season, the Audi was plagued with technical issues, less impressive performances on tarmac and driver errors, but also a couple of superb wins – including Michele Mouton’s victory in the San Remo rally, the first-ever female win at a WRC event. At the end of the season, few had doubts about the potential of the four-wheel drive. And as told in the previous chapter, after a series of

debacles at the FIA, the new Group B rules would rule exclusively from the beginning of 1983 (Davenport and Klein, 2012, p. 18).

In principle, this opened the way for engineering progressivity, but because of the back-and-forth of the FIA in terms of concluding the regulations, only Audi kept on with their combo of four-wheel drive and turbo-charged engines. The other participants were Opel, where the Ascona model was a refurbished, rear-wheel drive and normally aspirated Group 4 car, and Lancia, who in fact built a Group B racer with compressor-charged engine, but also continued with rear-wheel drive. With Hannu Mikkola's WRC title in 1983, it was clear that Audi was better adapted to the Group B rules than the others, although not perfect as it still was based on a road car. In the meantime, Peugeot had begun developing a brand new rally car for the Group B – the 205. Despite negative comments from Audi on the construction, that a turbo-charged mid-engine and four-wheel drive was 'undriveable' (Todt and Moncet, 1985, p. 31), and although Jean Boillot, President of Peugeot at first wanted to abandon the idea of four-wheel because 'it had already been used by the Audi Quattro' (Todt and Moncet, 1985, p. 27), the French engineers continued with this set-up.

Apparently, both the engineers and Jean Todt, the team manager and later FIA President, in contrast to the board, thought that in order to achieve the manufacturer's title in the you had to have a car that could win *all* types of WRC rallies. Thus four-wheel drive was needed. While the future proved them right, the development of the Group B edition of the 205 would also spur the introduction of the road-going model, which then was new segment for the company (in fact one of the main ideas was to launch them both at the same day). In fact, the idea was that the 205 should 'participate in high-level competition in order to create a more dynamic image' (Todt and Moncet, 1985, p. 26). Ari Vatanen's win of the Rally Monte Carlo in 1985 (see Chapter 6) made an incredible impact on the manufacturer's image and allegedly saved thousands of jobs as Peugeot was in a decline before 'the magic of Monte'

happened. Jean-Louis Moncet, co-author of *Peugeot 205 – The Story of a Challenge* with Jean Todt, recalls that after the rally:

there was a seemingly endless wave of interviews, invitations, and television appearances. Vic Dial [Peugeot's commercial director] was grinning with satisfaction, thinking of the retail sales effect; this victory established the 205 GTI next to the Golf, with a status that neither Ford, nor Opel nor Fiat had achieved. The statistics proved, moreover, that Peugeot was acquiring a sports image comparable to that of BMW and Audi (Todt and Moncet, 1985, p. 96).

Here, Todt points to the other aspect of entering motorsport. Besides technological transfers and performance learning, Hyundai – like Peugeot was – is in the WRC, spurred by a brand awareness strategy, according to Henrich.

Every decision by a car manufacturer is made with the intention of making money. This might seem odd as participating in motorsport has no direct effect on the amount of cars being sold and that any involvement in motorsport is expensive. We see the involvement in the WRC, but also the establishment of Hyundai Motorsport, as an investment. It is a way of elevating brand image, to build something that we don't have yet, which simultaneously reflects our mass-produced cars. This way, our involvement in the WRC is a tool achieving these aims. Previously our sponsorships of the FIFA World Cup, for instance, were about increasing awareness mainly. With motorsport we are directly participating. As for the future, we also envision the possibilities of producing rally cars for customers, for instance in the R5 series [those

cars eligible for competing in the WRC2 series], and pursuing other commercial uses of the know-how gained in motorsport.

It was not, however, the first time that Hyundai had entered the WRC. From 1999-2003 they participated with the Accent model, although under completely different circumstances. Back then, the South Korean company provided money and some technical support, whereas British outfit Motor Sport Developments (MSD) ran the operation itself. A lack of satisfaction with the programme from the manufacturer's side, as well as lack of results from the MSD's side, made the actors part on a sour note. With four events left to go in 2003, Hyundai froze all funding, which made it impossible for the MSD to complete the season. As a result, because of FIA's regulations requiring manufacturer teams to participate on all rounds, the team was given a fine of one million dollars by the FIA's World Motor Sport Council (WMSC) for failing to show up, while MSD had to close down. David Whitehead, founder and manager of MSD, was enraged by the outcome: 'In my 28 years of motorsport, I have never come across a situation like this, where the departure of a manufacturer from a major motorsport championship has been executed so poorly, causing such damage and ill feeling within the sport. It truly is unprecedented.'⁸¹

Hyundai, on the other hand, blamed MSD for the turmoil. In a press release B.H. Lee, Hyundai's Director of overseas marketing promotion, commented that, 'MSD has failed to provide us with audited financial records which we are legally entitled to review. Until we can get a true picture of the state of their finances, we have no choice but to withhold further payment.'⁸² MSD countered by saying that 'MSD has done nothing to justify HMC withholding any contractual payments.'⁸³ Without going further into details, or adjudicating who was to blame, the manufacturer left the WRC – but not for good. In the press release, Lee also stated that this was not the end of Hyundai's work in the WRC, but a sabbatical that

would allow the company to conduct a major reorganisation of its motorsport division.

Elsewhere, Harry Choi, global marketing and communications senior executive vice-president for Hyundai, commented: ‘This withdrawal is temporary but absolutely mandatory in order for us to reorganise and rethink our entire approach.’⁸⁴

Although many in the WRC community doubted a return to the WRC for the Korean manufacturer, they were proved wrong in 2012. Already in its 2003 annual report, Hyundai announced that Germany would be the hub of the new attack on the WRC, for several reasons: ‘The new team headquarters in Germany will avail itself of Europe’s excellent motorsport infrastructure and will provide a solid base to reposition Hyundai as a top competitor’ (Hyundai Motor Company, 2003, p. 29). Ten years later, Henrich elaborates, the location of Hyundai Motorsport in the German city of Frankfurt is not coincidental at all:

You could say that the location of Hyundai Motorsport in Alzenau plays a role in this as the company already had a history of involvement there. Its European headquarters was as said established there in 2001, its European R&D and design departments are there, and Frankfurt airport can get you anywhere in the world. Here we are close to most WRC events, at least the European ones. And besides Frankfurt being home to a large South Korean community, it is also conveniently located in terms of future performance concepts. Hockenheim racetrack is just 90 km from Alzenau and the Nürburgring race circuit, where Hyundai established its European Test Centre in 2013, is merely an hour and a half away.

Despite Hyundai’s large investments, Henrich is right in pointing out that measuring the effects on sales from advertising is a contested field (see Grohs, Wagner and Vsetecka 2004; Bagwell, 2008). Studies measuring effectiveness of sports branding argue that people’s image

of the sport, what they see as ‘the brand fit’ and their perception of what a high brand involvement entails, will have a great impact on how people view your company (see Grohs, Wagner and Vsetecka, 2004). Although surveys publicised in WRC’s fact book of 2010 (p. 25) argue that WRC provides US\$150 million of exposure value for the car and US\$50 million of exposure value for the brand, the critical point here is whether the brand fit gets any attention at all. As I discussed in previous chapters, the need for improved television coverage was imperative to the ISC when they acquired the commercial rights to the WRC in 2000. Whilst exposure is crucial, there are, however, other aspects that affect ROI (*return on investment*) that need to be considered.

Publicity is not effects, writes marketing professor Tony Meenaghan, and even if one were to accept media exposure as a measure of effectiveness, ‘this approach treats sponsorship merely as a media buy and takes no cognisance of the message element which is inherent in any brand/sponsorship relationship’ (Meenaghan, 2005, p. 254). Hence we find yet another reason to engage with the WRC community qualitatively. Sponsors also vary markedly in terms of how they undertake media exposure analysis, which makes it hard to compare the publicity effects achieved by particular sponsorship ventures (Meenaghan, 2005, p. 254). Nonetheless, exposure is worth *something* – especially if we factor in the broader business model as in Formula 1 (see Sylt and Reid, 2010, p. 131) or the long-term effects on transforming a rally car into a cultural heritage artefact. At the time of its breakthrough in the global landscape of cars in the early 1990s, Subaru, as the case in point, was a marginal car manufacturer, and did in effect set out to *create* a brand – not just refine it – through participation in the WRC and did so with margins.

During its joint participation with British specialist company Prodrive in the WRC 1993-2008, chronicled by Martin Beck-Burridge and Jeremy Walton in their 2001 book *Sports Sponsorship and Brand Development*, it achieved technological progress, brand

distinction and revenue. Its company history reveals a clear determination to use the WRC as an advertising opportunity, as an additional platform for technological innovation, and to differentiate its products through branding in domestic and export markets. In fact, the company had ‘bet its future’ at a time when sales were decreasing (a trend in the automotive industry in general), spurred by the idea that investments would pay off in the longer run (Beck-Burridge and Walton, 2001, pp. 49-50). They did not rush it, though. It would not be until 1989 that Ryuichiro Kuze, the President of Subaru Tecnica International (STI, the Subaru’s motorsport unit), started visiting WRC events with the aim of making contacts and discussing its entry to the sport. At the Safari Rally in Kenya, being accompanied by a representative from the Royal Automobile Club’s Motorsport Committee, he met David Richards of independent British motorsport outfit Prodrive, which at the time was managing the BMW rally team.

Sociologically, it is interesting to note that Prodrive at this point, long before ‘software of the mind’ (see for example Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010) became a buzz phrase in business relations, understood the importance of cultural diversity in transnational collaborations. Founded in 1984 by David Richards and Ian Parry, it had since its inception proved its effectiveness in combining the engineering parts of running a WRC team with commercial ventures and a clear management philosophy. Stimulated by the desired response, STI and Kuze spent almost a year with Prodrive including an in-depth evaluation of the rally potential of Subaru’s new Legacy model. The result was a division of labour with Subaru being in charge of engine and electronics, and Prodrive responsible for body, chassis and transmission. With this settled, the partnership agreement was finally struck on 20 September, 1989. The actual engineering of the cars would take place at Prodrive’s facilities at Banbury, Oxfordshire, England. To the Japanese manufacturer, ‘the collaborative way the rally team went about solving problems’ (Beck-Burridge and Walton, 2001, p. 60) was proof that they

harboured corresponding business cultures. In 2013 Hyundai took a similar route, Stefan Ph. Henrich says:

Different from our WRC approach 10 years ago, this time the approach is far more comprehensive with a closely-knit group of people representing both Hyundai Motorsport in Germany and the Hyundai Group in South Korea. Based on a two-way communication work structure we swap data on a daily basis from the development of the WRC car. This way learning can be exchanged between the units in addition to being an aid in bringing the two units together on a cultural level. As we are fully integrated into Hyundai Group it means that the motorsport team, with their technical skills and enormous WRC experience, needs to get accustomed to the corporate culture of Hyundai and vice versa. To make a team of more than a 100 people from various nationalities where the majority is motorsport people work together in this context, takes time. Just like in football, having the 11 best players in the world does not necessarily make it the best team in the world. Hence 2014 is a year of learning not only for the rallying operation itself, but in this respect also.

Here, Henrich reveals another important aspect of a modern WRC team. According to Edgar Schein (2004, ch. 4), an organisational culture emerges through three processes: group formation, group building and finally group work and functional familiarity. Along the way, a cultural fit between two organisations – the rally guys and the corporate herd – is necessary to increase the chance of becoming a successful joint venture. The reason is, researchers on this theme claim, that those elements that makes a cultural fit identifiable – a mutual competency in terms of cultural codes, languages and managerial interaction style – may affect corporate performance significantly, given the right circumstances. Sticking to the car world, based on

findings where the German and American approaches to administrative issues such as payscales and travel expenses were clearly different, a set of researchers use the merger of Daimler-Benz and Chrysler 'as a perfect example of merger failure due to incompatible cultures' (Appelbaum, Roberts and Shapiro, 2009, p. 37). Confirmation that this matters, in a positive way, in the WRC is also found if we return to the Subaru-Prodrive case. During 1990, the car was in a developmental phase and the search for drivers and co-drivers included a variety of names that could extract the maximum from the car.

In 1991, with a cultural fit in place, it began to do rallies in the British championship, even to win some, notably with Markku Alén, winner of nineteen WRC rallies, alongside a young, shy Scot named Colin McRae. With the new Impreza model introduced in the WRC in 1994, and the sponsorship income from British American Tobacco (known as BAT) which doubled the budget (Beck-Burrige and Walton, 2001, p. 62), the determination was patiently raised notch by notch. By doing WRC events in Greece, Kenya, Finland and even some non-WRC events in the US, rallying had brought 'the new car to the attention of a wider motoring public and achieved greater market exposure than would have been possible by other means' (Beck-Burrige and Walton, 2001, p. 64). Clothing the cars with the distinct blue and yellow colours of State Express 555, a BAT cigarette brand popular in Asia, the visual identity of the team also became cemented. Having great success in picking the right drivers, and with David Richards carefully moulding their careers through ups and downs, the first WRC title came in 1995, when Colin McRae became the youngest world champion ever.

Now, with McRae's driver's title as well as the manufacturer's title to show, the collaboration strategies agreed upon between Prodrive and STI continued successfully. In fact, as mentioned above, the collaboration was one of the key factors to their branding and sporting accomplishments, and because of this, the SWRT managed to win a string of WRC events the next decade, in addition to Drivers' Championship in 2001 (Richard Burns) and

2003 (Petter Solberg) and Manufacturers' Championship in 1996 and 1997. Initially, these results were thought of as means to improve brand distinction and technological progress – but did they? The answer is, not least given the cultural impact discussed above, yes. According to Beck-Burridge and Walton, 'the company's rally successes and related marketing efforts, at least from raw sales statistics, appear to have had an impressive impact upon domestic and overseas sales' (Beck-Burridge and Walton, 2001, p. 79). Furthermore, the rally performance 'has provided a strong brand image that is perceived to be relevant to all the company's products, not just the Impreza' (Beck-Burridge and Walton, 2001, p. 79). At the same time, Prodrive, as part of a highly traditional and competitive motorsport cluster in the UK (see MRA, 2004), had success with continual increases in annual turnover and a widening of company activities.

Between 2006 and 2008, however, results began eluding what was now well known as the SWRT – Subaru World Rally Team. Due to continuous poor performances, paired with strains in the global economy as well the fact that it had been in the championship for many years (longer than any other teams in the WRC at that point), Subaru quit world rallying in 2008, along with Suzuki, just one month before the 2009 season would start. FHI explained this by pointing out that 'our business environment has been dramatically changed due to the quick deterioration of the global economy.'⁸⁵ In its financial report for fiscal year 2009, it says that a net income of ¥18.5 billion in 2008 was turned into a net loss of ¥69.9 billion the following year (FHI, 2009, p. 5). More importantly, in my view, as stated in the press release about their exit, the company felt confident that it had 'achieved its original target in WRC participation'.⁸⁶ Yet, as Jason Barlow writes, 'No worries about their legacy, though. 15 versions of one very special vehicle' (Barlow, 2013).

While Subaru's participation in the WRC became a question of tolerable losses, both sportingly and financially, its cultural impact on the sport can be measured by other means.

Linked to what we have discussed before, cars obviously have a big part in the presence of nostalgia and narrative renderings of history. In this regard, as Tony Meenaghan explain, ‘perceived benefit to the activity by the sponsor can result in higher levels of brand attachment with consequent positive marketing effects’ (Meenaghan, 2005, p. 245). In contrast to the process where appointed decision-makers decide which objects should be included in the corpus of national heritage (see Heinich, 2011, p. 120), like the French *Inventaire général* (General Inventory Service), certain cars are made into cultural heritage items by communal deliberation. In this process, these cars are slowly going through what Nathalie Heinich, in her general discussion on heritage, calls ‘a transfer of sacredness’, achieving a special place in the symbolic system of rallying as opposed to the general ‘disenchantment process’ (Heinich, 2011, pp. 120-21) that has been a recurrent theme of the WRC since the 1980s. Authenticity, as mentioned above, has seemingly become a relative concept as people favour different cars.

In practice, this means that the views on what constitutes a ‘real’ WRC car vary, and for perfectly understandable reasons: the sound of the Audi (Alejandro), childhood memories of the Lancia Delta (Terry Jr), the team spirit at Toyota (Mathias) or the sideways style of the Ford Escort (the author). Still, everybody emphasised as part of their explanation, the forceful combination of sound and physical impression. In the case of Audi, as mentioned by Alejandro above, the revving of its five-cylinder engine has become what musicologists name a ‘sound souvenir’ (a concept originally used to describe endangered sounds, like that of pre-industrial life, that needed to be recorded for posterity, see Schaefer, 1994, p. 240) on file sharing Internet sites. Likewise, the Subaru’s engine construction often shortened ‘boxer’ (pistons lie parallel to the ground, instead of rising up against the hood as in-line or v-type engines do), means it simply makes a different – some would say angrier, growly – sound than other engine constructions. That made it recognizable, and still does. Many of those I

spoke with on different rallies swore that they could easily pick a Subaru or an Audi from the rest blindfolded (exactly *why* they made such a cacophony of sounds was less agreed upon and at times, the subject of very technical arguments).

Moreover, the reason why nobody chose a car from the past decade may lie in the fact that the older rally cars, in contrast to the newer ones as of 1997 and onwards, could be bought in the store and would bear a close resemblance to the rally version (turbo-charged engine, four-wheel drive, aerodynamic wings). Until the WRCars were introduced in 1997, when the Toyota Corolla, for instance, showed up in an edition impossible to buy for ordinary customers, the cars had to be build upon production models with a minimum of 2,500 ‘copies’ on sale. Arguably, this had a tremendous influence on authenticity measures, as emphasised by sociologist Colin Campbell on the essential activity of consumption: ‘it is not the actual selection, purchase or use of products but rather the imaginative pleasure-seeking to which this product image lends itself, real consumption is largely a result of this mentalistic hedonism.’ (C.Campbell, 1995, p. 118). A combination of ‘imaginative pleasure-seeking’ and actual proximity – especially in the case of the more reasonably priced Subarus rather than the extremely expensive Group B cars – is influential in the way the emotional relationship between fans and these cars has been fortified.

Finally, it is not merely about 300 or 400 horsepower or the technological sophistication that determines what cars are elevated to the status of cultural heritage objects. Brian, one of my American informants, put it this way:

I think the Group B cars were better from a personal preference standpoint. These were sheer monsters, cut loose from their cages, and allowed to have their way with the stage roads on the shortest of leashes. When a driver got sloppy and gave too much slack, these beasts bit back, often hard. Conan would be proud. The new WRC cars, on

the other hand, are still cool from the technological standpoint. When a crew chief can download logs from the recent stages and upload optimized maps to the ECU for peak performance, that's pretty bad-a. However this technological wizardry sort of mutes the ultimate demonstration of skill in vehicle control that makes rally so appealing.

Brian's emphasis on 'ultimate demonstration of skill' is notable here for several reasons. Even though there seems to be a minimum level of what a WRC car can be (it has to be four-wheel-drive, have a turbo-charged engine with enough power to drive the car at least as fast as those allowed in the previous regulation regime, and be based on a production model), the final verdict is based on how it is driven. In my view, this is also part of the reason why some of the cars have achieved iconic status after they left the rally stages. Based on numerous 'after hours' conversations about this, I believe that the breakthrough of the Subaru Impreza was not just because of its results, or its sound, but the way it was driven by Colin McRae. Similarly, the flame-spitting Audi S1 was considered a legend by some because of its sheer appearance. But its impact on the culture of rallying became even more magnificent due to Walter Röhrl's intrepid approach when driving the car flat-out on some of the most dramatic special stages in the WRC.

Across borders

It is Sunday in Olbia. The rally is over and the winner is crowned. Inside the M-Sport unit, the smell of fried eggs and bacon still hangs in the air, mixed with freshly brewed coffee and Danish pastry. Mads Østberg did well, according to what the team had expected of him and taking his brake problems into consideration, and he ends fifth. The service area is on its way to being dismantled, cleaned up, loaded into trailers and made ready for departure. It is

fascinating to observe all the small, and frankly quite glamour-free, tasks being carried out and at the same time feel the logistical and financial aspects of participating in the WRC looming in the background.

The circus is leaving town



On Sunday ‘the Stobart camp’ at Isola Bianca, Rally Sardinia, where Mads Østberg’s car was serviced in the similar image earlier in this chapter, is taken apart in few hours. Photo: Hans Erik Næss

But most of all, I notice the good spirit. Despite, or perhaps because of the commercial developments in the 1990s, teams are still considered big families and rest on what Edgar Schein calls ‘social validation’ – that certain values within the organisation are confirmed only by the shared social experience of a group (Schein, 2004, p. 29). Di and Stuart Spiers, who have catered in both Formula 1 teams as well as M-Sport and other WRC teams, points

out that they are not just chefs or water bottle carriers – they also offer ‘a friendly chat and sometimes a shoulder to cry on’. Part of the reason, according to Di Spires, is that ‘the boys in rallying are more appreciative than Formula One people, who have come to expect getting well looked after. These boys are grateful for anything you do for them. And they’ll do anything to help us because they understand our problems, being constantly on the move’ (cited in Allsop, 1999, p. 112). And by emphasising some of the requirements team members must conform to for such social validation, Derick Allsop fleshes out Schein’s concept even more:

Organisation, structure, expertise, dedication, enthusiasm, strong nerves and cool heads are just a few of the essentials in the creation and moulding of a successful rally team. Equally important are flexibility, a willingness to work long, even insane hours, in ever changing environments, climates and conditions. To the adventurer and rally fan the prospect might seem idyllic, and few here would swap their jobs for a pigeonhole in the real world. But this is no paid holiday, and as much as the mechanics appreciate the opportunity to travel across Europe, to Australia, New Zealand, Argentina, Kenya and China, the view underneath a rally car rarely changes (Allsop, 1999, p. 98).

According to John Millington,⁸⁷ the Logistics Manager with M-Sport since the early 1990s, the easy part in a world of borders, airports and customs, is moving people, booking hotels and renting cars. The difficult part is the logistics of the event material. Each WRC team – at least the big ones – has two kits of equipment (cars, spare parts, hospitality features). The first kit is for the European events and trailers are used to move things around. The total number of trucks and containers varies, but a description of how the first kit operation works, and the

logistical challenges affiliated with it even within Europe, can be illustrated by an operation by the Stobart team in 2008. Within 21 days, the truckers covered a total of 4,670 kilometres from the UK to Spain, on to Corsica and finally back to the UK.⁸⁸

The other kit is for the overseas events, like Argentina, Japan and Australia. These kits therefore contain separate inventories. A number of containers – six is an often given number – plus some thousand kilos of spares are air-freighted. If we take M-Sport's journey to rally Australia as an example, so-called AMP boxes which carry the spare parts and the rally cars will all be flying on the lower deck of an Airbus passenger aircraft from London Heathrow via Singapore to Sydney.⁸⁹ From there, they will be transferred by road to Coffs Harbour where the rally is taking place. To make this happen, you can't just book a ticket. M-Sport's air freight securities co-ordinator Ashley Fowler manages transportation targets, liaises with air freight suppliers and compiles a comprehensive list of everything that is sent in the air freight: 'It's quite funny to think that at any point in the rally season that we have shipping containers somewhere in the world – our logistics department and I are constantly keeping track of where our containers are throughout the year.'⁹⁰

The operation of both kits simultaneously is further complicated by circumstances outside the WRC. Within Europe, Millington says, things became easier when the European Union (EU) lifted travel restrictions on people, capital and services within the community with the Maastricht Treaty in 1993 and the Amsterdam Treaty in 1997.⁹¹ Outside the EU, things are more complicated. Preventative measures to keep diseases and the like out, Millington points out, means that they 'had to fly an Australian customs officer over to Japan, to oversee the washing of the cars and containers'.⁹² Other kinds of difficulties arise due to political matters. The most explicit example was Rally Jordan 2010. Because of political unrest, the route through Syria was no longer an option on grounds of safety. Alternative ways of moving the kit from Faro, venue of the previous WRC event in Portugal, to Trieste in

Italy had to be organised, as several of the trucks were too big to be freighted by air, so they had to be moved by sea.⁹³

For drivers, who in addition to rallies, must do PR events, testing and other travels as team representative, this nomadic lifestyle, where airports are as homey as their own apartments imposes a double challenge: they need to cope with the demands from an international press corps, as I will come back to in the next chapter, as well as adapt to the cultural norms of their team. Ultimately, this is also part of whether slogan ‘win on Sunday, sell on Monday’ will come true or not. In this process, many actors and factors have a say in whether a driver feels welcome or not. Early in his career, when he first got into the Subaru-Prodrive team, McRae considered Vatanen and Markku Alén to be ‘up there with the best and were genuinely good team-mates to be with. They’d done it all, had nothing to prove and certainly didn’t have any problems welcoming me to the line-up. They didn’t look down their noses either’ (McRae and Allsop, 2001, p. 44).

Similarly with M-Sport, due to my and the other team members’ English skills during my fieldwork at Rally Sardinia, it seemed like team integration was easier than, for instance, for a non-French speaking driver in a French team. Before overcoming my initial anxiety of conversing with others in the M-Sport team, I had in mind *Dans l'ombre des rouges*, the French documentary about Citroën’s 2003 WRC season. It is obvious that Colin McRae was not as integrated socially in the team as Sébastien Loeb and Carlos Sainz, both French-speaking drivers. Blatantly visible at all those non-racing moments WRC drivers and team members share during a rally, and between rallies, many pockets of solitude emerge in the documentary from language differences – and possibly the cultural reverberations that come with it. Average English skills among the rest of the team members, not least team principal Guy Frequelin (who, for the sake of clarity, is very generous to Colin otherwise), does nothing to improve the situation.

Whereas the French documentary illustrated the problems of getting *into* a team, multiple times driver's world champion Juha Kankkunen's story demonstrate the problems of adapting to a life *away* from the nomadic condition of a WRC driver. His problems began in 1996 when Toyota, the team he drove for, was banned for one year due to technical irregularities on their cars. Faced with a slightly less hectic programme than before, Kankkunen had more free time than in more than fifteen years. Problem was, he did not know what to do about it. Although married and father of a little boy, he struggled to cope with the regularities of life in addition to his wife's post-natal depression. According to his 2009 biography, *My Road*, the glamorous prospect of travelling the world and going fast also unaccustomed him to ordinary life: 'Life was easier when he was told what to do, where to go and what was expected of him' (Kankkunen and Korhonen, 2009, p. 167). Although he managed to make a comeback after Toyota's exclusion, he never regained his self-confidence as a driver and his career ended in 2002.

Thanks to his success in the WRC which had earned him great wealth, a testament to the Finnish tradition of managing rally talents from very young age, he did not have to work. But leaving the WRC brought back the same kind of restlessness he had experienced in his year off – but with much greater force. In sleepless nights, missing the rally action, he started to drink 'to help numb the desolation he felt inside'. While his wife, Pirjo 'desperately tried to keep their life normal' (Kankkunen and Korhonen, 2009, p. 223), Kankkunen was lost and disoriented always up for a drink and a party as alcohol-free days put him in a bad mood. At last, he was taken to an alcohol treatment centre and slowly began to realise the consequences of his life choices (Kankkunen and Korhonen, 2009, p. 227). In his biography, we can read that 'everything had happened so surreptitiously that he didn't realise how low he had sunk.' (Kankkunen and Korhonen, 2009, p. 227). While it was too late to save his marriage,

Kankkunen made a much-celebrated comeback in Rally Finland 2010, proving that his life was back in order.

Conclusion

While it may have been more important in pre-Internet times to be present in different markets to show off your product, today's manufacturers entering the WRC still see it as an action-packed method for honing their image and customer associations in locations close to people. Notably, we found that Hyundai, the most recent manufacturer to enter the WRC, uses many of the same motivations for participating as its predecessors. Only the future will tell whether it was a successful move, replicating Audi's in the way 'the company's over-riding brand image was transformed along the way' (Robson, 2008, p. 8), but in retrospect, the emotions several cars have evoked through their WRC clothing have been turned into hard cash for several manufacturers. Moreover, as the examples above have illustrated, the explanation of this success should include the cultural ramifications of WRC participation.

A WRC team does not only build cars that enable the drivers to produce sporting results and provide attention to the manufacturer, in some cases, they can even be considered manufacturers of cultural heritage artefacts. Historic editions of former WRC events like Rally Corsica, or historic cars running for show prior to the competing WRC cars (like at Rally Finland 2010), epitomise the role these cars have gained in their 'afterlife' (see for instance Bernardet, 2013). Twenty-six years after it quit the WRC, for instance, Audi's rallying history was used to promote the new A4 model to soccer moms in the US – a country, we know, with little tradition for WRC rallies – as Audi made car commercials with several clips of its Group B car.⁹⁴ In this chapter, we found that Subaru's collaboration with Prodrive made a lasting cultural impact on the history of rallying through the reworking of the

Impreza model in car cultures across the globe. As a result, and partly also because the popularity of Colin McRae was instrumental in making the car famous, a Prodrive-organised convoy gathered over 1000 Impreza's in 2008 to honour McRae's memory, who was killed in a helicopter crash in 2007.

To achieve this kind of impact, teams rely on a certain team spirit suited to their nomadic lifestyle. Based on fieldwork from M-Sport at Rally Sardinia 2011, I found numerous examples of an organisational culture where the management takes pride in keeping it together. 'There's rarely any bother or cross words,' Martin Wilkinson once said. 'Most of the guys are great and they work well together (...) It's good to be able to relax a bit if you can in the evenings. The lads will have a couple of beers and a quiet meal' (cited in Allsop, 1999, p. 102). Especially when it comes to drivers, as exemplified with Kankkunen and McRae above, they are, as a central part of this organisational culture, dependent on a team that backs them up socially as well as cultivating them into the promotional culture where the PR demands only seem to grow in intensity. Whereas drivers in the past reluctantly learned a bit of English in order to deal with the media attention, drivers of the 1990s were transformed into poster boys of the modern WRC team, and that is the theme of the next chapter.

Chapter 9: Heroes behind the wheel

Introduction

The fifth promotional arena of the WRC is its catalogue of driver personalities. While it might seem improper to treat drivers as ‘arenas’, the fact is that they are the public face of the entire WRC team. It is the drivers who are interviewed, praised and blamed, depending on how a rally or a season unfolds. They are the *heroes* – and they are accessible to the community as in no other motorsport. What’s more, in today’s promotional context, they are walking, talking symbols of the association between the sport and their financial backers and the manufacturer, and have the holders of thousands of jobs in the automotive industry, whose employment depends on them, breathing down their necks. To be successful publicists for themselves, the team and the sport, drivers thus need to resonate with the spectators, the team and the media – the entire community, in short.

For many, that is a tall order. While most drivers in the past did not need to satisfy either an international motoring press or promotional interests, by the 1990s, it was compulsory to speak a bit of English as foreign language (EFL, the global language of rallying) and be just as comfortable with the camera flashes as with the special stages. In general, as two rally historians observed by 2004, ‘modern rally drivers are finely honed athletes, a far cry from the stars of the early years who were more likely to grab a cigarette and a beer!’ (Hope-Frost and Davenport, 2004, p. 35). Yet, popularity in the WRC – here emphasised as the key attribute for using drivers for promotional purposes – is not merely gained by behaving like automotive costermongers or doing fast stage times. Despite changes in the promotional context, which have continued in the same pattern until today, a certain kind of rally driver seems to attract the fans whether we put 1980 or 2000 into the equation.

What's more, this popularity is often narratively formed and which makes a narrative analysis of it useful.

To unpack this claim, I will in this chapter include drivers' role as interlocutors for their sponsors, but more importantly, their role as ambassadors for the sport. By using three of the most popular world championship-winning drivers from three decades, Ari Vatanen, Colin McRae and Petter Solberg, I argue that, as has been shown by research on other sports 'heroes', like footballer Diego Maradona, WRC drivers must be 'seen in their cultural context in order to understand their social meaning and to observe their communal impact' (Archetti, 2005, p. 153; see also Holt and Mangan, 1996). In other words, where do they come from, what is their story and how have they dealt with the transformation from young talent to global stars? Unless this is taken into account, and furthermore combined with a respect for biographical authenticity, the promotional value of WRC drivers will not be valid as emotional currency in the WRC community.

A story about a beard

In recent years a new promotional element has become an organised part of WRC events: 'Meet the Crews' and autograph-signing sessions where fans and the media can come and talk to WRC crews, most notably drivers. Arranged within a limited space of time – 30 or 45 minutes – these sessions are not only a way to continue the sport's close proximity to its drivers. Dressed in team apparel, including their personal sponsor logos here and there, these arrangements illustrate how sponsorship responsibilities have been implemented as a natural part of being a WRC driver. At least over time, drivers represent a cluster of values associated with the manufacturer or sponsor. When Petter Solberg drove for the Subaru-Prodrive team, its team principal from 2002-6, David Lapworth, claimed that the Norwegian was perfect for

promotional duties because he fit the image of what a young Subaru owner should be like (cited in Solberg and Svardal, 2004, p. 184). And when I did fieldwork at Rally de France-Alsace 2011, Citroën's Marketing Director, Xavier Duchemin, said during a promo event that the image of Sébastien Loeb – who by then had been a works driver for Citroën since 2002 and racked up eight world championships – had become unequivocally associated with the manufacturer.⁹⁵

On the other hand, Loeb and other drivers are seen – especially by the FIA and the promoter – as representatives for the sport in general, not only their backers. Actually, three years prior to Duchemin's comment, Loeb was the main character in a peculiar e-mail exchange exposing the relevance of such a view, without even knowing it. After Rally Mexico 2008, Surinder Thatthi, head of the FIA Confederation of African Countries in Motorsport (CACMS) and later FIA Vice-President, wrote an e-mail to the World Rally Championship Commission (WRCC) chairman Morrie Chandler – with copies to others in the FIA system – complaining about the appearance of Loeb after the event: 'He was unshaven, scruffy looking and with unkempt hair! It is wrong. When the FIA gives him global TV coverage to millions of viewers and to many children worldwide he is a hero and role model ... I know there is a level of personal freedom one is allowed, but I feel he is taking this too far and someone should talk to him or his team about this.' Chandler responded by saying that 'unfortunately it is not a problem that is unique to our sport,' and suggested (besides offending Loeb saying his appearance was 'an insult to real males') that the media should 'focus on those who present our sport well.'

To hot things up, French newspaper *Le Figaro* mysteriously received copies of these e-mails, which were never meant to reach the public, two months after they had been exchanged and ran the story immediately (Voisard, 2008). Subsequently rerun by other media, it was revealed that Chandler's reply was also copied to Simon Long, Director of ISC

(the WRC's promoter), as a way of instructing him to take action against unshaven drivers.

Long, however, disagreed with both Thatthi and Chandler:

It is precisely Sebastian's "ruggedly good-looking" appearance which has helped endear him to so many new and young fans both in France and around the world. I feel it would be a real mistake given what we are trying to do in terms of refreshing and re-positioning the WRC brand, if we were to instruct Sebastian – or any other WRC driver – to always appear with a photo fit, clean shaven, pristine look. WRC is rugged and real, it isn't immaculate.⁹⁶

Chandler then responded: 'your organization is the one responsible for coverage and media growth of the WRC. If your experience says that his demeanour and appearance is what sells then so be it.' While the story died shortly after its revelation, partly due to its in-built ludicrousness, partly due to the leaking of FIA president Max Mosley's private sex-tapes involving prostitutes and alleged Nazi-style role-play a few months later (see Adams, 2008), it is an interconnected example of how sport heroes act as 'channeling devices' for the 'negotiation of cultural space and position for the entire culture' (Marshall, 1997, p. 49). With the arrival of Group B which, according to Malcolm Wilson, head of M-Sport, 'brought WRC to the global scene of motorsport,'⁹⁷ the elevation of investments, status and interest, made promotional demands on the drivers much more visible. Drivers could still act as themselves, but the requirements on them for promotional duties changed and, with that, their role – according to sociologist Erving Goffman 'the activity the incumbent would engage in were he to act solely in terms of the normative demands upon someone in that position' (Goffman, 1961, p. 75).

After his big breakthrough in 1982, Juha Kankkunen, for instance, was carefully

trained by his management in promotional activities – most notably in the art of speaking English in front of an international rallying press (Kankkunen and Korhonen, 2009, pp. 29-30). Faced with this new set of role expectations, understood as ‘both external constraints on the occupant of the role *and* as resources to be manipulated by the role-player’ (Manning, 1992, p. 177), drivers responded in different ways. When Kankkunen, who would later win the WRC Driver’s title four times, signed for Toyota in 1983 his contract clearly stated that he had ‘to act as the PR representative of the team’ (Kankkunen and Korhonen, 2009, pp. 33) – a responsibility he carried out without complaining. Approximately at the same time Walter Röhrl, on the other hand, did not fancy this side of motorsport at all. Eventually, it would be the reason to why Röhrl and the Rothmans-sponsored Opel team parted at the end of the 1982 season, the year he became WRC Driver’s champion for the second time:

A few days before the Monte Carlo Rally kicked off I received a letter: I had to do a PR film with Rothmans. Was I a movie star or a rally driver? I told Opel: “Do you know what Röhrl will be doing three days prior to the start? Cross-country skiing! Not a PR spot.” So a row developed between our team boss Tony Fall and myself. I told him he could go to hell. I drive my rallies, he promotes my results, and everything else is out of order (Röhrl, Müller and Klein, 2002, p. 132).

Nowadays, you have no choice but to engage with the promotional culture, and one of the first one’s to do so actively, was Spaniard Carlos Sainz, WRC Driver’s champion 1990 and 1992. As I have discussed in the previous chapters, the 1990s saw a promotional turnaround in the WRC, and Sainz felt both the advantages and the drawbacks of this. In comparison, the driver’s PR duties in Formula 1 – as well as the promotional apparatus around them – had already been formalised for years. Even though he loathed conventional PR work, Ayrton

Senna had from 1990 onwards a full-time travelling press officer (Folley, 2009, p. 3). As one of the main proponents for the new era in F1, Senna led the way desired by Bernie Ecclestone, according to one reviewer:

Bad boys were welcomed on track - to an extent - but those same aggressive drivers were expected to become meek little lambs once out of the cockpit, adhering to the whims of the sponsors who had brought such an influx of money into the sport (Walker, 2012).

In a similar way, Sainz personalised the developments that the entire WRC was going through. After his second Driver's championship title with Toyota in 1992, the WRC community stood in awe when Sainz abruptly left the company to drive for Jolly Club Lancia, a privately run team using a car that most insiders believed had reached its limits, and despite the fact that Sainz already had signed a new contract with Toyota. What few knew was that a conflict of interest had occurred behind the scenes. In addition to driver changes at Toyota that would challenge Sainz' role as lead driver and new suppliers of technical equipment being executed without Sainz' knowledge, head of TTE, Ove Andersson, had negotiated a sponsorship deal with Castrol, replacing the existing one with Repsol.

Sainz was dismayed as he cherished a close relationship with Repsol, a Spanish oil and gas company, which had been his personal sponsor for years and had built much of its communication policy on the image of the double world champion – as well as investing heavily in his career. ‘As a Spanish driver I was interested in continuing with Repsol, a Spanish company,’ Sainz said.⁹⁸ But Sainz' move to Jolly Club and Lancia posed a new problem. Lancia had close ties with Martini and suggested that Repsol could have the second-most important role in the sponsorship apparatus. Repsol refused, and the response

from Lancia was that Repsol then had to pay more in sponsorship than Martini in return for a continuation of their technological backing. Ultimately, Repsol did, and in the middle of this was Sainz, twice driver's world champion, and with uncertain prospects in the WRC. Still, he was present at the negotiations, one of the first drivers to do this.⁹⁹

Into the celebrity age

Extrapolating from Sainz' squabble showed where the sport was heading and marked the drivers entry into the promotional culture. Although the sport thrived, with lots of cars and drivers participating in the first half of the 1990s, it soon turned out that even 2,500 cars were possibly too many even for the Japanese manufacturers that heeded the call. Not surprisingly, this decline in interest was seen by the FIA as a threat to the future strength of rallying (Holmes, 1996, p. 11). The idea of the new rules was to take the creative freedom from the Group B regulations and pair it with vigorous safety requirements. Unlike Group A, manufacturers were no longer required to build 'Homologation Specials' in order to meet FIA approval. The base model need not have the characteristics of the WRC car, as evidenced by cars such the Peugeot 206, which had no road car variant with a turbo-charged petrol engine or four-wheel drive (but they must have available 19 kits to accomplish the same transformation).

These new rules also meant that companies could compete with cars designed and built outside the main factory, even if the decision to enter the WRC still had to come from the mother company, easing the economic pressure of needing to sell them without losing big money (Holmes, 1996, p. 12). Consequently, the manufacturers had great liberties in developing a competitive rally car, as well as sufficient predictability for the next couple of years. At the same time, as discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, International Sportsworld

Communicators (ISC) would become the first actor to acquire the commercial rights exclusively for the entire championship. Inspired by Formula 1, this eventually led to major changes in making the WRC a coherent championship. In David Richards' view:

When the Championship first started in 1977 it was a series of individual events, each of them important in their own right but teams had no obligation to participate on the entire Championship. The major change came when teams were required to participate on all rounds of the Championship which happened at the end of the '90s. Prior to this they would pick and choose based on their own individual marketing and promotional requirements.¹⁰⁰

Moreover, regulations and requirements governing the events were reformed, so that the whole format of a WRC event was on its way to fitting a fixed pattern. 'After decades of when local custom and the disparate policies of assorted car manufacturers held sway,' David Williams wrote in 1997, 'rallying has been jolted into the age of formula. Everything from tyre diameter to intercooler size, the length of rest halts to opening hours of the press office is now regulated' (Williams, 1997, p. 9). And as icing on the cake, one could still participate with Group A cars, meaning that privateers still had the chance to compete, as there were plenty of cars eligible for competition. Although deviant from tradition, the changes, according to Williams, certainly 'made international rallying look affordable and sustainable. They have also made it extraordinarily exiting. At no stage in its history has the sport been as competitive' (Williams, 1997, p. 8). Mathias, one of my informants that we met in the previous chapter on spectator culture, even said that he would put this era in front of the Group B when ranking the most important of all WRC epochs, 'because it allowed more drivers to win'.

Some bemoaned, although often in very mild terms, this development. During an interview with UK motorsport programme *Top Gear* at Rally Finland in 1997, Toyota team principal, Ove Andersson remarked that ‘rallying is also an emotional sport. Perhaps not so much today as it used to be before but...’ He was speaking about the new Toyota Corolla WRC, a ‘grandma’s car’ in comparison with the more flamboyant Celica model which it replaced. Others also criticised the WRC for acting like a baby elephant to the F1 in terms of promotional ventures, like the growth of mobile team units with smoked glass and air-conditioning we discussed in the previous chapter. In my view, however, the critics fail to see that changes of this magnitude always carry with them pros and cons. Ari Vatanen, for instance, points to the transfer from amateurism to professionalism as a natural progression of the sport:

When I won the WRC in 1981, it was for a private team, having its base in a small garage. At my first year with Ford [in 1975] I made 5000 pound – about the same amount of money as the cost of a BDA-engine! Today entering the WRC is a serious commercial decision for any company – not only for rallying’s sake, but for employees, shareholders and everybody else. Some have an unjustified and exaggerated view on how things are today compared with the past, although I understand that things have changed.¹⁰¹

One example is the introduction of the Colin McRae video game in 1998. By hooking on to the PlayStation generation in tandem with the democratisation of Internet access, like-minded fans could soon meet online and discuss the sport regardless of where they lived. Another example is that, as pointed out by economist Calvin Jones, several WRC organisers learned a lot from collaborating with actors who had experience of event management. In his review of

the 2001 edition of Rally GB, Jones claims that this was a necessary move to grapple with the changes of the sport:

The World Rally Championship was at this time moving from an event that included a mix of amateur and professional (and many local) participants to one which was fully professional and far more commercialized and sponsor-driven. The experience of the County Council in hosting major events was a significant benefit in helping an essentially amateur governing body grapple with the commercialization of its sport (Jones, 2002, p. 191).

The popularity of these changes, however, did not last forever. While, at its peak, the period included a string of manufacturer teams (seven at most) and numerous high-profile drivers in the WRC, making each event ‘anyone’s rally’ and competitive as never before, things would soon start to sour. A number of the new rules sought to ease costs for the competing teams in 2004, for instance, that teams would only be allowed to test for a maximum of 48 days in a calendar year (and only in France, UK, Spain, Italy and the Czech Republic), but this did not help as, at the same time, the number of events in one season was increased from 14 to 16. In addition, manufacturer teams had to enter at least two cars in all events. Events themselves also faced new demands as the FIA decided that each organiser had to pay 143,000 euros for hosting a WRC rally in 2004 (with that, they received a guarantee of staying in the WRC for the next three years), compared with 37,000 euros in 2003 (O’Connor, 2004, p. 175).

Former WRC driver Markko Märtin, back then a promising talent with five WRC wins under his belt before he left the sport after the accident that befell him and his co-driver Michael Park at the British WRC event in 2005, where Park was killed, stood out among the most critical voices: ‘It is just not the same championship that it used to be, so I can’t push

myself to make a huge effort to get in there and make it happen.’¹⁰² With worries about the promotional issues as well there were, in 2006, only two manufacturers left in the championship, Subaru and Ford, and many of driver profiles had retired or been forced out of work. Mitsubishi, Skoda and Peugeot had exited the sport, with the Japanese manufacturer, for instance, citing a need to ‘focus management resources on the continued promotion of the revitalization plan’ as the reason for suspending its rally operation.¹⁰³ Affected by economic turmoil in the car industry, most notably its unsuccessful merger with Daimler-Chrysler (called by two management researchers ‘a study in failure’, see Begley and Donnelly, 2011), they found themselves in a situation comparable to the way Subaru’s WRC plans ended three years later.

Although Mitsubishi promised to return in 2008 (it also had a sabbatical in 2003) many believed that this was the end of a manufacturer which had, up to then, acquired four driver titles from 1996 to 1999 with Finnish driver Tommi Mäkinen behind the wheel, as well as with their Mitsubishi Lancer creating a cultural heritage artefact second only to the Subaru Impreza (see previous chapter). Not even a waiver from the FIA, meaning that it could pass over some events (thus breaching the rule on manufacturer participation), made Mitsubishi stay. Citroën, moreover, was unhappy with how it was treated by the FIA and decided to have a year off in wait of its new C4 model. In return, however, the French manufacturer heavily supported what must have been the most professional ‘privateer team’ (it did not qualify as such, even though it was so in technical terms) in the history of rallying when Sébastien Loeb again became driver’s world champion in 2006. With the subsequent departure of Subaru and Suzuki in 2008, and though Citroën returned as a manufacturer team in 2007, the WRC was nonetheless scarcely populated by realistic title contenders.

What would eventually turn into a total dominance by Sébastien Loeb, who grabbed nine consecutive driver’s titles from 2004-12 while other high-profile drivers had retired or

been forced out of work, also affected the championship badly, as people started to think there was nothing to watch. Yet, in 2009, a positive buzz was in the air due to the announced rule changes that would apply from 2010. In particular, an influx of money to the promoter from the Abu Dhabi tourism authority beginning in 2007 decreased the promoter's operating loss from £2.2 million to £30,000 in 2008 (Sylt and Reid, 2009). Announcements the very same year from, among others, Volkswagen that it was considering entering the WRC was one of the reasons for David Evans to write in 2009 that 'the upshot of these new rules is that the WRC will offer increased accessibility and therefore greater competition and more spectacle' (Evans, 2009, p. 57). Allowing for longer rallies (the maximum length of special stages would be raised to 500 km, as opposed to 360 km in 2009), as well as night stages (a nod to the old-schoolers as night stages television-wise were a thing from the past), were two other reasons to get excited.

Last but not last, Evans argued, cars and drivers will be 'given a vast platform for achieving worldwide exposure courtesy of the new commercial agreements being discussed by the FIA to deliver a global promoter to the WRC. A new dawn is coming, but even the pre-dawn is looking exciting' (Evans, 2009, p. 57). Others, however, disagreed strongly and illustrate that the gap between traditionalists and commercialists was very much alive. 'Outwardly, the WRC was awash with optimism', wrote motorsport journalist Anthony Peacock in 2009. However, he goes on: 'beneath the veneer the sport was wrecked by a civil war between the old-school organisers and the brash, flash promoters' (Peacock, 2009). As star drivers like Tommi Mäkinen, McRae and Sainz left the sport and the ISC found a difficult working relationship with the FIA as well as the teams, the situation, Peacock concludes, 'allowed the old school to dig in and drive the very structure of the sport back to the Dark Ages'. And a few years later, because of the Antonov affair in 2011, the excitement really croaked.

WRC driver popularity: a biographical approach

A major part of this development outlined above was that Sainz' way had become the norm. If you want to be a WRC driver, you have no choice but to engage with the promotional culture. Traditionally, sponsorship has been manifested in stadiums, teams or infrastructural investments, but since Coca Cola's sponsoring of American baseball player George Herman 'Babe' Ruth in the 1930s, there has been a steady increase of 'player endorsements' (Delaney and Madigan, 2009, p. 223). In 2011, it was reported that Red Bull, the WRC's promoter, sponsored 456 athletes around the globe (*Der Spiegel*, 2011). A consequence of this, as *Business Insider* reported, is that a number of athletes now earn a lot more from the sponsors than their sports: in 2012, golfer Tiger Woods received a whopping 96 per cent, or 54.5 million dollars of his earnings from endorsements, while the highest ranking motorsport driver on the list, NASCAR-driver Dale Earnhardt Jr, made 85 per cent from endorsements.¹⁰⁴

It can be argued, marketing professor Don Roy writes, that this kind of individualised sponsorship takes on two forms. The first is through a competition-based positioning strategy. By positioning a brand via sponsorship of an individual, the idea is that it will influence consumers' perception of that brand causing them to regard it as superior to its competitors. Through vicarious learning, such as when a consumer observes a WRC driver use a certain product for performative purposes, this will eventually lead to behavioural choices based on that brand perception (Roy, 2005, p. 156). The other form, which is called a goal-based positioning approach, has two requirements: first, that consumers develop a deeper understanding of a brand in order to understand how it can meet their needs or goals, and second, that a sponsored event must be relevant to a brand's target market. Put differently, Roy writes, 'relevance of an event to a brand's target market can influence how consumers

perceive a sponsorship' (Roy, 2005, p. 157).

Evidently, these approaches blend in practice – at least in the WRC. According to Martin Whitaker, who was in charge of Ford and M-Sport PR overhaul in the late 1990s, the use of Colin McRae for commercial purposes was motivated by the emotional links between driver, sport and brand:

The importance of Colin is his reputation as an aggressive, flamboyant competitor and a winner. Ultimately that's what you want as a company. Because that's what's going to affect your performance, that's what's hopefully going to improve your revenue in terms of merchandising sales and going to increase the visibility of your product because he's going to be winning with it (...) We wanted to get emotion back into what we were doing and, again, Colin fits in with this general strategy. We have adverts with the car leaping in the air, and there's emotion there. And the advert showing a young, dreaming Colin and the grown-up, rally star Colin had tremendous response. There's feeling and emotion in that commercial (cited in Allsop, 1999, p. 35).

Further evidence of integrated approaches is uncovered if we take the promoter's role into consideration. Following ISC's acquisition of the commercial rights in 2000, there were attempts to position the WRC as a global entertainment brand. The primary marketing vehicle was to display the championship as an action sport, in the words of one ISC representative: 'we saw it very much as a young and more dynamic sport ... slightly extreme, slightly edgy sport' (cited in O'Connor, 2004, p. 137). In this context, the case of Sainz discussed above is interesting, as he became one of the first 'driver brands' of WRC, partly due to his attitude towards his commercial responsibilities, according to David Williams:

Whereas most top rally drivers at the time would have been more at home in the 1950s or 1960s when sponsorship demands were none too onerous, Sainz treats the commercial side with the utmost seriousness. He takes a key role in negotiating his own deals and devotes up a fortnight per year to sponsorship duties, whether that involves filming for television, making presentations or merely signing autographs. Sainz has an office and a secretary and, being the meticulous sort of man he is, he returns telephone calls (Williams, 1997, p. 32).

Be that as it may, it was not his secretarial qualities, his edgy mien, or his loyalty to sponsors that made him popular among fans as well as the CEOs. It was his character as a WRC driver. Nicknamed 'El Matador', Sainz became well respected because of his charismatic appearance, competitive temperament – which latter quality would eventually make him the driver with most WRC starts in history – and an impeccable reputation for being a true professional, regardless of which team he drove for. As an example, despite the fuss between sponsors and TTE, Andersson and Sainz parted on friendly terms.¹⁰⁵

By contrast, Formula 1 is famous because of its number of personal conflicts, where the strong will of some drivers and the risks involved sometimes resulted in tragic endings. Admirably accounted for in *Senna versus Prost*, the title of Malcolm Folley's 2009 book, it seems like the conflict between the Brazilian and French racing driver was a culmination of a ghoulish culture of aggrandisement that had infected the sport. Episodes including foul play, betrayal, fist-fights and even dangerous acts on the race track all became normal parts of the F1 circus in the 1980s, as drivers went out of their way to win, cheered on by the promotional apparatus in the hands of Bernie Ecclestone and the spectators who manifestly took sides in

the conflict at the races. Former F1 driver Martin Brundle, who raced against both Senna and Prost (as well as doing the British WRC event in 1996 and 1999), explains:

I think this type of behaviour is unquestionably a defining point of the great champions: they have all been utterly selfish bastards. Look at them: Lauda, Prost, Senna and Schumacher. All of them got their elbows out, galvanised the team around them, demanded all the best aspects of the resources, then, on top of that, they wanted to disadvantage their team-mate as well (cited in Folley, 2009, p. 171).

Make no mistake, king-sized egos are common in the WRC, too. But the difference in circumstances (you're rallying on roads against the clock, not on a race track against others within inches of one another at speeds of more than 300 km/h) seems to attract and produce a different kind of personalised majesty – for good and bad. Speaking about the abovementioned Walter Röhrl, German rally fan Chris put it this way:

Maybe the way Röhrl said things sometimes made him appear as arrogant, but thinking about what he means, he is right in so many things. And some 'arrogant' man like Röhrl is missing in modern WRC! There is no-one who tells them there and then 'This is shit, I am not doing this!' So you can see why Röhrl is not everybody's darling. But he is a good driver to explain the old driver characters. Nobody was like Röhrl. Nobody was like Vatanen.

And whilst there are circumstantial similarities between, for example, Ayrton Senna and Colin McRae because of their *banzai* attitude towards driving, those similarities do not paint a complete portrait. If we approach the issue of driver popularity and promotional capacity

comparatively in the WRC, we find instead that certain other rally drivers have not only tickled people's imagination, but also created it. Based on conversations with informants and people in all the arenas in which I have done fieldwork, there seems to be a collective understanding of who that handful of drivers are. Although not universally popular, I would still argue that a representative trio for the upcoming investigation is Ari Vatanen, Colin McRae and Petter Solberg. They became WRC champions once each – Vatanen in 1981, McRae in 1995 and Solberg in 2003 – and overlapped each other in the WRC community by being part of the same team at different points in time. Most importantly, they are selected because they confirm a saying in sport; 'true greatness is measured not only in medals but also by the impact on the senses' (Allsop, 1999, p. 36).

Ari 'the poet' Vatanen

Vatanen grew up in the rural areas of Tuupovara in Finland and took up rallying in the 1970s. Making his mark in the enormous pool of driving talents in Finland, he debuted in the WRC at the 1974 1,000 Lakes Rally. His real entry to the WRC scene, however, did not come until the year after Stuart Turner, the representative for Ford's motorsport department in the UK, gave him a works Escort for the rally. At first, he was almost lyrical about his big break:

Going to Ford's famous Boreham team base it was amazing to find three identical rally cars there with my name on one of them, alongside those of Timo Mäkinen and Roger Clark – can this be true!? After the various dreams and respective failures and fears it had seemed impossible to ever find myself in this position.

After a sensible start the first day, the next day would be different. ‘It was a somewhat similar accident to the one I later had in Argentina,’ Ari recalls. ‘On a long straight there was this notorious depression – but not so notorious to me! The trees cast their shadows hiding the deceptive nature of that spot and I came at full chat and it just launched the car.’¹⁰⁶. Initially, Vatanen, thought that this was his missed opportunity. While Vatanen had his self-confidence dented, Turner saw potential in this young Finn and he told him, that he had done a perfect rally at some point before he crashed, In fact, Vatanen was given the offer of moving to the UK to do a full season of the British Rally Championship the following year. Despite the fact that his approach gave him a reputation for wrecking more than the average amount of cars, he gained even more acclaim for his wins and his commitment.

For me, at this time, everything was a novelty, and I was discovering life – with Ford and the Escort. I always drove the Escort with the same enthusiasm as I live – flat out into each corner, and we’ll see what happens. Living to the full left no time for tactics, because life is not a game, and it cannot be rehearsed. The panel beaters got plenty of practice, though...¹⁰⁷

In the beginning, there was no luxury. Receiving a £5,000 retainer from Ford for the year, Ari shared a flat with Ford engineer John Griffith and usually spent the nights eating tinned food heated up by John and watching television. Yet, under the auspices of the Ford team, Ari was carefully groomed in all the aspects necessary to become a professional rally driver. Fending off the criticism for ‘stealing’ the works drive from British drivers in a British championship, Ari showed impressive learning skills – he had never driven on tarmac before, yet he beat the more experienced drivers by a good margin – and acquired the title as British Rally Champion in 1976. Time had now come for bigger challenges – the WRC. By now, he had risen to fame,

mostly because of his driving style: ‘To his spectators’, two rally historians write, ‘it wasn’t the fact that Vatanen had become champion that drew the crowds, it was his style of driving, which in the rear-wheel-drive Escorts was as flamboyant and reckless and glorious as the flight of Icarus’ (Campbell and Campbell, 1995, p. 60).

The Vatanen way



Vatanen at the wheel of his beloved Ford Escort, Rally Finland 1978. Photo: Jarmo Mäki/flickr.com

It would take a while though before his first WRC victory was a reality – at the Acropolis Rally in 1980, to be precise:

‘I had been waiting for it for so long! There had been so many near misses: I’d made so many mistakes, broken so many cars, but technical failure and circumstance had

played their part, too. After all that, I finally managed to break the duck in the most gruelling rally, Safari excepted. In those days we all used to stay in Glifada with our families and my wife Rita came with our three-weeks old daughter Ria. Can you imagine how happy I was?¹⁰⁸

The following year, Ari was offered a full WRC season in the works Escort and showed his appreciation by winning the Driver's title. In 1982-83, he moved on to Opel, chiefly because Ford's main sponsor, Rothmans, decided to change manufacturer and because Ford began developing a new car for the announced Group B (which Opel didn't) and won a notable number of rallies, despite having an underpowered car compared with the Lancias and Audi's Quattros. At one of these wins, the Safari Rally in 1983, Vatanen was particularly motivated by Jean Todt's presence: 'A rally driver who wants to impress someone, must go like hell from the start, but deliberately I did the opposite. I started very slowly and gently with the car and Jean was impressed. He did not expect that from me' (cited in Davenport and Klein, 2012, p. 27).

In fact, Todt was very impressed, and even though the two men knew each other slightly beforehand, the time had come for an increasingly professional relationship. At that time, as mentioned in the previous chapter, Todt was a former WRC co-driver and in charge of the new Group B programme at Peugeot. As late as December 1982, it was clear that Stig Blomqvist was to be first driver for Peugeot, alongside French star driver Guy Frequelin, but then Todt got what he recalls as 'a nasty surprise': Blomqvist had signed for Audi (Todt and Moncet, 1985, p. 39). Before that, Todt and Vatanen had a talk at the Intercontinental Hotel in Nairobi, Kenya, during the Safari Rally of 1983 and later that year, Todt actually let Vatanen have a look at the car, 'at night, in secret', in Paris (Todt and Moncet, 1985, p. 59). After Blomqvist's brush-off, Vatanen's first outing with the car was Rally Corsica in 1984. Against

all odds, with a brand-new car, Vatanen led after the initial stages. In France, the news was already beginning to ignite an interest in rallying like never before, and later Vatanen would discover that taxi drivers and restaurant owners recognised him and admired him even in the most remote parts of the world.

By contrast, the Corsican rally ended in the bushes. In a torrential rainfall, Vatanen aquaplaned off the road in a horrendous accident. That does not mean that Vatanen was a complete daredevil. After finishing the Rally New Zealand in the summer of 1985, he said to the French newspaper *L'Equipe* that he was delighted to finish a rally after four consecutive pull-outs. He considered a final push to see if he could catch the eventual winner, Timo Salonen, but decided to back off: 'Success does not warrant putting your health or your family's well-being at risk' (Vatanen and Väisänen, 1988, p. 16). For the next rally, these thoughts continued to accompany him at the hotel in Cordoba, Argentina. Vatanen recalls that 'the countryside was beautiful and the views magnificent, but the dirt roads were a disappointment as we had expected them to be in better condition' (Vatanen and Väisänen, 1988, p. 16). Unfortunately, there had been some mishaps with cows in the roads, meaning that Vatanen and his British co-driver, Terry Harryman could not drive them at the speed they wanted.

Worse, though, was the change of weather between recce and the rally. In some sections, the rain had transformed the road into a cattle trail. Still, the drivers set out to drive the Las Bajadas-Villa del Dique stage with no intention of backing off. Ahead of Vatanen, his team-mate Salonen, however, had noticed a slight colour change in the mud at one part of the stage and been on guard, easing off the throttle a bit. Vatanen, on the other hand, hit the mud hole flat out. 'I have no recollection of the actual accident, although I never lost consciousness completely. My Italian Sparco seat broke and I was thrown all over the car. This was the cause of my most serious injuries' (Vatanen and Väisänen, 1988, p. 17). Given

the tendency of the Peugeot 205 – Vatanen’s car at the time – to nose-dive over bumps in the road, it seems like the back of the car had hit the hole so hard that it bounced violently off the ground. According to one eyewitness, Enrique de Loreda (who gave Vatanen first aid and met up with him in Villa Carlos Paz many years later), the impact flipped the car forward multiple times and it came to a halt far away from the road.

At the finish line, people started to get worried when other competitors passed said they had not seen the wreck, or any trace of Vatanen at all. Jean Todt ordered a helicopter to begin a search immediately, but because the car was a pile of scrap metal and Vatanen was lying on the ground in thick bush, it took a while before they were located. Harryman was able to walk by himself and as soon the helicopter landed, they put Vatanen on the sump guard from the car (it had been ripped off in the crash) and used it as stretcher. Fast as hell, they flew to the nearest first-aid post where Vatanen was given three litres of blood, but due to his deteriorating condition, they moved him to Cordoba hospital. After being treated for his most evident and immediate injuries, he was put on a jet to Finland where they discovered additional injuries; fractured cervical vertebrae, crushed rib cage with eight broken ribs, a punctured lung – and so on (Vatanen and Väisänen, 1988, p. 21). Believe it or not, after touching home soil, the doctors told Vatanen that he would need only three days of rest. The mood was very good.

Medical complications the next days, however, produced an array of excruciating hallucinations and Vatanen had to be restrained in order not to hurt himself or others. Simultaneously, the medical indications were that the injuries were graver than first assumed and the doctors at one point actually doubted that he would make it because of potential damage his brain due to oxygen starvation (Vatanen and Väisänen, 1988, pp. 22-25). The rescue was, ‘whether by coincidence or not,’ Rita and Reverend Olli Valtonen. Vatanen was, and is, a devoted Christian and their presence helped liberate him from his demons and the

delirium passed. After some additional recovery, he could finally go home. However, Vatanen was not well. His depression got gradually worse and turned into ‘a morbid and irrational fear of AIDS,’ which affected everybody around him, including his family (Vatanen and Väisänen, 1988, p. 179). This psychological nightmare would take a whole year to recover from, and while he eventually returned to rallying and made great success in specialist races like the Pikes Peak and the Paris-Dakar run, it was never going to be the same as before.

Colin ‘if in doubt, flat out’ McRae

One who picked up Vatanen’s legacy as the madcap of the forest was Colin McRae (1968-2007). A WRC driver from 1992 to 2006 and world driver’s champion in 1995, his road to success is reminiscent of both Vatanen’s and, as we shall see, the story of Petter Solberg. With his father Jim actively involved in rallying – in fact, he was British champion five times – Colin and his brother Alistair had their mind set on what they wanted to do early on. ‘School was never my favourite place,’ said McRae. ‘I spent most of the time gazing out of the window, wanting to get out there and enjoy myself. It was always outdoor activities that interested me’ (McRae and Allsop, 2001, pp. 12-13). After puttering around with bikes in his early teens, Colin turned to cars at the age of 16. He soon earned a reputation for being ‘the hardest trier’ on the British rally scene. With due support from his family and their rallying friends, most of all, he managed to combine a job in the plumbing industry with ever more competitions.

After graduating through the steps in the lower classes, and by that proving his worth many times along with a generous share of spills and accidents, McRae was phoned up by David Richards. This was in 1990, and the relationship between Prodrive and Subaru was still

strong (see Chapter 8). Richards apparently had taken notice of the young Scot and, according to McRae, he ‘saw my British programme as a means for developing the Legacy for the World Championship, and presumably measuring my progress and potential’ (McRae and Allsop, 2001, p. 41). Media-savvy as it was, Prodrive also educated Colin in how to behave as a modern WRC driver. ‘They impressed on me that I was a sportsman, not a chauffeur. That meant training properly, living properly and following a sensible diet’ (McRae and Allsop, 2001, pp. 43). But most importantly, Prodrive took baby steps with the matching of McRae against WRC rivals. Part of the deal was to do certain WRC events, and in the British WRC event in 1991, he joined up with Markku Alén and Ari Vatanen.

Becoming a WRC driver with Subaru liberated the true talent of McRae, first with a magnificent win in New Zealand in 1993, beating a number of former champions, and then with the ferocious battle with team-mate Carlos Sainz in 1995 where McRae eventually came out as winner of the driver’s title in the WRC – the youngest one in history, at 27 years old. The 1995 season, though, was a year of strife. Many in the Subaru management considered the double WRC champion Sainz as the senior driver. But McRae was determined to show people that he wasn’t there just to aid Sainz to glory. Typically, the season started poorly. People had begun naming him ‘Colin McCrash’, Prodrive was unhappy with his performance, and his competitors were running ahead. But McRae refused to give up, he steadily picked up points as the season went on, and in the penultimate event of the 1995 season, Rally Spain, Sainz’ home rally, he and Sainz were going neck at neck before the final day. To avoid them pushing each other off the road in their chase for victory, Prodrive instructed the drivers to keep their positions – so-called team orders.

At first, McRae refused to accept the order and hammered his foot down. ‘I couldn’t accept that because it was unfair (...) I went into the lead and had every intention of staying there till the finish’ (McRae and Allsop, 2001, pp. 72-73). He didn’t even back off when the

team's managers physically walked on to the stage, jumped up and down with 'slow down' gestures beside the road when McRae came past at full speed. At the finish line, he met a very angry David Richards. Theoretically, McRae could check in late and get a penalty from the organisers, handing the victory to Sainz. But when asked about what he was going to do by the revved-up Richards, McRae replied: 'I'm going to check in and win the rally.' Richards was obviously looking for a different answer and said: 'I'd think very carefully about that decision if I was you' (McRae and Allsop, 2001, p. 74).

After cooling off, and seeing things in a wider perspective, McRae realised that this was 'a call I couldn't afford to get wrong'. It was not just the one victory that was at stake. Although it was a 'gut-wrenching' moment, where McRae's furiousness was also caught on camera, he now thought of the consequences. What about the next year? What about the contract? A WRC team has other obligations than to its driver. In the end, McRae accepted the terms and looked forward to the next event. The fact was that Sainz's first place finish in Spain left him and McRae tied for points going into the last event of the season – Wales Rally GB – an event which McRae felt confident he could win. And so he handed the victory to Sainz in Spain and began focusing on his revenge. Backed up by loads of ecstatic fans, McRae stormed through the British WRC rally like he never had done before to win and grab the Driver's title, both his and Subaru's first WRC title, leaving no doubt about who deserved the world championship.

If 1995 was a highlight, the next two seasons would be a more difficult time, if not personally, at least professionally. Personally, it went very well. Allison, who became McRae's wife, actually starred as his co-driver at his first ever rally win in 1988. Some years later they became a couple, but it soon turned out they had different plans. Whilst Allison wanted to settle down and get married the restless McRae did not want to give up his globetrotting lifestyle: 'I wanted to get on with my career and hang around with the guys. I

was happy being single, free to do what I wanted' (McRae and Allsop, 2001, p. 95). But Colin could not let go of this farmer's daughter from nearby his hometown. And the year after he clinched the WRC Driver's title, he flew to Canada where Allison then lived and laid out his intentions of a serious relationship. For that reason, the 1997 season looked good. It seemed 'like a fresh start in so many ways. I was happy and relieved that I'd sorted out my private life, which put me in a good frame of mind to concentrate on my job and the World Championship' (McRae and Allsop, 2001, p. 102).

Real drivers do it sideways



McRae and co-driver Nicky Grist flat out at Rally Finland 2001. Photo: Pasi Piesanen / Wikipedia Commons

In 1998, then, time had come for McRae to make a professional change. Although the start with the new team brought 'a real tingle of excitement', the first years with Ford and M-Sport

proved to be a rollercoaster ride (McRae and Allsop, 2001, p. 125). Because the team and the car had been set up and developed in a very brief period of time, it had a lot of ‘childhood diseases’ and with McRae overdoing it from time to time, the team did not manage to emulate the performance from earlier years. It looked like the exception would be the 2001 season. The situation was quite similar to the one in 1995. Down to the last rally of the season, the British WRC event, no less than four drivers in four different makes could be crowned champion and McRae was again confident that he could take the win. Additional tension was brought to the event due to the ‘Battle of Britain’ as it was named in the press between McRae and fellow Briton Richard Burns, driving a Subaru. At the rally, McRae set off at a blistering pace and led the rally after two stages. A second driver’s world championship was in his hands. The entire Britain was just waiting to put their hands together. On stage three, it was all over.

It was a very fast section, a fifth gear right. I turned into it just a little earlier and tighter than I wanted to and realised that I was going to cut right through the grass on the apex. I had time to correct it and take a wider angle but I was right on it, 100 per cent and feeling good. It was one of those split second decisions: you know, take a chance, it will be all right. Nine times out of ten the car would have driven through the grass and it wouldn’t have been a problem. This was the other time. It was a big, big mistake. I hadn’t checked the cut through the grass and there was a hole ((McRae and Allsop, 2001, p. 287).

That hole meant that the car flipped into the air and they rolled heavily multiple times. Luckily, McRae and co-driver Nicky Grist escaped without serious injuries, except for McRae’s pride, which was severely dented. To make matters worse, the situation was that to

win the driver's title, McRae had to win the rally. And to do so, McRae recalls, 'I had to be right on the edge' (McRae and Allsop, 2001, p. 288). Like so many of McRae's shunts, this was also caught on camera and fortified McRae's reputation as a risk-taker. Following his big accident in the British WRC event in 2001, McRae's performance would never return to old standards. Part of the reason was a gang of newcomers to the WRC who definitively made their mark.

Petter 'Hollywood' Solberg

Among the newcomers was Norwegian Petter Solberg, the team colleague of McRae in 1999-2001. Like Vatanen, he grew up on a farm in a rural area on the Eastern parts of Norway and began driving very early – at the age of seven. Never much of a schoolboy, Solberg used all his spare time and money to add skills to his dream of becoming WRC champion. On his way, he became dedicated to the border of lunacy, not only in his technical preparations before a race, but also with regard to sponsors, his general appearance and care for the people that supported him (Solberg and Svardal, 2004, p. 48). Like McRae, he came from a motorsport family, and Solberg said in 2004 that 'without my mum and dad I would not have been where I am today. They have given it all for me, and always supported me throughout my career, without interfering in the wrong ways like some parents do. A lot of emotions swirl when I think of my parents today' (Solberg and Svardal, 2004, p. 49).

In particular, the rivalry and companionship with his older brother Henning who in later years, also became a regular WRC contender, made Petter glow with self-esteem after winning his first – and only – Norwegian national rally championship in 1997. In true McRae/Vatanen style, despite having a kinder driving style than Vatanen and McRae, Petter's first rally with a Group A car – his brother's Henning's pricey Toyota Celica – ended badly,

as he went off at high speed at a sixth gear corner and smashed the car completely. But Solberg would soon regain his confidence and began to do international rallies. Among them, was the 1998 Lebanon Rally where he came second and almost beat the latest spec Ford Escort driven by Mohammed ben Sulayem – now FIA Vice-President and at that time a customer of M-Sport, the company that had got assigned by Ford to spearhead their assault on the WRC (see previous chapter). As much as his drive, though, the young Solberg was noticed for his efforts at the after-rally party where he – in addition to dancing all night long – was thrown in the pool by German WRC driver Armin Schwarz (Solberg and Svardal, 2004, pp. 87-88).

It was in fact the Middle Eastern adventure that got the attention of Malcolm Wilson, head of M-Sport. Malcolm Wilson recalls the situation: ‘Then, without any contact at all, he sent me a video of him in action. I watched it and some of his driving is pretty committed stuff. So I thought we’d take a closer look’ (Allsop, 1999, p. 41). Drafted to the Ford team in 1999 the 24-year old Solberg was considered a wild card in the WRC circus. Wilson’s choice was also influenced by talks with Fred Gallagher, the highly experienced co-driver who was introduced in the previous chapter. Gallagher had been in Norway by invitation of former Skoda works driver and Peugeot ice-crew member John Haugland. Petter’s manufacturer, Toyota, had employed him at the time to investigate the opportunities for Solberg doing some WRC events in 1999. Haugland knew Gallagher from earlier days and asked him for advice on how to introduce Solberg to WRC. Gallagher watched the Norwegian and was impressed by his commitment, but also his charisma. Gallagher then reported back to Wilson and in October 1998, Solberg was offered a three-year contract.

Underlying this choice was a strategy from Wilson to employ a set of drivers alongside the number 1 driver, Colin McRae, instead of hiring a full-time number 2 driver. The idea was to give the drivers the opportunity to tackle different kinds of events as well as

managing a talent enhancement role. After running some tests, Wilson was convinced that Petter was the young talent they should bring on board: ‘I thought everything about Petter was right. The kid was totally committed, he’s got flair, a good personality’ (Allsop, 1999, p. 42).

Strike a pose, Mr Solberg



Petter Solberg in a Subaru Impreza WRC2008 at the Goodwood Festival of Speed 2008. Photo: [estoril/flickr.com](https://www.flickr.com/photos/estoril/)

A similar view came from Martin Whitaker in 1999: ‘Petter, I think, is the star of the future. They call him Hollywood and it’s not difficult to see why. He’s got the looks, he’s got the personality and, crucially, he’s got the driving ability as well. He’s got everything’ (Allsop, 1999, p. 42). Initially, Solberg was supposed to be driving the outgoing Escort WRC on some rallies to gain experience. When one of the team’s other drivers, Thomas Rådström, was

injured prior to the Safari Rally, M-Sport team gave Solberg a chance to drive the new Focus WRC at this monstrous event.

Solberg, who got the message one day before he had to leave for Kenya and slept on a bench at the airport to be sure not to miss his flight, exceeded all expectations and finished fifth. Otherwise his chances are taken care of similar to the other two drivers: several offs and several lightning performances, although a win is still far away. What's more, in 2001, a serious conflict on contractual issues between M-Sport and Solberg's management causes him to move from Ford to Subaru. Carefully nurtured by David Richards and the rest of Prodrive from thereon, Solberg is allowed to progress in his own tempo. Despite a series of mechanical issues and driver errors the team never loses faith in Solberg and continue to develop the combination of car and driver, very similar to how they treated McRae in his early years with Prodrive. Equally, Solberg was becoming increasingly popular among fans and the media – in many people's opinion he was the first true media star in rallying. Steve Webb, who prior to his position at WRC TV (see chapter 5) was a PR representative for the Subaru World Rally Team, says:

The WRC has a long history of Nordic drivers who does not say much. They let the driving do the talking, and that is fair enough – but Petter has brought glamour to this sport. It is incredible to watch him in front of the crowds. At first I thought Petter played a role, but after having spent some time with him away from the limelight I realized that it was natural (cited in Solberg and Svardal, 2004, p. 156).

Reward for all of Solberg's hard work both on and off stage was near though, the first WRC win came in the final event of 2002 – the British WRC rally. The following year, in 2003, his position within the team was upgraded to lead driver, though the season does not seem like

it's going to be memorable. However, a strong second half of the 13 rallies-long season, with wins at Rally Cyprus, Rally Australia and Rally Corsica, together with a solid collection of points on other rallies, placed him neck and neck with Sébastien Loeb prior to the final rally: the British WRC event. After a thrilling finale, beating Loeb into second place in the rally and the championship, Solberg became world driver's champion by only one point. Such an end to the championship duel, aired directly on TV, was made for the storybooks. When he clinched the driver's title, Solberg went airborne with joy and his celebrations shortly after the finish, hugging, dancing, screaming and crying in the midst of fans, journalists, family and team colleagues, are considered as one of the most emotive scenes in the history of rallying.

Followed by runner-up positions in 2004 and 2005, the decline began. A growing tension between Prodrive, Subaru and Solberg as to whether it was the car or the driver – or both – that was to blame for the poor results led to a difficult working relationship. This tension became manifestly visible through the Discovery Channel series *Engineering the World Rally*. It was aired in 2007 and followed the team during the 2006 season like a fly on the wall through every aspect of the assault on the WRC title. Among these were the special circumstances posed by company politics during the Japanese WRC event, included in the penultimate, fifth episode. With ten events behind them so far in the season, they had not won a single rally. Score sheets like that do not match the sums of money that Subaru put into the sport in order to convert their participation into brand value. Tensions are high, not least between lead driver Petter Solberg – whose usual boyish allure seemingly has vanished – who thinks the car is underperforming and the team management who is not always convinced that the car is to blame.

Either way, as the commentator puts it after just 40 seconds into the 45 minutes long episode: 'In front of their home fans and their corporate bosses, they're under big pressure to deliver.' When the rally finally starts, something as simple as 'a poor patch of brake pads'

(29.47), according to Taylor, as well as handling problems, make the start of the rally a disaster for the team. With a 600,000-euro car, such mistakes cannot be made. And while it may be an effect of Discovery's dramaturgical choices, there are no smiles in the team, and although the final event in Wales ended with the team on a high, the feedback to the corporate bosses by Toshiya Azuma, Head of Marketing at Subaru, who attended Rally Japan, could not have been anything but moderate. So when Subaru finally exited WRC in December 2008, as explored in the previous chapter, many believed that Solberg, who had become closely associated with the Japanese manufacturer, would retire due to the timing (two weeks before season start and no works drives available). Others thought that Solberg had had enough; he had been around, become WRC champion and runner-up twice, done all the classic rallies and earned millions of euro.

Not so. Furious about Subaru's decision, Solberg began assembling what would be the Petter Solberg World Rally Team on his own. With Christmas a week away, circumstances were against him. Normally, the planning of a WRC season starts a year in advance – Solberg wanted to do it in a couple of weeks. Besides that, people have plans during the Christmas holidays and it turned out to be harder than he expected just getting a car. Because he believed that the Citroën C4 was the best rally car around, he approached the palace-like WRC factory in Versailles where the French manufacturer build their WRC weapons with a desire to buy one. At the French squad, however, they turned down his offer. Resistibly, they instead offered him a well-used Xsara (the model which Loeb took to championship wins in 2004-2006). Out of options, Solberg accepted and continued to expand his team by getting sponsors and hiring personnel. With a deep excavation into his private wealth and help from his innumerable contacts, he assembled a new team ready to take on the sporting and logistical challenges of the upcoming season in no time– simply because he was not ready to leave the sport he loved. Never before had the WRC seen such appetite for returning to the

championship, manifested in his new motto: ‘Never give up’, and the award was the first podium finish for a privateer at Rally Cyprus in 2009 since his old boss – Malcolm Wilson – managed a similar result in 1993.¹⁰⁹

The currency of emotional capital

Even though Vatanen, McRae and Solberg are and were popular, it doesn’t mean that they offer a blueprint on how to behave like a WRC driver. Those aspects of their careers dealt with above are, moreover, only slices of the kind of story they have to tell. But it is valuable to acknowledge the emotional capital that certain drivers possess and how to make use of it as a promotional asset to the narrative constitution of identity in the WRC. Without doubt, in rallying as elsewhere, ‘the sport celebrity’, David L. Andrews and Steven J. Jackson write in the introduction to the 2001 anthology *Sports stars*, ‘is effectively a multi-textual and multi-platform promotional entity’ (Andrews and Jackson, 2001, p. 6). Yet, in light of Vatanen, McRae and Solberg, I think that it’s reasonable to conclude that ‘the product’ itself is of little worth if the promotional methods is not utilised in accordance with the driver’s character.

While the expectations of WRC drivers have become increasingly predefined – which includes Erving Goffman’s ‘pattern of appropriate conduct’ (Goffman, 1959, p. 75), the promotional duties of WRC drivers also involve the risk of conflict between identity and role performance. Identities and roles is an interplay because ‘the meanings of the self (as object) are established and assessed in terms of the meanings of the performances generated by that self (as subject) within the culture of the interactional situation’ (Burke and Reitzes, 1981, p. 85). Unless you base ‘driver branding’ on a person’s character, and foster the necessary consistency between identity and role (Burke and Reitzes, 1981, p. 86), this discrepancy will

be disclosed by others in the WRC for reasons we have explored in previous chapters.

Sociologists Peter Kivisto and Dan Pittman (2007, p. 289) argue that if people are ‘caught up in the inauthenticity of their emotional displays’, *role distancing* will be the result. If that is the case in the WRC, it will harm both the promotional duties as well as the driver’s bid for biographical authenticity and sporting performance.

In the worst case, Kivisto and Pittman continue (2007, p. 289), ‘it is difficult to resolve distancing without fundamentally changing the definition of either the self or the situation that one wants to project.’ Fortunately, even though this might change, most rally drivers so far have given the self the upper hand in this contest. Examples are plenty if we zoom in on the three drivers compared above. ‘Imagine if I had to walk around and be someone else for 270 days every year,’ Petter Solberg concluded. ‘That would have been exhausting’ (Solberg and Svardal, 2004, p. 156). Hence, he kept his identity while adapting the role’s promotional duties to it rather than the other way around. McRae, who loved doing all sorts of action sports, was provided with other circumstances. In the 2005 documentary, *Pedal to the Metal* produced by UK company Ilc., David Richards talks about the young McRae’s introduction into the commercial corners of the WRC in the early 1990s:

He wasn’t that comfortable in doing PR functions...whereas Ari [Vatanen, his team mate at the time] was comfortable doing all those things. So we said alright, what we will do is do this visually, lots of shots of you riding motorbikes and skiing and jet skiing, all those sort of things, and we managed to create an action hero for the public.

Coupled with the necessity mentioned in the beginning of this chapter of seeing individual sport starts in a proper cultural context, I argue that the real promotional quality of WRC drivers lies in what they have brought to the community in terms of what I call emotional

capital – the stock of personality traits, skills and grit. Its amount is based not on a superstar aura of airs and graces, but on how share certain values while at the same time positively distinguish themselves from one another. Names mentioned in this context illustrate Daniel Boorstin's claim (1992, p. 61) that 'the hero created himself; the celebrity is created by the media. The hero is a big man; the celebrity is a big name.' The explanation to why this is true in rallying is fourfold.

First, they share an uncompromising attitude; it is do-or-die, and the perseverance to never let setbacks daunt you in your love for the sport. 'The Vatanen way' became a saying when somebody completely overestimated the speed of which one could drive through a corner, yet managed to bring it home. Vatanen's recollection of his career is telling: 'I love my profession. Hard knocks, accidents and all. Victory in a race fills me with the greatest satisfaction and a profound sense of well-being. The inherent danger may not be the sole attraction but it adds a certain spice to life' (Vatanen and Väisänen, 1988, p. 15). Similarly, McRae has no regrets about the way he drove: 'It brought me success, the big contract and an appreciative following. Being Mr Consistent is simply not my style. I prefer the fast and exciting way, and so do the fans' (McRae and Allsop, 2001, p. xi). Solberg's relentless commitment to the sport is not so much found in his driving style, but in his eagerness to do whatever it takes to win. In the formative years of his motorsport career, he once was up against his older brother Henning in a national sprint rally. The outcome of the rally would not have an impact on the standings in the national championship, but for Petter, the opportunity of winning was motivation enough. While Henning slept, Petter got up and *bicycled* through the stages in the middle of the night just to get an advantage over the others (Solberg and Svardal, 2004, p. 71).

Second, their attitude is also part of the narrative of how they worked their way from scruffy, cold garages to special stages around the world, rock star salaries and luxurious

Monte Carlo flats. Along the way, they never shied away from their backgrounds. Although he had his base in Monte Carlo, a house on home soil in Lanark, Scotland was important to McRae. '[There] I can see old friends again, go out for dinner with them. The good thing about going home is that although everybody obviously follows what Alistair (the brother, also rally driver) and I are doing, we can go down to the local pub for a drink and join in with the chat as though we're in there every Friday night, and nobody mentions motorsport' (cited in Allsop, 1999, p. 116). Solberg, for his part, was nicknamed 'Hollywood' by the media for his charismatic appearance, but this is, in my view, a bit misleading. In many ways he was the opposite of a Hollywood star – down-to-earth, emphatic, caring about his new and old friends, and most of all, always ready to offer a smile. And after getting over his nightmarish fears of AIDS and conviction that even his doctor and wife conspired against him, at Rally Finland in 1986, Vatanen acknowledged that 'not investing in your own family is one of the biggest mistakes that can be made' (Vatanen and Väisänen, 1988, p. 276).

Third, WRC drivers are – partly because of their lack of diva tendencies – more accessible to the wider community than in any other motorsport. When I asked Malcolm Wilson about why rallying is so popular across borders, he claimed it was because 'spectators can come so close to their heroes'. In previous chapter, we have seen that the service park in particular, but also the road sections between the special stages and the WRC team members' behaviour outside the rally events (in airports and at home), allow for an interaction within the community that is less marked by power ratios between those in high places and ordinary people. A UK rally fan, Sandra, for instance, shared this little story with me:

It is quite exciting to end up in the same hotel as the rally teams and/or media, and I have even found myself in the breakfast room alone with a driver who went on to become WRC champion. It is always a humbling experience to travel along the road

sections between stages with the WRC cars, for instance being sandwiched between Marcus Grönholm and Dani Sordo.

Another example came from Yukari, who we met in Chapter 7, who told me a story about her out-of-the-blue relationship with Julien Ingrassia, the 2013 world champion co-driver next to Sébastien Ogier:

In Rally Japan 2010, they won and Julien threw his cap to crowds in the podium ceremony. I jumped like everyone else and his cap came right over to me. That was the beginning. Later I went to Rally Acropolis 2011. I met Julien and took a photo together. Because I was wearing a kimono [a traditional Japanese costume], he wanted me to send the photo and gave me his e-mail address. One thing led to another, and the following year I started the fan page of Julien on Facebook. He allowed me to manage it as I want.

I am not saying that all WRC drivers are extrovert all the time, but that some of them engage with the fans and the media in ways you will struggle to discover in other motorsports. Insights like these illustrate the reasons some athletes are more highly regarded than others, which are documented in research elsewhere. Based on a quantitative survey, Keith Parry (2009) found that the most commonly given reason for selection of a sporting hero in the UK was not skill – that came second – but a personal trait associated with ‘attitude’. Likewise, like Joyce Woolridge (2002) has discussed with British footballers as a case category, sports heroes are comparable with film stars who combine the extraordinary (their sporting prowess), yet also can still be seen as ordinary and are not too removed from their fans. Even Sébastien Loeb underlined in an interview that *Je suis comme je suis* – ‘I am who I am’,

before he continued: ‘I don’t worry much about it and I don’t seek the spotlight. I’m not trying to be a star and that is perhaps what people appreciate.’¹¹⁰ Nathalie, one of my Canadian informants who spectated Rally de France-Alsace in 2013, said that to see Loeb commemorating his career at this event definitively was her best memory of one particular driver. ‘It was so great to see such emotion come out of him, wiping away tears and everything. Such a touching moment, especially from such an amazing driver who we weren’t used to seeing that kind of emotion from.’

Fourth, while some of the WRC’s biggest stars share some common features, we should also acknowledge the ways the relative diversity of drivers that catches people’s interest. German rally fan Chris put it like this:

If you take Vatanen, Mikkola, Waldegaard, Röhrl, Alen, Toivonen, Salonen, they all were very different characters with their rough and smooth edges, every single one of them somehow stood out in their very own way, something you don’t really find anymore today comparing drivers. And I actually don’t want to complain about modern day drivers. I quite like some of them, Sordo, Latvala, Neuville, but just compare Sordo, Ogier, Latvala, Hirvonen and name one comment that makes them different to one another as characters.

Related to this view is also the fact that sporting success is not enough to gain fame. Despite his position as one of the greatest tennis players of all time, Pete Sampras failed to achieve hero status with the media and public (see Lines, 2001). And despite Loeb’s nine driver titles and the surprisingly personal memoir, *Ma ligne de conduite* (I am guessing that even insiders would not believe that Loeb at the age of sixteen was cannabis smoking rebel with earrings, see Loeb and Keller, 2013), he has not made the same impact on the community as the three

drivers discussed below – even though he earned millions on lucrative deals in perfume and other businesses, as well as being made knight of the *Légion d'honneur* in 2009 (France's highest honour to a civilian). Names like Röhrli or McRae, on the other hand, have become WRC icons because they have certain narratives attached to their names. This discovery is highly relevant in the theoretical context of this thesis because, as sociologist Gary Whannel has identified, 'sport is presented largely in terms of stars and narratives: the media narrativises the events of sport, transforming them into stories with stars and characters; heroes and villains' (Whannel, 1998, p. 23). But without villains, or at least drivers that make their mark, there are consequently no heroes, either.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored the ways in which the WRC and its drivers in particular were whirled into the vortex of an emerging promotional culture in the 1990s. Together with the emergence of a whole segment of people traditionally unaffiliated with the sport, this not only enforced secretarial responsibilities upon drivers and their management, but influenced the entire way they acted in a privileged position. Mostly, it developed without grave problems, but, as seen in the example early in this chapter with Thatthi bemoaning Loeb's unshaven appearance to Morrie Chandler after Rally Mexico 2008, there is a potential conflict between external demands and drivers' view on their promotional responsibilities. Especially if we take into account that some drivers, like Loeb, have a way of dealing with the media that, at least compared with his autobiography, conceal his personality.

Despite the inherent absurdity of the Thatthi case, I think it is important to include in the discussion a warning about similar missteps. Simon Long, who took part in the discussions on e-mail, was right to point out that Loeb's ruggedness is part of what makes

him and the sport popular. Based on what I have explored in this chapter, this conclusion can be expanded: it is not the ruggedness per se, but the ability to maintain one's identity and pair it with a promotional role performance. By investigating the biographies of Ari Vatanen, Colin McRae and Petter Solberg comparatively, I found that their popularity originated in their personalities, rather than how well they adapted to the external demands of the promotional culture. Through ups and downs, and their handling of their roller-coaster careers, their stories reveal much about how they brought emotional capital to the WRC and earned their plaudits. This is not a blueprint for how to become a WRC star driver, but if we look at drivers as promotional arenas, it is a clear signal of why one should acknowledge the emotional value of biographical authenticity.

In fact, the overarching explanation of why some drivers become more popular than others follows a logic of attraction where 'the audience is expected to possess (or develop) some kind of affective attachment' to the individual (Andrews and Jackson, 2001, p. 7). As a result, the promotional value of a WRC driver can be nurtured through dialogue between driver and team, as in McRae's case. Sometimes, the result will be a self-effacing man like Loeb, in other cases, it will be a celebrity like Solberg. But it cannot be 'manufactured', as the role conflict between identity and role will make resonance with the wider community impossible. In other words, we may conclude, as Andrews and Jackson explain, that 'carefully scripted and heavily invested imaged personas (in sports) can potentially be compromised by declines in performative function' (Andrews and Jackson, 2001, p. 8). Imposing harsh restrictions on them how to dress, act or speak, beyond common decency, would without doubt impair the charismatic identity elements that made WRC drivers fascinating – or even legendary – to begin with.

Chapter 10: The WRC's promotional value

Introduction

Located in Paris' biggest square, between the Champs-Élysées to the west and the Tuileries Gardens to the east and decorated with a giant obelisk originally from Egypt, the FIA headquarters at 8 Place de la Concorde is a blend of cosmopolitan flair and gallic effortlessness. Standing among photo-obsessed tourists and construction workers having a cigarette break, it is hard to imagine the frantic activity that must have gone on behind the glass doors in the aftermath of the Antonov affair in 2011 and 2012.¹¹¹ The consensus in the larger WRC community seemed to be that they had failed big time; first, for having allowed the Antonov affair to happen (even the tiniest inspection of his past would have raised an eyebrow or two), second, for not taking care of the crisis properly, and third, for the reason that underlay the other two: not running the WRC as a business. Rasmus Bjerén, previously involved with the promotion of Rally Sweden, was one of the most critical voices:

It's the fact that they [the FIA] show everyone that they are willing to really do the thing that most people probably feared but thought were totally impossible. To let all the championship sponsors, manufacturers, team sponsors, drivers' sponsors and everyone else that are spending their money on the World Rally Championship down. The one single value that makes the WRC exist is the promotional value, where speed meets skills that meets rough circumstances and mixes up into action and adrenaline enough to glue people in front of their TVs, computers, magazines and phones just to follow it. No investor cares about speed, skills, circumstances, action or adrenaline after all. They care about the money. And no exposure, no money (Bjerén, 2012).

I agree with Bjerén that ‘the promotional value’ of WRC is crucial. Yet, the WRC’s quintessential nature, like that of any sport, is at risk when it commercializes itself to maintain or expand its market share in the experience economy – also known as the paradox of commercialization (Smith and Stewart, 2013, p. 534). For these reasons, I addressed the following research question in Chapter 1: how can we combine the traditional elements that according to the traditionalists once made rallying great with the commercial concerns of today’s modernists who fear that a beloved sport will end up bankrupt? In this thesis, I have argued that we need to reconsider the content of the WRC’s promotional value in order to better understand what there is to promote in the first place – its sporting identity. Based on ethnographic fieldwork, I argue that a narrative inquiry of the ways participants, fans and other stakeholders in the WRC experience and convey their impressions of the sport across its community has given us some answers on how to overcome the paradox of commercialism. In this final chapter, I assemble the arguments as to why this is the case.

Key findings

To some extent, the polarity between ‘traditionalists’ and ‘modernists’ that gave this thesis a starting point is real – but to choose sides will do the sport no good. As neither of the groups will go away, it is more a question of how their respective strengths can be combined for the sake of an increasingly ‘glocal’ championship. My suggestion has been an interpretation of the WRC as a symbolic community. To a lesser degree than religious, territorial or ethnic boundaries, which are often used to mark off the limits of a community by using political institutions to legitimize these borders, a symbolic community is ‘existing in the minds of the beholders’ (Cohen, 1985, p. 12) where, in the WRC’s case, integration or disintegration is an

effect of its narrative constitution of identity. Within this temporally invoked, trans-national and trans-local community, *a positive nostalgia* is found to be of major importance. Through considering views on and the use of media coverage, place, spectator culture, cars and drivers, the previous chapters have shown that nostalgia makes sense of the entire history of the WRC because it is part of ‘the process of creating and establishing a sporting heritage’, as two researchers conclude, while it ‘also propagates particular myths in order to create both a sense of order and identity’ (Ramshaw and Gammon, 2006, p. 232).

To explain this further, we need to recall some of the premises on which this analysis rests. In Chapter 1, I argued that any promotional understanding of the WRC had to begin with seeing it as a unique sporting experience. A major part of this argument was, as Chapter 2 explored, that any promotional transaction involves implicit and explicit *negotiation* between seller and buyer. Of particular importance here was the implicit negotiation, which conveys the meaning or ideations of the product or experience to prospective consumers. My tool to grasp meanings like these was the ethnographic analysis of narratives (the stories people told) and narrative analysis (the researcher’s way of discovering patterns in these stories) inserted into the context Andrew Wernick termed ‘the promotional culture’. In his view, such a culture encapsulates the oncoming evolution of advertising from a method of selling products into a cultural influenza covering ‘all the circuits of social life’ (Wernick, 1991, p. 188).

Because my analysis revealed that engagement in the WRC is, as stated in former research, motivated well beyond merely desire for entertainment, the promotional culture needs to be paired with a profound understanding of the meaning of the sport. My findings demonstrate what Simon Chadwick argues is ‘a very important characteristic of sport: that it is deeply socio-culturally embedded, which creates highly distinctive, and often unique, challenges for sport managers’ (Chadwick, 2009, p.192). As the meaning of the sport has to

be negotiated in order to make it worthwhile, I have attempted to grasp this emotional involvement through narratives which, when analysed, have turned out to be fundamental to circumventing the paradox of commercialism. Similar to the way in which sociologist Barry Schwartz claims that the main activity in the process of creating the past in the form of a ‘collective memory’ is not construction, but rather selection (Schwartz, 1982, pp. 395-96), previous chapters have exemplified how the WRC, interpreted as a symbolic community, uses the past selectively to engender group consciousness. However, Anthony P. Cohen, who coined the term symbolic community, warns:

it would be a mistake, though, to characterise such responses as merely ‘traditionalistic’, implying that the community in question is mired in its own past and is unable to face up to present imperatives. Rather, the past is being used here as a resource, in a number of ways. The manner in which the past is invoked is strongly indicative of the kinds of circumstance which makes such a ‘past-reference’ salient (Cohen, 1985, p. 99).

A value-laden term like ‘the Golden Age of rallying’, for instance, was already being used about Group B in 1986,¹¹² before the end of that season – but those three years, as well as other periods in WRC, also constitute a sense of history so important to current feelings about the sport. By investigating the narrative constitution of identity in the WRC ethnographically I uncovered how the meaning of the WRC – the relational composite of how people lace history, experiences, knowledge, the sense of place and cultural practices – was expressed differently depending on promotional arena. At the same time, I found a mutually reinforcing *leitmotif* in the positive nostalgia regardless of where I did fieldwork. To circumvent the paradox of commercialism the commercial apparatus and the governing body of the WRC

needs to acknowledge what rallies, drivers, spectator culture and cars, all seen as relationally defined arenas within the historical context of rallying, constitute of promotional value. Let me abridge some key findings from the previous chapters:

- The meaning of *rallies* was captured by people's appreciation of the sense of place. Because it is far more difficult to establish a tradition than for instance to discover a WRC star, rallies are natural settings for connecting today's events with history. As the locus for the key triggers of nostalgia – people, objects and experiences (see Holak and Havlena, 1992), place-evoked emotions help constitute the 'authenticity' of a sport's legacy, that is, the degree to which the narrative captures 'the essence and resonance of the actors' experience and perspective through details of action and thought revealed in context' (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman, 1997, p. 12). Because of the change of scenery and because the roads on which WRC rallies are driven are used for different purposes for the rest of the year, the sporting legacy becomes a matter of cultural reinvention on a regular basis. This makes certain places in the WRC folklore highly regarded tableaux of history.
- In terms of *spectator culture*, I found that there was no contradiction, as suggested by one of the critics in the wake of the Antonov affair in Chapter 4, between organizing events 'into the wild' and the willingness to come out and spectate the sport. On the contrary, my investigation revealed that spectators enjoyed the unscripted nature of the sport. Many of them made the rally into a day out, as well as combining it with the pleasures of travelling. A big part of this conclusion is the discovery that spectator culture is enabled by people's fascination for the sport, across sociological categories, rather than their wish to demonstrate loyalty to a specific team. Rather than being forced to take sides, one way or another, the integrative mechanism of WRC's

spectator culture was shown to be narrative proficiency. The better you know the history and development of the WRC, the higher the chance for a cultural understanding of the sport across nationalities, class and gender. Finally, spectators often shared their experiences on social media or in groups through narratives and can thus be seen as an untapped pool of marketing content.

- Rally *cars* are obvious attractions in a promotional context, and using the championship as a branding showroom is the primary reason why manufacturers choose to spend large amounts of money on the WRC. Yet, as Chapter 8 demonstrates, people associate the greatness of various WRC cars with different things: sound, flair or design. Consequently, it is on the basis of this combination – the elements that made some of the most iconic cars popular (sound, flair and design) and the unique challenge of rallying – that the FIA should decide on where they want the WRC to go next. Is it a series where cars are engineering fantasies (like the Group B) or similar to those you can actually buy in the shop (like the Group A)? As it is now, it is neither of these, which, for separate reasons, created an interest in the sport. This indecision leaves little room under the current regime for the manufacturers and their partners to create heritage objects like the Ford Escort, the Audi S1 and the Subaru Impreza.
- While WRC *drivers* come and go there are some qualities among some of them that seem to be promotionally relevant regardless of era. In my investigation of Ari Vatanen, Petter Solberg and Colin McRae I found that their capabilities to do extreme things with a rally car and be ‘one of the guys’ at the same time was highly valued within the WRC community. These characteristics in combination with openness to spectators and the embodiment of a vernacular charisma, put into practice by each driver differently, made me conclude that a relative diversity among drivers is a promotional good. If this diversity is homogenised, for instance as an effect of the

promotional developments in driver management since the early 1990s, each driver's personality must be nurtured increasingly to make a difference in a commercial setting.

Based on these findings my argument is that the paradox of commercialism can be circumvented by using the sport's history – most notably its nostalgic inclinations – for promotional purposes. Altering a preference for something through nostalgia is a valuable marketing tool if it is used effectively, because those high in nostalgia are likely to consume in order to experience nostalgia (Holbrook and Schindler, 2003). In closing, I therefore believe this positive nostalgia should be seen as an invite to the future rather than a graveyard of ambitions. Although Greg Ramshaw and Sean Gammon are eager to point out that in the study of sports and nostalgia, nostalgia is 'associated more with motivation than destination' (Ramshaw and Gammon, 2006, p. 239), it is my conviction that the two cannot be untwined. Insight to the WRC's positive nostalgia prepares those who negotiate the meaning of the WRC through the range of promotional methods available (discussed in Chapters 2 and 4). This chimes in neatly with the argument of those who claim that we should understand nostalgia as 'the desire not to return but to recognise aspects of the past as the basis for renewal and satisfaction in the future' (Pickering and Keightly, 2006, p. 921). Going into the future, the strength of the WRC lies in its past.

Policy implications

As a form of applied sociology, which in the view of Snyder and Spreitzer (1978, p. 8) 'will die on the vine of academic trivia' unless its policy implications are brought out to the public, this thesis is relevant to the FIA for one particular reason. It is necessary, as illustrated by

Rasmus Bjéren's criticism of the FIA in the beginning of this chapter, to evoke a more proactive stance to the next transformation of the WRC that inevitably will come. In chapter 4 we found that one of the reasons for the promotional troubles in the mid-2000s was the difficult working relationship between the promoter and the FIA where everybody felt they were entitled to have an opinion on everything. Alternatively, based upon their original mandates in the sport (see Chapters 1 and 4), it is my view that governance should be left to the FIA and promotion to the WRC Promoter GmbH. While the promotional keyword is (a positive) *nostalgia*, the FIA's keyword is *competition*. On balance, as Sten Söderman and Harald Dolles, the editors of the 2013 *Handbook of Research and Sport Business* write in its introduction, 'the main purpose of governance, then, is to ensure the popularity of the game, which, as long as a balance between competition and cooperation is maintained, can happen in many ways encompassing different views on what the game should be (Södermalm and Dolles, 2013, p. 7).

An exclusive emphasis on governance at the FIA does not come in conflict with the promotional importance of narrative uncovered by my investigation. While details are often tied to personal memories of cars, places, rallies or drivers, the main story I have assembled on the basis of people's thoughts is often formed around those occasions where it was 'anyone's rally' until the final stages. Memories, learned or lived, of what was good about the WRC do not usually coincide perfectly with Group B, Group A, or any other regulation era. Rather, the best of different eras is usually compared with the worst of each era and thus constitutes a relational pattern of what people value. To explain this appreciation of competition, David Carr's emphasis on turning points - 'the quintessential element of narrative' and 'the stuff of communal life' (Carr, 1991, p. 159) – is particularly important. They provide the dots between which one can draw lines and produce a story. Unlike those who see the shifts in the FIA's regulation regime as constituting these dots, I argue that the

competitive highs and lows regardless of era are a better way to apprehend the WRC's promotional qualities.

What's more, this narrative configuration of the WRC – the process, introduced in Chapter 2, which 'employs a thematic thread to lay out happenings as parts of an unfolding movement that culminates in an outcome' (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 5) – can be seen as a qualitative confirmation of the relevance of the 'uncertainty of outcome hypothesis' (UOH). Originally coined by US economist Simon Rottenberg in his 1956 article on baseball, and subsequently developed to include championship uncertainty (Rottenberg, 1956; see also Szymanski, 2003), it states that the number of people who consume sport will increase as the expected value of the competition increases (Levin and McDonald, 2009, p. 8). Research has proven the UOH theory to be valid in a number of sports, including NASCAR and Formula 1 (see Quirk and Fort, 1992; Huth, 2007; Levin and McDonald, 2009; Berkowitz, Depken II and Wilson, 2011; Pawlowski and Budzinski, 2013; Judde, Booth and Brooks, 2013), and it is thus of great relevance to a WRC promoter with commercial responsibility for years to come.

Demonstrably, competition cannot be fabricated – and anyone with the slightest knowledge of the FIA would admit that both it and its various promoters have done their share of work to enhance the WRC's competitiveness. Yet, as underlined in a study of NASCAR, competitive balance on track is not necessarily restored just because rule changes reduce competitive imbalances in the garage (Berkowitz, Depken II and Wilson, 2011, p. 254). Competition can, on the other hand, be given the best of conditions by utilizing the fact that the community treasures the sport as a whole more than its individual actors. Based on a comparative study of five sports, aggregated into 75 seasons, Michael Levin and Robert McDonald conclude that the league, championship or series benefits from better competition because fans, in the long run, may lose interest if one team – or in the WRCs case, one driver – continues to dominate. With a higher degree of competitiveness, the FIA may be able to

better negotiate with investors for championship-wide promotions, ensuring that all teams benefit from competitive competition (Levin and McDonald, 2009, pp. 20-21).

Theoretical implications

If one allows for more narrative inquiries at the intersection between sports management and sociology of sports, there is a chance – as mentioned early in Chapter 1 – that the paradox of commercialization may lose some of its paradoxical force. Theoretically, the concept of narrative is, as discussed in Chapter 2, riddled with problems. In addition to what was discussed there, it should be noted that the conceptual confusion about what a narrative inquiry is (and is not) is an immanent danger to its analytical usefulness in sociology. In their review, Poletta et al (2011, p. 113) emphasize how narrative as a tool for individual meaning-making ‘necessarily put to the side sociological questions about power, solidarity, inequality, and social change. For example, the centrality of story to identity and action was more asserted than demonstrated’. In addition, they point to something crucial in the question of whether plot – which is thought to be crucial to narrative’s effects – ‘actually works to structure narrative interpretation in the way it is thought to’ (Poletta et al., 2011, p. 123). The challenge for narrative researchers, consequently, is to include these elements in their empirical research or argue why they are left out.

For example, I notice a tendency among scholars working in the field of sport sociology with interactional theories in particular to explicitly distance themselves from the shadows of *misère* that has been the signature of many classic sport studies. One example is Marci D Cottingham’s study of interaction ritual chains among American football fans where she, in contrast to ‘antisocial aspects of fandom’ such as hooliganism, focuses on the positive atmosphere around the matches through interaction ritual chains (Cottingham, 2012, p. 169).

In this thesis, moreover, critical questions of power ratios between institutions, fans and teams (see Næss, 2014b, for a discussion) has been downplayed in favour of grasping the significance of being part of the community simply because it is more relevant in answering the research question: how can the WRC circumvent the paradox of commercialism? Simultaneously I have tried to demonstrate, rather than merely assert, the centrality of story to the narrative constitution of identity within the WRC community. As discussed in Chapter 2, this is not only a matter of theoretical prudence, but also rooted in a wish to engage the reader to participate in the investigation. Historian William Cronon writes that:

When a narrator honestly makes an audience care about what happens in a story, the story expresses the ties between past and present in a way that lends deeper meaning to both. This process, like everything else in history, is open to criticism, since the rhetorical device for making an audience care can become all too manipulative and sentimental. At its best, however, historical storytelling helps keep us morally engaged with the world by showing us how to care about it and its origins in ways we had not done before (Cronon, 1992, p. 1375).

In line with Cronon, I would therefore finish with the argument that a narrative investigation of sport fulfils several functions. It engages people to participate in the sport through other means than just being a spectator or a participant. By encouraging actors to produce a story about their experiences, it becomes possible to fit a plot into the historical scheme of things. Through this process, multivocality, the deliberate and even strategic inclusion of many voices and views on the subject matter, become a methodological instrument as well as a guideline for how to use research findings in policy work (see Tracy, 2010, p. 844). To promoters, as generally demonstrated in the context of the media through the growth of

so-called prosumers (Chapter 5) and spectator culture (Chapter 7), engaging with the community through a vote on their favourite rally *and making those votes count* in the composition of the WRC calendar is but one method of bringing it together.

It allows the researcher to convert the vast material gathered from ethnographic studies into readable prose and still provide analytic perspectives in line with the characteristics of the phenomena in question. Ideally, one achieves a specific kind of analytic credibility, that is, ‘reports ... that readers feel trustworthy enough to act on and make decisions in line with’ (Tracy, 2010, p. 843), as the structure of narrative inheres in the sporting events themselves: ‘Far from being a formal distortion of the events it relates’, David Carr writes, ‘a narrative account is an extension of one of their primary features’ (Carr, 1986, p. 117). In principle, a narrative inquiry could combine place, time and emplotment to analyse sociologically the meaning of any sport for different purposes. On a social level, I would argue, the findings introduced in this thesis are examples of the process which David Carr describe as typical to a narrative community:

A community in this sense exists by virtue of a story which is articulated and accepted, which typically concerns the group’s origins and its destiny, and which interprets what is happening now in the light of these two temporal poles. Nor is the prospect of death irrelevant in such cases, since the group must deal not only with possible external threats of destruction but also with its own centrifugal tendency to fragment. Again we can say that the narrative function is practical before it is cognitive or aesthetic; it renders concerted action possible and also works toward the self-preservation of the subject which acts. Indeed, we must go even further and say that it is literally constitutive of the group. As before, narrative is not a description or account of something that already exists independently of it and which it merely helps

along. Rather, narration as the unity of story, story-teller, audience and protagonist, is what constitutes the community, its activities, and its coherence in the first place (Carr, 1986, p. 128).

I am citing this in full because recognition of this view has immense consequences for a revamped promotional understanding not just of the WRC, but for sport in general. Similar to several other global sports, most notably football, it is precisely the narrative negotiation between past and present – online and offline – that engages many in the WRC community to spend time, money and emotions on the sport. In fact, I see this as the fundamental theoretical lesson from this thesis. When people explain why they find sports meaningful, they often do so in a narrative way. It is not a matter of generalizing the findings in a strictly social scientific manner, partly because narrative studies, due to their conflicting and complex nature, are in the words of Bent Flyvbjerg ‘difficult or impossible to summarise into neat scientific formulae, general propositions, and theories’ (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 237).

Rather, it is ‘*demonstrative* of the complexity of the process of [ameliorating the social phenomenon] and of the problems of how to facilitate it’ (Korac, 2003, p. 54; see also Payne and Williams, 2005). More specifically, I would argue that the findings introduced in this thesis are eligible for ‘contextual generalization’. By definition this is generalizable knowledge of both research procedures and epistemological findings at ‘local research frontiers’. They are defined as many researchers asking the same research questions that are crucial to the community with reference to similar sets of data and other empirical investigations (Mjøset, 2009, p. 60). As a result, the lessons from this investigation are fruitful if applied to other sports that wrestle with the paradox of commercialism. Beware, narratives are not a quick fix to the paradox of commercialization and do even less to resolve any practical issues in terms of managing sports on a daily level, but having done this study of the

WRC, I am convinced that a narrative inquiry of sports could make us understand the subtext of the axiom of the Roman philosopher Seneca (5 BC – 65 AD): ‘If one does not know to which port one is sailing, no wind is favourable.’

Methodological implications

Finding the right port require methods that helps you navigate. Let me take one example. Due to the behavioural complexity of sports consumers, as well as the fact that consumer behaviour is affected by both internal factors (feelings, memories, associations) and external factors (culture, family, class), I join those who argue that qualitative approaches – which grasp the meaning and symbolic engagement within targeted consumer groups – have proved more relevant than quantitative surveys in many cases (see Gladden and McDonald, 2005). Although WRC spectators for instance may be statistically homogeneous (in terms of gender and age), they are culturally diverse. Appreciation of this diversity through ethnographic means in various locations, paired with the promotional fan typologies introduced in Chapter 7 is a way of demystifying the sport. Differentiation could make it attractive to a Sunday morning kind of spectatorship, including women and families, without necessarily doing so on behalf of its sporting signature. If we accept anthropologist Raymond Madden’s claim that ‘the task for ethnographers is to tell their explanatory stories in such a way as to find a middle road between the inductive and the deductive’ (Madden, 2010, p. 18), we discover new possibilities for trans-local fieldwork.

Ethnographic ‘newthink’ as utilized in this thesis through the concept of ‘globography’ is however not a methodological revolution for those who are seeking one, it is merely underpinned by the idea that the attractiveness of all research techniques needs to be measured against the degree to which they permit the researcher to tackle the peculiarities of

contemporary practices (Czarniawska, 2007, p. 17; see also Næss, 2014c). By using trans-local fieldwork to unravel relations between and within sites, the researcher is equipped with the possibility of locating him or her at crucial intersections of scale and scope. Actors' interpretation and communication of what's going on at these intersections, then, is discovered through narrative inquiry. When combined with a historical context, this approach enables the researcher to grasp the emergence and distribution of meaning. Such globographic fieldwork, hence, is an effective way to transform social relations among people within a community into the production of knowledge (Lutz, 1988, p. 56; Malefyt and Morais, 2012, p. 65).

To achieve this I would argue that there are three guidelines one should follow. First, prepare well. Globographic fieldwork is usually short on time and requires efficiency. To get the most out of your travels, informants and observations, groundwork is of utter importance. It may reduce the chance of culture shocks, but in return you will be able to move around in the field without having the feeling that you drive a bumper car in an amusement park. Second, as time is short, it is necessary to blend into the crowds and make targeted use of data gathering techniques like speech-in-action (see Chapter 3). Obviously there are many ways to observe and gather information, not least depending on the field in which you do fieldwork, but as a rule of thumb I found the conversational approach to be useful. Rather than asking questions directly, or talking about issues as if it was an interview, the best way to get information about episodes or similar that connected the phenomenon, history and individual recollections, was to engage with people narratively. Third, as part of the narrative inquiry, the ethnographer should strive to pair the field's characteristics with his or hers textual representation of it. Maybe especially in the case of sports, but also other studies where stories plays a significant part, this technique creates a lot of possibilities to convey the

complexities and contradictions of the phenomenon – its joys and sorrows, problems and opportunities.

Conclusion

In this thesis we have seen that over the past four decades the WRC has spawned a number of areas relevant to the sociology of sports. It has come to affect deeply the sense of place in many localities around the world. It evokes a particular fan culture on all continents. It is also intertwined with the financial condition of the global car industry, the ‘glocalization’ of media conglomerates, and regulatory influence from bodies such as the European Union on logistical matters and promotional issues. Culturally, it takes form as a phenomenon you can engage with on a narrative basis, regardless of background. Fans, investors and participants in the WRC open their hearts and wallets on site, through social media, or speak their minds around the coffee maker. In addition, the WRC is interwoven in transnational car economics, glocal media developments and legal issues to such a degree that it could even form a new branch of sociology of sports.

On the basis of this mix of culture, economy and the media we understand why David Hassan, in the prologue to a special edition of *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, wrote that academic ventures into motorsport could challenge the sociological imagination:

When examining sport, its meanings and significance in society, the accent is often on individuals and teams that represent a nation or a particular ideological standpoint.

Rarely does attention turn to other sporting forms and yet it is here that a remarkable story is revealed (Hassan, 2011a, p. 187).

In this thesis, I have tried to add my two cents to this debate. While the WRC share some central challenges in balancing commerce and tradition with other world championships or large sporting events, it also contain a unique experience, history and cultural meaning. And even though it has been a long way from my first taste of the WRC in the 1980s to this thesis, the very sense of it has not changed in my view. Irrespective of the globalisation of the championship, its commercial debacles and identity discussions, it is still the basic elements that enchants me: the wild drives through forests, jungles, cities or mountainsides where drivers of all sorts race flat out until the finish line – and the stories that go with them.

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