

research snapshot

summarize | mobilize



Exploring a small town's success in appealing EGM expansion through caring-with practices

What this research is about

This research took Emma Power's framework of "caring-with" and applied it to explain how a small town in Australia appealed the expansion of electronic gaming machines (EGMs). Caring-with is a framework for ethical action that is focused on relational capacity building. Here, care moves beyond individual practices to collective actions of community members. This study helped understand how a small town developed a culture of caring-with to oppose EGMs, as community members saw potential harms from gambling and the long-term impacts it would have on their community. The researchers described how community members responded to the gambling development as a shared responsibility. They also explored how a culture of caring-with might challenge systemic injustices and support proactive actions to prevent EGM development.

What the researchers did

The researchers used a case study approach to explore the experience of a regional town in the state of Victoria, Australia. The small town has seen a change in its character through the influx of city dwellers in the past two decades. The timeframe for this study was between August 2010 and February 2013. At the time, Victoria's EGM regulator approved the application for 65 EGMs in a residential area in the centre of the town. The development was protested by most of the community and the local council. The application was thus denied on appeal.

The researchers reviewed documents related to the case. They also interviewed 17 participants about their experiences with EGM regulatory processes. Some participants were directly involved in the case,

What you need to know

This research offered a case study about how a local community in Australia came together to fight against EGM expansion in their small town. The researchers used the framework of "caring-with" to illustrate the case. The researchers interviewed 17 key stakeholders to generate an account of how it all started. Participants included community members, local councillors, and legal experts. The researchers explored how a community was able to mobilize a network of community relations and expertise to appeal the expansion of EGMs.

such as community members and local councillors. Others were professionals who might or might not be directly involved, such as expert witnesses, legal counsels, and peak body representatives.

What the researchers found

It was not easy for the town to appeal the development of EGMs in their community. First, they had to articulate the social disbenefits of EGMs in a standardized format that is required for regulatory evaluation. Second, they were limited by no opportunities for community voices to be heard. While Victoria has an EGM regulatory framework that seeks local participation in the processes, community members are represented only through local council. If local council did not object and appeal a decision, the community would have no chance to have an impact.

There are also many constraints in the appealing processes. For example, the council only has 60 days to build a good case against EGM development.

Further, local community and council have to navigate a complex regulatory system which can be very confusing. These constraints could present a challenge to articulate a good case against EGM development.

Despite these constraints, the community members of the town came together. Through community campaigning and activism, they got their voices across. EPIC (Enough Pokies in Castlemaine) emerged as an important activist organization. EPIC effectively set up a well-connected committee and rolled out a campaign involving people with high levels of expertise. They raised community awareness on the impacts of EGM gambling and exerted political pressure on local councillors.

In their fight against the EGM expansion, EPIC aimed to protect their heritage, art, and local expertise. They spoke of the identity of the town and people's attachment to their community. In contrast, local people who supported the EGM expansion emphasized the socio-economic opportunities and spaces for the "working class" people. The cast into "pro" and "anti" camps deepened the social divisions in the community, which are still felt nowadays.

The researchers used this case to illustrate "care" as collective practices and community relations. Gambling policy is largely guided by the notion that care is private and individual. Problem gambling is the responsibility of the individual gambler, who needs to seek help on their own. Caring-with shifts the emphasis to understand care as a public and social concern. It also highlights the need to understand diverse community relations that are involved. The town's community was able to create and mobilize a network of community relations to fight against the expansion of EGMs. The case also illustrates the need for local council or a third party to mediate conflicts between opponents and supporters.

How you can use this research

This research could be used by responsible gambling and harm reduction policymakers, local councillors, other government stakeholders, and researchers. Policy makers and local councillors could use this information to educate communities about how to

come together and create change. Government stakeholders could understand the importance of listening to local community's voices and getting them engaged in decision-making. Future studies could use the caring-with framework to gain insights into how communities engage with complex social issues like gambling.

About the researchers

Mette Hotker, Wendy Steele, and Marco Amati are affiliated with the Centre for Urban Research at RMIT University in Australia. For more information about this study, please contact Mette Hotker at mette.hotker@rmit.edu.au

Citation

Hotker, M., Steele, W., & Amati, M. (2020). When gambling fails: Caring-with urban communities at the local scale. *Cities*, 100, 102642. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2020.102642>

Funding

No funding source was declared for the study.

About Gambling Research Exchange (GREO)

Gambling Research Exchange (GREO) has partnered with the Knowledge Mobilization Unit at York University to produce Research Snapshots. GREO is an independent knowledge translation and exchange organization that aims to eliminate harm from gambling. Our goal is to support evidence-informed decision making in safer gambling policies, standards, and practices. The work we do is intended for researchers, policy makers, gambling regulators and operators, and treatment and prevention service providers.

Learn more about GREO by visiting greo.ca or emailing info@greo.ca.

