An Examination of the Relationship between Community Sport Facilities Servicescape Factors and Sport Development

Pipi Sotiriadou, Griffith University
Brad Hill, Griffith University

Socio-cultural Thursday, June 4, 2015 20-minute oral presentation (including questions)
Abstract 2015-067 3:50 PM (Bytowne)

Sport facility servicescape factors are particularly salient (Bitner, 1992; Wirtz, Mattila, & Tan, 2000) in managing the spectator experience. Servicescape is the umbrella term for the tangible and the non-tangible environmental factors that impact spectator service satisfaction in sport facilities. Research on tangible factors has examined the design of stadia (e.g., Szucs, Perraudou, & Allard, 2006) and spectator visual comfort for an uninterrupted view of events (van Hooff, Blocken, & van Harten, 2011), facility interior layout and seating space (Wakefield & Sloan, 1995), and safety (Melrose, Hampton, & Manu, 2011; Taylor, 1990). Equivalent knowledge on the design and tangible servicescape factors of community facilities is limited. Studies on non-tangible environmental factors too centre their focus on large spectator venues and price elasticity (e.g., Garcia & Rodriguez, 2002), ease of access (Lambrecht, Kaefer, & Ramenofsky 2009), scheduling or timing of events (Denaux, Denaux, & Yalcin, 2011), and venue location (Nelson, 2001).

However insightful these studies may be for event and stadia managers, they do not allow community venue managers to understand how environmental factors may influence the decision to participate and use community sports venues. Consequently, there is a scarcity of insights into the ways community venues’ servicescape presents as a means to contribute to attracting, retaining, and nurturing sport participation. As a result, the potential joint effect of servicescape factor on attracting and retaining participants is underdeveloped. The purpose of this paper is to explore the role of community facility servicescape factors on sport development.

Sports rely on their facilities (Wicker, Hallmann, & Breuer, 2013) to achieve their dual sport development goals of increasing mass participation and facilitating athlete development. These goals require sports to attract and retain users in order to deliver events and competitions, programs, training and coaching, and social gatherings (Sotiriadou, Shilbury, & Quick, 2008). Using the sport participation attraction-retention-transition-nurturing (ARTN) model (Sotiriadou et al., 2008) and previously documented servicescape factors, a questionnaire, with mostly open ended questions, was designed to identify the joint effects of servicescape and sport development processes on the attraction and retention of participants.

The study was commissioned by basketball Queensland, in Australia and the questionnaire was addressed to the 21,779 members (financial year 2012-2013) of the 34 existing basketball clubs. After three weeks of administering the questionnaire and two follow up reminders to participate, N=1,241 people completed the study. Even though a relatively small sample, qualitative responses provided a rich pool of qualitative data for analysis and establishing a more formal instrument in the future. Coding involved analysing data line-by-line to assign codes. Codes were compared for similarities and differences, and similar codes were grouped together and were given the same conceptual label (theme). Themes were re-evaluated for their interrelationships, and they were gradually subsumed into and grouped under more abstract, higher order categories.

The results indicate the joint effects of servicescape and sport development processes. For instance, even though tangible factors emerged as important for user experiences, there was compelling evidence that time, travel and costs associated with venue access are significantly more important for user attraction and retention. Based on the findings a framework is developed that isolates community sport venues as a sport development tactic. The framework illustrates the effects of various venue related servicescape factors on the pathways for sport development and participation. Building on the findings, the study offers venue managers and sport development officers a conceptualisation of the joint effects of servicescape and sport development processes.