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**A SYSTEM MODEL OF SPORT TOURISM WITH  
IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH**

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**ABSTRACT**

Problems related to sport tourism planning and development that must be addressed by educators today have become increasingly complex, ambiguous, and interrelated. In order to more effectively understand the complexity of the real world, system styles that encourage experiential learning should be used. A generic sport tourism system model has a subtle role as an *instrument* to support strategic thinking, group discussion, and learning in sport tourism management teams. In this respect, they are quite similar to qualitative problem structuring approaches used by strategy advisers and process consultants. A system model is described in terms of six sectors that support different cognitive and group processes in management teams.

The objective of this paper was to develop an integrated model of a sport tourism sys-

tem. The relationships in the model are designed to be simple and do not necessarily represent any particular sport system. It is meant to be a generic sport tourism system model with emphasis on implications for planning and decision making. The qualitative system dynamics methodology is used to represent the sport tourism system in order to represent the interrelated nature of sport tourism management decisions. It allows managers to move away from the persistent belief that there are elements as unilateral causation, independent and dependent variables.

System models can be depicted as maps that capture and activate knowledge. They can also be viewed as frameworks that filter and organize knowledge. They are also microworlds for experimentation, cooperation, and learning (15, 3).

The interrelationships of six primary sectors that are at the foundation of sport tourism are presented in this paper. They include [1] tourist, [2] hospitality, [3] infrastructure, [4] transportation, [5] sport resource, and [6] sport management. There are interactions within each of these sectors depicted by feedback loops. Also, the system is bounded by an external situation which impacts it, but which is beyond the direct control of the components within the system. Six of the many components of the external impacts are noted including: [1] government, [2] environment, [3] technology, [4] the economy, [5] climate, and [6] socio/culture.

## INTRODUCTION

Tourism is very hard to define. The theoretical definitions for tourism provide a holistic view of the field, but in practice, each of the phases of tourism is a separate entity (16, 11, 20). Each of these phases or subdisciplines has segregated itself and has formulated its own organizations. This has made it difficult to develop a practical definition of tourism. New models are needed to develop a comprehensive framework describing the relationships existing among the subdisciplines in tourism. Of the models that have been utilized to study tourism, one of the best is a systems approach (2, 20). A good model or framework is one that examines the basic questions of relationships among the subcomponents of the general system. The primary focus of a systems approach is on the integration of disciplines to form a comprehensive approach. The emphasis is on relationship, that is, commonalities and differences. The basic goal is to achieve understanding and to develop a common perception of the general discipline. A systems approach does not limit a subdiscipline but expands the discipline. It en-

hances opportunities where there are commonalities and provides increased understanding where there are differences. Resources can then be allocated on a basis of priorities that relate to a developmental policy for effectiveness (9).

The first issue that must be addressed in developing a tourism system is the understanding of the relationship between tourism and travel. Tourism is often mistaken for travel. The operational definitions for tourism that are used extensively are the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) codes (11). These SIC codes relate more to travel than to tourism. Business taxes have to be reported on a comprehensive basis; there is a demand for accountability. The use of SIC codes provides a very convenient method of reporting dollar revenues generated by a business. The primary problem of these SIC codes is that it creates artificial barriers that lead to further fragmentation in the subdisciplines of tourism. Tourism is often mired in the domain of travel. There are obvious relationships between travel and tourism as parent sciences. However, the economic impact of tourism is undetermined because there is not a convenient way to measure the economic impacts of tourism. The primary question raised is how to distinguish between pure travel and travel related to tourism. Obviously, travel is the means by which individuals arrive at tourist destinations for the expenditure of their time and dollars. Travel, in the context of tourism, is perceived as a means, not an end, and is an important part of the infrastructural development of tourism.

In addition to the problem of distinguishing travel from tourism, there is no way to integrate all of the necessary components that contribute to the existence of tourism. Integration should allow the various subcompo-

nents or sectors to express themselves politically (2). None of the subcomponents or subdisciplines in tourism should have a superior position. However, because of territoriality, dominance of one subdiscipline is achieved and sustained at the dysfunctionality of other subdisciplines. Integration of subdisciplines into a comprehensive plan is needed to achieve productivity effectiveness of tourism destination or a tourism product (2, 13, 15).

### **SPORT TOURISM**

One of the emerging subdisciplines in an integrated model of tourism is sport tourism (21). It is important that as this subdiscipline emerges that a system perspective be used to analyze the relationship between this subdiscipline and the other subdisciplines within the tourism. Sport tourism is an independent subdiscipline and is unique. Sport tourism flourishes in isolation based upon the geographical popularity of sport. It is important to cooperatively build on the structure of other subdisciplines, and to complement these subdisciplines in such a way that sport tourism becomes an integral part of tourism (6).

Sport activities occupy a large portion of Americans' leisure time, in terms of spectatorship and participation. (26). Sport is visualized in terms of mega events, such as Super Bowls, World Cup Soccer, etc. The numbers in terms of television ratings and spectators are shared; these numbers are used to justify the expenditures of additional revenue to obtain more spectators. Mega events generate interest of children as well as adult participation. Sport must be analyzed from the micro as well as the macro level in order to obtain a very clear understanding of the impact of sport in relation to tourism (6).

Sport itself is often segmented by the activity and the industry developed around that particular activity. Relationships among various sports are a forgotten perspective and a little understood phenomenon. It is important to understand sport tourism as a whole, the impact that each sport has, and the relationships among the sports. A sponsor often has to choose from a myriad of sports in order to allocate dollars to obtain maximum marketing and promotion exposure. The sponsor is constantly analyzing the comparative and profitable nature of the sport and where they can obtain the "biggest bang for their buck". This type of comparative approach must be used to understand sport tourism because it is the integration of the products from a subdisciplinary perspective that may have the greatest impact for development. The previous approach used, one of isolationism, had been utilized to develop sport tourism products but not as profitably. Different sports progress through various cycles of popularity and "de-popularity". Sport as a tourism product has been very susceptible to cycles of popularity, which are not necessarily economic cycles. The primary influence of economic cycles has been much less than the popularity cycles based on demand for the sport. Therefore, it is important to understand these cycles, the multiplicity of sport, and the tourism product. The sport tourism product may be developed a bundle or series of sport and when one sport is popular, the other is not. The core sport may change, but the sport tourism product overall can be maintained through bundling.

The primary problem is how to treat the system for the long term. Too often the packaged product centers on a single sport, and the product has provided feast or famine based upon the cyclic nature of the sport. One community that excelled in sport product development is Indianapolis. Once a

one-dimensional community with the Indianapolis race, it has diversified to a multiplicity of sports, both amateur and professional, and has developed a very diverse base of sport tourism packages. These packages have been bundled to overcome the cycles and recessionary trends of the economy. The elements in packaging that must be considered are impacts, policy implications, infrastructure, etc. The package decision maker is constantly seeking new frameworks on which to build revenue bases for the community. Most sought after, obviously, are the professional sports at the macro level that bring in great dollars in terms of stadium and television revenues. There is also a certain prestige or pride associated with the city that has professional sports. On a secondary or an intermediate level, there are participatory sports, like the Women's Bowling Congress, that provide good economic revenues for communities. Obviously, tournaments are a large source of revenue because they include travel, meals, hotel, etc. These types of tournaments may generate more dollars than the macro professional sports. At the micro level, there are community sport events that generate dollars from children through local adult amateur sports. A decision maker needs a framework in order to develop a comprehensive plan of sport tourism (3). This plan includes all of these levels and takes advantage of all these levels to generate dollars and revenues for the community as well as associated businesses. A system model can be used as a skeleton framework from which to develop a comprehensive business plan for sport tourism products and events. A systems model serves as a theoretical as well as an operational foundation to identify and exploit opportunities of marketing sport as tourism products and events (18).

## **THE OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The objectives of the study were to 1) build a framework for a sport tourism system, 2) provide a model to structure and organize the sectors and subsectors of sport tourism, 3) identify the relationships between and among sectors and subsectors, and 4) serve as the reference for policy implications for a sport tourism system. Weaved throughout each of these objectives is the development of a consistent, long-term framework to analyze and understand sport tourism, to develop opportunities and the ability to market sport.

## **SYSTEMS APPROACH**

The traditional systems approach has yielded effective results, especially at the macro level (2, 9, 18). A good example where the systems approach has been adopted is the National Aeronautical Space Administration (NASA). At NASA the technical aspects of the engineer, as well as the public relations specialist, were brought together to develop an effective project to put a "person on the moon". The improvements that have been made in systems theory in recent years have been the recognition that the macro, as well as was the micro level, must be systematized to develop vertical integration. In the original systems approach, horizontal integration was the primary emphasis. This does not suggest that in the original approach that vertical and horizontal integration were not a part of the original systems theory; however, on an operational basis, most of the emphasis was given to horizontal integration. The importance of the vertical integration and understanding the micro dynamics has been the primary emphases of recent research and development. In the beginning, the micro and horizontal integration was the primary em-

phasis, then the pendulum shifted to focusing on the micro level analysis and vertical integration. The systems approach process has evolved and has been brought back into balance. There should be a balance of micro as well as macro information, and the vertical as well as the horizontal relationships must be recognized. There must be homeostasis between the micro and the macro and the vertical as well as the horizontal elements.

Once a systems approach is applied to a particular discipline, it is important to develop an operational framework (9, 18). Two different approaches have been traditionally used. In one approach the process gives rise to the content. In the other approach, a framework is developed based upon content, then the system is studied and the content is modified based upon the process of applying the framework to the content. Both approaches have been used successfully. The approach adopted for this paper was the content first and the process of the systems approach second. In context a framework is developed, then the content is changed after applying the framework. There are two important thematic or content thrusts. One is in the area of tourism and the other is in the area of sport. Traditionally, the primary emphasis in tourism has been at the macro level with the economic development on the national and state level (5, 22). There has been little focus at the community level in terms of the necessary dollars to gain a micro understanding. An obvious thrust with the macro approach has been the development of infrastructure, especially those services that are added through the travel and hospitality sectors of the tourism component.

Economic approaches have far exceeded the behavioral science approaches to understand the benefits of tourism as well as the needs of the tourist. There has been a shift from

the economic emphasis of tourism to also include the behavioral as well as the cultural and ecological aspects of tourism. This creates a tourism economy which represents more of a shift from the horizontal to the vertical systems of planning. Increased understanding of the political, social, behavioral, and ecological areas are necessary parameters on which to build a sound economic basis to allow long-term, rather than short-term, planning (3).

## THE SPORT PHENOMENON

Sport has become a staple in the American diet in terms of participation as well as television viewing. It is one of the social constructs that is central to the popular culture of American society.

Sport has become a point of identification for both fans and the general public. Many fans live vicariously through sport. It provides a means by which to measure success or failure in their personal lives. Sport is used to develop energy or enthusiasm for living. For many individuals, it is an obsession or a religion around which they prioritize their lives. Sport, at one time in American history, was ancillary. Now, however, in many households it has become the driving force. This phenomenon can be analyzed at the micro level, with children participating in soccer and baseball, and at the macro level of involvement with professional sports. To understand sport and its applications is to explain motivational influences on the participants, clients, and spectators. The demand curve on most sports indicates an exponential rate of growth (14, 21, 26). The primary importance is how to do business on the sport without changing its essence to maintain or increase demand. In order to sustain demand one must understand the ba-

sic nature of the sport --why it has become an element or a construct in society. Understanding its influence in terms of visibility to popularize or change lifestyles is imperative.

Because the parent content area of sport tourism is sport, it takes the dominant position. Tourism is a secondary vehicle for the development of sport tourism. When tourism and sport is what are the unique dimensions that are compared that make this a discipline? This is the central question demanding examination. A framework must be established to answer this question in terms of the relationship sectors (6).

### **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OR MODEL**

There are two important elements to the development of a conceptual framework or model. One is the components or sectors that make up the system, and the other is the external factors that influence the system. It is important to examine the relationships between each of the sectors and determine how the external factors influence the system sectors. The system components that make up this model are the tourist sector, hospitality sector, infrastructure sector, sports resource sector, transportation sector, and sport management sector. The diagrammatic display of the relationship between these sectors is found in Figure 1. The systems model is an instrument that can be used as a map that captures and activates knowledge. It can also be viewed as a framework that filters and organizes knowledge. Integrated models are micro worlds for experimentation, cooperation, and learning. Relationships in models are designed to be simple and do not necessarily represent any particular sport. The purpose of a sport tourism system model is for planning and decision making.

The tourist sector is the first sector under the sport tourism system. Its primary role is to set the tone for relationships, especially among the hospitality, the infrastructure, and the transportation sectors (20). Eventually the relationships will change significantly. The tourist sector is in a superior position because it is the component that integrates the product. The tourist sector has a direct and feedback relationship to the hospitality sector, the infrastructure sector, and the sports resource sector. The tourist sector includes the management and marketing skills necessary to bring the product to the consumer.

The hospitality sector provides a way to infuse service into a tourism destination. All tourism and recreation facilities, sport facilities, lodging and food service are included. It may not be necessary to form a tourism destination, but it enhances the attractiveness to tourists. Infrastructure is a necessary component to the sport tourism destination and includes the water and power supply, communication channel and transportation mode. The hospitality and the infrastructure sectors are auxiliary. The hospitality sector and the infrastructure sector have feedback loops to the tourist sector related to the accessibility, mobility and level of service. Hospitality and infrastructure provide the amenities and the increase of quality of the tourist experience. It is these sectors where the perspective and nature of the experience are developed (10).

The hospitality sector has a direct relationship to the sport resource sector, and the sport resource sector has a direct relationship to the infrastructure sector. These are filtering components or auxiliary in that they are supportive vehicles to achieve the objectives of the sport tourism experience. The hospitality and infrastructure sectors are the

primary and secondary support services that are necessary to provide the foundation for the tourist. A third ancillary sector, transportation, has direct and feedback relationships in the infrastructural structure, and a direct relationship to the sport resource sector. Transportation is a tertiary support service. It has the same purpose as the hospitality and infrastructural sectors, to support and develop the experience and provide the necessary ambiance and quality to enrich the experience. The transportation sector is equated to the travel component of tourism. The primary difference between the concept of travel and transportation is that travel is associated with a neutral experience where the primary end is efficiency, while the transportation adds to the experiential base of the tourist while providing an effective mode of transportation. The hospitality, infrastructure, and transportation sectors are neglected because the primary experience is the focus of most tourism development. The sectors provide the depth and enrich quality of the tourist experience.

The final two elements of the system are the sport resource and the sport management sectors. The sport resource sector is the core of the sport tourism model because it is directly linked to all of the other sectors with a feedback loop to the tourist, infrastructure, and sport management sectors. The sport management sector is the end product. It has both a direct and a feedback loop to the sport resource sector. The sport resource and sport management sectors are associated with content development, presentation or administration. The sport resource sector is the content. It is central because, without it, there is no sport tourism product. The indigenous nature of the sport and its relationship to its fan and culture are extremely important. It is here that the content acquires meaning. All of the other sectors--the tourist,

hospitality, infrastructure, and transportation, have to be developed in relation to the content. Each of these sectors has an innate understanding of the content and its relationship to the client. The peculiarities of the fan have to be taken into consideration in the development of all services. Management is key in the effective presentation of the content. The mixing and matching of the sectors must be done in such a way as to develop a seamless experience for the client. The sport management sector includes all administrative processes. Moreover, it is invisible, and yet presents the best product of the sport content. Management in this context is not conventional. It is content-specific and identifies those particular techniques that work which are unique to the particular sport sector. One of the critical aspects of the sport management sector is the vertical integration of the micro to macro levels, and the horizontal integration with other sports with similarities and differences.

## EXTERNAL INFLUENCES

External factors are those elements that are outside the system that are not under the direct control of sport tourism managers. Individuals influence external factors through indirect methods. There are six external factors that are important in sport tourism: government, the environment, technology, the economy, the climate, and the socio/culture.

Government is an important entity in sport. Some sports have special exemptions from governmental regulations and are created monopolies because of their unique relationship with the public. Baseball is an example. Other sports do not have such government sanctions. Recognition by government is enough to give sport such as baseball a spe-



cial position, especially as it relates to the public trusts. Although the federal government has rarely interfered with the governance of sport, there is always the possibility of regulation. The capital investment by state and local government in sport gives it a special relationship. The public's general interest in sport as a community identifying factor is recognized by many state and local governments. The presence of sport gives a community prestige.

The second element is the environment, a highly variable factor. The environment is defined as the physical conditions affecting the delivery of the sport product. Only a contingency type crisis management style of management is effective in dealing with environment factors. It is difficult to anticipate unpredictable environmental conditions. Therefore, having a staff that can handle crises is one way of treating these environmental factors.

A third important factor is technology. Technology in the twenty-first century is changing very rapidly. Organizations must respond to changing technology and stay on the cutting edge. These are the organizations that will be successful. Technology has had a tremendous impact on increasing the effectiveness and sophistication of tourism services and products.

The fourth element, the economy, is an unpredictable factor, like the environment. The sport tourism professional must be prepared to use different management strategies for different economies, ranging from recession to prosperity. The sport tourist professional must be in a position to tailor their style to changing economic conditions.

The fifth condition, the climate, refers to the emotional conditions of the fan and general population toward sport tourism. Sociology and psychology have implication for development. Emotional conditions change. For example as the sport celebrity's salary increases and owners' profits increase, fan loyalty may decrease.

The last component is the socio/culture. The social and cultural implications of the sport must be understood. The climate represents a molecular or micro approach; the socio/cultural represents a macro approach to the external factors. As sport gains in popularity, it is institutionalized in culture and holds a different type of position based upon traditions that have been established in society. It is these traditions that provide stability in the external environment.

## IMPLICATIONS

The sport tourism system model is the basis for the development of strategic planning within sport tourism. It is necessary to apply the systems model to different institutions to determine its effectiveness. If a systems model is established, it can be quantified in a gaming and simulation model for educational purposes and used in training as well as research (2). A systems approach has the potential to revolutionize sport tourism. A systems approach allows integration among sport tourism of components integrating in the delivery of the product. Sport tourism has the maximum potential to change the client--it has the motivational ability to integrate it vicariously into their lifestyle.

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FIGURE 1  
SPORT TOURISM SYSTEM

