Alternative Typologies for Leisure Programs

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ABSTRACT: The traditional typologies of recreation programs based on type or function are now of limited value because they were developed for purposes that are no longer relevant. To meet the changing needs of the recreation field, typologies should offer conceptual frameworks that are useful for guiding strategic marketing decisions, facilitating generalizations, and developing theory. Six alternative typologies that meet these criteria are offered in the paper. They are based on: 1) nature of the service act; 2) relationship between the program and the customer; 3) potential for customization; 4) nature of demand for a program; 5) attributes of the program; and 6) program beneficiaries.

KEYWORDS: Classification system, typology, recreation and park programs, evaluation and marketing implications, theory development, customization, segmentation.

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Classification schemes provide a method of organizing and categorizing multidimensional concepts (Reynolds 1971). A typology is a classification scheme that can improve systematic thinking and research (Chafetz 1978). It is a nominal composite measure describing multidimensional sets of categories with two or more variables (Babbie 1986).

The key question to be addressed when developing typologies is “Which properties or characteristics are most important for classification purposes?” The answer depends on the purposes for which the typology is being constructed. These purposes are likely to change as a field evolves and hence, the importance of typology characteristics is likely to change.

Traditionally, two underlying reasons appear to have been responsible for developing recreation program classification systems. The first was descriptive. A classification system was needed to summarize the universe of activities that constituted the field in order to avoid developing lists of hundreds of individual programs.

The second reason was to ensure that recreation agencies offered a comprehensive set of programs. Only in the last decade or so has the field moved away from the idea of a “recreation diet.” This idea held that individuals need
experiences from each recreation activity or functional area, and that recreation agencies were responsible for providing those experiences. The benefits derived from any one activity were less important than the need to participate in a wide range of activities. Specialization or concentration on one activity or activity group might restrict the individual’s full development. Typologies were thus developed so that “Programmers could quickly categorize their activities and events and could report if they had achieved complete coverage of activities from the various program function groups” (Sessoms 1984).

No longer do public recreation agencies aim to deliver a full range of recreation programs. Rather, they realize increasingly that they are only one relatively small component of the total recreation system. Their challenge is to encourage the voluntary, private, nonprofit, and commercial sectors to develop programs whenever possible and to complement these efforts when the other sectors can’t deliver particular programs. Since the purposes for classification have changed, there is growing recognition that the traditional classification systems are no longer relevant and that characteristics of the typologies must change:

Although utilizing the functional program areas has been a popular method for classifying activities, the challenge to the recreation profession is to go beyond this system and be prepared to codify activities in various other ways (Farrell and Lundegren 1983).

The alternative leisure program typologies discussed in this paper offer conceptual frameworks that can help guide strategic marketing decisions, facilitate generalizations, and develop theory. These are the justifications for constructing recreation program typologies. Given these purposes, a well constructed typology fulfills three requisites: first, its categories are collectively exhaustive; that is, no activity cannot be placed somewhere in the overall scheme. Second, typology categories are mutually exclusive. This suggests that each category is unique and does not overlap with another. Third, a typology should facilitate the four main purposes of science: 1) the prediction of future events; 2) the explanation of past events; 3) the understanding of causes of events; and 4) the potential to control events (Reynolds 1971).

Allen and Buchanan (1982:307) noted that “Theory building is predicated upon the ability to classify phenomena.” They go on to observe that this process of classifying phenomena has been very evident in the study of leisure behavior, and that the existing literature is replete with investigations of various schemes for classifying leisure behavior. In this paper, classification systems will involve partitioning the universe of leisure programs into classes or sets that are homogeneous with respect to some categorical properties.
Classification systems evolve through two distinctly different processes (Harvey 1969). The first is "logical partitioning," which may be termed deductive or *a priori* classification, and this is the approach adopted in this paper. The second process is "group partitioning," which may be termed inductive or *ex post* classification. The former approach develops classes before any empirical data are examined, while the latter approach generates classes only after data have been analyzed.

In the realm of leisure programs, both processes have been used. The traditional typologies have been derived through logical partitioning. Some of these have been very broad, using categories such as indoor-outdoor, active-passive, winter-summer, structured-unstructured, high risk-low risk, high culture-low culture, or water based-land based. However, several more detailed classification systems have been proposed, most of them based either on the intended function of an activity or on the content of the activity.

Major functions used to classify activities may include social, aesthetic, physical, intellectual, cultural, environmental, or personally developmental. There may be overlap: "While each program pattern has a distinct character all of its own, it is also broad enough to incorporate elements of other patterns" (Carpenter and Howe 1985:132). For example, while jogging may be classified as primarily physical, it may also have social, intellectual, aesthetic, and personally developmental dimensions.

A reasonably representative classification system based on major types of activities is offered by Sessoms (1984), who suggests eight categories: music, dance, dramatics, literary activity, sports and games, nature and outings, social recreation, and arts and crafts. However, several different classifications by type have been proposed by the authors of various textbooks. Thus, Kraus and Curtis (1986) suggest sixteen types of recreation programs; Farrell and Lundegren (1983) list eleven; and Edginton, Compton, and Hanson (1980) propose nine.

Recent leisure research has produced several empirically derived typologies based on group partitioning, often using factor analysis, multidimensional scaling, or some other statistical clustering technique (Bishop 1970, Hendee and Burdge 1974, Holbrook 1980, McKechnie 1974, Witt 1971). These typologies often involve motives for participation, such as relaxation, achievement, intimacy, power, or socialization. Alternatively, they may classify programs according to their major thrusts, the perceived benefits they yield, or the degree to which they meet certain personal, social, and physical needs. Their limitation is that they are seldom generalized beyond their original data base. Ellis and Rademacher (1987) note:

A major problem with research focusing on activity typologies has been that clusters generated have not proven to be stable.... A pervasive need is for theory development to guide the conduct and interpretation of this typological research (:290).
Rather than developing classification systems for leisure phenomena in general, these procedures often have been restricted to problems that are highly situation-specific. Allen and Buchanan (1982) observed that the value of existing systems for advancing the theoretical understanding of leisure behavior is limited by the lack of coordinated research efforts and the need to integrate research findings. They concluded that very little attempt had been made to summarize or compare results across studies. Frank and Green (1968) suggest:

These taxonomic procedures may be called preclassification techniques since their purpose is to describe the natural groupings that occur in large masses of data. From these natural groupings (or clusters) the researchers can sometimes develop the requisite conceptual framework for classification (p. 302).

Bryan (1979) developed a typology for outdoor recreationists that was based on the a priori concept of logical partitioning which was subsequently empirically verified. His typology was based on "recreational specialization," which refers to a continuum of behavior from the general to the particular, reflected by equipment and skills used in the sport and activity setting preferences. At one end of the continuum is the person who devotes or limits interest to some special branch of the sport. At the other end is the person who has more general recreation interests.

His specialization dimensions could be generalizable because they underlie all recreation activities. For example, in the program area of photography, the low-high specialization continuum may be: snaphooter—duplicator gadget manipulator—artist. In hiking and backpacking, specialization continuum categories might be day hikers—overnighters—weekenders; on-trail distance hikers—backpackers; or off-trail hikers—backpackers. The length of the continuum will differ for various activities, and the activities themselves can be arranged on a specialization continuum.

Bryan’s typology has the potential for classifying programs according to a specialization hierarchy. Other researchers, (Donnelly, Vaske, and Graefe 1986) have confirmed that the specialization concept can be used to compare individuals who participate in different programs, as well as those who participate within a program.

The purpose of this paper is to introduce six alternative typologies for leisure programs. The typologies are based primarily on the work of Lovelock (1984), and consistent with Yu’s suggestion (1980), we propose alternative frameworks for the classification of leisure programs based on activity characteristics. This classification scheme proposes commonalities among recreation services based on: 1) nature of the service act; 2) relationship between the program and the customer; 3) potential for customization; 4) nature of demand for a program; 5) characteristics of the program; and 6) type of program. Each of these is used to develop a typology of leisure programs by specifying a series of attributes that creates categories into which leisure activities may be assigned.
Six Alternative Typologies

Nature of the Service Act

Distinguishing leisure programs according to the nature of the service act involves determining whether the program is directed at people or things and deciding whether the act is tangible or intangible. This delineation results in four categories (Figure 1): 1) tangible actions directed at people's bodies; 2) tangible actions directed at people's possessions; 3) intangible actions directed at people's minds; and 4) intangible actions directed at people's intangible assets. (Lovelock 1984).

![Figure 1: Nature of the Service Act]

The nature of the service act can be illustrated by exercise programs that consist of actions toward individuals that are tangible in the sense of weight loss, muscle tone, cardiovascular fitness, etc. Skate sharpening is also a tangible act, because the owner can feel and see the difference; however, the action of the service is directed toward things (skates). Purely intangible service acts are those that are much less obvious in their results. People attend theater, but what they receive as a result of that action is difficult to quantify. Also intangible is the provision of insurance against injury or liability. It is imperceptible unless there is occasion for its use.

Relationship Between the Program and the Customer

The second typology refers to whether or not the type of relationship between leisure program and the customer is derived according to a formal relationship, such as membership, and whether service delivery is continuous or discrete (Figure 2). Parks are the most common example of a continuously
delivered offering in the leisure field with no formal relationship to its patrons. Public parks are regularly maintained and provide unrestricted access to all segments of a community. Another basically continuous service within the set of leisure programs is day-care. This is purchased and delivered through a formal relationship; and long-term service is continuously available once the transaction has been made.

**Figure 2**
Type of Program Relationship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Membership</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day care</td>
<td>Softball league</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuous delivery</td>
<td>Discrete delivery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parks</td>
<td>Special events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No formal relationship</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The opposite of continuous is discrete, that is, noncontinuous program delivery. Special events are examples of separate programs that usually do not require a long-term formal membership because they are individually distinct. Softball leagues are an example of strong membership orientation. Players must first join a team, the team must register with the league, and frequently the league enters an agreement with the recreation department regarding scheduling and tournaments. Softball, like many sports, is scheduled and seasonal; therefore, its delivery is discrete. Formal relationships and continuous programs are most conducive to consumer evaluation, because the quality of a program provided by an agency is based on perceptions of service received over time, not just on one question. In the case of nonformal and discrete programs, a participant’s experience is limited and therefore, evaluations of quality are less reliable (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry 1986).

**Potential for Customization**

The third leisure typology is potential for customization, that is, tailoring the program to meet the needs of individual users. Due to the high labor content and variability involved with customization, program quality is difficult to control
(Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry 1985). Public agencies are becoming more involved in customization through their use of target marketing. Recognizing that there is no "average" user, public leisure agencies have begun to respond with segmentation strategies and more specialized programs. This differentiated approach is better able to meet recreationists’ preferences (Crompton 1983) because it is designed to deliver what consumers want, thereby increasing the likelihood of a quality experience.

![Figure 3: Potential for Customization](Image)

Figure 3 illustrates this typology. Leisure counseling is highly customized and requires a great deal of contact between participant and provider. In contrast, the local park setting is standardized and commonly provided for the use and benefit of an entire neighborhood. Information services are a customized service with very little direct contact between the resident and the municipal recreation and parks department. The information exchange is often by telephone—with either a personal response or a tape-recorded message—or by mail, both of which are brief, one-time occurrences. Swimming instruction on the other hand is a standardized program offering a high degree of interaction between the participants and the provider.

**Nature of Demand for a Program**

The nature of demand for a program impacts the quality of offerings. For example, too many people in a swimming pool may produce a lower quality experience, whereas great numbers of people at a major concert may actually enhance the quality of an experience. In this context, the term "demand" is used synonymously with consumption or level of use.
The supply or capacity available for a program is an important consideration when assessing demand. Frequently, supply and demand are not in balance. For example, the demand for swimming pools may exceed the supply in the summer months, but pools may be in oversupply in the winter season (Figure 4). Parks can accommodate great numbers of people, and they invariably emerge as the most-used facility provided by a leisure agency. Marinas are an example of a recreation service that exhibits a relatively low demand in most communities and consequently, few are provided.

**Figure 4**

**Nature of Demand for a Program**

- **High demand**
  - Swimming pools in summer
  - Parks

- **Low supply (capacity)**
  - Swimming pools in winter
  - Marinas

**Attributes of the Program**

A typology based on the relative importance of people or facilities can be useful in uncovering consumers' perceptions of a program's characteristics (Lovelock 1984). Staff-based services are likely to encounter difficulty in providing consistently high levels of service, which is so often linked to quality. For example, LaPage (1983) found that staff-public interactions have a greater impact on the perceived quality of park management than the condition of the facilities themselves.

Leisure programs can be arrayed according to characteristics of the program. The relative need for staff and a facility is the basis for this typology. Figure 5 depicts these relationships.
High staff-intensive indicates a high degree of direct staff involvement in the delivery of a program. Instructional programs for swimming and guitar playing require the involvement of departmental staff in direct delivery of the program. Low staff-intensive reflects a low level of direct staff involvement in program delivery. League softball is an activity that occurs without direct recreation staff involvement. The league is self-governing, but it uses recreation department ball diamond facilities. Senior trips to various events and destinations may occur as a result of arrangements and transportation organized by the recreation department, but there may be no intensive staff involvement in the actual traveling or activity being attended by the seniors, since such requirements are often provided at the destination.

High facility-intensive suggests that the program requires a specialized facility in order to occur. Swimming lessons require a pool, safety equipment, and other apparatus, while league softball requires a ball diamond. Low facility-intensive programs are flexible in their location, that is, the activity does not depend on a specialized facility. Guitar lessons and senior trip programs are examples of low facility-intensive settings, since facility-based attributes are not critical to the delivery of these programs.

Program Beneficiaries

Another characteristic that may be considered as a basis for a typology of leisure programs is the program beneficiary, that is, whether or not the program
is public or private. Public programs potentially benefit all people in the community and therefore, they are paid for with tax dollars. Public leisure programs would include local urban parks and playgrounds. Private programs are those that benefit only the relatively small number of people who participate and who therefore pay the cost of program delivery. Private recreation programs are exemplified by public marinas and golf courses (Crompton and Lamb 1986).

Figure 6 Program Beneficiaries

High level of use

Local parks

Golf course

Public (tax support)

Private (no tax support)

Playgrounds

Marina

Low level of use

Figure 6 illustrates activities categorized according to the type of program and the level of use they may expect to receive. Local parks are likely to have high use because there is no fee, special equipment, or skill required to enjoy them; and they are the most popular type of facility public leisure agencies offer. Conversely, marinas are used only by those able to afford large boats and their cost of operation and maintenance. Marinas, due to the nature of the facility, are also relatively limited in the numbers they can handle. Golf courses are used by a very specialized clientele, but the level of use could be expected to be higher than at marinas, because the cost for use and equipment would be less prohibitive. Moreover, golf equipment can usually be rented at a reasonable cost. Neighborhood playgrounds are free, categorizing them as public, and they cater only to children, who represent a small segment of the total market of park users; therefore, their level of use may be lower than that expected for local parks.
Discussion

In addition to their strategic implications for marketing, classification systems have two other purposes: the first is to facilitate generalizations, and the second is to contribute to the development of theory.

A major benefit of using a program typology matrix for leisure programs is that evaluation results and marketing implications may be applicable to other programs fitting the same classification. The typologies presented in this paper have an underlying conceptual rationale that ensures that the programs contained within each category have substantive commonalities that clearly distinguish them from programs in alternate categories. Subgroups or categories of recreation programs with similar characteristics may reasonably be assumed to be interchangeable (Yu 1980). The categories of the attributes of the program typology (Figure 5) serve as an illustration.

In the high staff and high facility quadrant, instead of swimming classes, a wide variety of karate classes, gymnastics classes, painting lessons, woodworking classes, pottery classes, equestrian lessons, skiing lessons, curling lessons, and other classes and lessons meeting the criteria could have been substituted. This implies that for programs such as these, the attributes most important in delivering a quality service to one interest group may be just as important to other interest groups in the same quadrant.

The activities shown in the other quadrants in the typology in Figure 5 can be similarly expanded. High facility-intensive and low staff-intensive programs would include many of the same activities mentioned in the previous paragraph, except they would be recreational rather than instructional, such as swimming, curling, horseback riding, woodworking, skiing, basketball, volleyball, softball, and camping.

Programs similar to guitar lessons with high staff and low facility requirements would include other skill development activities that do not require a specialized facility, but need a knowledgeable instructor. Lessons in fly tying, painting, photography, smocking, quilting, calligraphy, and interior decorating are examples. The last quadrant in this typology matrix used senior trips to exemplify low staff- and low facility-intensive programs. Other examples typical of the category may include self-directed activity groups or low facility-intensive interest groups using departmental facilities, such as a painting group meeting in departmentally provided space.

The activities contained within the typologies examined illustrate leisure programs that conform to the categories described. The typologies offer a perspective that transcends narrow program-specific boundaries. A narrow focus encourages a hands-on orientation that distinguishes each program and fails to see generalities. Narrow boundaries restrict the ability to identify and learn from parallel situations that have occurred in other programmatic contexts. Insight is lost that would otherwise be gained from comparing and contrasting
marketing applications in related service areas. The typologies described in this paper can effectively provide leisure agencies with a system for classifying the gamut of recreation programs. Once recreation programs are classified, evaluation can be performed more systematically according to the special features that define each classification. Agencies could probably expect to find similar marketing problems and opportunities among programs within the same category. This can lead to more appropriate marketing strategies based upon the commonalities among programs.

Leisure programs are eclectic, not homogeneous. To consider them as a single, homogeneous entity is clearly inappropriate. In a research context, the desire is to generalize findings beyond the sample used in a particular study. Bryan (1979) quotes biologist Hilary Moore as saying, "Any science calls for a system of classification, or the multiplicity of facts will conceal such orderly pattern as underlies them." Bryan goes on to point out that the development of social and behavioral research in recreation often proceeds in an uncoordinated fashion. The typologies presented in this paper are systems of classification that offer conceptual frameworks to guide these research efforts and to synthesize diverse findings in a meaningful way. Such typologies play fundamental roles in the development of a field since they are the primary means for organizing phenomena into classes or groups that are amenable to systematic investigation and theory development (Hunt 1983).

The taxonomies provide conceptual frameworks, but if they are to contribute to theory development, a broad structure of testable propositions must be developed from each of them. The propositions should develop links that are analytical rather than descriptive, links that can lead to predictive theories if cumulatively verified. To this point, no attempt has been made to fit classes to data, so that relations between variables and dimensions can be summarized (Bryan 1979). The future challenge is to determine whether the conceptual frameworks bear a close relationship to empirical reality.

The conceptual development and empirical testing of program typologies will continue to be a topic of leisure research. As research in the recreation field develops, the classification systems that guide and encode it will continue to change as part of the developmental process.

References


