Development of a Taxonomy of a Leisure Services Delivery System

John L. Crompton

ABSTRACT: Previous definitions of a Leisure Services Delivery System are briefly reviewed and a contemporary taxonomy of such a system is offered. An example is developed to illustrate the potential utility of the taxonomy in facilitating understanding of interrelationships within a Leisure Services Delivery System.

KEYWORDS: Leisure Services Delivery System, taxonomy.

AUTHOR: John L. Crompton is Assistant Professor in the Department of Recreation and Parks, Texas Agricultural Experiment Station, at Texas A&M University.


Introduction

For some time the notion of a Leisure Services Delivery System has been used in an attempt to express the totality of leisure services available to citizens in a community. The term has been widely assimilated and suggests complementary interactions between the multifarious leisure institutions, oriented towards a common goal. This may be more of a utopian desire than an actuality, but it would nevertheless appear to be a worthy goal. This paper is an attempt to provide a contemporary statement of the system as it exists at this time.

The first attempt to organize the many facets of leisure services into a structured taxonomy was made by Meyer and Brightbill (1948). They viewed community recreation services as part of the larger social system and of being comprised of three subsystems: public, private non-profit, and commercial. Kraus
(1971) offered an additional dimension suggesting that voluntary services should be considered as a fourth component in the system. He argued that they were open to the public at large whereas services offered by the private component were limited to a select clientele since members were admitted through careful screening and selection.

Murphy et al. (1973) pointed out that leisure service organizations structure opportunities for participants in an ecological framework. The particular components energized in the system depend upon the desires of consumers and their social and physical environments. It is they who determine which services should be offered and by whom, by their actions in the market place. The nature of component interactions within the Delivery System, the degree of their interdependency, and the changes in such relationships resulting from exposure to changing environmental factors such as cultural milieus, legal and political climates, economic conditions, or social mores, have not attracted the systematic attention of researchers. The first step in researching the nature of interrelationships would appear to be the development of a contemporary taxonomy which specifies and defines the relationship of Leisure Service Delivery System components. The subsequent research task is to examine the nature of the relationships in order to gain insights into their relative efficiencies and roles in delivering leisure services to the consumer.

The Taxonomy

Figure 1 suggests that components in the Leisure Services Delivery System can be meaningfully identified at six levels: product categories, product forms, firms, product lines, products and brands. These are briefly defined in the following paragraphs.

The LEISURE SERVICES DELIVERY SYSTEM is that group of service enterprises whose primary aim is to serve consumers' leisure time needs.

PRODUCT CATEGORIES are the macro components which comprise the market structure of the leisure services industry. The three components identified are essentially substitutes since they all provide opportunities for meeting leisure time needs.

PRODUCT FORMS are public and non-public provisions. These categories when added together, form the recreation and parks product category. They have sufficiently distinctive characteristics to differentiate them from each other. Public refers to the summation of government supplied recreation and parks provision, while non-public refers to the voluntary, private and commercial sectors.

FIRMS are the individual agencies which provide public recreation and parks facilities at all three levels of government.

PRODUCT LINES are clusters of items which compete more intensively with each other than with the rest of the product mix because they are direct substitutes, e.g., outdoor recreation, sports, and cultural activities.

PRODUCTS are individual items within a product line representing a specific version of the basic product idea. For example, within outdoor recreation, camping, interpretation, equestrianism are product lines.

BRANDS are distinctive units of products identified through some unique characteristic, e.g., location, leadership, and timeframe, of a particular camping program.
For the illustrative purposes of this note, all components or sub-systems in the Delivery System have been identified but, for the purposes of exposition, only the public recreation and parks sub-system has been developed. The other components in the system can be similarly extrapolated within this framework.

An Illustrative Example of its Potential Utility

The taxonomy identifies horizontal interrelationships within each level and vertical relationships between each level. Specifically it provides a useful framework within which to examine the nature of interrelationships between the various sub-systems. The taxonomy, in keeping with the operation of a true system, suggests that a decision made in one section of the leisure field impacts all others.

Conceptually, components of the system should be complementary in their operation in order to optimize allocation of resources and delivery of leisure services. While competition may encourage efficiency and improve quality of service, in this context it may be viewed as counterproductive since it represents
duplication of effort and waste of scarce resources. In the past, there has been duplication of effort by different component elements of the system. In essence, this duplication is synonymous with competition. The taxonomy offers a useful way of analyzing sources of duplication or competition. Its utility can be illustrated by considering the sources of competition to city recreation and park services. Figure 1 suggests that such competition comes from four sources: First, competition from other delivery systems such as police and libraries; second, competition from other product categories within the Leisure Services Delivery System, that is, tourism and home-centered recreation; third, competition from other product forms offering identical or very similar services, that is, the voluntary, private, and commercial sectors; and fourth, competition from other firms with the same product form, that is other public recreation and park agencies. All of these competitive forces have influenced the city recreation and parks sub-system.

Competition from other delivery systems has always been present, but in recent years the number, range, and magnitude of governmental services has proliferated. New demands for a share of the tax dollar have inevitably made it more difficult for recreation and parks to increase or retain its market share.

In addition to recreation and parks, two other product category sub-systems—home-centered recreation and tourism—are specified. Conceptually, the three are differentiated in terms of travel distance and frequency of visit to the site of a leisure experience. Most recreation takes place around the home (Cheek and Burch 1976). However, there are no data available to suggest the extent and direction of impact of competition from this source on the recreation and parks sub-system. Assessment of the competition from tourism is similarly difficult. It is possible to contend that many tourism experiences focus on recreation and park resources and as such, tourism complements rather than competes with the recreation and parks category. However, this symbiotic relationship is probably more characteristic of state and federal facilities than of city facilities. Since people now appear to have greater time, money, mobility and inclination to travel than in previous eras, their expenditures of time and money (albeit tax dollars) in the recreation and parks sub-system seem likely to decrease.

Product form competition is forthcoming from the voluntary, private, and commercial sectors. Historically, the voluntary and private sectors were the first to offer organized recreation services. In recent years, extensive private development, particularly tennis, golf, and country clubs, has provided an increasing range of opportunities which for many constitute an attractive alternative to public sector provision. For a long period of time, the city recreation and parks sub-system had relatively little competition from the commercial sector because it adopted a very low, heavily subsidized, “stay out” (so low as to make the prospects look uninviting) penetration pricing policy, which effectively discouraged competition from the commercial sector. Thus, its public sector support and consequent growth in market share was at least a partial reflection of the lack of alternatives available to the mass of the citizenry. However, with the growth of real incomes especially over the past 20 year period, low price has been a less useful strategic weapon. Consumers are now no longer as prepared to compromise what they want for lesser alternatives which they can afford, because they are now more able to afford the alternatives which are most appealing. This has encouraged the commercial sector to make greater efforts in the recreation and parks field. It has
served to attract considerable consumer support, which formerly was channeled into the city recreation and parks sub-system.

Competition from other firms with the same product form, that is, other public recreation and park sub-systems, has grown, both at the federal and state levels. For example, the number of facilities administered by the National Park Service has increased 50 percent in the last decade. State parks have similarly proliferated in response to urban man's desire to escape into a more rural environment to recreate. These facilities seem likely to continue to receive substantial citizenry support. The continued boom in sales of outdoor recreation equipment such as boats, camping equipment, and off-road vehicles, implies the need for facilities in which to enjoy using the equipment. The attendance at these state and federal facilities reflect growing consumer support, which effectively serves as a source of competition to city services.

Concluding Comments

The illustrative example has been used to show the utility of the taxonomy in specifying the direction and source of interactive impacts within a Leisure Service Delivery System. It provides a basic schema within which any particular applied situation can be objectively analysed. Generalizations abound in the eclectic field of leisure services. There is continued debate as to the appropriate role of the various institutions within it. Inefficient allocation of scarce resources can only result in restricting the number of leisure opportunities available to consumers. The taxonomy presented hopefully may be the precursor of research aimed at operationally examining relationships of institutions, replacing evangelical rhetoric in the debate with systematic empirical evaluation.

Reference


