IMPORTANCE-PERFORMANCE
ANALYSIS
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Introduction and Background
What is important to visitors in a leisure setting? How well are these valued components of the leisure experience being provided? One method of beginning to answer these crucial questions is importance-performance analysis. This article explains that technique; the emphasis is on methodology.

Importance-performance analysis, developed as a tool for market researchers (Martilla & James, 1977), is based on the concept that satisfaction is a result of a preference for an object or service and judgments of its performance (Myers & Alpert, 1968). Thus, the target population is asked to rate certain attributes of the facility or service on its importance to the rater and on the organization's performance of the features.

Recreation researchers have recently discovered the technique's use in the evaluation of leisure (Guadagnolo, 1983; Mills & Snepenger, 1983; Warnick, 1983). The scale is relatively easy to administer and the results relatively simple to interpret.
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willingness to pay with time and/or money along with a
willingness to participate is only one measure of success.
Two other measures must be considered - the
organization's ability to convey the messages set forth as
objectives, and the ability of the resource to sustain the
activity without irreparable damage to the resource. Thus,
these points should be considered when adopting this
technique for applied or theoretical research.

The technique was field tested using 35 attributes of a
metropolitan park system in Ohio. The metropolitan park
system entails fairly extensive urban nature parks and an
established nature interpretation program. The 35 items
included in the analysis to assess visitor perceptions were
based on objectives of the park system. Included in the
items were park attributes relating to park hours, travel
distance, opportunities, crowding, facilities, programming,
natural history, maintenance, and administration.

Additional open-ended questions were
asked of participants to add further meaning to the study.
Due to the extensive nature of the study, data are not
reported here.

The target population, all park visitors, was sampled
by distributing one survey form per vehicle or one per
group of people walking as they entered the park.
Questionnaires were distributed in alternating fashion
(i.e., the first car received an importance survey, the
second received a performance survey, the third an
importance survey, etc.). All vehicles were directed to
stop at the entrance and occupants were asked to com-
plete the survey. Only a few refused to take the survey.
The vehicle driver was given a questionnaire, pencil,
letter explaining the survey's purpose, and instructions.
Visitors could return the survey as they left the park or
mail it to the park office. Overall return rate was 56 %
(n=488).

In this study, each completed questionnaire represents
a case. To make sense of the data or compare answers,
the answers must be combined into one mean answer per
question. Here, the average visitor answer is most
important, although even extreme cases should be consid-
ered.

In calculating the mean, all people answering the
importance scale were combined and all people answer-
ing the performance scale were combined to give overall
means for each feature on each scale. These means were
used to rank the 35 scale features for each group and to
plot the features on the action grid.

Findings

The majority of the features fell into the two high-
performance quadrants of "possible overkill" and "keep
up the good work." The midpoint lines were set before
the study began.

It is important to remember when examining the
action grid that the results represent only the views of the
visitors. This is only one aspect of leisure management.
Any actions taken must be tempered by a knowledge of
the organization's goals as well as natural and cultural
resource limitations. Visitor needs may not always mesh
with organizational and resource needs. Therefore, this
knowledge allows managers either to take appropriate
action to match performance ratings to importance ratings
or to explain to their clients why this cannot or should not
be done. In situations where visitor needs are secondary
to organization and resource concerns, the negative
impacts must be mitigated through public education/interpretation or alternative opportunities to meet the
needs.

References

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