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PLANNING AND DESIGN

Environmental Sustainability in Sport Facilities in East Tennessee

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Abstract

Considering the recent emphasis on sustainability in the sport industry, this study focused on the environmental management of sport facilities. More specifically, we explored small-scale sport facilities and examined their environmental practices. We sought to identify challenges (e.g., financial and human resources) associated with the adoption of these programs. We collected data through semistructured interviews with various individuals responsible for the management of the sport facilities and the environmental initiatives. Results indicated that all sport facilities have a recycling program with larger facilities having additional programs focusing on energy saving equipment and stations for recharging electrical cars. Findings also revealed that multiple challenges prevent sport facility managers from adopting environmentally sustainable initiatives: lack of education, the age of the facility, limited funding, and insufficient human power. We also discussed suggestions for future research and the practical implications of the study.

Keywords: *sustainability; sport facilities; environmental programs*

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In recent years, sport entities have begun to place the environment as a corporate agenda priority. For example, the 2011 Major League Baseball (MLB) All-Star game was executed with consideration of its environmental impact (Hershkowitz, 2011). In 2010, the Winter Olympics created a “green roof” on the Olympic village designed to manage stormwater drainage and reduce the heat island effect of urbanization. Strong messages discouraging the use of toxic materials such as polystyrene and plastic were communicated during the 2010 FIFA World Cup. In March 2010, more than 25 sport teams and venues from across North America joined the Green Sports Alliance, an entity created to address environmental sustainability in sport. Scholarly work has indicated that professional sport organizations adopt environmental business practices due to strategic and institutional pressures (Babiak & Trendafilova, 2011). This is further reinforced by the notion that sport business entities are perceived to be in a unique position to impact society (Godfrey, 2009; Smith & Westerbeek, 2007).

Considering the recent emphasis on sustainability in sport, the purpose of this study was twofold: (1) to examine environmental practices within sport facilities in eastern Tennessee and (2) to identify barriers (e.g., financial and human resources) for achieving sustainability objectives.

Review of Literature

Sport arenas, ballparks, and stadiums consume massive amounts of nonrenewable energy, a challenge that more cities are attempting to address by investing in environmentally friendly sport facilities (Kellison & Mondello, 2012). Recent scholarship in urban planning and sport management has critically analyzed the increasingly popular choice to outfit new sport facilities with environmentally conscious features, a choice motivated by factors including the belief that such facilities will be more cost-effective long term given their decreased reliance on public utility consumption. The majority of research related to pro-environmentalism and sport has focused on facilities that house major professional teams or international competitions such as the Olympic Games or FIFA World Cup (e.g., Ansari, Bin Azad, Azeemi, & Tabassum, 2013; Cilletti, Lanasa, Ramos, Luchs, & Lou, 2010; Mallen, Adams, Stevens, & Thompson, 2010; Ponsford, 2011; Samuel & Stubbs, 2012; Trendafilova, Babiak, & Heinze, 2013).

Less is known about the environmental strategies of sport facility managers in smaller minor league markets. Although professional sport leagues and mega events attract the most interest from the media and consumers, we are somewhat surprised that public assembly facilities in smaller communities and cities have not received much attention in the sport management literature. Given the finite number of professional sport venues and their locations in large urban environments, ordinary citizens are more likely to use other public spaces such as city pools, fitness and recreation centers, and multipurpose arenas or performance halls. Below, we highlight the existing literature related to regional sustainable initiatives occurring in local communities and outline the unique challenges sport managers in minor league markets face when implementing pro-environmental strategies.

Sustainability in Local Communities

Previous research has suggested that a number of actors can initiate communitywide pro-environmental policies. Increasingly, elected officials and business owners are confronting the challenges of reducing the environmental impacts associated with local industry and development. Given the potential environmental, economic, and social benefits of environmental stewardship, these decision makers have a vested interest in adopting green business practices (Kellison & Kim, in press). In light of these expected benefits, some policy makers have initiated eco-friendly initiatives without provocation from the general public. Calls for environmental stewardship from local citizens are also becoming more pronounced in communities ranging from rural villages to urban metropolises (Stoddart, Tindall, & Greenfield, 2012; Turcu, 2013).

Based on the premise that local environmental initiatives may elicit positive behavioral changes among community members, some scholars have investigated factors that have led local citizens to adopt conservation behaviors. For example, Hallin (1995) observed the conservation habits of citizens in Foley, Minnesota (population 2,000), and noted that the majority of individuals who engaged in pro-environmental behaviors were influenced by personal experiences rather than the specter of future ecological harm. These personal experiences included living through significant historical events (e.g., Great Depression, Vietnam War), which influenced individuals' "worldviews, value systems, and behavior" (Hallin, 1995, p. 574). Additionally, other Foley citizens engaged in conservation activities after they were identified as role models in the community; as Hallin noted, "to behave in environmentally responsible ways became more of their identities as teachers or other professionals" (p. 574). Based on these findings, individuals who recognize their effect on the larger community are more likely to promote pro-environmental initiatives. This notion is further supported by Evans et al. (2012), who found that citizens were more likely to engage in pro-environmental behaviors for self-transcendent causes (e.g., caring for the ecosystem) than out of self-interest (e.g., receiving cash deposits for recycling cans).

Scholarly work has explored the impact of pro-environmental initiatives from myriad scopes and perspectives. Most of the existing work within the sport management literature has centered on individual arenas, ballparks, and stadiums. Such scholarship is commonsensical considering that the mega sport facility is often one of its city's most recognized and symbolic physical structures (Horne, 2011). However, researchers who have investigated the pro-environmental strategies of smaller communities have largely looked beyond particular businesses and facilities and instead have focused on townwide and citywide initiatives. For example, Paul and Che (2011) examined the pro-environmental strategies of Greenburg, Kansas (population 1,400), a town being rebuilt after it was nearly destroyed by a tornado in 2007. One of the challenges for civic leaders in Greenburg was to remain committed to reconstructing in an environmentally sensitive manner despite the town's limited financial resources. In other places, sustainable initiatives have arisen out of city officials' desire to reduce public utility costs. For example, policy makers in Catoosa County, Georgia, were inspired to adopt and enforce new environmental regulatory restrictions, in part, after the closure of a local landfill revealed that they could be "both a good environmental citizen and a cost-effective provider of services to county residents" (Irvin, Appel, McEntire, & Rabon, 2008, p. 592).

Case study analyses such as those by Paul and Che (2011) and Irvin et al. (2008) have been useful in identifying the ways in which pro-environmental strategies have been implemented at local and regional levels. The case study approach was similarly employed by Climate Solutions, whose 2012 report identified the best sustainability practices in several small U.S. communities. For example, residents in Hailey, Idaho (population 8,075), were offered materials and labor rebates that significantly offset the cost to retrofit existing buildings with eco-friendly technologies. Additionally, policy makers in Bedford, New York (population 18,457), unanimously approved a strategic plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 20% by 2020. Furthermore, officials in Oberlin, Ohio (population 8,268), partnered with the local electric company to develop a plan for more efficient energy consumption; as a result of the partnership, over 90% of the town's electrical power is generated from renewable resources such as landfill gas, solar, and wind. As shown by the examples, the Climate Solutions report demonstrates the feasibility of large-scale environmentally sustainable projects in small- and moderate-sized communities.

Despite the promising developments in the cities outlined by Climate Solutions (2012), environmental advocates still face several barriers when convincing local citizens to embrace sustainable initiatives. Trier and Maiboroda (2009) researched Belstone, England's (population 260) "Green Village" initiative, a series of pro-environmental strategies initially implemented by a small number of citizens with the hope that all villagers would eventually adopt sustainable behaviors. They noted the group of early adopters quickly became acclimated to more sustainable

lifestyles, but the desired “snowball effect” failed to materialize. Similar research has highlighted the influence of local citizens and business leaders in smaller communities. For instance, Dabrowska, Bates, and Murphy’s (2012) investigated Elmira, Ontario (population 9,931), and identified a number of individual characteristics influencing citizens’ levels of concern toward a water contamination crisis, including personal religious beliefs and the perceived trustworthiness of local industry. Thus, with fewer residents and businesses in communities such as Elmira, these actors may have more influence on policy decisions.

Within the sport management literature, several scholars have proposed strategies to encourage pro-environmental development in sport facility design and operations. Pfahl (2010) suggested that strategic planning and the development of cross-functional organizational teams were vital to effectively responding to an organization’s environmental issues. Larger organizations such as major professional sport teams may be better equipped to assemble such work teams than the minor league teams that exist in smaller communities. As discussed further in the next section, a small-market team is typically made up of a bare-bones staff and has limited resources, thereby complicating possible environmental initiatives.

Elsewhere, Mallen and Chard (2012) provided a strategic vision in which environmental sustainability (ES) could be realized in Canada’s more than 2,400 sport facilities. Additionally, they provided an agenda for future research:

It is now up to both the sport practitioners and the...academy to engage in debate to further understandings concerning sport facilities and ES. ...In addition, research is needed to expose the specific challenges, barriers, best practices and the elements that aid in congruence between the goals and the implementation of sport facility ES. (pp. 241–242)

In this study, we endeavor to answer Mallen and Chard’s call to identify the specific challenges and barriers that sport facility managers face. Given their expansive open-air designs, sport venues in general have historically placed significant burdens on local natural resources. Although much smaller in scale than their major league counterparts, small town sport facilities still face many of the same challenges. Additionally, fewer human and financial resources may present minor league facility managers with unique challenges, as we discuss below.

Barriers to Sustainable Design

Policy makers, business owners, and local citizens may face barriers when attempting to implement pro-environmental strategies. In some cases, these barriers are organizational: the absence of leadership with expertise on green design, too few staff members to implement a plan, and a lack of financial resources. In other cases, psychological barriers may be present, such as citizens’ mistrust in local decision makers or their lack of attachment to the surrounding natural environment (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). In this section, we chronicle the organizational and psychological barriers to sustainable design.

Apathetic and negative attitudes toward the effectiveness of eco-friendly initiatives are big challenges that environmental advocates face. According to Quimby and Angelique (2011), feelings of apathy and hopelessness can emerge when individuals feel that their actions will fail to produce positive benefits to the environment. These feelings may be especially pronounced in small communities where citizens are likely to recognize that their pro-environmental efforts will be radically offset by the huge carbon footprints of growing domestic economies and developing nations abroad (Irvin et al., 2008). Thus, local communities may be less inclined to support pro-environmental strategies if they understand the purpose of focusing on large-scale problems such as climate change—a problem unlikely to be solved by small town initiatives.

Local communities may also be resistant to pro-environmental initiatives if the plans are perceived as threatening to local industry. For example, in small industrial towns in which one or several factories are the main centers of employment and commercial activity, new environ-

mental regulations may restrict business operations: “Local communities in pursuing their own self-interest may not pursue the wider interest. For example, they may fail to take account of the external effects of their actions” (Tisdell, 1997, p. 1368). Additionally, the potential for greater personal wealth or local economic development may lead communities to exploit their natural resources. Exactly who should have authority over processing and exporting these natural resources has been the subject of much debate; most recently, this controversy has centered on the economic and environmental impacts of hydraulic fracturing (cf. Finewood & Stroup, 2012).

Certain internal barriers may also hinder an organization’s ability to adopt eco-friendly strategies, including insufficient economic resources, low levels of employee involvement, the absence of environmental experts, and a lack of time (Quimby & Angelique, 2011; Saha, 2009; Sennes, Breillat, Ribeyre, & Gombert, 2008). The presence of these institutional barriers seems especially possible in the organizations of minor professional sport teams. That is, the likelihood that a front office of a double-A baseball team has the capability to staff a dedicated sustainability work team (as recommended by Pfahl, 2010) is low given their typically limited capital and human resources.

In addition to identifying the obstacles to pro-environmental initiatives, researchers have explored the consequences of socially responsible initiatives for local business leaders. In examining small town businesses, Besser (2002) identified several negative outcomes of socially responsible business initiatives, including time drain, public scrutiny, and discourtesy from others. She noted that in extreme cases, decision makers were even physically threatened after pledging support to certain community programs. In light of the possible burdens environmental regulations may place on local industries, policy makers who propose pro-environmental initiatives might expect similar negative consequences. Although many examples of corporate social responsibility would likely generate goodwill among the community (e.g., donating to a charitable cause, donating tickets to underprivileged youth), other initiatives may face resistance. For example, teams that champion a pro-environmental agenda may be accused of “greenwashing,” or embellishing, the ecological benefits of their sustainability programs (Peattie & Crane, 2005).

Considering the factors that may aid or hinder the adoption of sustainable business practices in small communities, further research is needed to identify the particular factors that contribute to pro-environmental sport strategies in those settings. Acknowledging that business owners and managers hold the ultimate authority to adopt socially responsible business practices, Besser (2012) advocated that researchers focus on the perspectives of primary decision makers:

...Insight into the owner’s motivations for contributing to community betterment and the consequences of that behavior for the business and the owner will add to this literature. Equally important, this knowledge can inform policies aimed at increasing good citizenship for all sizes of businesses regardless of location. (p. 129)

Based on this recommendation, in this study, we focus on the individuals involved in key sustainable programming decisions. This focus allows us to identify the unique challenges sport organizations in small communities face when attempting to implement environmental initiatives.

Great urban metropolises such as London, Sydney, and Tokyo have been hailed as centers for creativity, the arts, culture, and economics. Moreover, following Tokyo’s unveiling of its Olympic stadium for 2020, all these facilities will be recognized for their pro-environmental sport facilities. Vallance, Perkins, Bowring, and Dixon (2012) argued these cities represent unique laboratories in which scholars can study the varying forces supporting and opposing sustainable initiatives: “The city, long characterized by diversity and difference, perhaps holds the greatest promise of accommodating the multiple and unfolding interpretations and applications of this alluring yet highly problematic idea” (p. 1708). Certainly, the towns and cities

highlighted in our study differ from the cities Vallance et al. discussed. Nevertheless, although less demographically diverse and economically robust than major cities, the eastern Tennessee communities profiled in this study have their own distinctive characteristics. As we discuss further in the following section, the unique features of these small towns and cities present facility managers with a number of opportunities and challenges unlike those experienced in typical major league cities.

Method

Facilities

We focused our research on seven sport facilities in the eastern Tennessee geographical area. Facilities varied from baseball fields, to an ice hockey arena, to a motor racing track. The largest facility was constructed in 1960 and could accommodate up to 165,000 spectators. It is managed by an organization responsible for managing similar sport facilities. Although this facility could be classified as a large-scale sport facility, we decided to include it due to its location in eastern Tennessee. The remaining facilities were built between 1956 and 2000, and the seating capacity varied between 1,500 and 7,655. The management structure of the facilities varies as well. Some are individually owned and managed, and others are owned and operated by the city or the city's sport foundation. The exception is one facility and team that are owned and operated by a Major League Baseball team. All baseball facilities and teams included in this study are affiliates of a Major League Baseball team.

Participants

The participants in this study were the facility manager of each sport facility or other individuals (e.g., director of operations, general manager) with primary responsibilities for the decisions related to implementing environmentally sustainable programs. These individuals were interviewed either in person or over the phone. Eight interviews were conducted. The interviews were semistructured in nature and were recorded digitally for later transcription and analysis. The interview guide was developed based on the literature in this area of research. Interview questions revolved around general attitudes toward the environment and the specific sustainability initiatives the facility and team had in that regard.

Data Analysis

A traditional constant comparative method was used for data analysis of the interview transcripts, as it is a systematic method for recording, coding, and analyzing data (Henderson, 2006). Using this technique permitted the researchers to review the data for occurrences of similarities and differences (Schram, 2006). Two researchers individually analyzed the data and compared results.

Results

The results are organized in three groups based on the magnitude of the environmental programs and the financial and human resources necessary to implement them. We would like to acknowledge that this classification is rather arbitrary and not founded on solid financial data since such data were difficult to acquire. Table 1 presents a summary of the findings and also includes challenges our participants identified and their long-term goals in relation to sustainability initiatives.

Table 1*Existing Environmental Programs, Challenges, and Long-Term Goals*

Tier III	Tier II	Tier I	Challenges	Long-term goals
Plastic bottles recycling	Fluorescent lighting	Car-charging stations	Insufficient staff	Car-charging stations
Cardboard and aluminum cans recycling	Irrigation systems	Landfills (catch methane gas)	Limited funding	More landfills
Self-separation of solid waste	HVAC	Alternative fuels for fleet vehicles	Lack of knowledge about novel technologies	Solar panels
			Age of facility	Water-free urinals

In relation to the first objective of this study, data analysis revealed that all sport facilities had a recycling program, with some facilities solely focusing on recycling plastic bottles and other facilities (in addition to plastic bottles) on recycling cardboard and aluminum cans. Larger facilities had additional programs focusing on energy saving equipment and stations for recharging electrical cars. In relation to the second objective of the study, participants shared that multiple challenges prevent them from adopting more environmentally sustainable initiatives: lack of education (among facility operations personnel and members of the local community), the age of the facility, limited funding, and insufficient human power. Results also indicated that no system is in place to track down the outcome of some of these programs since most numbers are cumulative for the entire city and do not provide specifics for the facility itself. In relation to future plans, teams indicated that despite the limited financial and human resources, they plan to build more recharging stations for electrical cars and to explore the possibility for installing solar panels. In addition, facilities have considered implementing water-free urinals. Data also revealed that despite the existing barriers, sport facility personnel are optimistic about the future and constantly on the lookout for new opportunities to collaborate and implement additional programs to minimize the environmental impact.

Discussion and Conclusions

We are encouraged to see that each facility is implementing recycling programs and is continuing to explore more opportunities for expanding the scope of environmentally sustainable programs. Unfortunately, no system is in place to track the benefits of implementing green programs, making it difficult for prospective investors to see their return on investment. Some environmental initiatives such as solar panels involve a substantial initial cost. Additionally, the lack of expertise on sustainability programs among facility operations personnel and members of the general community complicates matters further.

The findings of this study have applications for sport facility operations personnel and local communities. Achieving sustainability requires a collective effort and the collaboration of multiple stakeholders. Although teams and operations personnel realized the importance of collaboration and were interested in establishing new relationships in the local community with environmental groups and other businesses, the lack of staff members made this task challenging. In most cases, the city was in charge of operations with a handful of employees assigned to multiple responsibilities on a daily basis. A possible solution to this could be a better system of

communication between the team and the local community. Having the word out there not only about the environmental programs in place but also about the specific needs of the facility could initiate interest in potential partners for creating additional environmental initiatives. In other words, marketing efforts need to focus not only on the game and attracting more spectators but also on marketing the green programs. Additionally, marketing green initiatives could trigger environmental behaviors at home, thus expanding the scope of these efforts from the facility to the spectators' homes.

The link between the factors presenting challenges for implementing environmentally sustainable programs is important. For example, funding is difficult to acquire partially due to the numbers related to facility environmental practices not being tracked. This is connected to the lack of sufficient human power to allow for such data collection, which in turn impacts the possibility for obtaining funding because potential sponsors would like to see evidence for return on investment. Furthermore, public pressure to address the environment forces teams and facility operations personnel to take actions, but at the same time, other social issues take precedence, such as facility compliance with the Americans With Disabilities Act.

The challenges facing facility operations personnel identified in this research concur with previously published scholarly work, pointing at economic resources, lack of time, and absence of environmental expertise as the main internal barriers for adopting sustainability practices (Quimby & Angeliq, 2011; Saha, 2009; Sennes et al., 2008). Although limited financial and human resources might present challenges and prevent the sport organization and the facility manager from forming a dedicated sustainability team (Pfahl, 2010), finding creative ways to partner with local organizations and businesses could be the solution. We acknowledge that challenges associated with the infrastructure of the community may not be possible to overcome (e.g., the lack of a local solid waste distribution center). Therefore, future research should focus in depth on the unique and various factors influencing the operations of a sport team and its facility housed in a small community and the local community's culture, values, and beliefs.

Although small communities have fewer resources than major cities, research has indicated that sport organizations play an important role in the structure and functioning of small communities (Wild, 1974). In other words, sport could be used as tool for fostering interactions and social networks (Kemp, 1999; Walter, 1981), therefore helping the local team and facility manager to form partnerships with local organizations to initiate environmentally sustainable programs. Sport often plays an integrative function in rural communities, and collaboration is critical among partners for mobilizing community resources (Dempsey, 1990; Dredge, 2006; Provan, Veazie, Staten, & Teufel-Shone, 2005). Small town sport teams have a special connection with the local community (Hoffmann, Kraus, & Manning, 2012), and strong ties between the team and the community have the potential to not only promote but also strengthen community integration (Reding, Grieve, Derryberry, & Paquin, 2011). We believe that our findings provide a new direction to explore gaps and practical needs in the areas of facility/venue management, stakeholder engagement, and sustainability strategies in small cities and towns in particular.

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