

# INFLUENCE OF THE PERCEPTION OF SPORTSCAPE FACTORS ON SOCCER ATTENDANCE IN BELGIUM CASE STUDY OF THE JAN BREYDEL SOCCER STADIUM

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## Aim

The objective of the present study is to investigate the sportscape perception of soccer fans and to understand how this perception influences their attendance decisions. Furthermore, the link between the ranking of the teams and the sportscape perception is established. In particular, we want to study whether the sportscape is perceived differently by the fans of two different soccer teams (e.g. Cercle Brugge K.S.V. and Club Brugge K.V.) playing in the same stadium, the Jan Breydel soccer stadium. Finally, we want to know what the effect of the quality of soccer and of the winning record is on sportscape perception.

## Theoretical background

In Belgium, soccer has almost 200,000 attendees each weekend in first league, and many more in lower leagues. This implies that soccer is the biggest spectator sport in the country. Recently, however, attendance levels almost came to a standstill. There are many factors influencing the attendance levels, among which the sportscape can be considered as one important factor (Wakefield, 1996).

Furthermore, the importance of the sportscape to future purchase behaviour is widely accepted in sport industries (Hill, 2000). Sportscape is defined by five important factors: 1) stadium access; 2) facility aesthetics; 3) scoreboard quality; 4) seating comfort; 5) layout accessibility. This last factor is split in two subcategories: space allocation and signage (Wakefield, 1996). This model will be adapted together with the sport service quality to define sportscape perception. Due to unique features as emotional involvement, sense of community, unpredictable outcome and changing support preferences, it is important to explore a sport specific context (Wakefield, 1996). It is also clear that the sportscape is mediated by cognitive and affective responses (Hightower, 2002).

A lot of major league teams have rebuilt or improved their stadium and saw an increase in the levels of attendance (Lee, 2011). Besides the importance of the sportscape, it is clear that winning teams are more attractive to fans than losing teams (Garcia, 2002).

The following hypotheses are being tested:

- H1: A positive sportscape perception will be a significant positive factor in the supporters' attendance.
- H2: Sportscape perception predicts attendance to a larger extent in a lower ranked team.

## Methodology

The study context is the Belgian first league in soccer. For this case study, the environment should be the same in order to control for confounding variables from the sportscape. In the Belgian first league there are two clubs playing in the same stadium, with the same sportscape. Club Brugge K.V. and Cercle Brugge K.S.V. play in the Jan Breydel stadium. The study focus is on all games played in the Jan Breydel stadium during the season 2011-12.

The present study is part of a larger research project in Belgium and Portugal. For this research a standardised questionnaire has been developed. Existing scales were expanded and refined. The questionnaire consists of three parts: (I) Personal interest in soccer by ranking on a Likert-scale; (II) more detailed information about why someone is a fan and attends games; (III) socio-demographic background.

## Results

Data was collected between November 17<sup>th</sup>, 2012 and January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2013, and will be analysed soon. A total amount of 1,839 reliable answers are selected from the dataset (1,693 answers of Club Brugge and 200 of Cercle Brugge). Conclusions from a marketing perspective will be presented.

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