

Attracting and retaining club members in times of changing societies:

The case of cycling in Australia

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Previous research revealed that sport clubs increasingly experience problems regarding the recruitment and retention of members. Demographic shifts in Western societies (e.g., low birth rates, more females and old people) and an increasing number of leisure substitutes and sport providers on the market contribute to decreasing club memberships. Also, the *pay as you play* trend combined with increased opportunities to play sport in a more non-organised fashion intensifies pressures on clubs to sustain their viability. By applying the sport development processes framework, this study examined the attraction and retention processes of cycling members in Australia. Data were gathered via interviews with cycling representatives at a national, state, and club level. The results suggest that cycling clubs experience difficulties offering value for money. The findings have implications for club management. Club managers should actively

engage in marketing activities that highlights the social value of sport clubs as well as skill development.

Keywords: organised sport; social benefits; membership; attraction and retention; social participation.

INTRODUCTION

Sport clubs in many Western countries face several challenges in times of changing societies. First, demographic changes present a challenge and are perceived as a problem by sport clubs (Breuer & Wicker, 2009, 2011; Lamprecht, Fischer, & Stamm, 2011).

Demographic shifts imply that the population in many Western countries is getting older, more female, and more ethnically diverse. This development is problematic since the typical member of a sport club is a young male without migration background (e.g. Committee of Australian Sport and Recreation Officials [CASRO], 2010; Scheerder, Vanreusel, & Taks, 2005; Wicker, Hallmann, & Breuer, 2013). Thus, the growing population groups are typically underrepresented in sport clubs. Importantly, females and older people may prefer sport activities with a health and fitness focus rather than one of competitive sport (which is usually provided by clubs). Together with shrinking population numbers, this may lead to a decrease in the membership base of sport clubs. The second challenge relates to the variety of leisure activities that people have nowadays (Breuer, 2005) which represent substitutes for club activity. Moreover, leisure time can be limited by busy and irregular work schedules (e.g. shift work and the hospitality industry) which often conflicts with the fixed training sessions of sport clubs.

As a result of these changes, many people tend to practise more non-organised sports and are not members of sports club. This trend particularly applies to sports that do not need specific facilities and team members. For example, in Australia, team sports such as soccer and cricket effectively require club membership in order to take part at almost any level, which is arguably why they attract high rates of club membership (CASRO, 2010). On the contrary, for sports like surfing and cycling this is only the case at the higher levels of competitive participation. Consequently, those sports underperform in club memberships, although they experience large participation numbers at a non-organised recreational level. The trends in these sports are problematic for sport clubs since they showcase that people like practising the sport, but not in a club setting. These changes in the patterns of sport participation have been noted by Coalter (1999) who concluded that “although levels of participation in traditional sports may have declined, participation in physical recreations has expanded and diversified” (p. 25). This diversification attests to sport clubs’ challenges and difficulties in attracting and retaining members. The question arises how clubs can be successful in attracting and retaining members.

The purpose of this study is to examine how sport clubs can attract and retain members in times of changing social structures and the challenges they come across in the process. This study uses the case of cycling in Australia, a sport that is characterised by high participant numbers, but low organisational affiliation. The majority of people who go cycling participate only in non-organised activity (90%), with only a very small number involved solely in organised cycling (2%; Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2007). This means that while there are people cycling on a recreational basis, clubs are challenged to convert these people into members. This study advances the following main research question: What efforts do cycling clubs undertake to attract and retain members successfully? By adopting an organisational perspective, the Sport Development Process (SDP) model is

applied to answer the research question. The findings contribute to both club management and sport development domains. The study has implications for sport managers and marketers with regard to shaping marketing strategies that allow sport clubs to diversify membership benefits and optimise opportunities for social interaction.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The various contributions that sport clubs make to society have been recognised in the literature (e.g., Lamprecht et al., 2011; Taylor, Barrett, & Nichols, 2009). In addition to the provision of sport opportunities, sport clubs also provide non-sport and social programmes for their members (Breuer & Wicker, 2011; Lamprecht et al., 2011). The membership structure of clubs suggests that competitive sport is not a priority for many members. For example, in Scotland, 8% of the club members are non-sports players or social members with another 44% practising mainly recreational sport (Allison, 2001). The equivalent figures for cycling from the Scottish clubs survey are 8% non-sports players or social members and 51% practising mainly recreational sport (Allison, 2001). In the UK, only 65% of all adult club members participate actively in sport (Sport and Recreation Alliance, 2011). Besides the social benefits through clubs, revenue from membership fees is the most important income source highlighting the importance of a solid membership base for clubs (for an overview see Wicker, Breuer, & Hennigs, 2012).

Previous research shows that sport clubs across countries experience problems regarding the attraction and retention of members (e.g., Breuer & Wicker, 2009, 2011; Lamprecht et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2009). For example, in the UK, 64% of the sport clubs have problems in recruiting members and 53% in retaining members (Sport and Recreation Alliance, 2011). Thus, the question arises what clubs need to do to solve this problem. In the UK, aid with grants, skill enhancement, and links with schools were considered opportunities for clubs in the future to mitigate the clubs' problems in general (Sport and Recreation

Alliance, 2011). In Scotland, autonomy, planning for the club, and meeting members' needs were regarded as critical to the clubs' development and survival (Allison, 2001). To address the problem more specifically, 72% of the sport clubs in Germany stated they would respond to the problem of recruiting and retaining members. Most of the clubs increased their advertising and public relations activities (43%), followed by conversations regarding the retention of members (13%) and expansion of programmes (12%). However, only 27% of the clubs considered themselves successful (Breuer & Haase, 2007).

In addition to the clubs' perspective, the participants' views can inform the clubs' strategies regarding the attraction and retention of members. Existing literature recognises the reasons why people join sport clubs and the barriers to club participation such as education, time, and income. It was shown that people with lower levels of educational attainment, high weekly workloads, and low income were less likely to be a member of a sport club (e.g., Scheerder et al., 2005; Wicker et al., 2013). Experience, participant needs, word-of-mouth, market communications, price, and image were identified as major factors in the mind of a consumer when deciding with which sport to become involved (Robinson, 2006). Previous research also indicates that expectations may differ among population groups. For example, females were found to value the social aspects of the sport environment as well as a professional instructor with technical knowledge (Hanlon, Morris, & Nabbs, 2010). Older members also value the social interaction in clubs (Patford & Breen, 2009). A number of barriers to participation were identified for people with disabilities including accessibility of facilities, programming, as well as staff attitude and abilities (French & Hainsworth, 2001). It was also highlighted that specific recruitment and retention strategies are needed for culturally diverse people (Hanlon & Coleman, 2006).

A few studies have examined the characteristics of cycling participants and members of cycling clubs (e.g., Bull, 2006; Fullagar & Pavlidis, 2012; Wicker et al., 2010). They

showed that cyclists are not a homogeneous group of consumers; in fact, there is great heterogeneity among cyclists because they differ with regard to various characteristics. Previous research shows that cyclists have various socio-economic and demographic backgrounds (e.g., Bull, 2006; Wicker, 2009). Consequently, the cycling experience differs among consumers. For example, it was found that females value different aspects of cycling such as a shared journey, safety, enjoyment, comfort, and respect (Fullagar & Pavlidis, 2012). These findings indicate that females may be less interested in the competitive character of the sport than males. A different study on racing cyclists in the tourism context (Bull, 2006) also showed that cycling is undertaken at many different levels supporting the heterogeneity of cyclists. Riders range from people who ride occasionally or cycle while on holiday to those serious or elite cyclists who compete in races and travel far distances. The study also revealed that the travel behaviour and experience as well as the underlying motivations for travel varied among cycling tourists (Bull, 2006).

Cyclists are also heterogeneous regarding the money they spend on their sport. While it was shown that members of cycling clubs have high sport-related expenditure on average (i.e., €1,885 per year); this figure varies depending on individual characteristics (Wicker et al., 2010). For example, older cyclists with high income spent more money on their sport. Also, the level of performance and the weekly time of participation had a positive effect on sport-related expenditure: Competitive cyclists who practise many hours per week spend more money on their sport (Wicker et al., 2010). From the club's perspective it is important to acknowledge that only a small share of the expenses is related to club membership since most of the money is spent on equipment (Wicker, 2009). The above mentioned differences in consumer behaviour indicate that there are various groups of cyclists with different participation levels, interests, and expenditure levels that should be addressed as such by cycling clubs when trying to attract and retain members.

A handful of studies have been conducted that examine cycling organisations. At the organisational level, several aspects may not necessarily contribute to an increase in interest of the population in joining a cycling club. For example, the Union Cycliste International (UCI) has undergone change in recent years and introduced new forms of competitions and leagues; however, their success can be questioned (Benjits & Lagae, 2012; Morrow & Idle, 2008). Also, cycling has a long history of commercialisation and doping (Brewer, 2002).

In summary, the literature review shows that sport clubs in general and cycling clubs in particular experience problems regarding the attraction and retention of members. While the participants' perspective has been well investigated, only a few studies looked at the interventions and strategies of clubs to mitigate the problem. This study addresses this shortcoming.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is based on the *Sport Development Processes* (SDP) model introduced by Sotiriadou, Shilbury and Quick (2008). Sotiriadou (2010) maintains that sport development seeks to attract, retain or transition, and nurture participants through a series of processes, from grassroots to elite competition and from youth to older adults. In addition to age, gender, and level of skill the process of attracting, retaining, and nurturing participants is inclusive of people at any level of disability and origin (e.g., Indigenous or Aboriginal) as they too need to be attracted, retained, and nurtured in the process (Sotiriadou, 2012). These processes are encapsulated by the SDP model (Sotiriadou, 2010; Fig. 1).

The SDP model consists of three main processes (i.e., attraction, retention/transition, and nurturing). Attraction is the process whereby sport development strategies draw new participants or target groups (Sotiriadou, 2010). The retention/transition process is more concerned with providing quality experiences to existing members and the implementation of throughputs (i.e., policies and strategies) that aim to take the participation level and

commitment to a higher level. The retention and transition process aims to capitalise on the attraction process, and helps participants obtain the skills required to achieve high standards of personal best performance. The nurturing process is a more direct, tailored approach to specific sports and individuals or teams. The aim is to nurture participants (e.g., elite athletes, Paralympians, Master's participants) to play sport and to sustain a culture of continued engagement, improvement, and success to the best of their ability.

Even though the attraction, retention or transition and nurturing processes work together to deliver sport development opportunities to various groups of people, these processes are also distinct and individual (Sotiriadou et al., 2008) and can be studied separately. Although sport development processes may be distinct, they have three common elements: (a) *stakeholder* input, (b) *strategies* as to throughput (i.e., how the input is distributed and managed), and (c) *pathways* for the desired sport development output (Sotiriadou, 2010; Fig. 1). There are two types of stakeholders within the sport development processes. The first consists of individuals or organisations that support sport financially or operationally through policy development, programs and other sport development strategies. The second is organisations or individuals (e.g., coaches, sport development officers, clubs) that help implement these policies, programmes and strategies (Sotiriadou et al. 2008). Stakeholders are critical in the delivery of quality programmes at any level of participation or development. That is because their input can either be in devising (e.g., Australian Sports Commission) or in implementing (e.g., coaches, sport development officers) strategies relevant to the desired outcome.

Insert Figure 1 here

Strategies (regarding throughputs) represent the ways in which the stakeholders implement policies and programmes. In this sense, the attraction process would require different strategies and ways of implementing them from the nurturing or retention process.

These strategies consist of the programmes and other tools and are categorised into player development, facilities, coaches, umpires, administration/management, promotions, competitions and events/competitions. Sport development pathways represent the outcome of stakeholder input and throughput. Pathways are the means to move from one sport development process to another (Sotiriadou et al., 2008). Therefore, an outcome of a process may be to enter a new development process (e.g., from the attraction to the retention). Sotiriadou et al. (2008) stressed that the SDP model offered aggregate results on the stakeholder input, throughput and output from 35 sports. However, the SDP framework is generic and cannot be automatically applied to all sports. This study is testing the framework using cycling as a case to identify sport-specific development processes.

METHODOLOGY

Sampling and data collection

This study examines and tests the inherent properties of the SDP framework (Sotiriadou et al., 2008). The Australian sport system is comprised of three levels of sport organisations representing sport at national (e.g., Cycling Australia), state (e.g., Cycling Queensland), and local levels (i.e., cycling clubs). To gain insight into the processes and systems in place for attracting and retaining cycling members, data was collected through in-depth interviews with executive members and development officers from cycling organisations at all three levels. This approach was designed to allow national, state and local input, as well as to ensure both managerial and volunteer perspectives are captured.

A total of 21 interviews that lasted between 45-92 minutes were conducted with 16 local club representatives, three representatives from state cycling bodies (Cycling Queensland, Cycling New South Wales, and Cycling Northern Territory) and two representatives from Cycling Australia. The interviewees agreed to share information on ways their organisation, its participants, and other stakeholders contributed towards attracting

members and retaining them over time. Organisational representatives were identified from organisational websites. Once contact details were obtained and confirmed, letters were sent detailing the purpose and benefits of the study and inviting participation. The letters further informed invitees that the researchers would be making contact to schedule an interview to collect data for the study. Several weeks later, a number of phone calls were made to follow up participant interest to be part of the study. Most of the invited individuals agreed to participate and committed to an interview. The consent form, which was signed by participants prior to the interview, detailed the degree of disclosure for both the individual and the organisation, the use of the information collected, and participation requirements in accordance with research ethics standards.

The interview schedule was comprised of two parts: 1) attraction and 2) retention of members. Each part was divided into three groups of questions in order to examine the (a) stakeholders (input), (b) strategies (throughputs), and (c) pathways (outputs). Questions for the input-throughput-output were drawn from the work of Sotiriadou et al.'s (2008) SDP variables (e.g., programmes, facilities, coaches, competitions, promotions, administration). The questions focused on ways the clubs attract and retain members, the contribution of various stakeholders towards the attraction and retention of members, and the importance and outcomes of memberships to clubs.

Coding and analysis

All interviews were recorded, transcribed and put into a standard format which allowed the identity of participants to remain anonymous for coding and reporting purposes. All transcribed material remained confidential and access was restricted to the researchers only. The original interview data and the transcripts were saved in electronic format and hard copies were stored in a lockable cabinet.

The coding and data analysis was guided by the inductive reasoning and analytical processes recommended by Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell, and Alexander (1995) in order to reach adequate levels of explanation of the phenomenon under investigation. To develop the codes and analyse the main themes emphasised by the cycling representatives, the data was entered into NVivo where codes, themes and conceptual categories were generated based on stakeholder input, throughput, and output. The pool of data was coded for consistent and correlating data, similar responses, and identifiable trends (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This enabled a process of constant comparison in conjunction with a progressive analysis of the transcripts (Sotiriadou & Shilbury, 2010). Constant comparisons assisted the interpretation of conceptual categories into theoretical constructs (Jennings & Junek, 2007). Throughout the coding process the data was reduced to trends, themes, and patterns that assisted in identifying what participants perceived to make the attraction and retention process more successful and what obstacles the clubs faced.

RESULTS

Attraction and retention stakeholder strategies (input and throughputs)

Besides offering a racing licence to members, cycling clubs are responsible for maintaining the overall administration and management of the club in order to provide services to members, including the development and running of programmes and events. The two core services that emerged from the data are *racing* and *social* services. Racing services exposed the extensive list of what a single cycling club can offer to members, and addressed the types of racing (track, criterion, velodrome, road), along with the format in which they were presented (inter-club racing, competitions, open events). Social elements focused on the relationships fostered within the club. Some participants commented that “social, non-competitive rides are enjoyed by the majority of members” (GX), and one participant

explained that their cycling club had “become an interest group which operated mainly for a social purpose” (PX).

The interviewees felt that societal factors such as road rage and negative attitudes towards cyclists are inhibiting the attraction process. Insurance and racing licenses are offered as a means to attract members to the sport. Some interviewees expressed the opinion that it is “forced membership” (SX) because “a participant cannot race in competition without the insurance and license” (GX). Irrespectively of this opinion, clubs appear to be using a variety of approaches to increase and sustain membership. These were grouped into two comprehensive themes; (a) *promotional activities and awareness*, and (b) *events, programmes and incentives* (both *financial* assistance and *resource* provisions).

State bodies (e.g., state departments and sports organisations) and sport federations offer cycling's largest promotions through websites, e-newsletters and calendars of events, and through reporting on significant landmarks and promoting the sport as a whole.

Promotions conducted at the club level are often done by generating awareness through branded equipment and apparel and through creating partnerships with local businesses which are often connected with the sport (e.g. local coffee shops that members would visit after club rides, employees who are also members of the clubs). Sponsorship exchanges and alliances with local businesses are also perceived to be effective in promoting community awareness of clubs. One interviewee explains: “we use logos on uniforms, publicity via our club website and newsletters for in-kind, cash or resource exchange” (PX). Many interviewees suggested that clubs rely on members’ word-of-mouth in promoting the club, which often communicates the club culture. That culture “thrive[s] on social gatherings such as morning teas, barbecues and social rides; all of which are significant attraction points for prospective members” (TX). According to some clubs, referrals through family members and

friends who are already registered with the club are also common and draw new members to the club.

Awareness was identified as having a strong influence on an individual's decision to join a club. In acknowledgement of this, clubs promote their name and services through utilising existing resources such as riders' uniforms and the club website, and target individuals who would be interested in racing by advertising in publications they are likely to read. All interviewees commented on the importance of the club's website in increasing awareness and recruitment of members. One interviewee explains: "The majority of new members had researched the organisation's website prior to joining the club. That's why our website needs to be regularly maintained and up-to-date" (DX). The interviewees reported that when individuals were aware of the facilities and racing offered by the club, they were "able to make judgements as to whether or not they would join" (BX). Another interviewee suggested: "The final decision to register sometimes depended on whether they [members] looked favourably on what the club had to offer and felt they would receive value for money" (RX).

Club promotions and efforts to increase awareness appear to operate hand-in-hand with *events and competitions*. One interviewee highlights this by stating that "organised training rides where riders are 'geared up' [wearing their club uniforms] are effective in promoting club awareness and may influence the new members' decision to join" (DX). An integrative approach is taken across some clubs to ensure that the community spirit and the social culture of the club are sustained through events. These clubs are encouraging social and charity rides, the sharing of resources with other sporting clubs, promoting volunteer work and providing structure for clear lines of communication to foster the club culture.

Interviewees presented various events, programmes and financial or resource-related incentives that offered opportunities to ride and 'value for money' to members. There was a

belief amongst interviewees that members joined because “they were aware of the club’s history in producing consistent and quality events and competitions for members” (DX). Most clubs conducted regular events and ran programmes to market their services to the community. Many interviewees were in favour of ‘come and try’ sessions and casual rides coordinated by the organisation that provided prospective members with “the opportunity to see what the sport involved and what it offered to its members” (EX). Some clubs reported providing seminars on cycling to riders and the local community. One interviewee gave detail of a ‘track racing night’ which “introduces new members to cycling without the distractions of the road in an indoor training centre using virtual reality and ride simulations” (EX).

The interviewees agreed with what one of them captures best by saying that: “Continuing to create opportunities for members to ride through consistent, quality competition, and producing quality services such as coaching and development programmes is imperative in retaining participants” (AX). To retain members, clubs need to run consistent and successful “events that riders enjoy [and that] meet their needs” (WL). In that context, administrative and management club activities as well as the provision of facilities appear to be essential for member retention. More specifically, by taking care of administrative duties and efficiently managing regulatory procedures (i.e., road blockages, council lobbying), some club representatives felt that clubs were “lessening the obstacles” (RX) for their members to continue riding and effectively facilitating their access to more riding opportunities. Facility provision and development was a priority for some clubs, as some interviewees acknowledged the impact this area of the sport had in drawing new members to clubs. As one interviewee explained “new facilities and improved circuits give members more value for money and more opportunities to ride” (EX). Some interviewees were of the view that by offering financial assistance with respect to membership, riding equipment and uniforms, members were incentivised to join the club. Additional incentives

that were perceived as effective in attracting new members included providing bicycles and equipment to junior riders (to reduce costs) and implementing junior development programmes.

Attraction and retention outcomes and resource related challenges

This section presents the four themes of the perceived effect that increasing and retaining the number of members has on the clubs. These findings represent the deeper analysis of data. The results show that the attraction of new and retention of existing members leads to (a) *larger pools of participants* at club level, and therefore plays a role in (b) a growing *club culture* and in (c) increasing the pool of *volunteers*. There is also (d) *financial* benefit to attracting and retaining members, as membership is a direct revenue source for the club, although attracting and retaining members has no significance for government funding that filters to grassroots. Club *resource* related issues and interviewees' views of *societal perceptions* of cycling are also presented.

Interviewees noted that “increasing the number of participants results in more competitive racing” (PX) and “a better atmosphere at competitions as the number of attendees increase” (NX). Increasing the number of members was reported by some interviewees as helping to “grow the talent pool and development [of] programming” (FX). One interviewee claims that “more junior participation increases the demand for more junior development programmes” (SX). Likewise, another interviewee explains that “an increased number of master riders require more skills sessions and workshops” (BX).

Interviewees also commented on the overall improvement that growing membership and volunteers had on the club culture as “there are more people to assist with events and at competitions” (SX) resulting in well organised competitions. The club culture is built over time and strong ties are created through long relationships bound together by common

interest. In this regard, as acknowledged by many interviewees, the flow-on effects of retaining members are strong:

Continuing satisfaction will ground a member and secure their loyalty, often shared by those who are also involved in the club, foster the club culture and draw more people to the club and result in retention on a larger scale where one person's decision to stay will affect other members. (PX)

Furthermore, generating consistent income sources for the club is important. With increased funding, clubs are able to “create bigger and better events [which] engage more of the community and attract more people to the sport” (CX). Most interviewees commented that retaining members can ultimately result in building the membership base. They identified word-of-mouth as having “a ripple effect” (FX), meaning gaining access to more members and participants through referrals. This can range from referring a friend to encouraging family members to take on cycling. One interviewee gave the example of their club where there was an “increase in junior participation as parents, already club members, encourage their children to ride” (GX).

All interviewees were able to identify areas requiring improvement in the attraction and retention capacity of cycling clubs. One interviewee explains:

We can continue as we are or it [the club] could have a more professional approach and run as business. It would have to be with more promotions, sales and clothing. Just creating more of a team identity and atmosphere. (JX)

However, interviewees admitted that due to time and resource limitations in running the club there is usually “no strategy in place to attract new participants. What are we then required [to do] to maximise member attraction?” (RX). According to interviewees, some clubs are limited in their ability to provide sufficient development programmes and opportunities to enhance skills and financially support competitive riders. Therefore, interviewees were of the opinion that due to a lack of resources, it is difficult to grow the clubs.

Regarding the attraction of new members, interviewees communicated a strain on human and physical resources within clubs. One interviewee explains that:

In order to maximise club potential in attracting members, the club would need more time, more willingness from members to volunteer and more crossover between sports with common goals to distribute workloads and prevent the unnecessary doubling-up of resources (OX).

One respondent commented that “decreasing costs would draw more people to the sport” (HX) and others concurred that facility improvements (i.e., more places for riding) would increase the appeal of their particular club “but they [facilities] are limited due to the lack of rider-safe areas” (RX). The creation of a recreational membership was suggested by one interviewee, where “members who do not compete and prefer to ride casually can benefit from reduced expenses to ride for leisure and still reap the benefits of a club structure” (OX).

In addition to resource issues, interviewees expressed views on the perception of *society* on cycling. The interviewees discussed the initial reluctance that individuals may have in getting involved. One interviewee commented that “the sport itself may act as a deterrent, as it is a hard sport requiring dedication to progress through the levels”. Another interviewee believed that cycling “is classed as an expensive sport, especially when compared to other sports accessible to people”. Other interviewees claimed that “there is a social stigma attached to cycling” (PX) in that cycling “is not viewed, especially by younger people, as a typical sport to engage in” (SX) and there is “a perceptual bias of cyclists as road cycling is not catered too well by city planners therefore cyclists are often obstacles on the road” (PX). As the government has not catered to cyclists on all roads, road cycling – the most common form of cycling – is not the safest sport to engage in. Maintaining safe practices and offering safe places to ride is of utmost importance to clubs, but this can be difficult. People know the dangers of riding on the road which can be an obstacle from the beginning and eliminate the prospects of selecting cycling as a sport.

Overall, interviewees felt that exposure of the sport; stronger public presence through media; and more 'come and try' sessions would benefit local cycling clubs. By increasing awareness of the sport, there would be greater likelihood of people taking it on, especially at a junior level where the sport appears to be lacking. According to many interviewees, gaining greater interest within younger age groups would provide stimulus for an improved junior development programme (19-23-year-olds) which "would benefit the sport immensely in terms of growing the talent pool and producing tangible results in competition" (TX).

Interviewees also discussed resources and capacity issues in relation to retaining members. The club culture was recognised as an important area requiring maintenance to sustain a membership base. The idea of operating as a team and devising incentives encouraging people involved with the club to volunteer on occasion was stressed. Some interviewees highlighted council or government-imposed obstacles (such as restrictions on riding routes and failure to enact sport development programmes or cycling support strategies) which contributed towards membership withdrawals or disinterest in the club. These clubs suggested better lobbying for the sport and flexibility with authorities to be potential solutions to these problems.

According to interviewees, the quality of member services as well as the quality and number of resources supplied affect a member's decision to stay with a club. One interviewee commented that "a club's ability to meet the expectations of the rider will differ depending on that rider's expectations" (CX). The interviewees put forward the notion that an overall improvement of resources including building finances to support elite-level competition and travel and the presence of riding locations such as road tracks and velodromes would lead to better member satisfaction and contentment, and increase their likelihood of staying with the club. One interviewee exemplifies this point by stating: "By catering to elite riders and

providing pathways for competition, clubs display themselves as quality service providers thereby increasing member satisfaction” (DX).

Discussion

The results show that the attraction and retention processes are inextricably linked, not only because clubs need members to retain them, but more importantly because the outcomes of a successful attraction, such as more members, higher income, broader talent base, and more volunteers, form preconditions (e.g., better run events and club culture) for successful retention. Even though interviewees stress the significance of promotions and awareness to successfully attract and retain members, there seems to be limited strategies to successfully market the sport through the right channels and offer value for money to members. This finding is similar to previous research (Breuer & Haase, 2007). One explanation for the lack of strategies in this study may be that clubs focus on the promotion of sport and not on the social aspects of sport consumption. Increasing the number of social events at the club and the promotion of social interactions should meet the needs of the growing population groups that are typically underrepresented in clubs (i.e., older people, females; Hanlon et al., 2010; Patford & Breen, 2009). Given that members of cycling clubs are willing to spend lots of money on their sport (Wicker, 2009), there is the opportunity for clubs to generate income from social events.

Using the SDP (Sotiriadou, 2010) as a theoretical framework, this study tested and validated the attraction and retention processes. Testing the SDP framework using cycling facilitated a deeper and richer representation of sport development processes for cycling. Hence, this study advances the sport development literature from generic to sport specific sport development related issues and ways they are dealt with. That advancement has been realised because the use of the SDP framework enabled (a) the identification of the

stakeholders involved, (b) the ways cycling clubs attract and retain members, (c) the links between the attraction and retention, and (d) the outcomes of each process on the clubs.

However, the generalisability of the findings in this study needs to be assessed with caution as it was conducted in one sport in a national context.¹ Nevertheless, the challenge of attracting and retaining club members may be evidenced in various countries in a number of sports that experience increase in non-organised participation and decrease in memberships. Therefore, even though the results of this study are cycling specific, it is anticipated that other sports would be faced with similar sport development processes and may have similar needs and issues.

This study has implications for the management and marketing of sport clubs in general and cycling clubs in particular. First, it can be recommended that clubs provide opportunities for member feedback (such as biannual club meetings and close member-executive relationships). This is important since local sport clubs are often created with the focus of meeting a need when they are established. Feedback could help clubs continue to match their members' needs and retain member interest. In this context, clubs must also be prepared for change when demands are not being met. Second, clubs should increase their marketing activities. In doing so, the focus should be the design and promotion of opportunities for social participation and skill development (e.g., coaching, event management) that more ad hoc forms of participation do not present. In addition they need to offer greater value for membership money to existing and prospective members. The shift from a membership-based model to a pay as you play model may represent an opportunity rather than a threat to clubs interested in diversifying their membership offerings. They may also use events to offer specials and promote their services, or design programmes that better meet the needs of their target markets.

¹ For a copy of the full interview schedule please contact the lead author of this paper.

Third, word of mouth promotion and social media as one form of it can be critical. While this promotional tool cannot be controlled by clubs, it can certainly be facilitated. Social events or a membership increase are likely to generate positive word of mouth, a stronger club culture, and better run events and services to members. Fourth, clubs should capitalise on the fact that it is easier to get people to play more sports once they are in the system, as opposed to engage disinterested people to initiate physical activity and sports. Therefore, clubs should communicate their social benefits to already existing informal participants. However, the focus should not be exclusively on this market. Growing population groups such as older people, females, and those from ethnically diverse backgrounds who are currently underrepresented in sports clubs should also be engaged.

The provided recommendations need to be put into context, given the voluntary nature and limited resources of most clubs (Cuskelly, 2004). Therefore, designing and implementing innovative and successful attraction and retention strategies is a challenge that needs to be met with the collaborative efforts of stakeholders from national, state and local levels. In this regard it is important not only to focus on the large clubs, but also on smaller clubs that are nevertheless critical sport providers (Nichols & James, 2008).

Conclusion

The study reveals that the sport of cycling faces a number of challenges in attracting and retaining club members. As the changes in society lead to shortages in time and money and shape the sport participation demand to new directions, creating a new membership platform which offers value for money and encourages member recruitment, as well as granting existing club members' entitlements and an array of access options, will prove beneficial strategies for the challenges ahead.

Future studies should compare and contrast the attraction and retention processes across sports to find similarities and differences within sport development processes. A study

of this nature would enable sport development officers, sport policy makers, and sport organisations to develop synergies where common gaps in the pathways exist and further advance their capacities to deliver consistent and professional services and value for money to members.

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Figure 1

Sport development stakeholders, strategies, and pathways for attracting, retaining and nurturing members (Sotiriadou, 2010)

