

REVISITING REVISIT INTENTION BASED ON A RAFTING SPORTING EVENT (EVENTQUAL)

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Abstract

Purpose - The study aims to examine the impact of service quality dimensions (based on the EVENTQUAL scale) on the revisit intention of sporting event and contrast the perception between first-time and previous participants.

Design - The survey was designed to measure EVENTQUAL dimensions as independent variables (accessibility, staff, tangibles and complementary services) and revisit intention as the dependent variable. The moderating variable (type of participation) was also introduced to enable comparison between the perception of first-time (109) and previous participants (97).

Methodology - The study implemented quantitative analysis, such as descriptive statistics, structural equation modelling (SEM) and multi-group SEM.

Findings - The SEM findings revealed a significant positive effect of tangibles on revisit intention, while multi-group SEM results indicated the significant positive effect of tangibles on revisit intention solely for previous visitors.

Originality - The study contributes to the existing knowledge by evaluating the EVENTQUAL model at a multi-site sporting event, acknowledged from the perspective of its participants. Moreover, the rafting event was observed in the context of a sporting event activity in contrast to previous literature in the context of adventure tourism.

Keywords Rafting, sporting event, EVENTQUAL, revisit intention, Serbia

INTRODUCTION

The study of sports events has become a topic of contemporary interest (Alguacil et al. 2018) as the number of sporting events rapidly increases (Theodorakis et al. 2019). According to Kadam & Deshmukh (2021), “the global sports tourism market size was valued at \$323,420 million in 2020 and is projected to reach \$1,803,704 million by 2030”. Sports tourism is not exclusively focused on international events, but also includes local, regional and national events (Saayman 2012). Thus, local communities that actively develop sports tourism compete in offering small, medium or large events (Coetzee et al. 2019). Water sports, such as rafting, are considered to be one form of active sports tourism (Kaplanidou and Gibson 2010), comprising of both adventure and typical sport tourism activities (Hall and McArthur 1991; Saayman 2012). Within the existing tourism literature, rafting has primarily been investigated as a form of adventure tourism (Buckley et al. 2014; Greffrath and Roux 2012; Jamal et al. 2019; Sato et al. 2018; Wu and Liang 2011), however, rafting has rarely been considered outside of the general adventure tourism context, specifically in the form of both a local sporting and entertainment event. Rafting as an adventure tourism activity focuses on the individual actor and his/her inner battle while undertaking raft-related challenges but the socialisation and entertainment aspects of rafting have previously been overlooked.

In the field of sport, there is a vast number of approaches for measuring service quality. However, research papers exclusively dedicated to “service quality in sports are rather scarce” (Moura e Sá & Cunha 2019, 436). According to Calabuig-Moreno et al. (2016a, 23) “some authors have used existing instruments to gauge visitor perceptions of service quality at sporting events, while others have designed their own measurement scales”. Mundina et al. (2005) proposed a questionnaire for measuring the quality of the Mediterranean Games in Almeria, Spain in 2005. The resulting model was eventually labelled as EVENTQUAL by other authors in the context of various sporting events (Alguacil et al. 2018; Calabuig Moreno and Crespo Hervàs 2009; Calabuig Moreno et al. 2009; Calabuig Moreno et al. 2010a; Calabuig-Moreno et al. 2016a; Pérez Campos et al. 2008; Pérez Campos and Dos Santos 2013). The EVENTQUAL scale has proven to be reliable and valid and one which can be applied to other sporting events when adapted to reflect the specific characteristics of an event itself (Calabuig-Moreno et al. 2016a). Calabuig-Moreno et al. (2016a) used an abridged version of the EVENTQUAL instrument, which was justified given that it facilitates its application in complex contexts such as sporting events. The model encapsulated the perception of the quality of sporting events by spectators through four dimensions: tangibility, staff, complementary services and accessibility (Calabuig-Moreno et al. 2016a). In contrast to previous studies, where EVENTQUAL was tested mainly in the context of spectators, this model focuses on participants.

Within the sports industry, service quality can be viewed from two distinct perspectives – that of the spectator and participant (Lee et al. 2011). The strong influence of service quality on revisit intention in the context of a sporting event has been noted by many authors (Coetzee et al. 2019; Hussein 2016; Theodorakis and Alexandris 2008; Tsuji et al. 2007). Some authors looked at the differences in behaviour of first-time and repeat visitors (Kaplanidou and Gibson 2012; Osti et al. 2012). This paper examines the applicability of the EVENTQUAL scale from the perspective of the participant (both first time and repeat), in contrast to the commonly applied approach directed to visitor perspective (Calabuig Moreno and Crespo Hervàs 2009; Calabuig Moreno et al. 2009; Calabuig Moreno et al. 2010b; Calabuig-Moreno et al. 2016a; Pérez Campos and Dos Santos 2013). In addition, the impact of the EVENTQUAL model dimensions on the intention to revisit the event (participate) was not assessed. Moreover, the study contributes to the verification of EVENTQUAL in a different geographical area and socio-cultural context (Serbia) to its initial application in Spain.

The study aims to investigate the event’s service quality (EVENTQUAL) effect on revisit intention. Understanding participant future intention is of great importance for managers of sport rafting events, in order to acknowledge which dimensions have the greatest impact on event revisit intention and if there is a difference in the perception of revisit intention by first-time and repeat participants. The main contribution of the study is its analysis of the differences between revisit intention for first-time and repeat participants, within the EVENTQUAL dimensions in the context of multi-site adventure sports events.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 EVENTQUAL

According to Calabuig-Moreno et al. (2016a, 23) “research on service quality in the context of sport has increased significantly over the last few years”. In terms of sporting events, service quality is the difference between what visitors expect from each dimension and what they actually receive (Ma and Kaplanidou 2022). SERVQUAL has been commonly used to measure service quality (Parasuraman et al. 1985), however, subsequently some authors have designed their own measurements of service quality beyond SERVQUAL. According to Calabuig Moreno et al. (2010b, 69) the “EVENTQUAL model was developed with four dimensions of spectator perception of service quality in sporting events: tangibles, staff, complementary services and accessibility”. Mundina et al. (2005) proposed an initial questionnaire that was used to analyse the perceptual quality and satisfaction of spectators at the Mediterranean Games in Almeria, Spain in 2005. Additionally, spectator perception of the service quality experienced at four ACB basketball league games confirmed the validity of the EVENTQUAL scale (Crespo Hervás et al. 2013). Baker and Crompton (2000) made a clear distinction between service quality and satisfaction, arguing that customer satisfaction is in the function of service quality assessment. The EVENTQUAL perception quality scale initially had 22 items (Pérez Campos et al. 2008) deployed to predict future intentions of spectators regarding the event (Calabuig Moreno et al. 2010b; Calabuig-Moreno et al. 2016b). It was concluded that results differed depending on whether the scale was applied to one-time events or recurring events (Crespo Hervás et al. 2013). The EVENTQUAL scale was also used among spectators of the 2013 Men’s International Handball World Championship in Spain (Pérez Campos and Dos Santos 2013), while some authors used only certain dimensions of the EVENTQUAL scale for their research purposes (Calabuig-Moreno et al. 2016b). However, verification of the EVENTQUAL scale in the context of participants is scarce. Due to the fact that identifying the essential elements of service quality in sport tourism is of critical importance (Andam et al. 2015; Shonk and Chelladurai 2008), the following four relevant service aspects were identified for the rafting event: accessibility, staff, tangibles and complimentary services.

Accessibility

According to Ribeiro et al. (2018, 8) “quality of access to an event is defined as the ‘ease and speed’ of how consumers can reach their desired location”. Easy access is something that is taken for granted by visitors to a sporting event (Kim et al. 2016). Accessibility as a quality dimension of sporting events has often been studied (Kelley and Turley 2001; Theodorakis et al. 2001). A good level of accessibility implies that factors such as car parking, public transport, easy entry and exit access are present and that a stadium is generally accessible (Theodorakis et al. 2001; Theodorakis and Alexandris 2008; Theodorakis et al. 2019). Theodorakis et al. (2001) used the SPORTSERV scale with accessibility dimensions when examining service quality for sport spectators. According to Kaplanidou and Vogt (2007, 184) “when sport tourists decide whether to revisit a destination as a result of exposure to an event, several variables may influence their decisions” and accessibility would certainly be one of them. Tzetzis et

al. (2014) concluded that access as a dimension of service quality is not a significant predictor of the intention to re-attend for the participants and spectators of small-scale beach volleyball events. Previous studies were mostly deployed from the spectators' perspective, so information of accessibility perceived from the perspective of sports event participants would prove to be highly beneficial. Accessibility of the event venue and its basic features was perceived as of major importance for the participants, thus, it is reasonable to expect that it will influence repeated participation at the event. Therefore, accessibility is a variable that has a considerable impact on sport event re-visitation and thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Accessibility has a significant positive effect on revisit intention.

Staff

At a sporting event, the staff communicate directly with both event visitors (Kim et al. 2016) and event participants (Xiao et al. 2020). The form of which this interaction can take includes providing assistance, the manner in which any help is given, the degree of courtesy and care directed toward attendees and the prompt delivery of individualised attention (Andam et al. 2015). Sports event staff facilitate services at a sporting event from start to finish (Kim et al. 2016) underlining the importance of staff for holding events (Lee et al. 2011; Kim et al. 2016). Many authors have integrated a staff dimension into the models used to assess the quality of sporting events (Alexandris et al. 2004; Kelley and Turley 2001). Interaction with employees is an important quality factor (MacIntosh and Parent 2017) because demand primarily attaches great importance to the psychological and social aspects of events (Kaplanidou et al. 2013). Theodorakis and Alexandris (2008) investigated the revisit intention of attendees of football matches in Greece and discovered that the service attribute of personnel at the events was rather weak and proved to be a significant predictor for revisit intention. In contrast to sporting event studies centred around spectators, event personnel were not identified as a significant predictor of satisfaction – and consequently behavioural intention – in the case of several sport event studies focused on participants (An et al. 2020; Theodorakis et al. 2015), with a noble exception of Vegara-Ferri et al. (2020). These studies suggested that “participant sporting events might differ from spectator sporting events regarding the relationship between interaction quality and satisfaction” (An et al. 2020, 11) due to their limited interaction with event personnel (Theodorakis et al. 2015). However, since the event being investigated is not absolutely dedicated to sport (rafting), as considerable attention was also given to entertainment features, interaction with staff is more appreciated and valued by participants, especially in the context of the rafting instructions. In line with this, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Staff have a significant positive effect on revisit intention

Tangibles

According to Theodorakis et al. (2009, 462) “tangibles are items such as the cleanliness of the facility, visual appeal, the comfort of seating, to provision of unimpeded views, cleanliness, lighting, air quality and the maintenance of fittings and equipment”. According to Kouthouris and Alexandris (2005, 103) tangibles are “an organisation’s

physical environment, such as facilities, equipment and communication materials”. According to Jeong et al. (2019) physical environment quality was found to be an important dimension within event service quality, having a significant impact on behavioural intention. In outdoor activities, the actual physical environment such as a river is not controlled by the organiser but is influenced by weather conditions and particular consideration should be given as to whether it can be classified as a tangible element when researching (Kouthouris and Alexandris 2005). Irrespective to labelling, facilities features were certainly of importance for the participants, especially since they directly influence event participation satisfaction and revisit behaviour. Tangibles are a frequently-explored aspect of quality in the context of sporting events (Alexandris et al. 2004; Theodorakis et al. 2001; Theodorakis and Alexandris 2008; Theodorakis et al. 2019). Aspects related to physical facilities in which the service was provided were similar to the conceptualisation of the “tangibles” dimension in the SERVQUAL instrument (Andam et al. 2015). Theodorakis et al. (2013) used tangibles to measure a functional quality of a professional football match in Greece that had a partial impact on future visitor behaviour. Tangibles were one of the two most critical dimensions capable of influencing the future intentions of spectators of the Korean Professional Basketball League (Kim et al. 2006). The tangibles aspect of sporting event service quality was not only important for the spectators of a sporting event, but also its participants. During an examination of the effect of service quality factors on the revisit intention of female golfers (as participants), the tangibles dimension was identified as a predictor of revisit intention (Lee et al. 2011). Moreover, Milovanović et al. (2019) identified that the core aspects of quality (items related to competition, the opening ceremony, organisation and schedule) influenced participants’ behavioural intention. These items can be associated with the service quality dimension of tangibles in this study. Consequently, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Tangibles have a significant positive effect on revisit intention

Complementary services

The complementary services dimension includes elements such as beverage (tea and coffee) services, cleaning and hygiene of toilet facilities (Calabuig Moreno et al. 2016a), or secondary products such as memorabilia, food and beverages (Jo Ko et al. 2011). O’Brien (2007) argues that event organisers aim to maximise revenue from the sale of secondary products. Participants in sporting events assess the event service quality by evaluating quality of both basic and auxiliary services (Kim et al. 2016). Kelley and Turley (2001) identified that auxiliary service quality, such as concessions, positively affect event attendance. With regards to facilities, this may also include the availability of food and refreshments, facilities for children, as well as other pre- and post-event forms of entertainment before and after the event (Hall et al. 2010). Peripheral service quality influences the behavioural intentions of event participants (Tsuji et al. 2007). Certainly, a direct positive relationship between service quality factors and sport consumption behaviour has been confirmed in prior studies – primarily related to revisit intention (Kim et al. 2016). This was especially in the context of event participants, who appreciate the food and beverage aspects of the event. As a result, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Complementary services have a significant positive effect on revisit intention

1.2 Revisit intention-differentiation between first-time and repeat participants

According to Oppermann (1998, 131), “attracting previous visitors is more cost-effective than attracting new ones”. Many studies have acknowledged the significant impact of service quality on favourable behavioural intentions of sporting event visitors and more specifically, revisit intentions (Alexandris et al. 2004; Coetzee et al. 2019; Murray and Howat 2002; Theodorakis and Alexandris 2008; Tsuji et al. 2007). The connection between the quality of services at sports events and the future behaviour of visitors is also influenced by loyalty to the sports team itself (Theodorakis et al. 2019). Hussein (2016) asserted that an individual’s awareness of a particular event determines revisit intention. Moreover, the involvement of visitors in the event programme and activities induce revisit intention (Brown et al. 2018; Hussein 2016; Lee and Beeler 2009). According to Coetzee et al (2019, 303) “effective and physical engagement are significant positive predictors of participant intentions to revisit a sports event”. The intention to revisit may be influenced by gender, as different perceptions of the key dimensions of quality were identified by different gender groups when attending a basketball event (Ho Kim et al. 2013).

Relatively few studies have compared the behaviour of first-time visitors and repeat visitors to sporting events (Del Chiappa et al. 2014; Scott and Turco 2011). Based on the frequency of repeated visits, they can be classified as ‘infrequent’, ‘frequent’ and ‘very frequent’. Infrequent visits indicated “somewhat loyal visitors”, regular visits indicated “loyal”, while annual and biennial visits indicated “very loyal” sporting event visitors (Osti et al. 2012). Kaplanidou and Gibson (2010) investigated the differences between first-time and repeat visitors of a youth football event, where no significant differences were shown between the three groups – first-time, second-time and third-time visitors. Taks et al. (2009) noted some differences in behaviour between first-time visitors and repeat visitors in relation to motivation. First-time visitors are motivated to learn more about the physical aspects of the event and destination, while repeat visitors are more interested in the cause, sport and identity with the event itself – something which develops over time (Snelgrove and Wood 2010). In terms of consumption and satisfaction, there are contradictory findings, suggesting that first-time visitors spend more money, stay longer and are more satisfied than returning visitors and vice-versa (Del Chiappa et al. 2014). This study follows the recommendation of Hussein (2016), who suggests investigating the factors that influence the intention to revisit an event in a more in-depth manner. Considering that there are differences in behaviour between first-time participants and repeat participants, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H5: There is a statistically significant difference between first-time and repeat participants regarding the effect of accessibility on revisit intention.

H6: There is a statistically significant difference between first-time and repeat participants regarding the effect of staff on revisit intention.

H7: There is a statistically significant difference between first-time and repeat participants regarding the effect of tangibles on revisit intention.

H8: There is a statistically significant difference between first-time and repeat participants regarding the effect of complementary services on revisit intention.

2. METHODOLOGY

The survey used convenience sampling to gather responses from 207 respondents. The respondents were participants in the rafting sport event *Veseli spust*, which has been traditionally held on the river Ibar in Kraljevo, Serbia on the last Saturday in June or the first Saturday in July, since 1990. The organisers of the event are the City of Kraljevo and the Ibar Kayak Club. Therefore, professional kayakers and recreational kayakers (rafters) alike take part in the event. *Veseli spust* is a sport, recreational and ecological event that attracts several thousand participants and visitors. The number of participants in the first event was 150 and that number has increased over time. At its peak, the event attracted over 10,000 domestic and foreign visitors. Apart from regular rubber boats, the event is characterised by unusual and interesting vessels made of wood, bottles, styrofoam and car tyres. The participants bring vessels that must be capable of sailing for about 25 kilometres – from the starting point near the medieval town of Maglič, to the finish line in the city of Kraljevo. Participation involves a combination of sport, recreational and entertainment content, as shown in the photographs in Figures 1 and 2.

Figure 1. The participants of the sports rafting event „Veseli spust“



Source: <https://www.kurir.rs/vesti/srbija/3293453/kraljevcani-se-uz-trubace-spustili-niz-ibar-u-veselom-spustu-vise-od-1000-ljudi>

Figure 2. The participants of the sports rafting event “Veseli spust”



Source: https://www.tripadvisor.rs/LocationPhotoDirectLink-g1028714-i153187630-Kraljevo_Central_Serbia.html

A focus group, consisting of representatives of the event organiser, met before the event started to evaluate the questionnaire in order to determine if the EVENTQUAL questions were appropriate for this specific event and if they were unambiguous for respondents when completing the questionnaire. Once the initial draft of the questionnaire was completed, twenty respondents who had attended the event the previous year undertook pilot testing to check its validity. As a result of the feedback received, some minor modifications were made.

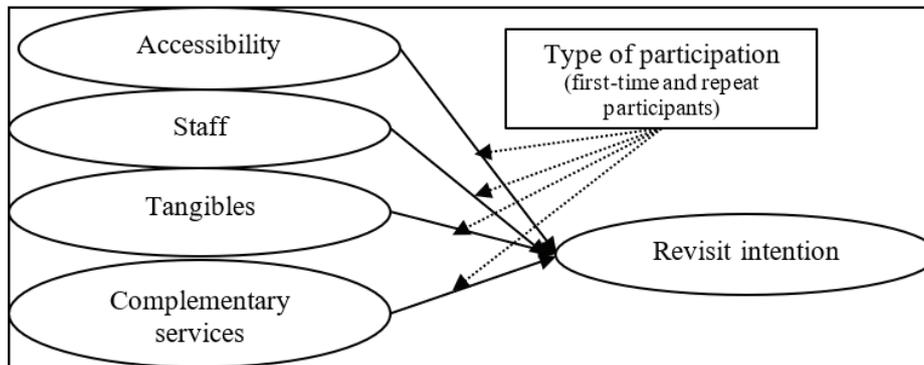
Due to fact that the rafting event *Veseli spust* is a ticketless, one-day event and time was limited, the convenience sampling method was chosen for data collection. Taking into account the number of participants of previous events and the projection of the organisers that there would be several hundred participants this particular year, the initial aim was to gather 300 responses. Overall, 207 respondents were willing to participate in the research, meaning that an appropriate response rate (69%) was obtained. Upon the completion of the event, the total number of participants in the event was around 800, thus, a sample of 207 gathered responses secured a wide generalisability of the findings obtained.

The event is usually held at the beginning of July, however, due to heavy rain and floods throughout the preceding months, *Veseli spust* was delayed a number of times before eventually being held on 16th September 2018. The survey was conducted throughout the whole event's length at the starting camp and the finish line at Mataruška Banja, to

secure a wide distribution of responses. The organisers were aware of the research and had previously given their consent to its undertaking.

The initial EVENTQUAL scale (Calabuig-Moreno et al. 2016a) consisted of the four dimensions (accessibility, staff, tangibles and complementary services), accessibility measured via two items, with the remaining three dimensions all including three items. All of the EVENTQUAL items were additionally adjusted to fit the event research context. Revisit intention was measured with three statements (Coetzee et al. 2019; Yoon et al. 2010) and all the statements were adapted to fit the purpose of the study. A research model was then conceptualised comprising of four independent variables (accessibility, staff, tangibles and complementary services), one dependent variable (revisit intention) and one moderation variable (type of participation – first time participants and repeat participants) (Figure 3). Respondents' answers to the five latent variables were recorded on a seven-point Likert scale (1 - I completely disagree; 7 - I completely agree).

Figure 3. The proposed research model



Source: Authors' own elaboration

Data analysis was completed in the SPSS and AMOS. Firstly, the data gathered were analysed via use of descriptive statistics. The following statistical analyses were then deployed: descriptive statistics, confirmative factor analysis, structural equation modelling (SEM) and multi-group SEM.

3. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The sample contains more male respondents (65.6%) than female, the most common age group was 18 to 24 (31.9%), the largest group had completed secondary school education (46.9%) and the most common marital status was single (53.1%). The sample has an almost even distribution between first-time and repeat participants (Table 1).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of respondents' characteristics (n = 207)

Demographics	Frequency	%
Gender		
Male	135	65.2
Female	61	29.5
Missing	11	5.3
Age		
18-24	66	31.9
25-34	50	24.2
35-44	52	25.1
45-54	28	13.5
55-64	6	2.9
>65	4	1.9
Missing	1	0.5
Education		
Secondary school	97	46.9
College	43	20.8
Bachelor	56	27.1
Master/PhD	8	3.9
Missing	2	1.5
Marital status		
Married	82	39.6
Single	110	53.1
Widowed/divorced	11	5.3
Missing	4	1.9
Type of participation		
First-time participants	109	52.7
Repeat participants	97	46.9
Missing	1	0.5

Source: Authors' own elaboration

Table 2 shows the mean values and standard deviations of the items used in the survey. The highest mean value was identified for the item labelled *I am likely to revisit this event* (6.13), while the lowest mean value was for the item *The staff in charge of food and beverage service do their job professionally* (5.30). In contrast to the initially proposed EVENTQUAL model (Calabuig-Moreno et al. 2016a), one item from the staff variable (*Staff are friendly*) and one from the complementary services (*The cleaning and hygiene of the toilets were good*) were discarded from further analysis to achieve the fit of the model.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics (N=207)

Items	MV	SD
Accessibility	5.84	1.47
I can easily find my starting location	5.99	1.52
Movement within the rafting camp is facilitated by clear signalization and marked corridors	5.69	1.42
Staff	5.77	1.34
Staff is well trained	5.80	1.35
Staff does their job well	5.75	1.34
Tangibles	5.62	1.34
I am satisfied with the conditions in the starting and ending rafting destination	5.76	1.31
Camps and vacation spots met my expectations	5.49	1.43
Visibility of the flow of rafting and other competitors during the sailing is satisfactory	5.60	1.28
Complementary services	5.37	1.47
Food and beverage services are in accordance with my needs	5.44	1.48
The staff in charge of food and beverage service does their job professionally	5.30	1.46
Revisit intention	6.07	1.26
I would like to participate again in the future	6.05	1.25
I'll keep attending the event	6.03	1.25
I am likely to revisit this event	6.13	1.28

Source: Authors' own elaboration

The reliability and internal consistency of the items are presented in Table 3. The reliability level was adequate (Nunnally 1978), with varying values for the variable *staff* (Cronbach's alpha = 0.909) and variable *accessibility* (Cronbach's alpha = 0.689). By deploying confirmative factor analysis, the fit of the research model was tested. The value of the ratio χ^2/df (2.47) was acceptable (Bagozzi and Yi 1988). Other fit indices also have adequate values (CFI = 0.957; TLI = 0.934; IFI = 0.958; RMSEA = 0.084) greater than 0.9 (Byrne 1998). Moreover, convergent and discriminatory validity and composite reliability were also assured (Bagozzi and Yi 1988) (Table 3).

Table 3. Results of confirmatory factor analysis

Constructs	CR	AVE	Cronbach's alpha
Accessibility	0.705	0.553	0.689
Staff	0.897	0.814	0.894
Tangibles	0.818	0.600	0.818
Complementary services	0.784	0.647	0.780
Revisit intention	0.890	0.732	0.886

Notes: $\chi^2 = 106.103$; $df = 43$; $p = 0.00$; $\chi^2/df = 2.47$; $CFI = 0.957$; $TLI = 0.934$; $IFI = 0.958$; $RMSEA = 0.084$.
 Source: Authors' own elaboration

As the results confirmed the validity of the model fit, SEM was deployed to examine the effects of the EVENTQUAL dimensions (accessibility, staff, tangibles and complementary services) on revisit intention.

Table 4. Results of SEM analysis

Hypothesized relationship	B	P	Results
H1: Accessibility → Revisit Intention	0.175 ^{ns}	0.403	Not Supported
H2: Staff → Revisit Intention	- 0.006 ^{ns}	0.979	Not Supported
H3: Tangibles → Revisit Intention	0.525 ^{**}	0.007	Supported
H4: Complementary services → Revisit intention	- 0.132 ^{ns}	0.375	Not Supported

Notes: **Significant at the 0.01 level; ^{ns}Non-significant
 Source: Authors' own elaboration

The results indicate that only the variable *tangibles* had a statistically significant effect on revisit intention ($\beta = 0.525$, $p < 0.01$), confirming hypothesis H3, while accessibility, staff and complementary services had a non-significant effect on revisit intention, meaning that hypotheses H1, H2 and H4 are rejected.

Table 5 shows whether there were significant differences between first-time and repeat participant groups at both model and path level. MGI testing was deployed to investigate the invariance of the model parameters across the proposed groups. The findings support both configural and metric invariance between the groups ($df = 11$; χ^2 difference = 5.495; $p = 0.905$).

Table 5. Results of multi-group SEM comparison test

Model 1-First time participants (n=109)	Standardized path coefficient (t value)		t-statistic (p-value 2-tailed)
	Model 1	Model 2	
Model 2- Repeat participants (n=97)			
H5: Accessibility → Revisit Intention	0.286 ^{ns}	- 0.123 ^{ns}	0.803 (0.423) ^{ns}
H6: Staff → Revisit Intention	0.042 ^{ns}	0.196 ^{ns}	0.297 (0.767) ^{ns}
H7: Tangibles → Revisit Intention	0.329 ^{ns}	0.658**	0.727 (0.469) ^{ns}
H8: Complementary services → Revisit intention	0.017 ^{ns}	- 0.166 ^{ns}	0.484 (0.629) ^{ns}

Level of statistical significance:*** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 levels; ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 levels; ^{ns} – not significant.

Model results: Constrained model, χ^2 (173.250) df (97), $p < .001$; Unconstrained model, χ^2 (167.755) df (86), $p < .001$; χ^2 difference 0,905 (5,495) df (11), $p = 0.905$ ^{ns}

Source: Authors' own elaboration

The results of multi-group SEM indicate that the groups did not differ concerning the model and its path. Thus, hypotheses H5, H6, H7 and H8 were rejected. Nevertheless, additional insight in multi-group SEM analysis findings pointed out that sports event tangibles had a significant effect on revisit intention exclusively for repeating participants, in contrast to first-time participants (Table 5).

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

The EVENTQUAL model has been used repeatedly (Calabuig Moreno and Crespo Hervàs 2009; Calabuig Moreno et al. 2010b; Calabuig-Moreno et al. 2016a; Pérez Campos et al. 2008; Pérez Campos and Dos Santos 2013) in the context of various sporting events. However, it had not previously been verified in a different geographical context (outside of Spain) and in the context of untypical sporting events, such as a rafting event. The paper has examined the dimensions of the EVENTQUAL model (Calabuig-Moreno et al. 2016a) and their effect on revisit intention in the context of an 'untypical' local, multi-site, outdoor sporting event that combines elements of adventure, sport and entertainment. In particular, the study investigated the influence of sports event service quality dimensions such as tangibles, staff, complementary services and accessibility on revisit intention.

Since, most of the previous EVENTQUAL studies were executed in the context of professional sporting events with a large number of visitors, testing a scale in the context of an amateur event with a limited number of spectators presented a challenge. Thus, one of the reasons why three of four hypotheses were not supported may lie in the fact that previous EVENTQUAL studies were directed towards spectators of sporting events and they are likely to evaluate service quality features differently than the thrill-seeking participants of this unusual event.

The research concluded that the tangibles dimension has a significant impact on the

revisit intention of sport event participants, confirming the previous findings of the Lee et al. (2011) study. Moreover, based on the invariance test, tangibles were identified to be of greater importance for repeat participants in contrast to first-time participants. Core rafting event features – encapsulated within the tangibles dimension – were found to be the vital antecedents of revisit intention. The study's findings suggest that in terms of tangibles, participants place considerable importance on conditions at the start and finish, with the highest total mean in comparison to other EVENTQUAL service quality items.

The study has several theoretical and practical implications. Firstly, rafting was investigated as an event and prior unaddressed issues within (event) tourism literature were considered. Rafting as an adventure activity has been the subject of studies by many authors (Buckley et al. 2014; Greffrath and Roux 2012; Jamal et al. 2019; Sato et al. 2018; Wu and Liang 2011), however, a scarce number of studies have investigated rafting activity within the sporting tourism event context and in particular, participant perceptions of its service quality dimensions. Secondly, the applicability of the EVENTQUAL scale in the context of 'untypical sporting events', linked to multiple locations, confirms that its application is possible outside the context of previously investigated sporting events organised in single-site indoor venues. Moreover, the study has also verified the EVENTQUAL scale in a non-professional sporting event environment. As a result, wider generalisability (both geographical and contextual) of the EVENTQUAL model has been realised, allowing the possibility for it to be tested in other research contexts. Thirdly, previous research used the EVENTQUAL model to assess the quality of sporting events from the spectator perspective, while the focus of this paper was directed at its participants. In contrast to previous studies directed at spectators (Calabuig Moreno et al. 2009; Calabuig-Moreno et al. 2016a; Pérez Campos and Dos Santos 2013), participants (and in particular, repeat participants) perceive service quality dimensions of sporting events differently, putting priority on core event experience aspects rather than other supporting service features. Finally, EVENTQUAL service quality was considered in the context of a local hallmark event, rather than its common use in the context of mega-sporting events (Crespo Hervás et al. 2013; Pérez Campos and Dos Santos 2013), confirming its applicability regardless of the size of the sporting event.

Due to the growing number of sporting events, a saturated tourism market and serious competition (Ho Kim et al. 2013), the study's results provide important guidelines for managers of unique sporting events in assisting them in managing these events more efficiently. Given the fact that it is more cost-effective to retain existing visitors than to attract new ones (Oppermann 1998), managers of sporting events should pay close attention to the tangibles aspect of event service quality. As tangibles of outdoor events are perceived as a complex issue (Kim et al. 2016), managers should dedicate additional attention to an event's core features, especially considering their capacity to induce the total event experience. Since participant revisit intention is determined by the sporting event's core services, managers should provide premium quality services capable of enhancing participants' event experiences, rather than spend resources on sporting event supporting services and their quality. Premium quality services should be those of importance to the rafting itself: route, facilities within the rafting stops, signalling and

space for rafts on the river. The event managers of *Veseli spust* should also look to improve visibility on the rafting course as, due to overcrowding along the course, there can be accidents as various rafts hit each other. Since the study's findings suggest (based on the items' mean values) that event camps and vacation spots have failed to fulfil participant expectations, managers should pay more attention to the layout of camping space, rest areas and services designed to revitalise participants when taking a break from rafting. To attract new participants, managers should pay additional attention to complementary services, especially food and beverages, as this specific aspect was perceived as of the lowest service quality. A good selection of food and beverages at the start and finish line should be of high priority for *Veseli spust's* organisers, as they add to the celebration element of these event programme segments at their beginning and conclusion.

The limitations of the work lie in the fact that only the EVENTQUAL scale was applied rather than a combined scale for measuring event service quality. Therefore, it would prove beneficial to assess additional service quality dimensions outside the scope of the EVENTQUAL scale that could subsequently be identified as important antecedents of re-participation in the event. Additionally, there were only a limited number of items per variable. Finally, not all of the participants were surveyed at the same time – some were surveyed immediately after arriving at their final destination, while others were surveyed later on while socialising at the final destination. This could lead to certain differences in their perception of the items investigated.

Future research efforts should be directed to the possibility of applying this model in the context of different events, not just those affiliated with sport. Taking into account Getz's (2014) event typology and the fact that the event investigated is a sporting event that combines adventure and entertainment elements, the study has made some initial effort in verifying the model's applicability in a context outside the classic sporting event. In order to enhance the validity of the event service quality model that was deployed, it is necessary to integrate variables from other service quality models, such as FESTPERF and EES (Event Experience Scale), as well as to include multiple statements within the proposed variables. The search for the optimal combination of variables for assessing the quality of the service of the event and its items, should be the ultimate aim of authors who will engage in researching the quality of an event.

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