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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Quantifying the relationship between visitor satisfaction and perceived accessibility to pedestrian spaces on festival days



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Abstract

Many cities organize cultural festivals to promote their distinctiveness, boost the local economy, and enhance quality of life. However, urban spaces are packed with visitors on festival days, thus affecting accessibility to pedestrian spaces. This research examined visitor satisfaction with accessibility to pedestrian spaces during special events such as festivals. We particularly focused on the *Hakata Dontaku* festival, which is celebrated in Fukuoka, Japan. We studied three main elements that affect pedestrian satisfaction and perceived accessibility through walking, namely, safety, mobility, and amenities. We first analyzed previous studies and employed analytical hierarchy process to setup indicators for satisfaction measurement. Second, we determined visitor satisfaction through a survey questionnaire, which was conducted during the *Hakata Dontaku* festival. Third, we assessed the normality of the data set that was obtained from the questionnaire. Finally, we applied structural equation modeling. Results showed that the proposed model was a good fit, as indicated by the goodness of fit test, and the majority of indicators loaded significant values that supported their constructs. Satisfaction with amenities was found to be the most statistically significant variable that influences visitors' perceived accessibility during the *Hakata Dontaku* festival.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

In the last few decades, city-promoted festivals have become a popular instrument to create a sense of distinctiveness. In this era characterized by competitiveness at both national and international scales, many cities attract visitors by organizing cultural festivals. Researchers have determined that festivals not only help a city to preserve its local culture and history, but also enable it to stand out as a tourist destination. Such festivals can contribute to the urban economy, raise property values, attract commercial development, and highlight esthetic amenities in urban area (Zukin, 1995). Eventually, these festivals will improve citizens' well-being by providing free access to social recreational resources (Nelson and Prilleltensky, 2002) and allowing them to participate in experiences that are distinct from daily life.

Festivals attract a great number of visitors. Although festivals are short-term events, municipalities should provide facilities to ensure visitor satisfaction, which in turn will create a positive impression of the city. The scope of characteristics of these facilities ranges from tangible aspects, such as well-planned programs, comfortable amenities, and esthetics, to intangible aspects, such as convenience, security, information, and staff (Cole and Chancellor, 2009). Satisfied festival attendees may become repeat visitors and provide positive advertising through word of mouth (Cole and Chancellor, 2009). Therefore, local governments should pay close attention to improving visitor satisfaction through understanding and developing relevant indicators.

Holding a festival changes the atmosphere of urban spaces significantly, and the venue of such a festival tends to record large footfalls. The *Hakata Dontaku* festival, which features a two-day parade along the city's pedestrian routes, attracts more than two million people. Figure 1 (retrieved from Fukuoka Now and Fukuoka Dreaming websites) shows a pathway along the parade route packed with visitors. The large number of people could create accessibility or walkability (note that we use these two words inter-changeably) issues for visitors. This paper focuses on a

rarely examined issue, which is visitor satisfaction with pedestrians' paces in terms of perceived accessibility during festivals. Accessibility to pedestrian spaces is strongly related to both the tangible and intangible aspects of visitor satisfaction, such as comfortable amenities, convenience, and security, as mentioned before.

A number of approaches can be used to assess pedestrian accessibility. Pikora et al. (2001) employed an observation-based tool checklist to collect data in the field. They found that on normal days, personal safety, esthetics, and mobility were important elements that influenced walking. Based on their findings, this study raises the question on whether these factors also affect perceived accessibility during the festival day. We answer this question by investigating the relationship among the above-mentioned factors via structural equation modeling (SEM).

1.2. Theoretical background

Previous studies found that perceived accessibility was affected by the variables elaborated as follows:

The word "satisfaction" is generally defined as accumulative construct that is affected by user expectations and performance perceptions in any given period (Johnson et al., 1995). Furthermore, the urban planning literature defines perception as the process of attaining awareness and understanding sensory information. In this study, pedestrian satisfaction with accessibility is related to the perception of the ease of accessing an opportunity (social activities) based on the fulfillment of walking needs in urban spaces. Hagen (2006) noted that pedestrians have various needs; health, mobility, and safety are categorized as basic needs, and the other needs include reliability, convenience, comfort, and esthetic. The perceptions of these features produce different reactions in each pedestrian.

Researchers have focused on the relationship between urban elements in terms of pedestrian spaces that could affect accessibility. Every pedestrian needs a safe place to walk. In urban setting, this means safety from auto mobiles and crimes. Craig et al. (2002) identified the absence of obstacles in pedestrians' desired routes, maintenance level, road safety,



Figure 1 Full packed of visitors on the pathway during festival day.

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