

# Blueprinting an Event & Customer Oriented Marketing Mix: The Case of the Sfindami Mountain Festival Small Scale Event

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**Abstract:** The paper attempts to define, through mapping, the important Supply-Demand Service(s) Contact-Points, and to discuss the development of a suitable Service Blueprint design system that could be applied to sport events and other relevant events. After a description of the relevant literature of Services Blueprinting Analysis, SBA, the paper presents an application of it to a real sporting event, the Sfindami Mountain Festival, SMF, which took place in 2013. After the results of the SBA analysis the paper suggests the use of a customer centric model of marketing mix, giving emphasis to how the use of SBA in Sport and other related events could lead to the understanding of the customer's needs and expectations and to the delivery of better services to them.

**Keywords:** Service Blueprinting, Small Scale Events, 4Cs

## 1. Introduction

Sport tourism appears to be a rising field, one form of special interest tourism having attracted particular attention [1] [2] [3] and having “become the subject of an increasing level of both academic and government interest” [4].

Sporting occasions may attract domestic, regional and international tourists but it is not the sporting mega-events but the less significant ones, those that are more likely to generate more tourism and economic development opportunities [5].

Through their two-part study, Gibson et al. [1] reason that small-scale events may hold “some untapped potential for tourism development in the communities hosting them” leading to more benefits for a community than mega events.

Indeed, many scholars agree that small-scale sport events may be a helpful tool for building tourism sustainability in communities [5] [6] [7]. Besides, sport events may be a “chance to showcase a community” [2], “increase city revenue and community spirit, while increasing traveler's awareness of the local community” [1], “a useful tool for building social capital, fostering community development” [6] and they “can provide people and groups with a sense of togetherness, belonging and support during interaction” [8].

However, while the studies over the mega or hallmark events are numerous and great emphasis is placed on them, the academic research regarding small-scale sport events tourism potential is little and scattered [5] [1].

This paper examines the blueprinting of a small-scale sport event, the Sfindami Mountain Festival, SMF, a research based on a priori explorative study of the service activities/processes in the service environment.

The primary purpose of the paper is to define the Important Service Quality episodes that can affect the quality level on the a priori explored and mapped important Supply-Demand “Service(s) Contact-Points”.

Another object of this paper is to discuss ad hoc based on the development of a suitable Service Blueprint design system and also the related Service Quality problematic that can affect the final tourism service strategy of the Small Scale Sport event.

## **2. Service Blueprinting**

The tourism product is a complex product, consisting of goods and services in different activities [9], and as such, sport tourism is being affected by “the quality of services provided” presenting “a positive relationship between tourist satisfaction and a desire to return” [10]. If a service is well designed and turn to be a pleasant experience, then it may act as a key point of differentiation from competitors, it is more likely to bring favorable service quality and brand image evaluations, and, thus, to affect customer loyalty [11].

It was Shostack [12] [13] who first developed the service blueprinting for designing and managing service processes in order to early encounter issues of service development and reduction of failure prospect. She inserted the consideration of four steps (identifying processes, isolating fail points, establishing a time frame, and analyzing profitability) into the process of designing a blueprint.

### *2.1 Effectiveness*

Several researchers have referred to the effectiveness of a service blueprint. It may be used both in designing of elements and entities and in managing existing services [12]. A service blueprint may decrease probability of failure, help the achievement of a controlled implementation and help companies gain control of the design and management process [13].

“Blueprinting has so far been applied to a wide range of different service processes and has been used for different purposes” [14]. Bitner et al. [11] reason that service blueprint is a flexible approach, able to be used both strategically and at a very micro-implementation level. It is an effective and powerful technique, helpful to all members of the organization to face the challenges of service process design and analysis, since it allows them to visualize an entire service and its underlying support processes. By presenting a variety of practical applications, the authors point out that service blueprinting is a service innovation approach, adaptable across several types of organizations. Other researchers recognize the effectiveness of service blueprinting as well [15] [16].

### *2.2 Outline*

Blueprinting is a method introduced by Shostack [12] [13] and based on Bitner et al., [11] Milton & Johnson define that blueprinting

“essentially is a representation of the crucial aspects of a repeatable service process involving many actors and a customer” [15]

A blueprint may be considered as a two-dimensional flowchart generating two sets of information and illustrating all the sequences and steps of a service delivery process, with the horizontal axis depicting the chronology of actions that the service customer and service provider conduct whereas the vertical axis representing the different areas of actions [14] [16].

Service blueprinting is a customer-focused approach, taking the light of the customer, not the organization [11] [15]. It is different from other flowchart approaches in that the customer actions are central to it and typically laid out first. This article will describe some techniques which can serve as a blueprint for current and future managers (e.g. directors, coordinators, supervisors, and graduate assistants) in the sport and tourism industry.

### **3. Exploratory case study of a real sporting event, the Sfindami Mountain Festival; SMF, in 2013.**

The SMF Sfindami Mountain Festival is a two day event organized every year during April at Sfindami, Pieria. In 2013, the event was held for the 7th year.

The aim of the event is to offer athletes, runners and mountain bikers, children, parents and spectators, with a love of athletics and nature, an experience of this area.

The organizer is SFENDAMOS, a local and non-profit company based in Sfindami [17].

#### *3.1 Sfindami village*

Sfindami is a small community of Pieria, built at an altitude of 160m. It is situated at the North of Greece, in the Pidna-Kolindros municipality. It is 25km from Katerini, the capital city of Pieria and 40km away from Olympus, the mountain of Gods. It has 935 inhabitants (2011 census). Agriculture such as tobacco, olives, and cereals is their main occupation and livestock, secondarily [18].

#### *3.2 SMF small-scale event*

Sfindami Mountain Festival, SMF, was founded in 2007 when the 1<sup>st</sup> annual outdoor festivals were organized in the region by the organization committee SFENDAMOS A.M.K.E. (a local, non-profit company) at Prophet Elias' hill. The festival is named by the Sfindamos tree that grows in the area.

The product SMF includes a mixture of athletic, cultural, informative and entertainment services data. The capacity of the festival by maximum number of participants in sports is 600 people, with around 300 runners and 300 mountain bikers. The festival is organized every spring and lasts for two days.

Sports events: Two major sporting event activities are included. The mountain running route and the mountain biking route take place on the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 2<sup>nd</sup> day, accordingly.

Cultural events: Demonstrations of local products along with traditions and musical events with local significance are included.

Informative events: A series of athletic seminars, exhibitions of various sports products as well as cultural elements and area's traditions are held.

Entertainment events: They involve virtuosity demonstration, events and competitions for the children (from 3 years old and over), for families and for the elderly, and sportswear bazaar for the athletes.

Apart from the sports events, the cultural, the informative and the entertainment events are intended to recreate and inform both the athletes and the attendant visitors. Therefore, during the two-day festival, the visitors and the athletes have the possibility to entertain themselves with virtuosity demonstrations, to get informed through the seminars, to participate in parallel activities that take place during the races, to savor traditional delicacies, to find out about the local traditions, to learn and see the new products and the innovations in the respective sports [19].

### 3.3 Design and method of the study

Bitner et al. [11] draw the conclusion that blueprint technique is “versatile and flexible” and can be used “in many different ways” (p. 10). The paper is an empirical analysis of Blueprinting in Services (based on the aforementioned research) and its appliance to a real sporting event, the Sfindami Mountain Festival; SMF, in 2013. SMF was selected for research because it is a small-scale sport event being “operated within existing infrastructure and within the capacity thresholds of the host cities” [5].

The technique employed here is based on the “five components of a typical service blueprint” [11], on a priori explorative study of the service activities/processes in the service environment.

Specifically, ten different areas, which all together constitute the place where SMF was held, were observed for their material elements, the activities of the guests, the visually and non-visually detectable activities related to the staff and the support processes.

Bitner et al., [11] underline that this blueprinting differs from other flowcharting approaches because the actions of the customer are central to the creation of the blueprint (p. 24), therefore, the researchers of SMF charted the clients’ activities and a satisfaction questionnaire was used in order to find out the following:

- the clients’ opinions for the product characteristics that created satisfaction or dissatisfaction
- the strengths and the weaknesses of the event
- the visitors’ proposals for any possible improvements as regards the procedures of the athletic event.

SMF: Observation reports of 20th April 2013

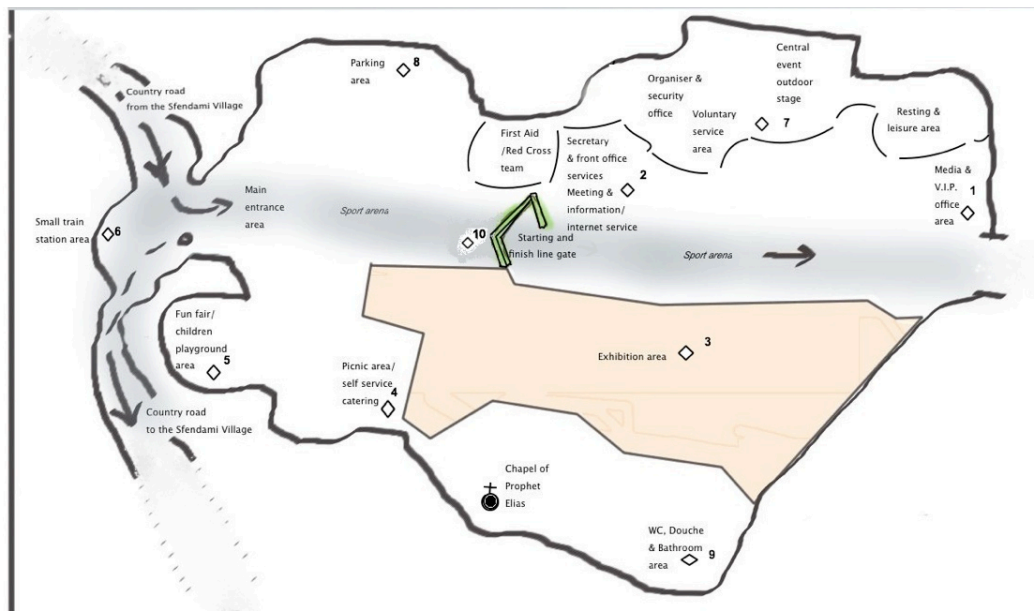


Figure 1: The SMF event area and the basic product services and facilities in the area

#### 3.3.1 Official guests hosting stand (VIP; Media & V.I.P. office area # 1#)

*Physical Evidence:*

A shelter, a single table and some chairs for the hospitality of the official guests are set up in this area.

*Customer Actions:*

The official guests (members of the regional and local authorities, journalists, politicians, sponsors, etc) arrive at noon. After the completion of the necessary greetings between the organizers and the official guests, the latter are hosted in the VIP area where they are able to watch the procedures of the event start. They also get informed about the program, they dine in this hosting stand, and they watch the parallel events, for instance the music event with the orchestra brass, the Bronzes of Kastoria. After the completion of the games they take part in the award procedure of the athletes. The official guests express their satisfaction to the organizers as concerns the service on the stand and the music event.

*Onstage/ Visible Contact Employee Actions:*

The staff and the volunteers of SMF prepare and arrange the tables and the area. They put local dishes on the table of the official guests. Some visitors get confused and sit at the table of the official guests. The organizers and the volunteers help them with clarifications. The personnel serve and care for the table of the official guests.

*Backstage/ Invisible Contact Employee Actions:*

A brochure for the event program has been prepared and distributed to the official guests. The appropriate local delicacy has also been prepared and placed on the hosting stand. The placement of the hosting stand of the official guests was designed at such a way so as to be near to the starting point of the race, the music event and the award podium of the athletes.

*Support Processes:*

Ladies, volunteers of SMF, care for the area whereas the organizers inform and notify the official guests as regards the program and the event in general.

### *3.3.2 The secretariat of SMF (Secretary & Front office services; Meeting & information/ internet service #2#)*

*Physical Evidence:*

There are offices, 4 Laptops, 2 printers, an electronic time recording system, loudspeaker, speaking trumpet and a radio communication system in the area.

*Customer Actions:*

The athletes check their registration made via internet (where they had filled in the relevant registration form) and pay for the cost of their participation. They also sign a declaration before the start that they accept the terms of taking part (full physical and psychological health, use of photographs, use of personal data for promotional purposes etc). After the race, the ranking of the athletes who took part is checked.

*Onstage/ Visible Contact Employee Actions:*

The secretariat staff checks the athletes' registration and provides information to the interested parties. They also deliver the bag with the shirt, the number plate of the athlete, leaflets and some gifts with medicated ointments. Often, before noon, some athletes complain about several matters arising, for example some chips of electronic recording time do not work. Some visitors observe the large number of the campers and notify the secretariat the overcrowding problem that they face since the space is insufficient and limited. Like the previous year, there are some non-updated athletes' registrations which have been completed electronically but they do not appear as completed registrations in the secretariat archives. Some minor mistakes have been made concerning the providing of the numbers to the athletes as well as some mistakes in the delivery of the materials inside the bag, such as lack of water or of gifts inside the bag. There was lack of brochures and informative leaflets for the event program, a problem that was very soon solved. There was also deficiency in main pharmaceuticals such as painkillers.

*Backstage/ Invisible Contact Employee Actions:*

Before the information and service process and during the information process of the athletes, the personnel deal with the control of file records and the number of participants and handle the writing software website and the electronic mail. They also prepare everything that regards the deliverable bag to the athletes. During the race, the personnel update the time count file that every athlete achieved. In the end, the time categorization of each participated athlete is made.

*Support Processes:*

There is a system of managing electronic records and a system of timekeeping in the area of Secretariat.

*3.3.3 The exhibition area (Trade shows; Exhibition area #3#)*

*Physical Evidence:*

The local products and products of sports equipment are presented here. There are ten stands. The stand of the regional unit of Pieria, the stand of Pontian Association of Pieria, a stand of energy products and vitamins, 4 stands with equipment and biking items, a stand of the Folklore and Cultural Association of Sfendami village, a kiosk with T-shirts as souvenirs and a stand with athletic shoes.

*Customer Actions:*

The visitors, who are mainly tourists and escorts, arrive at noon. They visit the stands, and after being informed, some of them buy some souvenirs, like T-shirts.

*Onstage/ Visible Contact Employee Actions:*

Before noon, the personnel are busy with the preparations of the exhibition area, in order to complete the activities before the arrival of the guests. Some stands are already able to serve the customers whereas some others are not organized yet. The first visitors go to the prepared stands and give time to the rest to get ready.

*Backstage/ Invisible Contact Employee Actions:*

The personnel lets the visitors get informed without bothering them. Some stands have already been prepared and have enough stock in brochures and information leaflets, which have been brought here by their own professional vehicles.

*Support Processes:*

There are inscriptions, photographers and advertising material and flags with product names. The photographs are used for the publicity and the promotion of the event in other audiences.

*3.3.4 The space for picnic and children's creative activities (Self-service catering; Fun fair; Children Playground Area #4#, #5#)*

*Physical Evidence:*

It includes an outdoor play area for education, fun and creative activities of the children. There are volunteer educators inside a controlled enclosure which also has toys, stationery, small tables and chairs.

*Customer Actions:*

The younger visitors arrive with their escorts before noon and are usually family members of the athletes or the employees in the event. The minors deal with Painting issues regarding the event and the region, with table tennis match, with music and songs, with several games (picking flowers, handicrafts with flowers, toy balloons) and with plasticine structures. The ecological information activities involve the description of the flora in the place visited. Parents may stay with their children. There were some problems in the availability of labor leaders. The supervisor did not come and was replenished by a volunteer mother. There was not a responsible for the children's activities early when the first young visitors arrived in the area. Some deficiencies in children's chairs were also noted.

*Onstage/ Visible Contact Employee Actions:*

The staff cares for the organization and the cleanliness of the creative activities space. Then, the necessary equipment is installed. During the activities and after having informed the parents relatively, the staff takes some photographs regarding the activities and the creations of the children.

*Backstage/Invisible Contact Employee Actions:*

The staff not only deals with the children's creative activities but also contributes to the child care.

*Support Processes:*

The area is supported by a cleaning service that takes care of all the spaces of the event. The volunteering has been enabled. For instance, there are volunteers who, before the arrival of the visitors, support the service of children's creative activities with technical equipment. This equipment may involve borrowing of children chairs and tables, stationery, find and transfer of the table and equipment of the table tennis as well as care, preparation, decoration and maintenance of all this area.

### *3.3.5 The place of the arrival and the departure of the local train (Small Train Station Area #6#)*

*Physical Evidence:*

The train starts from the village Sfindami. There is one driver who arranges its departure and the number of passengers that will be transferred to and from the event point. The stops are two and there is the relative marking inside the village which is the departure point. A marking also exists in the arrival area (Prophet Elias' hill) of the train. A beautiful natural landscape surrounds the route.

*Customer Actions:*

The visitors who start from the village may use freely the train and return to the village with the same transport. These are the locations where they board and get off the train. Many visitors express their satisfaction for the beautiful route from the village to the event area.

*Onstage/Visible Contact Employee Actions:*

The driver waits for the visitors to gather in the train parking and then departs for the event or, respectively, for the return to the village. The train goes slowly up to the hill and also returns with the same speed. Several complaints were expressed for the frequency of the routes and for the driver's correspondence to an immediate departure of the train.

*Backstage/Invisible Contact Employee Actions:*

The driver ensures the vehicle power supply and maintenance, uses a mobile phone to communicate for possible delays, changes in the route numbers or events that need attention. The traffic management and parking staff welcomes the visitors of the train and guides them in the region.

*Support Processes:*

The area is supported by a cleaning service that takes care of all the spaces of the event. The volunteering has been enabled. For instance, there are volunteers who support the management of car traffic to and from the parking. Before the start, the organizer ensures the proper marking of the train parking spaces and of the traffic and route of the vehicles and the train to and from the event area. Some complaints were expressed for the dust of the vehicles and for some car drivers' behavior to the train driver.

### *3.3.6 Red Cross Stand (Red Cross service; First Aid #7a#)*

*Physical Evidence:*

The service area is situated on a tent and there is an office, a wireless radio communication system, medical equipment and transport vehicles close to the area.

*Customer Actions:*

Some athletes or visitors seek support or medical service and medical attention. Four incidents occurred almost each per hour between 11:23 and 14:23. For example, someone from the organizing committee was tested for pressure and some information was requested concerning painkillers, bandages and ointments.

*Onstage/Visible Contact Employee Actions:*

The staff arrives in the morning and organizes the service. They prepare and set up the equipment, for instance, the stretcher and a bed, they bring boxes with first aid material and the necessary equipment for the wireless communication.

*Backstage/Invisible Contact Employee Actions:*

Before the starting, the organizer searches for volunteers and then, at the Red Cross stand, trains them in providing first aid instructions to the athletes and to the visitors of the event.

*Support Processes:*

The Secretariat area has a system of wireless communication which is coordinated with the transport means and the outdoor stations (kiosks) which support the monitoring and smooth course of the athletes. The transport equipment, medical treatment and care is enough for any isolated incidents that may be identified by the volunteer staff engaged in outdoor stops as well as by the volunteers who are responsible for storage and control and the rescue group of the area who cooperate with the organizing body.

### 3.3.7 Central event outdoor stage (resting and leisure area #7b#)

*Physical Evidence:*

There are hanging banners with the sponsors of the event on the stand along with some loudspeakers and chairs to monitor the awards. In the hospitality center there is a canopy tent with chairs and tables equipment, configured as host stalls for the visitors. Local dishes, relative material and catering equipment is here. However, some problems occurred before the setting up of the stand such as area pollution with nails having been left on the grass and speakers screech because they had not been properly adjusted. The music before noon was too loud.

*Customer Actions:*

The visitors come to this area in order to coordinate their activities with the rest members of their family before the race. Some eat something, other escorts play games, for example cards, and get informed about the event or just rest while observing the event. Many volunteers gather here in the morning. This is the area where the pasta party is held after the completion of the games.

*Onstage/Visible Contact Employee Actions:*

The event volunteers gather near the podium before the arrival of the first visitors in order to coordinate everything. Then, the organizer's technicians make up the final set up and decoration of the podium. The photographers take some pictures of the event area. Some problems were noticed; for example the staff did not take care the cleanliness of the area (some left coffee and water packaging on the stand area) and the visitors cannot find place to safely place their luggage and the like (things, bags etc). A photographer, who is partner of the organizer, complained to a colleague that he is stealing her job.

*Backstage/Invisible Contact Employee Actions:*

Before the starting, the organizer searches for volunteers and asks them to come earlier to the area in order to get generally informed about the voluntary activities and the requisite actions that are essential for the proper operation of the event.

*Support Processes:*

The organizer ensures the support of the podium through technicians, who monitor the smooth operation of the megaphone and microphone installations, and seeks ways of decoration and display of the podium. The photographers capture the moments and the awards of the podium. These activities are transferred in the form



of text and visual material on the regional websites and relevant social media (facebook).

### 3.3.8 The Parking Area (#8#)

#### *Physical Evidence:*

It is an outdoor area of land on an earthen ground bordered by cultivated lands and trees. At the starting of the event the area is filled with cars and is encircled by a plastic tape determining the entry and the parking perimeter. The access to and from the parking is supported by staff volunteers carrying special vests. There are some problems mainly due to high vegetation and because there is traffic anarchy in the parking area between 13:30 and 14:30. After 14:30 there are few vacant parking spaces whereas after 15:30 and until the end of the event, the spaces remain stably full due to the start of the sporting event.

#### *Customer Actions:*

They move towards the parking area trying to spot a free parking space and organize any luggage and preparation activities, for example clothing change next to the car. In the morning (09:30 – 10:30) some visitors reproach the staff for the delays in the organization and the layout of the stands. Apart from the car parking, some visitors request an area for dog guarding. The secretariat is closed in the morning (10:30 – 11:30) and some visitors cannot receive updated information. A client, who takes part for first time, cannot get relevant information regarding the process of races conduct. Another client grumbled for the parking infrastructure since his vehicle could not be released from the parking space due to the soft soil. Another driver attempted to release his vehicle, which was immured at the parking area, without the support of the staff (11:30 – 12:30).

#### *Onstage/ Visible Contact Employee Actions:*

The staff gives the appropriate instructions and directs the vehicles to and from the area.

#### *Backstage/ Invisible Contact Employee Actions:*

Before the beginning of the event, the organizer gathers the volunteers and gives them the last necessary directions of access and parking in the area.

#### *Support Processes:*

The organizer displays on the internet and gives the visitors the necessary directions of access and parking in the area.

### 3.3.9 The Healthcare space (WC, Douche & Bathroom area #9#)

#### *Physical Evidence:*

The area in northeast and in the perimeter of the central area of the sporting event. The area is wooded and the facilities of male and female toilets are at the downhill side of the hill. Inside the toilets, where the installations are fixed, there are bins, soap, water hose, toilet paper and showers additionally constructed as prefabricated. During morning (10:30 – 11:00) there was a shortage in toilet paper, soap and number of toilets. There were also difficulties regarding the accessibility to the area (puddled water, mud), the function of a toilet flush while there were problems in the female toilets as concerns cleanliness and hygiene. Some other troubles were also observed such as a small basin, nonexistence of mirror, door malfunctions and no lighting. It is also stated that there was not a bench for the visitors' convenience.

#### *Customer Actions:*

Some athletes wash the plastic food containers, change clothes and take care of their physical hygiene. In the morning many persons went to the toilet (17 people until 11:30). The visitors step on puddled water and the access is difficult due to the moist soil. The healthcare space was overcrowded between 13:30 and 14:30.

#### *Onstage/ Visible Contact Employee Actions:*

The staff that deals with the cleanliness ensures the cleanliness of the toilets and the changing of the garbage bag. The staff cleaned the toilets at 11:00. Before this time, the visitors had a bad impression of the space and its cleanliness. Between 11:01 and 11:59 there were again some shortages in the toilet paper and malfunctions of a toilet flush. After the visit of the staff at 12:00, the toilets are clean again. Another problem occurred due to lack in baskets (throwing and collecting papers). The staff remained until 14:00. After this time, there were matters of garbage collection due to non-cleanliness. After 14:30 the toilet flush was not working and the toilets were dirty and muddy.

*Backstage/Invisible Contact Employee Actions:*

Before the beginning the managers of the organizer supply the cleaning staff with material and equipment, give instructions and determine the frequency and the way of cleaning. There are many mosquitos in the area.

*Support Processes:*

There is the relevant inscription for the toilet space so as to inform the visitors. However, despite the inscription, many visitors indicated their discontent about the orientation in the area.

### *3.3.10 Starting & Finish Line Sport Competition Gate Area (#10#)*

*Physical Evidence:*

At the Start there are hanging banners for the sponsors and the event symbol. In the surrounding area, left and right of the Start, ribbons separate the path from the spectators and the several exhibition stands and the organizers' services. In the morning, many exhibitors unload their vehicles with equipment. Until 12:30, several cars remain in the area despite the Secretariat's announcements and appeals to the visitors to remove their cars. During this period, several technical problems with the microphones occurred. The landscape is beautiful with flowering spring view and colorful combinations where green and purple color dominate.

*Customer Actions:*

The visitors get informed through leaflets and prospectus. The athletes get prepared by muscle warming to be in a good physical condition. The athletes depart and return to the start arch and return arch. Then, they rest, snack and change clothes. The person in charge of coordination and information interviews some athletes at the finish point and presents the athletes and their impressions of the participation in the race to the public with the support of a microphone installation. The athletes thank the organizing body and express their gratification for the beautiful route.

*Onstage/Visible Contact Employee Actions:*

The beginning of the event happens at the Start with the welcome of the visitors and the athletes. The organizer announces the beginning by using microphone and speaker installations. The participants gather here at 11:30 and get informed. There is supervision and a group of Red Cross rescuers here. Then, the games for the children and adults are organized. The children's games include 3 age categories (ages: 2-4 years with an escort, 5-8 years and 9-12 years) and are held at noon (between 12:00 and 13:00). After termination, all children receive their medals. Before the main race of the adults, there are some proceedings such as musical events to start the race with the Brass Band of Kastoria and drumbeats. Upon the arrival of the first athletes, the organizer and the staff hang medals to the participant athletes who have finished. Some issues occurred after the end of the race with regard to the time monitoring and recording. A host of people impedes the athletes to reach the finish. The large crowd at this area makes the clarification of the athletes' termination and the stakeholders' information even more complicated with respect to the time of every numbered athlete.

*Backstage/Invisible Contact Employee Actions:*

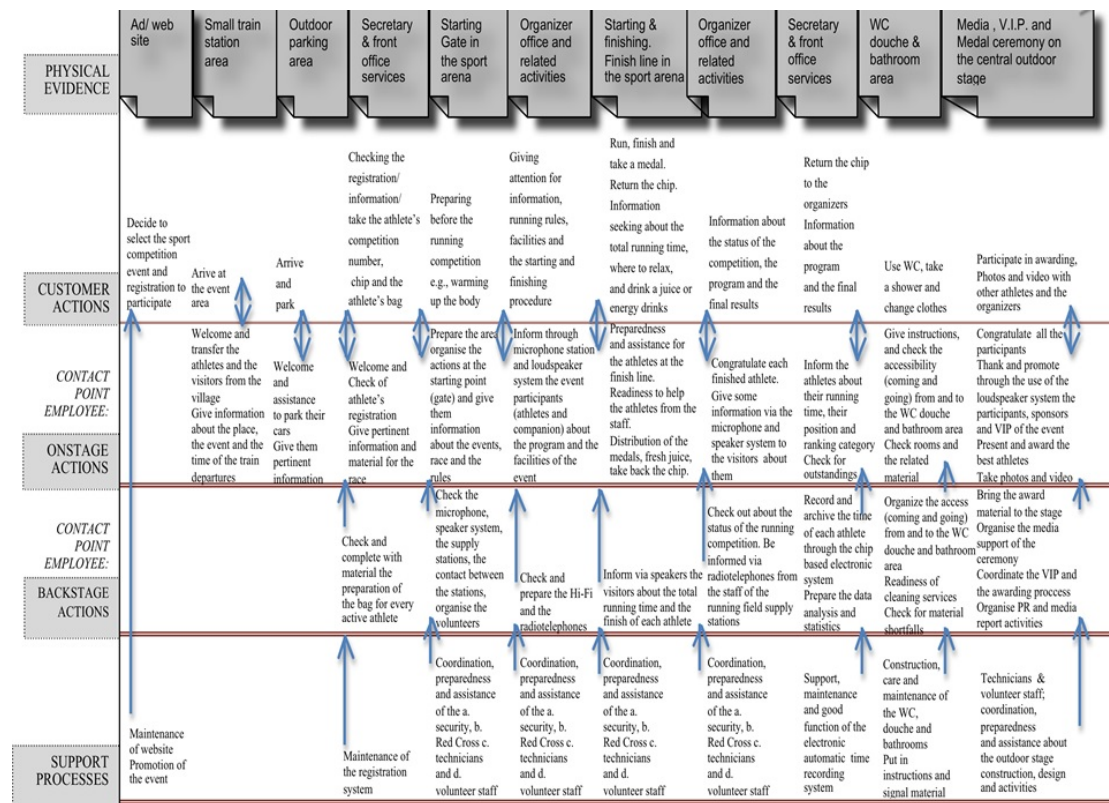
Before the starting, the organizer ensures the display of the banners and of the publicity material which concern the sponsors as well. There is a relevant vehicle which transports the relative material in the morning (around 10:30, it carried banners, ribbons and toys for the children).

*Support Processes:*

The photographic group (apart from the Press office) covers and captures the event and the happenings therein. It also uses an unmanned video instrument. Some volunteers give their assistance in the opening process of the event. The technicians support the electrical facilities. Some athletes indicated a problem at the ribbons supporting the athletes' path.

**4. Findings**

The study resulted in the identification of the Contact-Points of the SMF. These are 13 Service Supply-Demand Contact Points that define a better approach for Service Quality Analysis and Design managerial approaches (Figure 2).



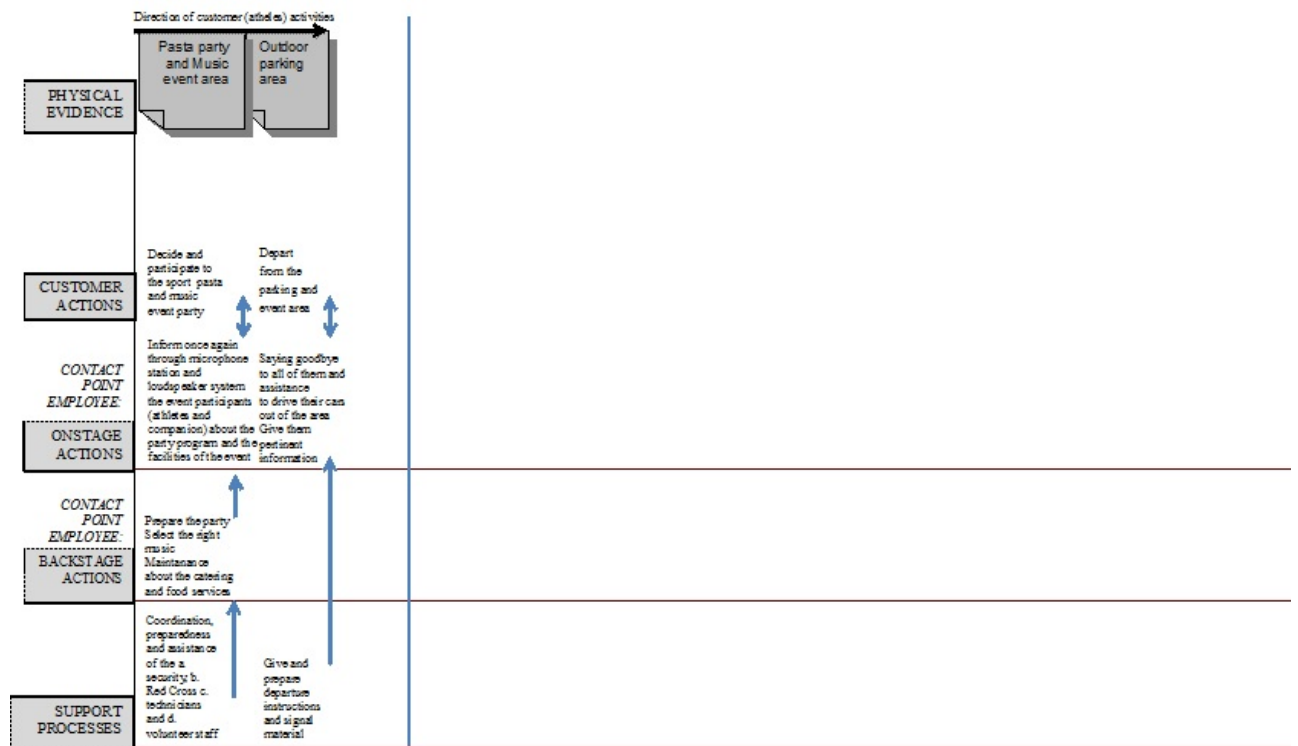


Figure 2 (cont): Service Blueprinting Components of the SMF 2013 sport event. The segment of athletes; area of analysis the central place of the SMF 2013 basic sport event; are of analysis the central place of the SMF 2013 basic sport event; Day of the running competition: 20 April 2013

## 5. The 4Cs as a customer centric marketing mix model

Through the chart of the clients' activities, we set a complete marketing strategy based on how to meet the needs and demands of the target tourists (athletes and visitors) using the 4Cs as service design elements. The concept of 4Cs was opted for its customer-oriented approach, placing the customer in the center of marketing planning [20] as the service blueprinting does [11].

### 5.1 Customer Solution

*Finding out the customers wants and needs and creating the product, the service or the solution to satisfy them.*

Bitsani & Kavoura [21] observe that "standardized and mass tourist packages do not cater for tourists' needs" since people search for alternative forms of tourism which will "respect the local community and its visitors and in the meantime, the cultural heritage and the environment", offering interesting, educating and beneficial vacations.

The product SMF is indeed an alternative form of tourism and a totality of tangible and intangible elements. It is a brand existing through 2007, constantly evolving and becoming known to the wide audience, therefore, its marketing should be based on athletes' and visitors' needs.

The organizers could conduct a thorough research among the visitors to gather information and judge their needs. By sorting the points of their satisfaction and grievances, they will then design the event according to the customers' feedback, thus achieving a more efficient customer service and better customer support during the event. Therefore, the final product should include information regarding

sporting, transportation, attractions, regional characteristics, entertainment and local delicacies and products.

### *5.2 Cost to the customer*

*Planning the cost of the product on the basis of what the customer is willing to pay*

Although no special points relating to the price were spotted, SMF could be further developed based on the number of clients that participate every year in a row. Several discounts or different payment terms could be applied to loyal customers who take part in SMF every year or bring their friends for registration.

According to Liao's study for website marketing [22], the organizers could calculate and set the specific cost customized to the clients' requirements, through the conduct of a website survey on several costs that athletes and visitors are willing to pay according to their needs.

### *5.3 Convenience*

*Providing convenient solutions to the customers (athletes/visitors) in order to choose the small-scale event from the competition.*

The study of Bitsani & Kavoura [21] for mountainous regions concludes that it is most important to offer visitors accessibility, tourism infrastructure and preservation of natural beauty. SMF should be constructed and organized based on customers' needs for convenience.

First of all, the location of SMF is easily accessible either by the local train or by car. There are also several distribution options to experience the product SMF, such as the stage, the competition area or the exhibition area. The point is that SMF should remain the place where customers would be eager to travel the distance to receive its services, as it is for the time being. More frequent routes of the train, better organization of the parking space and cleanliness of all the spaces could be some movements towards a positive customer experience of SMF.

Secondly, the majority of the processes problems occurred when there was overcrowding, that is in the secretariat, the leisure area, the parking, the bathroom and the competition area. A larger space for the secretariat, a more efficient numeration of the material in accordance with the registrants, investment on online services, the settlement of the stands before the beginning of the event and a better organization of the parking and the bathroom are important elements to which heed should be paid in order to better organize the SMF processes and offer convenient solutions to the visitors.

Thirdly, the role of the staff and the volunteers at some cases should be better clarified by the organizers based on the selective process of capable partners. That is more emphasis should be placed on volunteerism since volunteers are part of the SMF image and the customers often addressed to them for help and directions. In order to avoid customer reduction, the organizers should recognize who their people are and which their skills are, to reinforce their role, to inspire them and to highlight the importance of the punctuality and of their role for the success of the event both before and during SMF.

Fourthly, the organizers could invest on the website as a convenient distribution channel for the customers, such as an official website with a high ranking in major search engines, the design of an e-commerce platform and information platform and the use of the virtual tour technology in order to help visitors have the SFM experience before booking [22]. Of course the website should be optimized for mobile use.

Besides, a better control of the electronic recording along with e-information and technology can help the sport tourists to be just in time informed in their smart mobile services.

### *5.4 Communication*

*Communicating value to the customers and building relationship with them*

The promotion of SMF is made mainly by its official website, leaflets distribution, poster covering, social media and the word of mouth.

Internet is a perfect tool for tourism marketing, offering great potentials and providing both communicational and informational services [23], therefore, more attention should be paid on the SMF website page.

The existence of networks would bring together all the stakeholders involved for the promotion and for sustainable tourist development of the region [24], maybe resulting “in favor of destination’s management and marketing processes” [25]. The organizers of SMF could encourage the visitors to make comments and exchange experiences by creating a network or a forum in order to ensure a meaningful dialogue in the official website. Several tools could be used for the latter to amplify SEO in order to rank well while all the new information should be updated on time.

Masouras et al., [26] state that social media are among the most crucial promotional tools in tourism industry, being able to transform the online visitors into potential customers. Besides, social media may offer the concept of innovation, offering innovative ways for communication among people and offering innovative activities for the company’s advertising among its targeted groups all over the globe [27]. A social media strategy designed to promote the small-scale event and gather customer insights with the use of sponsored advertisements, among others, should be applied.

## **6. Discussion**

The blueprints in this case may become a valuable tool for SMF managers and other relative event managers in that they may provide them with potential they had not realized before.

Through the blueprinting process and the chart of the clients’ activities, the event managers are able during the planning process and the prioritization of the marketing mix actions (4Cs proposals) to focus more on customers’ needs and to identify some new paths for future innovations with the scope to understand the significant role of the volunteers, and generally, to set new service practices standards.

More emphasis should be given in future to the improvement of the providing services so as the event becomes better year in year out. In our case, the more effective function of the secretariat, the signage, valid and timely results, a proper preparation and coordination of the volunteers, a better organization of the exhibition area, the frequency of the routes of the train, the cleanliness of the area, parking infrastructure, malfunctions and shortages at the healthcare space are some weaknesses that could be earlier faced.

On the other hand, based on the positive comments relating to the service on the stand, the local food, the music event and the beautiful route from the village to the event area, we realize that the management of SMF event and other relative events should emphasize on points like the aforementioned.

## **7. Conclusion**

This paper describes in detail the customers’ activities at a practical level and may act as a useful design tool for the blueprint of services in a small-scale sport event.

The resulting information from the data analysis of the research may lead to the improvement, design and implementation of the provided services using the 4Cs (Customer Solution, Cost to the consumer, Convenience, Communication) as service design elements.

It may also lead to the new services design and to the confrontation of possible weaknesses that were noticed during the organization as well as to the execution of the procedures as a useful data basis for future service staff and skill development. Few studies regarding small scale events and few applications on the level of sport event tourism are generally noticed. Therefore, we recommend that more future research be conducted so as to be able to use more advanced blueprint approaches that can enforce and improve the marketing planning process, like the customer driven processes of understanding better the product characteristics of small scale events, which may cause pleasure or dissatisfaction to the clients.

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