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Stakeholder homogeneity or heterogeneity? Opposition to stadium subsidies in Washington, DC and the LGBT community

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On September 29, 2004, Washington DC Mayor Anthony Williams announced an agreement with Major League Baseball to relocate the Montreal Expos to the city. Within the agreement, Washington promised \$440 million[1] in public subsidies to build a stadium in the Near Southeast neighborhood, an area located within one mile of Capitol Hill and targeted by the city for rapid redevelopment. As has been the case in many cities, the city's subsidization plans resulted in the formation of an *ad hoc* coalition of opponents, which included a combination of local residents and advocates for other public policy issues, such as schools, children, poverty, and affordable housing.

Friedman & Mason (2004, 2005) found that groups opposing sports stadium development can be described as dependent stakeholders, as they possessed legitimacy within the policy process and urgency to defeat subsidies (see Mitchell, Agle & Wood, 1997). These groups also lacked power, and were only successful in defeating subsidization decisions when they enlisted the aid of more powerful stakeholders (Friedman & Mason, 2004). For this reason, individuals and organization that oppose stadium development must reach consensus in order to effectively mobilize.

In Washington, the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community was one potential ally for opponents – with both the possibility of becoming active and a valid claim beyond issues of effective urban governance – because a long-term center of LGBT life within the city was within the footprint of the proposed stadium site. After many businesses serving the LGBT community were dislocated due to redevelopment in Northwest Washington in the early 1970s, some reopened within four buildings in a one-block area on O Street. Taking advantage of low rents within a marginal economic area of light industrial and warehouse uses that had no appreciable residential presence, O Street became a “24-hour mini-mall of sexual prurience” (Schwartzman, 2005, p. A1) with a series of businesses that featured drag shows and nude dancing, adult theatres, adult bookstores, bathhouses, and gay- and lesbian-oriented nightclubs (Chibbaro, 2004). Yet, the highly sexualized nature and purpose of these businesses obscured many community-building functions, including hosting political events, helping to fund community organizations, and involvement in health education through events focused on AIDS prevention and breast cancer detection.

Given O Street's role and the historic activism of Washington's LGBT community in advancing its interests and protecting its gains through organizations like the Gay and Lesbian Activists Alliance (GLAA), stakeholder theorists employing Mitchell, Agle, and Wood's (1997) (MAW) model would suggest that the LGBT community would have possessed urgency and added to the

salience possessed by stadium opponents. However, beyond a few isolated actions and public statements expressing concern, there was little organized mobilization of the broader LGBT community against the stadium. While Mayor Williams may have diffused potential opposition by promising that the businesses would be able to reopen elsewhere in the city (a promise never fulfilled for reasons that will also be addressed), the failure of the LGBT community to mobilize against the stadium also suggests a more complex stakeholder dynamic than that suggested by MAW's model.

As Wolfe and Putler (2002) have discussed, there can be considerable heterogeneity within stakeholder groups as individual members and subgroups have divergent and conflicting interests. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to investigate these diverging interests within the LGBT community as one possible explanation for its apparent lack of urgency in both defending the O Street businesses against their removal in favor of the stadium, and its relative passivity in 2007 as the DC Council debated the conditions under which the businesses could reopen in other parts of the city. To do so, this research examines data collected through interviews, a public forum about the history of O Street, public records, and a variety of print and electronic media sources, and the archives of the GLAA and the Rainbow History Project, which catalogues LGBT history in Washington. In doing so, we use this case as a means to explore the value of MAW's model in a sport context, and to further our understanding of how stakeholders mobilize and are managed surrounding the stadium subsidy issue.

[1] The official final subsidy is \$611 million, but other estimates are as much as \$770 million (Friedman, 2008).