
THE USE OF SPORTS STADIUMS IN URBAN REGENERATION PROJECTS

Submitting author: Mr Mark Panton
Birkbeck College, Management
London, SE5 9AS
United Kingdom

All authors: Mark Panton (corresp)

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Abstract

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AIM OF THE PAPER

The use of sports stadiums in regeneration is quite a recent phenomenon in the UK, with the breadth of literature in this field relatively limited. However, it is an area of growing interest with numerous sports stadium regeneration projects, many involving football clubs, being both completed (e.g. Huddersfield Town F.C., Manchester City F.C.), in progress (e.g. West Ham United F.C.) and proposed (e.g. Bristol City F.C., Liverpool F.C., Queens Park Rangers F.C., Tottenham F.C.). This means there are undoubted opportunities to learn from existing regeneration projects and apply the developed understanding to future projects.

It has been acknowledged in the literature that sporting infrastructure has tremendous potential to create economic and social change, but there is also a need for further research on the impacts of sports stadia and the effects on their 'communities' (Davies, 2006, 2011). This research aims to understand these issues from a stakeholder perspective and add to the debate by presenting initial findings from a comparative case study involving stadium developments in the communities of East Manchester and Tottenham.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review considers different aspects of stakeholder theory and the case study approach, together with insights from studies on the use of stadium regeneration projects in the USA and Europe. The literature review has provided the main themes and many of the specific

questions for the research study. In particular the seminal article by Mitchell, Agle and Wood (1997) on the salience of legitimacy, power and urgency (who matters) underpins the research and is used to inform the analysis of the various stakeholder perspectives.

Stakeholder theory is particularly relevant for this analysis, given that one of its fundamental arguments is that organisations should be managed in the interest of all constituents, not only those of shareholders. Football clubs regularly claim to be central to their local communities in a variety of contexts and could therefore be expected to seriously consult with their various stakeholders in such developments.

This research uses as a starting point Freeman's broad definition of stakeholders as: "... any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives" (1984: 46). The comparative case study approach is particularly appropriate to understand a real-life phenomenon in depth (Yin, 2009).

Some research has been published by, amongst others, Davies (2011) and Jones (2002) on the impacts of building new sports stadiums in the UK, but it is a fairly recent phenomenon in this country, so the scope and breadth of literature in this field is relatively limited. In the USA, sports stadiums have been used to attempt to tackle urban decline in cities for many years. This has led to a wider literature, discussion and evidence base concerning stadiums and economic development founded on this experience. However, much of the material considers the argument from an economic perspective; therefore this contribution is aimed at extending the body of knowledge that deals with using sports stadiums in urban regeneration projects in the UK from a stakeholder perspective. It is also intended that by providing thick description, informed by existing theoretical constructs, the research can produce insights into how football clubs involved in major regeneration projects interact with complex bodies of stakeholders.

METHODOLOGY, RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA ANALYSIS

The research is based on comparative case study research focussing on the stadium developments in the communities of East Manchester and Tottenham. The data collection involved semi-structured interviews and observations at meetings with stakeholders involved in the projects. These stakeholders include representatives of the football clubs, local residents, businesses, councillors, football supporters, local police and protest groups. The original data is analysed with the assistance of a qualitative data analysis software package (NVivo) and triangulated with existing documents available from the websites and other media to understand the major themes that emerge around the central theories. Data collection issues of access, 'going native' and use of social media are also discussed in the methodology section.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The process of data analysis is in the very early stages. Results so far obtained demonstrate dramatically conflicting views on the use of sports stadiums in urban regeneration and some of these will be presented. What is clear is that it is not easy to balance wide stakeholder participation with successful developments. However, the analysis of the data is ongoing and will be undertaken throughout the summer of 2014 and it is expected there will be more substantial results by September 2014.

References

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