

Determining value: a comparative case study of arena development in small Canadian cities

Authors: K. Meaghan Carey, Daniel S. Mason

Institution: University of Alberta, Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation, Edmonton, Canada

E-mail: kmcarey@ualberta.ca

Aim of paper

The literature on the leveraging of sport facilities to meet broader urban development goals has largely focused on large-scale arenas and stadiums in major metropolitan areas (Chapin, 2004; Jones, 2001; Rosentraub, 2010); however, smaller cities and suburban areas have also engaged in the process of using a sport facility to anchor growth development planning, and larger cities have considered smaller venues to meet local infrastructure needs (Carey & Mason, 2014). The aim of this paper is to contribute to the literature by examining how civic elites in 14 smaller Canadian urban areas conceptualized the development of a new sport facility. Specifically, this paper seeks to answer the question: how do the policy makers and business leaders of a small city understand and articulate the value the sport facility as an amenity?

Theoretical background

The modern urban economy has placed increased significance on the provision of leisure and consumption based developments (c.f. Clark, 2004, Hannigan, 1998); as a result, cities, large and small, have sought to enhance their image and regenerate urban areas through consumption based infrastructure, or constructed amenities, often anchored by major developments such as arenas, convention centres, or performing arts centres. Smaller urban centres also pursue consumption based growth strategies and potentially face a greater risk than their larger counterparts in pursuing these types of developments, as they are without the resources that larger metropolitan areas may possess (e.g. economic and human resources, supporting infrastructure). On a per capita basis, the public's financial burden to finance a sports and entertainment facility in a smaller city may equal or exceed that faced by taxpayers in larger cities (Mason, et al., 2007).

The existing body of literature focusing on small cities has addressed economic growth (Burayidi, 2001; Paradis, 2002); community growth perceptions (Ramsey, et al., 2016); the formation of their cultural economy (Garrett-Petts, 2005); tourism based downtown revitalization (Paradis, 2002); and urban regeneration (Smith, 2007). This research project will contribute to literature of small cities through examining how elites understand and value constructed amenities as they consider the construction of arenas to host sports and entertainment events. To do so three questions will guide this study: Q1: What were the motivations articulated by civic elites for pursuing the development of a new arena? Q2: What were the perceived contributions the facility will make in the community? Q3: How is the arena linked to broader development initiatives?

Methodology

As Durkheim (1982) suggested, only by comparing and measuring relationships can we achieve greater certainty.

Applying Durkheim's (1982) work to the urban studies field, Kantor and Savitch (2005) stated that comparison of cases provides contrasting models that can point to crucial distinctions within a given set of findings. To answer the research questions it was determined that a qualitative multiple case study (Yin, 2009) design would provide scope and depth needed, and would allow for the comparison between different cities. Kantor and Savitch (2005) recommend 8 to 12 cases as a starting point for comparative analysis, this study includes 14 Canadian cities that pursued the development of an arena between 1990 and 2015.

Case studies generally use multiple data sources, a strategy which enhances credibility (Yin, 2009). The data sources for this study include, but not limited to: newspaper media articles, government reports, policy documents, and industry reports. Given time and financial constraints, interviews were omitted as data source.

Content analysis will be the methodological approach guiding the analysis. Qualitative content analysis examines language used for the purpose of classifying large amounts of text into an efficient number of categories that represent similar meanings (Weber, 1990). The categories and themes will be allowed to emerge from the data in an inductive process to allow new insights to develop (Kondrack & Wellman, 2002).

Results, discussion and implications

While the analysis is currently under way, the comparative analysis will explore the relationship between sport and urban development, and will contribute to a broader understanding of how small cities approach development opportunities and the motivations of the decision makers (civic elites) to pursue new infrastructure. In doing so, the results will add to the literature on sports facilities and urban development, and reasons why cities of all sizes continue to pursue sports-led urban development.

References

- Bell, D., & Jayne, M. (2006). *Small Cities: Urban Experience Beyond the Metropolis*. Routledge.
- Carey, M., & Mason, D. S. (2014). Building consent: Funding recreation, cultural, and sports amenities in a Canadian city. *Managing Leisure*, 19(2), 105-120.
- Clark, T. N. (2004). *The City as an Entertainment Machine*. Lexington Books.
- Rosentraub, M. S. (2010). Major league winners: Using sports and cultural centers as tools for economic development. CRC Press.
- Paradis, T. W. (2002). The political economy of theme development in small urban places: The case of Roswell, New Mexico. *Tourism Geographies*, 4(1), 22-43.