



## An alternative view of public subsidy and sport facilities through social anchor theory

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### ABSTRACT

This research article sought to review and refine the concept of social anchor theory (SAT) through sport facilities. According to this conception of SAT, organizations and/or institutions can contribute to the development of the overall community through two components: social capital and collective identity. This notion is supported across diverse literatures including architecture, sociology, public administration and urban development. While considerable research on sport facilities is primarily centered on them as physical, financial, political and economic structures, a dearth of research explores the role of the facility as a social anchor and its roles within both formal and informal community development. Our conclusions suggest that sport facilities are, indeed, viable social anchors within communities and community networks. Further, they are capable of maintaining a collective image or creating a preferred image for both community members and a fan nation. Finally, based on this information, municipal investment into sport venues should not be strictly looked at as a vehicle to produce economic returns.

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The investment of public dollars toward the building, renovating and maintenance of sport venues has regularly occurred over the past six decades (Coates, 2007; Grant-Long, 2005; Seifried, 2010). Municipal and community governments frequently claim to invest public money into sport facilities because they create changes for city centers (Barghchi, Omar, & Aman, 2009; Chapin, 2002; Nelson, 2002; Sternberg, 2002). Hannigan (1998) described the investment strategy as generally centered on improving the quality of life, labor and business opportunities because society has transitioned from industrial to service-based economies. Other scholarly literature on the construction and renovation of sports facilities has similarly focused on establishing whether or not the local economy improves through tourist revenue, encourages local investment and infrastructure improvements, and increases employment opportunities and tax revenue (Coates, 2007; Gratton, Shibli, & Coleman, 2005; Nelson, 2002; Parlow, 2002; Rosen- traub, 2006, 2008).

From this information, it appears municipal leaders invest some public money in order to prompt inflows of cap-

ital by helping to increase the number of available entertainment amenities and services. Furthermore, the commitment to publicly subsidize sport venues suggests elected officials do not always serve as simple managers of community dollars but also act as municipal entrepreneurs. Repeated interviews with community leaders explain sport-related projects appear popular because they elicit more public excitement and prompt more urban development proposals than other city projects (Chema, 1996; Rosentraub & Ijla, 2008). Nelson (2002) elaborated on this point by suggesting that many communities position sport venues, like museums and symphonies, as a “critical element of a metropolitan area’s economic and social vitality” to counter their choice to limit opportunity costs (p. 98). Remarkably, this comment and others offered by Gratton et al. (2005), Parlow (2002) and Rosentraub (2008) highlight social vitality and changing the image of the city as a purpose for such investment ventures. The City of Indianapolis, Indiana, USA serves as a great illustration of the use of sport as a strategy to help create change from an industrial location to service destination.

Starting in 1974, the town officials of Indianapolis aimed to transform their deteriorating urban sprawl into an attractive commercial and residential center with help from a several hundred-million dollar investment collected

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through the approval of multiple taxes (i.e., food and beverage, hotel, ticket, restaurant and car rental). Sport was used as the primary vehicle to prompt changes in perception about Indianapolis because city officials believed sport could change the city image and real estate development patterns more readily than other types of investments (Rosentraub, 2008; Rosentraub, Swindell, & Tsvetkova, 2008). From this investment, Indianapolis emerged as a location the envy of many communities because their sport investment strategy led to greater local investment and infrastructure improvements, increased employment opportunities, and created more attractive residential and commercial space in the city (Rosentraub, 2008; Rosentraub et al., 2008). These improvements also positioned the community to be viewed as a socially vibrant area capable of attracting tourists to important national and international sporting events. Evidence of this phenomenon is readily available. For example, Indianapolis is the hub of USA Swimming and Diving and other Olympic Events (i.e., gymnastics and synchronized swimming) as well as headquarters to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and its men's and women's basketball tournaments in the recently constructed Lucas Oil Stadium (i.e., roughly \$600 million in 2008). Combined these sport venues and the events they host have contributed great economic benefits from which Indianapolis has also achieved incredible social recognition as a regionally, nationally, and globally significant city. Uniquely, sport facilities act as a major social anchor to that image.

Social anchors have been identified as structures which support the development and maintenance of social capital, identity (group or individual), and/or social networks (Clopton & Finch, 2011; Crompton, 2004). Wood and Thomas (2005) noted social anchors may include objects produced by cities or sport organizations because of the cultural events and activities which may regularly occur inside. The application of social anchor theory (SAT) to sport facilities was briefly introduced by Coates (2007), Crompton (2004), and Clopton and Finch (2011) when they positioned sport facilities as possessing the potential to be social anchors through the interaction and development it prompts and produces. Misener and Mason (2006) and Perks (2007) further proposed sporting events may serve as an adequate resource to explore the construct of social capital and thus SAT. Despite this recognition, a thorough scholarly review is absent regarding SAT through sport venues. Such a review may be significant because it can provide a new perspective regarding the justification to use public monies to support sport facility construction or renovation when previously only an economic return viewpoint has been used.

The purpose of this conceptual effort is to examine sport facilities using existing literature from several different fields (e.g., architecture, sociology, public administration and urban development) that discuss the concept of social anchors through social capital and identity. This inquiry begins with Bridger and Alter's (2006) assumption and Clopton and Finch's (2011) position that social anchors act as the base for social networks which connect entire communities and/or fan nations together and that they provide stability for future development, recruitment, and maintenance of communities and/or fan nations. Overall, this re-

view of SAT seeks to improve our understanding about the contextual significance sport facilities play in the process of community development, the maintenance of a city's image, and as a center for social capital of communities and fan nations. A case study on Los Angeles will also be used to help explain social anchors.

The possibility of sport venues acting as social anchors can also be supported through the social construction of the built environment, a process through which Milligan (1998) presented as place attachment. Within, Milligan (1998) argued place attachment significantly influences identity, both individual and group, and provides an emotional link to a physical site through social interaction. Place attachment consists of two components: interactional past and interactional potential, both which influence the creation of social capital. Interactional past emerges from an individual's past experiences with the site, the events which took place there, and the degree of meaningfulness of those experiences shared with others. Interactional potential is connected to future experiences – imagined or anticipated – to be possible in the site (Milligan, 1998). Interactional past and interactional potential can be seen in physical sites such as sport facilities. Both new and old facilities can and do capitalize on this phenomenon (Seifried & Meyer, 2010).

Seifried's (2011) work in the *Journal of Sport Management* on the extensibility of sport facilities further highlighted the idea that fan nations can be viewed as capable of experiencing interactional past and establishing interactional potential through place attachment regardless of their physical location in the time-space continuum. Specifically, Seifried (2011) demonstrated the sport facility, as a generator, processor, and disseminator of information, is capable of helping live and remote spectators increase or maintain allegiance or identity with a sport organization and their fan nation. Seifried posited this is possible because technology allows a virtual location to feel real and sport facilities emerge as an anchor through interactions with their live and remote spectators. In particular, Seifried argued this is achievable through the collective fan nation. A fan nation was defined by Foster and Hyatt (2008) as "comprised mostly of fans who are not [actual] citizens of cities" (p. 266) and who come together through utilizing "an imagined cohesiveness they share" with others through the use of myths, symbols, tangible objects, and rituals (p. 269).

### Social anchor theory (SAT) through social capital

Putnam's (2000) seminal work on social capital and civic groups based social capital upon the *quality* of relationships that individuals maintain and operationalized social capital as an outcome that is both individual and collective. Social capital was described as the aggregate of the quality relationships and networks of individual members within a community and showed to be both an individual attribute and a community asset. Putnam further recognized communities demonstrating the highest levels of social capital can distinguish themselves from other groups because they share strong social networks supported by a strong civic infrastructure and norms mutually respected by group members. Overall, social capital can benefit all community members, to varying degrees, regardless of the amount of

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