

Journal of Sport & Social Issues

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Journal of Sport and Social Issues 2002; 26; 235

DOI: 10.1177/0193723502263002

The online version of this article can be found at:
<http://jss.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/26/3/235>

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NEW SPORTS STADIUMS, COMMUNITY SELF-ESTEEM, AND COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE CONSCIENCE

Rick Eckstein
Kevin Delaney

Sports economists have created a sizable literature on the costs and benefits of publicly funded major-league sports stadiums. This research suggests a growing consensus that stadiums provide little economic advantage for local communities. In response, some stadium supporters have modified their tactics to increasingly avoid claims of tangible economic benefits. Instead, they insist that new stadiums offer communities more intangible social benefits. These alleged intangible benefits can take many specific forms but usually have something to do with a community's self esteem or its collective conscience. This article draws on the authors' primary research in 10 U.S. cities that are involved in different stages of new stadium construction. The authors demonstrate how local elites socially construct ideas such as community self-esteem and community collective conscience to help them reap large amounts of public dollars for their private stadiums.

In recent years, there has been intense interest in the issue of publicly funding new professional sports stadiums. Across the country, teams have threatened to leave their cities if the public sector failed to provide considerable public monies for new facilities. In many of these cities, debates have raged, especially over the economic benefits to city and regional economies from professional sports. Supporters of new stadiums claim there will be great economic windfalls from this public investment. Opponents argue that it is little more than a public subsidy of private profit. The vast majority of sports economists seem to believe that the payoff from professional sports teams simply does not justify the level of public investment, although the specific intensity of this general conclusion varies from study to study (Baade & Dye, 1988; Baim, 1992; Euchner, 1993; Noll & Zimbalist, 1997; Quirk & Fort, 1992, 1999; Rosentraub, 1997; Shropshire, 1995; Zimbalist, 1992). Despite the growing evidence that there is little economic windfall from publicly funded stadiums, cities continue to invest billions of dollars to build new ballparks.

As both elites and masses become aware of specious economic claims, supporters of new ballparks have had to justify public spending in other

Journal of Sport & Social Issues, Volume 26, No. 3, August 2002, pp. 235-247
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ways. Our research shows that arguments for publicly financed stadiums decreasingly guarantee economic benefits and increasingly guarantee noneconomic benefits (although some of these noneconomic benefits may indirectly generate economic benefits). In this article, we will describe how pro-stadium supporters have increasingly turned to noneconomic justifications in their quest to secure massive public investment in new stadiums. These noneconomic benefits generally fall into two different but interrelated categories, which we call *community self-esteem* and *community collective conscience*. We will show how elites construct these benefits and why these arguments have more resonance in some cities than others.

Our research casts a skeptical shadow on claims that new stadiums in particular or professional sports in general, really produce such noneconomic benefits that transcend class, gender, and racial differences. Instead, we believe that these alleged noneconomic benefits have been socially constructed by stadium supporters (usually relatively powerful people and organizations) to achieve their goals despite increased resistance from people and organizations (usually less powerful) who have begun challenging the contention that publicly financed professional sports stadiums stimulate local economic growth.

STUDYING NEW SPORTS STADIUMS

We have studied 10 U.S. cities that are in different stages of stadium construction. Cleveland, Baltimore, Denver, and Phoenix have all recently built publicly financed sports stadiums. Since 1994, the Cleveland Indians (baseball) have played in Jacobs Field, which is connected by a parking garage to Gund Arena, which houses the Cleveland Cavaliers (basketball).¹ Cleveland has recently completed another new stadium for the football Browns. The Colorado Rockies began playing in Coors Field in Denver in 1995. Bank One Ballpark in Phoenix houses the newly created Arizona Diamondbacks and opened in 1998, and the Baltimore Orioles have been playing in Oriole Park at Camden Yards since 1992.

Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, and San Diego are at various stages of construction. Pittsburgh and Cincinnati are building both new football and baseball stadiums; San Diego is building only a baseball stadium. Cincinnati's football stadium and Pittsburgh's baseball stadium were recently completed; their second stadiums are under construction. San Diego seems committed to a new stadium, but there are many obstacles in the way. Philadelphia plans to build two new stadiums, but construction was delayed as debates raged for a time over siting and funding. Minnesota's state legislature has consistently voted against public funding for new professional stadiums, but there is recent talk in Minneapolis about building a privately funded, scaled-down baseball stadium. Hartford was seemingly all set to build a new football stadium when its designated team (the New England Patriots) decided to stay in Massachusetts.

With each of these 10 cities, our research starts with an overview of the local media, including the local business press.² We then generate a list of 5

to 10 key players in each city to interview. These include members of the business community (including team executives), political elites, and community activists who have supported or opposed new stadiums. In addition, we chat with regular folks in taverns, restaurants, and hotels to see what they think. We have received great cooperation from our sources and have thus far formally interviewed more than 70 people and informally talked with several dozen more. We have spent time in each city and have composed detailed physical ethnographies (with many nice photos) of the locations in which stadiums have been built or will be built. Methodologically, then, our study expands on existing stadium research because it is simultaneously more primary and more comparative.

Our research also relies on different theoretical frameworks to drive the empirical analysis. Most critical work on stadiums uses a “corporate welfare” perspective in which public funding is negatively likened to socialism for the rich (Cagan & deMausse, 1999). We have no argument with this perspective and have uncovered new examples to support it. Similarly, we have new evidence to further challenge the assertion that stadiums generate local economic growth. However, this emphasis on the economic outcomes of public funding often overlooks the fascinating social processes by which this funding comes about. Indeed, we realized the importance of these processes after discovering that even though most cities were successful in building (or starting to build) new subsidized stadiums, this success was not identical. In short, the outcomes were alike only in the most general sense; the ways cities reached these outcomes varied greatly.

While unpacking this black box of process, we discovered the interplay between economic and noneconomic justifications for publicly financed stadiums. We also noticed enormous variation in how stadium supporters in different places employed these arguments. In some cities, there was a conscious and concerted effort to eschew arguments about economic development and instead highlight the noneconomic rewards of new stadiums. In other cities, there was greater emphasis on economic development. Mostly, there was a combination of these alleged justifications but with a noticeable waning of the economic arguments and a noticeable waxing of the noneconomic arguments. This seemed especially clear in cities such as Cleveland and Denver, in which there was a time lag between building new ballparks. The earlier stadiums were very much couched in economic development talk, whereas the more recent stadiums are increasingly tied to community self-esteem and community collective conscience.

Our idea of community self-esteem has two separate but related threads. One is a highly symbolic notion about how people living in a community perceive their community. Do citizens think they reside in a third-rate town or in a first-rate, major-league city? How do professional sports and new professional sports stadiums play into this internal definition of a community’s self-esteem? The other thread is a more external projection of a city’s image to outsiders. Does it project, as Euchner (1993, p. 73) described it, a major-league reputation, or is the city externally perceived as

second-class (see also Shropshire, 1995, p. 62)? What sort of social amenities, such as professional sports and sports stadiums, does one city have to offer relative to other cities? This external impression management is, in part, aimed at attracting transient tourists and their disposable incomes. But, it is even more strongly aimed at recruiting permanent additions to the community such as new businesses and new employees. Although this recruitment is not completely noneconomic, it is less direct than those economic benefits historically guaranteed by new stadium construction. For instance, creating an attractive external impression might help businesses adequately fill existing labor slots (especially for high-end labor). A more direct economic benefit would make the stadium construction itself responsible for any new job slot.

We distinguish between the internal and external elements of community self-esteem because, in the minds of stadium strategists anyway, they are different and require distinctive approaches in efforts to win stadium funding. For instance, attempts to manipulate internal community self-esteem usually warn local residents of slipping to the depths of some nearby city (which has been socially constructed as inferior) if franchises leave or new ballparks are not built. Manipulation of external perceptions places more emphasis on the positive attributes of the community and the need for amenities to influence outsiders' impressions and actions. This argument is often connected to the mobility of capital and the pitting of cities against one another to attract increasingly mobile corporations.

Community collective conscience, on the other hand, refers to the shared values, beliefs, and experiences that bind community members to one another. Sociologist Emile Durkheim coined this idea in the 19th century to help explain the differences between highly integrated traditional societies and more differentiated modern societies.³ Traditional societies (usually preindustrial) had a high degree of collective conscience because its members were continually interacting with, and dependent on, one another. Religion usually provided the institutional mechanism of this bond. Modern societies (usually industrial) have a low degree of collective conscience because its members are highly atomized and alienated from each other. Without these shared everyday experiences that generate shared values and beliefs, and without a single dominant religion, modern societies must find their social glue elsewhere. Stadium supporters have increasingly turned to the argument that sports, especially professional sports, are a source of this social glue, providing what some have called a "sense of continuity in a discontinuous and atomized society" (Ingham, Howell, & Schilperoot, 1987).

Of course, just because people claim that sports create community collective conscience is not proof that it does provide this social glue. Many people told us that sports represent the shared norms and values of their community in which class and race differences disappear when cheering for the home team (preferably in a new stadium). They insist that when the home team plays well, which is sometimes augmented by a new ballpark, the

intangible social benefits wash over the entire metropolitan area. People on the streets are friendlier to each other, domestic disputes decline, and city folks stop moving to the suburbs. However, stadium supporters may only want others to believe that sports provide this social glue because it obfuscates the important (and perhaps intensifying) class, race, and gender differences in the community. Supporters also ignore the fact that the new stadiums are sought, in large part, because they will provide more luxury boxes and club seating, which is likely to separate social classes in the ballpark rather than integrate them.

SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTING COMMUNITY SELF-ESTEEM AND COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE CONSCIENCE

Although we are able to document a clear shift away from economic justifications for the public financing of stadiums to more noneconomic arguments, there has not been a complete disappearance of direct economic arguments. Interestingly, in our interviews, this argument came much more often from political elites than from business executives. For instance, a mayoral assistant in Pittsburgh insisted that new stadiums were sure to draw new visitors from all over southwest Pennsylvania, as he said, “to put heads in beds.” This type of anatomical word play was also used by a Connecticut governor’s aide, who promised that the new football stadium in Hartford would put “feet on the street.” A political leader in Cleveland said,

For the city to support a project, it has to be about economic development, it can’t be about keeping a team. You have to make [a stadium] project fit into an overall development context. By my count, we are about to open one hotel and have another one down the road, as many as 20 new retail establishments, and we are closing in on 100 new housing starts in that immediate neighborhood, which was one of the most run-down, near-downtown areas of the city.⁴

Several political appointees in Philadelphia promised that a new center city baseball stadium would greatly increase retail business activity.

People will come in and dump their cars, and a large percentage of people are gonna eat, they are going to walk around, and spend bucks. If someone from Maine comes in for the Red Sox, they come in and go twice, maybe Friday and Saturday or Sunday, and they stay and shop. In St. Louis, and other places, people come from wherever the hell they are from and they do things they can’t do at home. We think the downtown stadium will create the same kind of synergy in Philadelphia.

Ironically, business executives, including those with the sports teams themselves, were actually more skeptical about any economic windfall associated with new stadiums. A business and civic leader in Minneapolis, who was instrumental in bringing professional sports to Minnesota, said,

The argument about economic development has been attempted here, but it’s never proven to be true. I don’t think it is a strong argument. Do businesses

open up because they want to be near a stadium? I don't think so. People go to a stadium for one simple purpose: to go to a game. They are not going shopping. There has been no economic development around the Metrodome.

A real estate developer, whose company owns much of the land being used for Pittsburgh's new stadiums, echoes this skepticism about economic development and suggests that community self-esteem is much more important.

Sports, you could argue over the numbers, but they are just not economic generators. If you had, say, \$100 million to spend in the region and wanted to get the most economic impact, sports teams wouldn't do it. But the teams are part of the community. The stadiums will provide us with a civic shot in the arm and be good publicity for the region.

Cincinnati's stadium proponents best articulated this growing concern with community self-esteem. The entire campaign avoided claims of economic gain and focused exclusively on "keeping Cincinnati a major-league city." This slogan adorned T-shirts, bumper stickers, advertisements, and headlines all over Hamilton County in hopes of building support for a sales tax increase to fund two new stadiums. A politician central to the initiative explained this approach as follows:

The economic development argument did not really stir people. Now, sports owners are not very sympathetic figures [but] baseball is an important part of the city's history. So the tagline became "Keep Cincinnati a major-league city." We played off that, saying it means more than major-league sports but major-league schools, parks, arts, and entertainment. Do we really want to be like Louisville, Kentucky? Columbus is a great place, but it's struggling to get an NHL team there. We've got an NFL and major-league [baseball] team. Do we really want to risk that? Do we want to be a city on the move or a city that's spiraling down?

A local journalist covering this story for years said that it was no surprise that stadium supporters took this tactic.

For me, as someone who grew up in northern Kentucky, Cincinnati had always had a sort of superiority complex. The sales tax campaign played off on those fears, which were already there. The thought was what distinguishes us from these other towns is that we have two major-league teams in such a small market. We need to hang on to this so we don't become another one of those podunk towns that doesn't have football. There was exit polling after the sales tax when people said they voted for it but complained bitterly. Said these rich team owners don't deserve all this money; we're just working stiffs, so why should we pay more? But a lot of these people said I held my nose and voted yes because I don't want the city to turn into Dayton.

Stadium supporters in many cities often manipulated community self-esteem by targeting another urban area that had been socially constructed as inferior. People in Cleveland warned that without new professional sports stadiums the city would be "just like Akron." Ballpark

proponents in Minneapolis and Denver seem worried that without new stadiums the cities would be just “a colder version of Omaha.” Phoenix elites insisted that major-league baseball would prevent Phoenix from turning into “another Tucson.” Interestingly, stadium supporters in Pittsburgh could not manipulate community self-esteem in this way. Traditionally, people in Pittsburgh use Cleveland as the example of urban depravity. But in terms of new stadiums, Pittsburgh’s elites wanted very much to be like Cleveland. There was some talk of not becoming another Johnstown, but such a comparison had little credibility.

The external component of community self-esteem was also a dominant theme in these midsized cities. Stadium proponents believed (or claimed to believe) that new ballparks would project the right image to important outsiders.

You are in Cleveland, Ohio and you have 23 or 24 Fortune 500 companies headquartered here, and these guys are competing for CFOs and COOs, and all these key players with cities all over the world, and they are trying to get the same talent you get in New York and Philadelphia and San Francisco and Los Angeles. So what are you going to sell? You sell the city’s amenities. We have a great art museum, a great orchestra, and major-league sports. Nice suburbs? There are nice suburbs everywhere.

Business leaders in Cincinnati, Cleveland, Minneapolis, and Pittsburgh all stressed the difficulties in attracting what they call “major-league talent” to work at their cities’ companies. A business leader explained,

What’s the greatest single problem a business has today? Workforce. If you interview 50 businesses at random, I’ll bet 49 would say that my biggest problem is getting qualified workers. To get workers, you have to get people who want to be in your community because they love the community, it’s got things to offer. As the incoming CEO of [one local] company said, I got 80 people making over \$100,000 in this operation. Every one of them are young, aggressive, highly compensated people. They go to the best schools in the country, they can go anywhere they want, they are the A players in the business world. I need things that A players want.

In the minds of these business elites, new stadiums (assumedly with luxury boxes) are just the sort of amenities that the A players are looking for. A member of Cincinnati’s city government, who was opposed to the stadium initiatives, echoed this narrow definition of which amenities contribute to a city’s externally perceived community self-esteem.

I think the whole hypocrisy of this stadium stuff is that the schools have been in bankruptcy for 6, 7, 8 years. None of the sales tax is supposed to go to schools, just stadiums. The hypocrisy is you have all these business people who put a million dollars in. We know their kids do not go to the Cincinnati public schools. They don’t live in the city. If the schools were the priority, and they should have been, then we should have taken care of the schools first and then worried

about building the stadiums. But business says, without the stadiums we can't bring in the kind of workforce we want.

Some civic leaders, however, hope that new stadiums and professional sports will let outsiders know that they are an important city. As one put it,

The teams are the city's identity. The Japanese know who Jaromir Jagr is [hockey player for the Pittsburgh Penguins]. They don't know who Tom O'Brien from PNC Bank is. For better or worse, it is national identity.

In addition to this concern with internal and external community self-esteem is the broader notion of sports creating a community conscience. Stadium supporters are increasingly using this notion to argue that sports create a social glue that brings disparate people together around a shared urban identity. A top executive of the Minnesota Twins told us,

I think sports can bring people together across social and economic lines. Those lines are obliterated. You can have a CEO of a major corporation sitting next to a homeless person and they both are there for a baseball game; they are both there for the same reason. They can afford to be there. So, it has tremendous social value.

One of the leading architects of the effort to build new stadiums in Cleveland went even further to articulate a postmodern view of cities in which ballparks were a key to interaction.

If you look at the Western world, cities were important in the first 1,500 years because they provided defense. From 1500 to 1970-ish, they were important as centers of business and commerce... But, I think Plato and Aristotle were right, as human beings we are social creatures and we want to have a lot of interaction with each other. So, cities will be important in the 21st century if they give people opportunities and reasons to come together.

Whether CEOs actually sit next to homeless people in new stadiums replete with luxury boxes and whether Plato and Aristotle would have supported tax initiatives for stadiums are debatable points. What is happening here, however, is an attempt to articulate sports as a key social unifier within a community. This idea resonates for some who are searching to justify public subsidies despite increasing evidence questioning the economic benefits from new stadiums.

In Minnesota, for example, the Metrodome is only about 20 years old. Many residents can still recall the promises of economic development that were made when that stadium was constructed. Today, the dome sits just off downtown, with absolutely no economic spin-off in the surrounding area. As a result, appeals to community collective conscience are used more frequently in efforts to gain a new ballpark. As one business executive explained,

I make the argument that it's good for the quality of life of the community and it is good for the soul of the community. It's good to be able to go to a place to yell at the umpire.... In sports, people get out their feelings. It's a great thing for the soul.

Perhaps an even more extreme version of this idea of sports as social glue came from a top management official of a major-league baseball team that tied bringing a team to his city to the maintenance of the nuclear family unit, as follows:

I thought baseball could bring tremendous value to this community in terms of quality of life, as it relates to young people and families. The break up of the family has been a big issue for me.... I've adopted this area as my home, and knowing how I grew up as a baseball fan, I knew what baseball could do [for families and communities].... I don't want to overlook the quality of life issue and the impact baseball has on families. With the disintegration of families in this country, to me, it is an important issue because one of the most enjoyable things I had last year was watching families, the little kids with the parents and grandparents, and all of them enjoying the game.

Finally, for newer communities, mostly in Western states, professional sports are purported to provide cohesion among a heterogeneous population, which has relocated from all over the country.

This is a community that in 1945 had 50,000 people, so almost everyone here today is from somewhere else, there are very few natives.... Well, getting that pride that was first generated when the Suns [NBA basketball team] came. It brought the community together. Now, after 30 years with the Suns, you look at the exposure and the publicity that has come to the community as a result of what is here—I am talking about the teams—it is enormous. And there is pride. People take pride in this.

ANALYSIS

Stadium supporters' appeals to community self-esteem and community collective conscience seem most effective in smaller cities, newly emerging cities (in the South and West), and those cities that have suffered serious population decline. These venues provide greater salience for the idea that the city could fall to the ranks of a second-class city or at least never be taken seriously by outsiders. These arguments are less effective in cities such as Los Angeles and Philadelphia. Los Angeles, which lost its football Rams to St. Louis a few years ago, seems in no immediate danger of being considered a minor-league city either internally or externally. Efforts to publicly fund new stadiums there have been thoroughly unsuccessful. Philadelphia's current struggle to gain public support for financing two new stadiums reflects the same problem. Like Los Angeles, Philadelphia has many other positive attributes and a downtown that keeps going even after the office workers head home. Thus, the role of sports in the city's personality becomes less important (see Shropshire, 1995, p. 68). Interestingly, this forces stadium

supporters to rely more on the easily disputable claims of direct economic development.

It is also harder to make the argument that stadiums generate direct economic spin-off in cities in which one stadium has already been built and a second one is contemplated or in which the current stadium is of recent vintage. Mostly this is because previous economic promises just have not been fulfilled. In Minneapolis, for example, everyone can look around the 20-year-old Metrodome and see nothing but a small restaurant called Hubert's, a community jail, and a sea of parking lots. Most residents still remember the promises of selling lucrative development rights to the parcels of land around the dome and then watching as nothing materialized. In these cases, there is much more skepticism surrounding economic arguments, and stadium supporters must look for different strategic arguments.

As mentioned earlier, we found that political elites were more likely to use economic justifications, whereas business leaders were more likely to use appeals to community self-esteem and community collective conscience. We suspect this is because political leaders need to justify to their constituents why they are spending significant tax dollars on stadiums while pressing social needs go unmet. They want to argue that economic outlays will not exceed economic returns, thus making new stadium funding, at worst, revenue-neutral. Business leaders, on the other hand, know very well that there would be better ways to gain an economic payoff from the investment of hundreds of millions of dollars. So, they turn to arguments about amenities, recruiting, self-esteem, and social glue. Ironically, each is dabbling in the expertise of the other, with political leaders trying to talk dollars and cents and business leaders talking about civic pride.

Of course, all of these tendencies can play out in unique combinations in any particular city. In all three of the middle-sized, Mideastern cities we studied (Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Pittsburgh), powerful people played on this notion of community self-esteem, although not to the same degree. Stadium supporters in Cincinnati focused almost exclusively on the city's prestige and self-esteem, and there was relatively little talk about the two new stadiums generating any kind of local economic growth. One corporate leader told us that it is just not possible to make that rationale stick, so the business community focused instead on something a bit harder to prove or disprove. One executive likened it to selling laundry detergent (appropriate in a town dominated by Proctor & Gamble) in which you do not necessarily promise the cleanest clothes, just that you will like your image better. The referendum to raise the sales tax in Cincinnati (and surrounding Hamilton County) to fund two new stadiums passed easily. We believe the emphasis on community self-esteem was a necessary, but not sufficient, contributor to this outcome.

Stadium initiatives in Cleveland and Pittsburgh also stressed these noneconomic factors but not quite as exclusively. In Cleveland, political leaders told us that Jacobs Field/Gund Arena had already created an economic miracle and that the new football stadium would do more of the same.

Our inspection of the Jacobs Field area uncovered no such miracles, just a sea of parking lots and a smattering of sports bars with frequent ownership turnover. Cleveland's corporate leaders, like those in the opposite corner of Ohio, seemed aware of the oversold claims of economic development. The reality of Jacobs Field made clear that touting economic windfalls would not build public support for the football stadium they very much wanted. So, they focused instead on linking the new stadium with the city's (and surrounding area's) self-esteem. Thus, there was constant talk that all that separates Cleveland from the Akrons of the world is first-rate sports stadiums. The referendum to pay for the football stadium by extending the sin tax on tobacco and alcohol for an additional 10 years in Cleveland passed easily. More easily, in fact, than the sin-tax referendum in the early 1990s, which paid for Jacobs Field. As in Cincinnati, we think emphasizing community self-esteem rather than economic development contributed heavily, although not exclusively, to this outcome.

Pittsburgh's new stadium supporters, however, did not focus on the city's self-esteem when pressing for a six-county sales tax increase in 1997. Instead, the two new stadiums, along with a new convention center (replacing one dual-purpose stadium and an existing convention center), would rejuvenate Pittsburgh's Golden Triangle area and create the sorts of good jobs that had been disappearing for decades. The sales tax increase was defeated by an almost 2:1 margin. We believe this outcome would have been different had strategists focused on community self-esteem, or what one opponent to Pittsburgh's stadiums called "quality of life issues." As it turned out, the vote was irrelevant because Pittsburgh's powerful political and corporate elites decided to build the new stadiums anyway. At this point, then, there started to be more talk (although still not exclusively) about community self-esteem.

The campaigns to open Coors Field in Denver and Bank One Ballpark in Phoenix offered a mixture of strategies. Overall, supporters in both cities stressed alleged economic gains but not at the complete expense of community self-esteem arguments. In Denver, the stadium was presented as a missing link in the economic revitalization of the historic Lower Downtown (LoDo) district. However, we talked with many regular people who said that, during the referendum campaign (to raise sales taxes in a six-county region), there were occasional reminders that professional sports (and the sparkling new stadiums they required) was the only thing that kept Denver from being just another Omaha. The more recent campaign to build a new football stadium is focusing much more directly on community self-esteem. Now people are being told regularly that, without the Broncos' new stadium, you might as well just move the mountains to Omaha and call it Denver.

One Phoenix executive told us that you could shoot a gun in downtown after 5 p.m. on any day and not hit a soul. The central business district completely emptied after work. The Diamondbacks, and their new stadium, were supposed to fix that. But stadium supporters also told us that Phoenix had a self-image problem. They insisted that people in the rest of the country

still viewed Phoenix as a desert retirement community of octogenarians and rattlesnakes rather than the sixth-largest city in the United States. Bank One Ballpark would have the country's first fully retractable roof to allow for both real grass to grow (because it needs sun) plus real people to watch games (because they need cool). That would certainly put Phoenix on people's radar.

Baltimore's Camden Yards was the first ballpark built in the latest wave of new stadium construction (1990s). These ballparks seek to re-create the intimate, inner-city, single-sport stadiums of the early 20th century, which is, ironically, the exact atmosphere stadium builders had been avoiding for the past 30 years.⁵ Camden Yards, along with its recently built neighbor for the football Ravens, has always been heralded as the marquis example of how new stadiums create economic growth. Only indirectly have the ballparks ever been linked with community self-esteem. Hartford's now defunct plan to build a new stadium for the New England Patriots (who currently play in Foxboro, Massachusetts) also leaned heavily on promises of economic development, with only a little talk about community self-esteem. San Diego is more of a hybrid (much like Phoenix) in which supporters insist there will be economic development but also play up noneconomic factors, such as not being seen as a mere cul-de-sac to Los Angeles.

We expect increasing focus on noneconomic issues in upcoming attempts to garner public dollars for stadium construction. This is mostly because of the growing evidence, both through systematic research and anecdotal observation, that new stadiums simply do not create economic growth for the areas in which they are built. Nor do they contribute in any way to alleviating the myriad social problems in these communities. Our research, especially our field work, certainly bears this out. Cleveland's school system is one of the worst in the country and remains in state receivership even while the Indians sell out every home game. Poverty is increasing in urban Denver even as 50,000 people per game visit Coors Field. The barrios of Phoenix (bordering on third-world destitution) and the slums of West Baltimore (with one of the highest homicide rates in the United States) seem unaffected by the supposed multiplier effect of the sold-out, publicly funded stadiums only a few blocks away.

This growing evidence against economic spin-off has almost forced stadium supporters to become more sophisticated in their arguments about why public money should be used to subsidize privately owned sports franchises.⁶ These more sophisticated arguments increasingly turn to symbols of community self-esteem and community collective conscience. It is no coincidence, of course, that these noneconomic benefits are difficult, or impossible, to measure and therefore difficult, or impossible, to challenge. As a result, we were offered "proof" in the form of Cleveland's bicycle messengers smiling more since a new stadium was built and the increase in Phoenix's family values because they can attend ball games at Bank One Ballpark. We see no more reason to believe promises about community self-esteem and community collective conscience than we do to believe promises about

economic spin-off. It is not that political and economic elites have reached a noneconomic epiphany about new sports stadiums; they are just trying a new strategy. The social constructions of community self-esteem and community collective conscience are the latest effort by powerful individuals and organizations to use public resources to satisfy their own parochial interests.

NOTES

1. We have restricted our research to large, single-use football and baseball stadiums. The public financing of indoor arenas is important but requires a different theoretical approach because they are smaller, cheaper, and have more uses.
2. Examples of this include the *Cincinnati Business Times* and the *Denver Business Journal*.
3. We have added the word *community* because Durkheim was most interested in macro-level societies, whereas we are more interested in smaller locales within a society.
4. For the record, our fieldwork in the stadium district uncovered a different reality.
5. The last wave, in the early 1980s, was the era of domes: Kingdome, Silverdome, Metrodome, Skydome, Superdome, and sort-of-dome (Dallas).
6. Some recent research even shows that new stadiums may contribute to a decline in per-capita income (Coates & Humphreys, 2000).

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