The Use of the Sport Development Conceptual Framework to Assess Indianapolis as a Sports City in the US: A Case Study

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Many American cities have claimed to be "sports cities". A "sports city" is defined as “a metropolitan that has the amenities and capability of providing the first-class sport entertainment products, services, and participation opportunities to its residents” (Li, 2010). Atlanta, Boston, Denver, Indianapolis, just name a few, are among those American cities fighting for this glamorous label or designation. The Mayor of Indianapolis even claimed that the city is an amateur/Olympics sports capital [of the United States and the world] (Ballard, 2010). The USA Sports Travel Internet Network (2009) also refers Indianapolis as both the “Amateur Sports Capital of the World”, and the “Racing Capital of the World”. To fight for this special honor, those aforementioned American cities have invested heavily in building sports-related facilities and infrastructure, bringing and sponsoring sports events, and luring and subsidizing professional sports franchises. The ultimate goal of the efforts is three-fold: (a) to enhance the quality of sports life of its residents, (b) to enhance the economic development of the area, and (c) to enhance its image and reputation (Toh, 2010).

To truly determine if a city is qualified to be called a “sports city” and deserves this special title, what are the assessment criteria? This study first attempted to identify these criteria with the application of the sport development conceptual framework developed by Ekindes and Li (2008) and then assessed Indianapolis to see if it was what its Mayor declared it to be in a case study.

Sport development is conceptualized as a system in which various types of resources are input, consumed or converted into measurable outputs (Ekindes & Li, 2008). The system has three components, that is, the input, the conversion and the output components. The author of this study proposed that to determine if a city can be called a “sports city”, the assessment of its level of sport development, particularly, the three components of the sport development system, would provide the necessary hint for the decision. According to Ekindes and Li (2008), each component of the sport development system has a number of elements. The assessment of those elements will yield critical information about whether or not a particular component of the system is functional or effective. The level of sport development in a city, which is the holistic reflection of the functionality of the city as a sports system, can be assessed by examining each component in general and its elements in particular.

The assessment of the input component involves nine criteria, such as the policies developed by the local government for the sake of promoting sport development, and the level of funding provided by the local government to support the process of sport development. To assess the functionality of the conversation component, seven criteria must be examined. Examples of these criteria include the percentage of adults in the city who regularly participate in sport, the percentage of youths who regularly participate in sport in this metropolitan area, and the number of sports competitions and events held in the city annually. The gross domestic sports product of the metropolitan, the performance of the local professional sports franchises, the overall health status of its residents, the overall reputation of the city, and the quality of sports life of its residents are the five criteria that are used to assess the output component of the sport development system.

The assessment of the City of Indianapolis with Ekindes and Li’s sport development conceptual framework confirmed that the city was indeed a sports city. The city met nearly all the criteria outlined in the conceptual framework. Particularly, the city achieved a very high mark in such areas as the overall reputation, the number of amateur sports participation, the number of sports-related organizations, the number of sports competitions and events, the number of professional sports franchises, and the level of government spending and investment in sport.