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Perspectives of Sport and Leisure Amenity Development in a Small City

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(including questions)**

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Regardless of population size, geographic location, or economic base, many cities actively pursue downtown development strategies in order to meet economic growth, sense of community, and image enhancement objectives. However, most academic literature exploring sport-related development has focused on the strategies of larger urban centres such as Indianapolis, Columbus, and Baltimore (See Chapin, 2004, Curry et al., 2004, & Rosentraub et al., 1994). While downtowns large and small share common elements, there are specific components unique to smaller cities that are salient to development. Robertson (1999) put forth nine characteristics, which seek to distinguish small city downtowns from their larger counterparts. These characteristics are inline with Scott's (2001) assertion that the strength of a small city is its' ability to create a niche market facilitated by unique historic and local features. The existing body of literature that does focus on small cities has addressed economic growth (Burayidi, 2001; Paradis, 2002); the formation of their cultural economy (Garrett-Petts, 2005); community and a sense of place (Paradis, 2000); tourism based downtown revitalization (Paradis, 2002); and urban regeneration (Smith, 2007). This research project will contribute to the growing body of literature of small cities through examining the role of sport and leisure amenities in the downtown revitalization of a small Canadian city. The primary research question that guided this project was: how are sport and leisure amenities understood to contribute to a community? The research will explore the development a new arena complex in the downtown of a small city and how it was understood by the relevant stakeholders to contribute to their community.

The selected case study for this project was the City of Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, which has a long history as a tourist and retirement city. It serves as a hub city for small towns and farming communities in the surrounding area. The City of Moose Jaw provides an example of a small city, approximate population of 35,000, striving to be competitive with its regional counterparts for mobile capital through the pursuit of a sport/entertainment centered redevelopment strategy for its downtown core. In 2004 local business and political elites of Moose Jaw began to pursue the idea of developing a new arena for their Western Hockey League team, the Moose Jaw Warriors, to replace their current home, the Moose Jaw Civic Centre (built in 1959). Since the early concept of a new multi-purpose arena arose in the small Western city, the development proposal has been through two municipal plebiscites, both resulting in large margins of support for the project; committing the City of Moose Jaw to approximately \$34 million in funding for the project and allowing the development to move forward. The multiplex development project ultimately encompassed two separate city facilities in order to gain broad community support; the facilities were a multipurpose venue located in the downtown core (housing a 4,500 seat arena for hockey games and concert events, as well as an eight sheet curling surface), and an indoor soccer/field house located to the south of the city.

The process in which the development of the arena/entertainment centre was debated and pursued by community members is the focal point of this case study. This research project employed a qualitative approach to examine the arena development. The data collected includes, newspaper articles, official government documents, such as reports and meeting minutes, and transcripts from eight semi-structured interviews conducted between August 18 to 20th, 2010. Analysis was conducted using an emergent approach to coding, which allowed for the inductive identification (Thomas, 2006) of themes that focused on the motivations for the arena development, which stemmed from the expectations of the community, and how stakeholders perceived the arena to contribute to the cities vibrancy and growth. The findings show that elite stakeholders within this case were operating inline with commonly held beliefs about how a city should act or what it requires to be competitive (i.e. consumption based amenity development – hotels, galleries, theatres, arenas). The analysis also determined that the construction of a new arena in the downtown core was congruent with other development projects, which contributed positively to developing public support for the project.

This paper is part of a larger research study examining the role of sport-related amenities in the strategic planning

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process in small to mid sized Canadian cities. The purpose of the study is to explore the role of sport and leisure amenities in the community and economic development strategies of Western Canadian cities. The contribution of this paper is the examination of the factors leading to the development of a new amenity and how community members conceptualize the amenity within their city. In doing so, it will help policy makers in other small cities understand how their community may perceive the development of a sport amenity, and through that understanding garner positive community support for the project.

Selected References:

- Burayidi, M. A. (2001). *Downtowns: Revitalizing the centers of small urban communities*. New York: Routledge.
- 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.
- Rosentraub, M. S., Swindell, D., Przybylski, M. and Mullins, D. R. (1994). Sport And Downtown Development Strategy If You Build It, Will Jobs Come?. *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 16, 221-239.