Examining the Modernization Construct through the Historical Case Study of Kenan Stadium 1926-2016

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The proliferation of permanent football facilities at universities began with academically and financially elite northeastern institutions in 1903 initially through the opening of Harvard Stadium. Shortly thereafter, other elite northeast universities unveiled their own permanent football-specific facilities (e.g., Penn-1903, Johns Hopkins-1907, Yale-1915, Princeton-1915). State-funded, public universities soon followed this trend so that by the end of the 1920s college football revenues approached $50 million per year with a profit rate of approximately 50 percent (Schmidt, 2007). Like many other universities, The University of North Carolina (UNC) at Chapel Hill opened a small and unimpressive football facility during this early period of permanent construction, Emerson Field in 1916. However, like northeastern universities with permanent facilities, UNC looked to capitalize on the growing attraction of college football during the 1920s with the construction of a larger permanent and more complex facility (i.e., increased spectator and player amenities), Kenan Stadium in 1926. Further, like other institutions of higher education, their athletic and academic leadership sought to use the construction of a permanent on-campus facility to promote increased enrollment, alumni donations, and academic expansion (Schmidt, 2007). Within this point, institutions in the Southern U.S., politicians, and university presidents used college football and college football facilities to counter popular Northern images of a culturally backward and agrarian Southern culture (Borucki, 2003; Doyle, 1994). In essence, the modernization of a campus and institutions was promoted through advancements connected to the construction of stadia.

This historical case study focused on the construction and evolution of Kenan Memorial Stadium from 1926 to 2016 at UNC through the lens of modernization to learn more conceptually about that construct and how it has been used as a rhetorical strategy. Ingelhart and Welzel (2005) defined modernization as the “process of human development, in which socioeconomic development brings cultural changes that … promotes human emancipation” (p. 2). Other scholars such as Adelman (1993) suggested, “Modernization offers a way of integrating three concomitant sets of processes: the modernization of structures, the modernization of public beliefs, and actual popular mentalities” through characteristics such as competition, record-keeping, bureaucracy, and standardization. (p. 356). Other descriptors of modernization involve technological development, job specialization, and rationality for a safer and more secure society through continuous service and product improvement.

Despite this scholarly attention to the development of modernization, many scholars questioned the utility of the construct as an organizing framework suggesting it is ahistorical, reductive, and ideologically deterministic (Seifried & Novicevic, 2016). Modernization critics also posited it cannot be used for prognostic or analytical goals due to linear assumptions regarding the development of society and/or social phenomena. The purpose of this study is to highlight the utility of modernization as an organizing construct and to demonstrate how, the funding, construction, and expansion history of Kenan Stadium provides an important snapshot of the ongoing facility arms. Moreover, this work aims to show how modernization has been used as a rhetorical strategy by the institution to promote its quality, activities, and accomplishments.

This work is best described as applied history. Applied history encompasses research on individual actors and events, seeks to establish of patterns, and attempts to understand specific environmental conditions to assist goals of present practitioners and comprehend and develop methods to overcome barriers and challenges associated with their practical and conceptual work (Brophy, 2013; Neustadt & May, 1986; Sterns & Tarr, 1981; Tosh, 2006; Wood, 2008). In particular, applied history demonstrates how trend assessment can facilitate and justify decisions or the discounting of a specific course of action under similar circumstances (Brophy, 2013; Neustadt & May, 1986; Sterns & Tarr, 1981; Tosh, 2006). Importantly, applied history is also recognized as useful to develop knowledge or build
theory because the richness of information available on the past can help avoid potentially limiting perspectives offered by a non-reflective present (Brands & Suri, 2016; Brophy, 2013; Tosh, 2006).

In recent years sport management scholars such as Amis and Silk (2005) have encouraged their peers and colleagues to expand the lenses and methodologies of their research. In response to the encouragements of Amis and Silk, other sport management scholars have argued that research done using the historical method can be a valuable tool to expand the depth and scope of sport management research and theory construction (de Wilde & Seifried, 2012; Seifried, 2010). This study followed a five-step process outlined in Seifried (2010) to engage in historical research. Step 1 required the pursuit of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources were secured during a visit to the UNC special collections library and includes documents such as letters of correspondence, memorandums, financial/accounting ledgers, committee reports and proposals, information brochures, game programs. Secondary sources included journal articles, history books, and newspaper articles. Step 2 involved the source criticism of the primary and secondary sources. Within, internal and external checks on sources were conducted for reliability and validity. Step 3 concerned the analysis and interpretation of established themes emanating from the evidence collected. The historicisation is based one main assumption: specific historical episodes are dependent on environmental conditions. Step 4 made use of an ideal-type as a heuristic tool to not only organize the document chronologically but also identify the emerging conclusions on modernization.

Contributions of this work on the evolutionary history of Kenan Stadium include promoting modernization as involving prognostic abilities through efforts to remove dysfunction, improve infrastructure and telecommunications, increase comfort and energy consumption, and the transmission of information. This work also demonstrates specific examples on how modernization has been used a rhetorical strategy to promote the institution. Finally, for practitioners, this presentation is compelling because it provides campus leaders and sport managers important information capable of helping them anticipate future developments of sport stadia and formulate responsible renovation decisions connected to prospective rehabilitation, restoration, preservation, and/or reconstruction (Seifried, 2010). Next, the inventory of information (e.g., funding strategies, construction costs, seating capacity, widths, construction materials, site sizes, concession stands, restrooms, and technological devices) provided from this research may help sport facility planning professionals improve their economic situation.