Using Applied History to Preserve Cultural Heritage through the Adaptive Reuse of Multipurpose Facilities

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Much of the extant sport facility literature suggests sport facility owners seek to build on the most fiscally advantageous sites possible (Fisher, 1993; Pujadas, 2012; Seifried & Pastore, 2009). Similarly, evidence of increased civic pride and psychic income, the revitalization of dilapidated areas, and improved land usage have been observed as intangible benefits of sport facility construction (Groothuis, Johnson, & Whitehead, 2004; Groothuis & Rotthoff, 2016; Schwester, 2007, Seifried & Pastore). Moreover, the intersection of team and civic benefits has resulted in sport facilities becoming social anchors for fan nations (Seifried & Clopton, 2013). Considering the status of sport facilities as social anchors, and therefore, sites for collective community identity, Pfleegor, Seifried, and Soebbing (2013) suggested facility owners and civic leaders may have a moral obligation to preserve cultural heritage in the form of sport facilities. Relatedly, Pfleegor and Seifried (2012) demonstrated that heritage has been sacrificed to maximize profit.

Despite this moral obligation or the best intentions of ownership, some facilities lack the space and infrastructure to be renovated to meet modern sport needs and are necessarily replaced (Belanger, 2000). Unfortunately, once rendered obsolete, these structures of collective community memory and identity are rarely preserved or rehabilitated for continued community benefit. In fact, many iconic arenas are razed rather than adapted for reuse. For example, of the “Original Six” National Hockey League arenas only Maple Leaf Gardens and the Montreal Forum have been adapted for reuse while the other four facilities were demolished. Maple Leaf Gardens and the Montreal Forum serve as contrasting examples of adaptive reuse of multipurpose urban sport arenas.

Elrod and Fortenberry (2017) defined adaptive reuse as the renovation of abandoned buildings to reestablish them as community assets. Applied history examines phenomena to identify patterns and understand environmental conditions to assist practitioners in developing methods to overcome challenges to practical and conceptual work (Brophy, 2013; Neustadt & May, 1986; Sterns & Tarr, 1981; Tosh, 2006; Wood, 2008). The purpose of this research is to explore what factors led the adaptive reuse/rehabilitation of Maple Leaf Gardens to succeed, while the Montreal Forum’s faltered. This research will demonstrate the role and value of understanding cultural heritage, the historical method, and applied history to sport management. This research is important because both Maple Leaf Gardens and the Montreal Forum were designated as national historic sites prior to their renovation treatments. As a result, this presentation is instructive to facility managers and management scholars because it explores necessary accommodations to preserve historical site status.

The presentation is organized as follows; First we discuss the concept of cultural heritage and how it has manifested in sport. Second, we differentiate Maple Leaf Gardens from the Montreal Forum by examining the geographic, cultural, and sport history of each facility (e.g., development, construction, operation, decline). Third we outline the adaptive reuse (i.e., preservation, rehabilitation), civic response to, and outcomes of each facility. Lastly, the presentation concludes by offering a set of recommendations for sport facility managers once they have decided to rehabilitate a facility.