FEATURED ESSAY

THE POLITICS OF BREAD AND CIRCUSES
Building the City for the Visitor Class

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City leaders in the United States devote enormous public resources to the construction of large entertainment projects, including stadiums, convention centers, entertainment districts, and festival malls. Their justification is that such projects will generate economic returns by attracting tourists to the city. Although this economic expectation is tested in the literature, little attention is given to the political and social implications of building a city for visitors rather than local residents. A focus on building the city for the visitor class may strain the bonds of trust between local leaders and the citizenry and skew the civic agenda to the detriment of fundamental municipal services.

> "I feel like a Roman emperor. I can't give decent city services, I want to close [city] health centers, and I want to cut back on library hours, and here I am giving bread and circuses to the people."
>
> Philadelphia Mayor Edward Rendell on the occasion of the opening of the Pennsylvania Convention Center, 1993 (Bissinger 1997, 202)

During the period of rapid urbanization in the late nineteenth century, the great task of American municipal governments was to manage the politics of city building for a burgeoning populace by providing the public services essential to health, safety, and civic education. A century later, city governments are consumed by a very different task. City regimes now devote enormous energies and resources not simply to the basic and traditional municipal functions but also to the task of making cities, in the words of Judd

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and Fainstein (1999), "places to play." This undertaking entails the construction of expensive entertainment amenities, often in partnership with private investors, designed to appeal primarily to out-of-town visitors, including the suburban middle classes. This is true even in the nation's poorest, most decrepit cities, such as Detroit and Newark. Putting the best face on this urban obsession, Sharon Zukin (1995, 2) noted that "culture is more and more the business of cities." But another way to view this development is to say that increasingly, the urban civic arena is preoccupied by a politics of bread and circuses.

Building a city as an entertainment venue is a very different undertaking than building a city to accommodate residential interests. Although the former objective is often justified as a means to generate the resources to accomplish the latter aim, the two are not easily reconciled. For example, one feature that distinguished the development of municipal services in the late nineteenth century was their fundamental democratic nature: These were not just for the well-to-do but also for the common people. Indeed, as Jon Teaford (1984) pointed out, American city dwellers of all classes had greater access to clean water, free schools, public libraries, parks, and public health facilities than did even the comfortable urban middle classes in the great cities of Europe. Today, however, the city as a place to play is manifestly built for the middle classes, who can afford to attend professional sporting events, eat in the new outdoor cafés, attend trade and professional conventions, shop in the festival malls, and patronize the high- and middlebrow arts. Many, if not most, of these are visitors to the city, and in the view of local leaders, they must be shielded from the city's residents. The city is no longer regarded as the great melting pot, the meeting place of diverse classes and races. Thus, for example, the proposal for a "Yankee Village" surrounding Yankee Stadium in the Bronx would involve increasing parking capacity and constructing a new mass-transit station within the confines of the stadium to ensure that no matter how they travel to the ballgame, "fans will not come into contact with Bronx locals" (Fainstein and Stokes 1998, 160).

It is not surprising that political and civic leaders increasingly are intent on spending their political and fiscal resources to support such entertainment facilities.[1] Such amenities not only offer literally monumental evidence of mayoral achievement, but more important, local leaders believe that they hold out the prospect of economic revival by bringing the middle class back into the cities from which it fled long ago, not as resident taxpayers but at least as free-spending visitors. Thus city leaders make entertainment projects a keystone of their urban economic development strategy, hoping that they will generate ancillary investment, high employment multipliers in the hospitality and retail sectors, and local tax revenues.

A substantial literature, however, suggests that such expectations are generally misplaced (Swindell and Rosentraub 1998). The economic effects of stadium investments, casino projects, convention centers, and other entertainment amenities generally show up on the negative side of the balance sheet, and in the few cases when they do not, their effects are highly localized. Cost overruns in the construction phase, high public subsidies for operating expenses and debt service, sweetheart deals for professional sports team owners, overoptimistic job creation projections, the unlikelihood of stimulating ancillary development beyond the immediate neighborhood, and the absence of evidence that new entertainment venues actually increase total regional entertainment spending mean that such projects almost never pay for themselves (Rosentraub 1997; Sanders 1998; Gross 1998).

Although a great deal of attention has been paid to the issue of economic impacts of entertainment amenities, little effort has been made to consider the broader consequences for cities of pursuing a politics of bread and circuses. What does it mean for cities to spend their money and their political capital in pursuit of the discretionary entertainment spending of visitors rather than the tax payments of a resident middle class? Does courting the middle class as visitors mean the creation of a different sort of city than one designed either to bring the middle class back as residents or to serve the diverse and often poorer resident population?

URBAN ENTERTAINMENT AMENITIES IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Despite the need to build the basic infrastructure of urban settlements and to provide for public health and safety in the late nineteenth century, local governments in the United States did not entirely ignore the recreational and cultural interests of their populations. The creation of New York's Central Park in 1857 and Chicago's Jackson Park in 1893 bracketed a period of great urban public park building. In the 1860s, Philadelphia created the first public zoo in the United States (Teaford 1984). City playgrounds for children, with swings and slides and climbing frames, appeared around the turn of the century (Sessoms 1984). Milwaukee built the first public indoor swimming pool in the late 1890s, located, incidentally, in a working-class neighborhood (Orum 1995). After World War II, leisure time expanded, and cities responded by building municipal golf courses and softball fields (Herson and Bolland 1998). The construction of stadiums paid for by local taxpayers began in the 1920s, when several cities—Chicago, Los Angeles, and Cleveland—built facilities to accompany bids for the Olympic games (Danielson

1997). Thus the expenditure of local public resources for entertainment and recreational amenities is not entirely new. Nevertheless, the current pattern of local government entertainment investment is different from that in the earlier period in several ways:

1. The pace and variety of construction have markedly increased
2. The demographic and economic context is different
3. The intended patron base has shifted from the city's residents to visitors
4. The scale of entertainment construction is significantly greater

PACE AND VARIETY

Annual state and local expenditures for sports facilities and convention centers rose from about $700 million in the mid-1970s to more than $2 billion in the early 1990s (Sanders 1995). Table 1 shows the decade-by-decade record of construction of major-league professional sports facilities for football, baseball, basketball, and hockey. The boom in stadiums and arenas began in the 1960s as professional sports franchises expanded into the sunbelt states. By the 1990s, however, cities in all regions of the country were building facilities for major-league teams. Over the same period, cities invested heavily in convention centers and exhibition halls. In 1970, only 15 cities in the United States had a facility to host a trade show for 20,000 people. By 1985, the number of cities that could accommodate such large crowds had increased tenfold (Frieden and Sagalyn 1989). By David Laslo's count, there were 409 convention halls in 1997 in cities of all sizes with more than 55-million square feet of exhibition space, up from 24-million square feet in 120 cities at the end of the 1960s (Laslo 1998).

Cities also began to invest with private partners in festival malls, riverfront walks, and urban entertainment districts. Boston's subsidy of the Faneuil Hall–Quincy Market complex in the mid-1970s served as the prototype urban festival mall project, in which developers, with city assistance, combined architectural renovation, high-end retailing, and a wide array of restaurants and cafés as a way of drawing people into the heart of the city. Quincy Market was so successful economically and aesthetically that nearly 250 communities were prompted to copy the model in one way or another over the following dozen years (Walters 1990). One variant of these developments occurred along urban riverfronts, often in decaying industrial districts. Cleveland, Chattanooga, Columbia (South Carolina), and Louisville are among the cities in which planners have sought to transform these wasteland areas by combining parkland, mixed-use commercial and residential development, and entertainment venues to create a riverside version of the festival mall (Jordan

TABLE 1: Number of Urban Professional Sports Facilities Constructed with 50% Public Financing or More, by Decade

1920-1929	3[a]
1930-1939	—
1940-1949	1
1950-1959	2
1960-1969	10
1970-1979	16
1980-1989	7
1990-1998	19

SOURCE: Rafool (1997).
NOTE: Professional sports facilities include baseball and football stadiums and basketball and hockey arenas. Publicly financed suburban facilities, such as the New Jersey Meadowlands complex, are not included here.
a. Although each of these three stadiums was built originally to bid for the Olympic games, all were eventually used by professional sports teams.

1997). Yet another type of city gathering place in the 1990s is the downtown urban entertainment district, typified in some cities by a high concentration of multiplex movie theaters, sports complexes, bars and cafés, and "theme" retailing, such as Disney and Nike stores. Downtown Phoenix and New York City's Times Square are the pioneer models (Fulton 1997). In other cities, the entertainment is more sedate: Newark's New Jersey Center for the Performing Arts and Philadelphia's Avenue of the Arts complex are examples of the approximately 60 officially designated arts-based cultural districts in cities across the country (Strom 1998; *New York Times*, 18 November 1997).

CONTEXT

The era in which cities began to build public parks, the most common sort of nineteenth-century recreational amenity, was a time of rapid urban population and economic growth. Later, when cities first began in earnest to finance professional sports facilities, it was primarily the new and prosperous cities of the South and West that did so. Prior to 1970, of the 14 cities that built publicly financed sports facilities, 10 (71%) were growing in population.

After 1970, however, municipal investment in entertainment amenities became a universal urban undertaking. Of the 30 cities that undertook stadium or arena construction in the next quarter century, only 57% were growing. Thirteen of the cities were experiencing population losses, some of drastic dimensions, such as Detroit and St. Louis. Even more striking is that 26 of the 30 cities that built sports facilities after 1970 were experiencing an increase in the number of people living in high-poverty neighborhoods—that is, census tracts in which 40% or more of the population lives below the federal poverty line (Jargowsky 1997, 222-32). In Houston, for example, the number of people in high-poverty tracts rose from slightly over 4,000 in 1970 to more than 119,000 in 1990. In Detroit, the increase was from just over 64,000 to 363,000, and in Cincinnati, it was from 2,200 to almost 20,000. In short, in the contemporary period, many local governments have been making large public investments in entertainment facilities at the same time that the municipal tax base is declining and social welfare needs are rising.

PATRON BASE

In the nineteenth century, urban recreational facilities were designed for the urban populace. Although the great city parks built after the Civil War were often far from the immigrant quarters and thus beyond the easy reach of slum dwellers too poor to pay the carfare, for "middle-class urbanites and their working-class cousins . . . the great parks were accessible refuges from the drabness of the city, and thousands flooded the municipal preserves each weekend" (Teaford 1984, 257-58). Even exceptional events such as world's fairs relied heavily on local visitors. Cronon (1991, 343) noted that of all the people who came to Chicago's Columbian Exposition of 1893, "the largest share undoubtedly came from Chicago itself." Writing about what were at the turn of the nineteenth century admittedly largely privately financed ballparks, midways, dance halls, vaudeville theaters, and movie palaces, Nasaw (1993, 2) stated that "the world of 'public' amusements was . . . where the city's peoples came together to have a good time in public."

In contrast, today's entertainment facilities, marketed vigorously by tourism promoters, are designed to bring visitors into the city (Kotler, Haider, and Rein 1993). Tourism is a way of importing spending and exporting the tax burden. These are the obvious objectives behind the construction of convention centers. An estimated 80% to 95% of convention-goers stay overnight in the host city, paying hefty room taxes in the process. They represent a highly desirable type of visitor because they tend to spend considerably more per day than ordinary tourists or attendees at cultural performances or sporting matches (Petersen 1996, 6). These latter events are aimed at other sorts of out-of-town visitors besides convention-goers. For example, New Jersey's Performing Arts Center, located in the heart of Newark, drew 70% of its audience in its first year from suburban counties around Newark (*New York Times*, 6 July 1998). Even in a city as large as New York, the fan base at sporting events is heavily suburban: 85% of those who go to Yankee baseball games are suburbanites (Fainstein and Stokes 1998, 159). In fact, baseball teams justify new stadiums in part on the grounds that such facilities will increase out-of-town fan attendance. In making the case for a new stadium for the Milwaukee Brewers baseball team, consultants pointed out that the Minnesota Twins and the Toronto Blue Jays built new facilities and promptly saw their nonmetropolitan attendance grow by 47% and 52%, respectively. The consultants predicted a similar effect of a new Brewer stadium (Arthur Andersen & Co. 1995, 9). In short, the objective of the new politics of entertainment amenities is primarily to attract visitors.

SCALE

Facilities built today are more expensive and bigger than in the past. Soldier Field in Chicago, built in 1924, cost the equivalent of only $20 million in 1995 dollars. Baltimore's Memorial Stadium of 1950 cost only $38 million, adjusted to 1995 dollars. The generation of stadiums from the 1960s—for example, Candlestick in San Francisco, Jack Murphy in San Diego, and RFK Stadium in Washington, D.C.—rarely cost more than $125 million in 1995 dollars (Rafool 1997). Contemporary stadiums, however, with their retractable roofs, elaborate concession areas, luxury boxes, closed-circuit television transmission, and high-tech scoreboards, begin at well over $200 million and range to a projected $1 billion or more for a proposed new Yankee stadium on Manhattan's congested West Side.

For certain classes of entertainment facilities, size has also increased. Convention centers built in the late 1960s in Atlanta and Denver had 70,000- and 100,000-square feet of exhibition space, respectively. Replacement facilities built in those cities more recently have 950,000- and 300,000-square feet, and they must compete with Chicago's upgraded McCormick Place with its 2.2-million square feet of space (it was originally only one-seventh that size) and New York City's 750,000-square-foot Javits Center (Kotler, Haider, and Rein 1993; Sanders 1998).

BUILDING A CITY FOR VISITORS

The amount of fiscal and political resources and the level of energy that local elites must devote to the realization of large entertainment projects are so great that more mundane urban problems and needs must often be subordinated or ignored. In pursuing big entertainment projects, local elites create a hierarchy of interests in which the concerns of visitors to cities—including commuters, day-trippers, tourists, and business travelers—take precedence over those of the people who reside in the city. Visitors must not only have easy transportation access to the city, but once there, they must at least have parking or mass-transit access to the city's attractions, police protection, clean and well-lit streets in tourist districts, sanitary restaurants, honest taxi service, and fireproof hotels. Proponents of big entertainment projects justify the allocation of public resources and civic energies to big projects and the services that support them on the grounds that the projects themselves generate big economic development gains for residents of the city in the form of jobs and tax revenues. It is this claim that has attracted the attention of analysts. Yet the effects on cities of the mobilization of resources to build big entertainment amenities are likely to extend well beyond economic development outcomes. One of the potential unexplored effects of entertainment projects is that they threaten to strain the bonds of trust and accountability between citizens and their leaders. A second possible effect is that the effort to realize these projects can easily skew or distort the civic agenda.

STRAINING THE LINKS BETWEEN LEADERS AND THE LED

In seeking to build publicly subsidized entertainment projects to attract visiting spenders, local elites risk deepening distrust of government, creating deep polarities, and breeding cynicism among residents in the city. Consider first the democratic challenges of public financing of huge capital projects for entertainment purposes. Because these efforts are both so costly and so important to local elites, the preference is to shield the funding decision from the uncertain outcome of a public vote. Sometimes a bond or tax referendum is unavoidable if the project requires a levy on local taxpayers, however. This is a minor risk for local elites because more than half the time, voters refuse to pass such referenda. However, a negative outcome is rarely a permanent obstacle to the eventual commitment of public subsidies. It simply delays the project as leaders search for ways to detour around voter disapproval. In such cases, if resorting to means other than a public vote to use public funds does not stoke the fires of voter frustration, then other factors associated with large capital expenditures for entertainment amenities are likely to do so. These include the high opportunity costs associated with making such large investments, the potential for driving up the cost of public borrowing for other projects, and the diminution of local fiscal flexibility.

Referenda on whether to commit public funds to the construction of big entertainment amenities are not in fact the norm. Although the National Council of State Legislatures has determined that public financing was used for the construction of major-league sports facilities in 71 cases through 1996, there was no public vote in 54 of these (Rafool 1997). When referenda are held, they result, more often than not, in negative votes. The same is true of votes on convention and civic centers. Herson and Bolland (1998, 352) noted that in the late 1980s, voter support for bond issues for these sorts of projects fell, on average, below 44%. By way of comparison, support for bond issues for water and sewer systems in the same period ranged from 69% to 77%.

A negative referendum outcome does not always lay the issue to rest. As the mayor of Chandler, Arizona, once commented on an approaching referendum on whether to provide public funds to build a new spring training site for a major-league ball club, “If the voters pass this, we’ll move forward. If the voters don’t pass this, we’ll still move forward” (quoted in Fort 1997, 146). There were at least 30 sports-facility-funding referenda between 1984 and 1997, of which 19 produced negative votes in 14 different cities (Sekwat 1996; Fort 1997). However, in 7 of the 14 cities—Chicago, Cleveland, Milwaukee, Phoenix, Pittsburgh, San Jose, and Seattle—new stadiums or arenas were subsequently initiated using public funds other than simply local levies.

State legislatures in Wisconsin, Arizona, Pennsylvania, and Washington provided funding packages for the stadiums in Milwaukee, Phoenix, Pittsburgh, and Seattle, thus essentially bypassing local electorates. In a typical scenario, the state of Pennsylvania came to the rescue of stadium proponents when Pittsburgh-area voters in 1997 resoundingly defeated a ballot measure that would have imposed a half-percentage-point sales tax for seven years to finance two new stadiums for the baseball and football teams, expand the convention center, and pay for projects in Pittsburgh’s cultural district. In the wake of the defeat, state and local politicians and team officials immediately began to meet privately to work out what came to be called Plan B. This involved committing public funds through a bond sale backed by a county sales tax already in place and a hotel tax, as well as securing $150 million from the state of Pennsylvania. Stadium construction is going forward. In the state of Washington, voters turned down an increase in the state sales tax to fund a new stadium for the Seattle Mariners, but the state legislature, declaring an “emergency” to block another public referendum, passed an alternative public financing plan in a special session called by the governor.

The sales tax in the Pennsylvania case, although county based, is administered by the Allegheny County Regional Asset District, a special authority created in 1994 to raise tax revenues for the present stadium, the zoo, and local libraries. The use of special authorities to administer taxes and borrow money for stadium financing and operations is widespread. Major-league sports facilities are managed by special authorities in at least 14 other cities besides Pittsburgh (Rafool 1997). Although stadium and other big-asset projects are not always controversial, one virtue of special authorities, from the point of view of project proponents, is that their governing boards are typically insulated from the voters. For example, the mayor of Pittsburgh and the members of the Allegheny County Commission select the seven members of the Allegheny County Regional Asset District, one of whom must be chosen from a list of nominees supplied by the private development community. Likewise, the King County executive and the governor of the state of Washington appoint the seven members of the Washington State Major League Baseball Stadium Public Facilities District, and in Michigan, the Wayne County executive alone chooses the six members of the Detroit Stadium Authority.

The sums involved in financing big entertainment projects, particularly stadiums, are so large that they inevitably raise issues of the apparent opportunity costs in voters' minds. The irony of spending hundreds of millions of public dollars to fund a sports facility that will be used a few times a year is not lost on proponents of greater social spending. As New York residents began to debate the construction of a stadium on Manhattan's West Side, with an estimated cost promising to top $1 billion, parents' organizations made the case that this was enough money to build sufficient classroom space to end the city's chronic school overcrowding (*New York Times*, 22 May 1998). Because education is a municipal responsibility in New York City, the opportunity-cost equation does not pose a merely hypothetical guns-or-butter choice: Money raised for the stadium would not be available for the schools. In other cities, the schools are run by separate school districts and financed by a dedicated property tax. Voters may or may not be entirely aware of the existence of two separate revenue streams, but the symbolism of spending for a stadium in a city with an impoverished and effective school system, such as in Cleveland, is not lost on parents' groups. Cleveland's mayor has defended the investment of $280 million in a football stadium: "The income for the stadium couldn't be used for the schools," he says, "so we're not robbing children to pay for football. Far more important is keeping a community mosaic" (*New York Times*, 2 September 1998).

Even if money spent for a big entertainment project could not legally be spent for other purposes, a commitment to a large local capital expenditure may greatly constrain the degree of fiscal flexibility that a city has over time. Furthermore, it could conceivably drive up the cost of borrowing for other purposes. Both of these effects are conjectural. It is known that local taxpayers have a finite tax tolerance or willingness to pay. Even very small exactions, such as the one-tenth of 1% sales tax levied on residents of metropolitan Milwaukee for the new Brewer stadium, can elicit intense opposition. Given citizen tax resistance, it is possible that cities that nevertheless commit to expensive capital projects may eventually find that the taxpayers are "tapped out," unwilling to permit tax increases for other less glamorous services or emergencies.

We also know that various sorts of government bonds must compete for buyers. Particularly large bond issues, such as those to finance a stadium, may so dominate the bond market for a period that they force other borrowers to raise the interest rates on their securities to attract buyers. The result is that taxpayers will end up paying more to retire school bonds or highway bonds than they would have if those borrowing authorities had not had to compete with the stadium bonds.

Where fiscal matters are concerned, the potential for strains between large segments of the electorate and local political elites is clearly high. What is not known is whether voters in those cities where there is significant opposition to public spending for large entertainment projects hold public officials accountable at election time. Memories are often short, and support for such spending in some cities balances opposition. (Indeed, supporters may overwhelm opponents in cities where a team's fortunes flourish, as was the case in San Diego and Denver, where stadium referenda coincided with Padres and Broncos championship seasons.) But other sources of tension besides simply fiscal issues may arise to produce strains between the electorate and its leaders.

Consider what might be called the problem of taxpayer bait and switch. The public is promised a stadium at a certain price, and this is the figure on which a referendum is held or around which the public debate revolves. Once construction is under way, however, the price inevitably rises. The cost of Coors Field in Denver rose from $141 million, the estimate on which the 1990 voter referendum was based, to $215 million when the stadium was finished. Jacobs Field in Cleveland went from an initial cost of $128 million to more than $170 million. The new football stadium for the Browns was running $33 million over budget in 1998, and the project had not yet even been completed. The Bank One Ball Park in Phoenix came in at $110 million over budget. In Wisconsin, a state government audit estimated the final cost of Miller Park in Milwaukee at $398 million, up from the $250 million figure that set the initial public debate. Referring to the memo of understanding signed by state and local officials and ball club executives who acknowledged the initial cost at $250 million, a Wisconsin state legislator commented, "We were told to rely on that . . . [but now] I have to ask, 'Is your word any good?'" (*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, 13 November 1997).

Another issue has to do with the politics of fantastic expectations. Projections of benefits or economic activity by development proponents are almost always exaggerated. New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani claimed that a new Yankee Stadium in Manhattan would generate $1 billion worth of economic activity in the city each year. An independent consulting firm, however, estimated the impact at $100 million. Stadium and other big entertainment projects almost never actually deliver the magnitude of economic benefits promised. New York's Times Square entertainment district has indubitably revitalized that formerly seedy neighborhood, but developers apparently overestimated the real estate market and consumer demand for theme retailing. Rent speculation quickly outpaced the market, driving many retail and restaurant businesses away and leaving significant commercial space empty (*New York Times*, 8 February 1999). Proponents of gambling casinos paint an incomplete and unrealistically optimistic picture of their economic impact by emphasizing the gains but almost never the costs. Indeed, Gazel (1998, 83) concluded, "Many state and local economies in the United States have, most likely, experienced net monetary losses due to casino gambling in their jurisdictions."

Stadiums generally fail to generate a significant number of jobs after the construction phase (Baade and Sanderson 1997). Even when such projects do result in employment gains, the cost in public subsidies per job created is extremely high compared to other economic development programs (Baade and Sanderson 1997; Rosentraub 1997). The Congressional Research Service once calculated, for example, that each job created by the construction of a football stadium for the Baltimore Ravens would cost $127,000 in public funds, far above the $6,250 per job created spent on average by the state of Maryland economic development fund for business and industrial projects (Peirce 1996).

The source of fantastic or exaggerated expectations is not simply the rhetoric of persuasion by local political and development elites bent on gaining public support for building a stadium or convention center. The rhetoric itself is usually based on consultant projections about the economic impact of these amenities that use inflated spending and employment multipliers. Although the application of multipliers by neutral economic analysts is generally informed by empirical research or by reference to U.S. Department of Commerce standards, consultants hired by project proponents often seem to pull their multipliers out of thin air. Baade and Dye (1988) showed, for example, that economic impact projections for stadium projects have used multipliers that range from 1.2 to 3.2, although no objective factors can explain either the values selected by the consultants or the variation among them. As Rosentraub (1997, 163) stated, "If abused or misrepresented, the multiplier can produce estimates of impact that are nothing more than a mythical expectation of growth."

What are the effects on a local electorate of perfunctory referenda, disembodied special authorities, enormous public expenditures to subsidize wealthy team owners, chronic cost overruns for capital projects, minuscule job creation, and disappointing levels of spin-off economic activity? First, it is important to acknowledge that many residents will not in fact be disaffected, for they take pride in their professional sports teams and various cultural amenities and are willing to pay to keep them (Swindell and Rosentraub 1998). Many of these people will support local elites as they seek to build entertainment amenities. Indeed, Austrian and Rosentraub (1997) observed that elected officials in Cleveland were returned to office by the voters despite high stadium and arena cost overruns, although the executive director of the project lost the confidence of his board and his job as well. Nevertheless, many citizens—sometimes a minority, although rarely a small one, and often a majority—are opposed to public subsidies of huge entertainment projects, perhaps even offended at the expenditure of funds for games and tourism when more pressing social needs go unsatisfied. In Wisconsin, angry voters mounted the first successful recall campaign in state history to remove the state senator who cast the deciding vote in the legislature to impose a sales tax to finance the new Brewer stadium. Whether the Wisconsin case is an anomaly or a sign of things to come is not clear, but the ways in which opposition is played out more broadly in local politics bear watching.

When local elites build big entertainment projects with public help, they run the risk not only of breeding cynicism but also of polarizing their community. The issue lends itself to stark, if oversimplified, contrasts—stadiums for millionaires or schoolrooms for poor children. When sports facilities are concerned, it holds out the potential for driving a wedge between the young and the old and between men and women. When the issue is a convention or performing arts center, the wedge is likely to divide social classes and perhaps the races. When local elites push to support casino gambling, the cleavage falls along religious lines. No other type of major capital expenditure—not for roads, schools, wastewater treatment facilities, public buildings, jails, or sewers—has the potential to generate such intense divisions in local politics.

SKEWING THE CIVIC AGENDA

Big entertainment projects may be regarded as spongelike in character: They often have a tendency to absorb a disproportionate share of resources that might go to other projects or other places in the city. When Houston Mayor Bob Lanier refused to accede to the demands by the Oiler football team for a new city-financed stadium, he framed the issue in either-or terms for a U.S. Senate subcommittee: "Sure, sports are important to a city's image, but in my judgment it's more important to have parks, police, water, and youth programs" (*Texas Monthly* 1996). All politics is about making choices, of course, but the allocation of such great amounts of money, energy, and attention to entertainment amenities carries with it a special harsh irony in poor big cities with competing needs. Mayor Lanier claimed to be speaking for "working-class taxpayers" who would never be able to afford to sit in the luxury boxes their tax dollars would help to finance. In reality, the deepest line of cleavage created by the pursuit of entertainment projects is often that between downtown interests and residential neighborhoods, a conflict that subsumes a whole set of mutually reinforcing racial, class, big business–small business, and even city-suburban divisions. As a critic of the New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC) in Newark complained, "It is being built by nonresidents for nonresidents. They will come and get dumped off at the front, see the show, and then leave without having any impact on the community" (*Newark Star-Ledger,* 2 March 1997). This "dumping" function is essentially the rationale for Detroit's showcase mass-transit facility built during the late 1970s, the People Mover monorail. It plies a two-mile loop around the downtown to serve hockey fans, who drive in from the suburbs, and out-of-town visitors to the Detroit auto show. Riders use the People Mover to visit the downtown restaurant area (Greektown) and then travel to their events in Joe Louis Arena or Cobo Hall. Detroit has no other light- or heavy-rail mass transit to serve residential commuters to the downtown coming from the far reaches of the city. During ordinary weekdays, the People Mover, one of the most costly mass-transit projects in its time, rarely carries more than a few thousand residents a day.

The clearest illustrations of how the civic agenda is skewed in favor of downtown interests lie in the realms of public safety and development priorities. Tourist attractions cannot succeed unless visitors are made to feel safe. Shortly after the NJPAC opened in downtown Newark, the director expressed relief that there had been no "Bonfire of the Vanities" incidents, referring to the Tom Wolfe novel in which white suburbanites become lost and then get terrorized in a South Bronx ghetto (Strom 1998). Cities go to great lengths to provide reassurance. Fort Worth prominently advertises its Sundance Square entertainment district as "one of the . . . safest downtown districts in America," but city leaders do more than proclaim the safety of their attractions. They allocate hard dollars to protect the space around tourist attractions, which necessitates shifting resources from or denying new resources to other parts of the city. Thus, in Newark, the city has built a new police substation across the street from the Performing Arts Center, and the state constructed a highway ramp to make it easier for visitors to drive directly from out of town into the adjacent state-financed parking garage. In Detroit, city officials project the need to hire an additional 300 officers to protect visitors to the casinos. On days that the Yankees play in the Bronx, there are more police in the borough than on other days. Understanding the need to shift police resources to the stadium locale on game days, the mayor of Providence, Rhode Island, demanded that if the city were to help build a new stadium for the New England Patriots, the team itself would have to come up with special payments for the extra police services required (Mahtesian 1998). The team owner saved himself those costs, choosing instead to stay in Foxboro.

Big entertainment projects are often so large that they absorb all of a city's public development resources. Although the NJPAC, Coors Field in Denver, and the Gateway project in Cleveland do seem to have stimulated considerable ancillary development in the downtowns of their respective cities, there is a still a question of whether such development has spillover effects in the residential neighborhoods. Baltimore's investment in the Inner Harbor festival marketplace in the 1970s certainly did not spontaneously stimulate development in adjacent poor residential areas, nor did it generate surplus revenues that the city could use for neighborhood development projects. As a result, Baltimore has become "two cities: a city of developers, suburban professionals, and 'back to the city' gentry . . . and a city of impoverished blacks and displaced manufacturing workers, who continue to suffer from shrinking economic opportunities, declining public services and neighborhood distress" (Levine 1987, 103). A similar result is unfolding in Detroit. Until the city embraced plans to participate in building two downtown stadiums and three gambling casinos, its Downtown Development Agency made a practice of concentrating on small commercial and housing projects. Now, however, the city has committed huge sums to land acquisition, site clearance, and infrastructure improvements for the big entertainment amenities. Would-be loft, office tower, and housing developers and small business entrepreneurs complain not only that no public money is left over for their projects but also that city officials do not even return their phone calls (*Detroit Free Press*, 28 September and 6 October 1998).

BALANCING URBAN PRIORITIES

Few people would argue with the proposition that facilities that bring high or even mass culture, sports, and recreational opportunities to a city may enhance the quality of urban life. Stadiums and performing arts centers and festival malls help to transform places that would otherwise simply be markets or dormitories or, to remember George Sternlieb's (1971) phrase, "sandboxes" into destinations. Thus a case can be made that at some level, public encouragement and facilitation of these entertainment amenities are a legitimate governmental function in a generally affluent society.

The issue, then, is not whether to spend public money; rather, the issue is a matter of balance or proportionality. When the public costs of building a stadium, convention center, or festival mall compromise the basic services provided to residents of the city, exhaust the municipality's fiscal flexibility, or consume its political energies, then priorities have become unbalanced. The principle might be reduced to the simple, though rarely observed, injunction that entertainment amenities should be subsidized by the public only in those places that can afford it. In judging how much of a city's resources to commit to entertainment amenities, at least two rules of thumb should be kept in mind. One is that most entertainment projects are highly profitable to their investors, at least eventually, and many could be—indeed, would be—built without much public support at all. A second is that most of these projects provide quite low economic returns to the city in the way of jobs and tax revenues.

The problem, of course, is that few cities are bold enough to call the bluff of a team owner seeking a new stadium or the hotel industry seeking a new convention center. And then to justify their accession to the demands of these developers, city officials exaggerate the returns to the city. Thus it is all too common for a city to use its scarce resources not to build infrastructure, fund youth recreation programs, subsidize homeless shelters, or enrich the schools but to help wealthy investors construct entertainment facilities for well-off visitors who produce few payoffs for residents. When local leaders fail to calibrate public expenditures to public returns and speak instead of creating a "big-league" image or a "world-class" city as a way of justifying expenditures on entertainment amenities, then it is fair to conclude that they are offering their constituents not the best basic services that have long been core municipal responsibilities but rather the thin sustenance of bread and circuses.

NOTE

1. *Entertainment facilities* include sports stadiums and arenas, festival malls, performing arts centers, entertainment districts, casinos, and convention centers. The latter do not technically provide entertainment. Nevertheless, I include them in this category because, like those amenities designed explicitly for the entertainment of large numbers of people, they receive public subsidies primarily because they promise to import dollars that will recirculate in the local retail and hospitality sectors and that can be tapped through various tourism taxes, such as hotel room and car rental taxes. Another common term used to refer to stadiums, arenas, and convention centers is *public assembly facilities*, preferred by the Urban Land Institute, but this seems to exclude art museums, entertainment districts, casinos, and festival malls (see Petersen 1996).

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