“Motor City” rebound? Sport as a catalyst to reviving downtown Detroit: A case study

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Abstract

Major urban cities across the United States have strategically considered sport-based economic development. This investigation examined the role that sport played in revitalization of downtown Detroit, Michigan, the 18th largest city in the United States. Detroit is home to four professional sport franchises, three of which have sport facilities anchored in downtown. Historically, Detroit has been known for its role in the global automobile industry and the prowess of its professional sport teams. Due to Detroit’s major demographic and economic losses due to the downturn of the automobile industry, viable strategic options for sustaining the economy are needed. This case study utilized interviews with an expert panel of economic development stakeholders. Semi-structured questions were used to facilitate the interview. From the interviews, three themes emerged: (1) sport facilities and franchises as an economic development catalyst of downtown; (2) sport’s role in enhancing the image of downtown; and (3) challenges to the role of sport in the revitalization of downtown Detroit. Important findings of the study included: (1) sport plays a role in driving the economy of downtown Detroit; (2) sport facilities and their programming are important attractions for downtown revitalization in Detroit; and (3) sport cannot solely sustain the economy in the city nor the downtown area and its use as an economic development tool must be considered cautiously.

Introduction

Major cities across the United States have strategically considered sport-based economic development. While the goal of sport investment may be to bring people back into downtown areas for sport consumption, the debate between academic researchers and industry professionals as to whether such initiatives have proved to be an economic boost continues (Baade, 1996; Goodman, 2001; Quigley & Trewyn, 2000). Scholarly work on the economic impact of sports facilities has concluded that sport teams and their facilities promise a great deal for a city but the economic returns on investments are questionable (Baade, 1996; Chapin, 2004; Rosentraub, 2010; Santo & Mildner, 2010).

Detroit is the largest city in the state of Michigan (USA), and the seat of Wayne County. It is the major city among the primary cultural, financial, and transportation centers in the Metro Detroit area, a region of 5.2 million people. In 2010, the city had a base population of 713,777 and ranked as the 18th most populous city in the United States (United States Census Bureau, 2009). Globally, Detroit gained and sustained its reputation as the automobile capital of the United States for better than a half-century. Detroit and the surrounding region constitute a major center of commerce and global trade, most notably as home to America’s “Big Three” automobile companies, General Motors, Ford, and Chrysler. About 80,500 people work in downtown Detroit, comprising one-fifth of the city’s employment base. Detroit’s six county Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) has a population of about 4.3 million and a workforce of about 2.1 million. In May 2011, the Department of Labor reported metropolitan Detroit’s unemployment rate at 11.6%, with the city’s unemployment rate for May 2011 at 20% (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). Despite losses in population and economic declines downtown Detroit has seen an increased role as a sport and entertainment hub in the 21st century with the opening

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of three casino resort hotels, new stadiums, and a revitalized riverfront.

**Professional sports in Detroit**

Detroit is no stranger to sports, as it is only one of 13 US cities with a team from all four professional sport leagues: the Detroit Tigers (Major League Baseball), the Lions (National Football League), the Pistons (National Basketball League), and the Red Wings (National Hockey League). Detroit continues to invest heavily in sport franchises and facilities. The Tigers play in Comerica Park, which opened in 2000, and seats 41,255 (Detroit.tigers.mlb.com, 2012). The Lions play at Ford Field, which opened in 2006, and is owned by the Detroit/Wayne County Stadium Authority. It regularly seats 65,000 and can be expanded to seat 70,000 (Detroitiations.com, 2012). Joe Louis Arena, affectionately known as “The Joe,” is home to the 11-time Stanley Cup Champion Red Wings. The arena opened in 1979 and seats 20,058 (Olympiaentertainment.com, 2012).

Detroit has hosted several major sporting events hoping to boost the local economy. For example, the Detroit Metro Convention and Visitors Bureau (DMCVB) claimed that Super Bowl XL (played in 2006), yielded a $261 million economic impact for the city (Monforton & Artman, 2006), and the 2005 Major League Baseball All-Star festivities generated an economic impact of $42 million (Monforton, 2005). Similarly, the 2004 Ryder Cup (golf) match was considered a ‘win’ to area marketers, with $77 million direct visitor spending and $114 million in gross economic impact (Monforton & Artman, 2004). Despite the positive economic impact numbers provided by Detroit stakeholders, scholars and independent research firms have indicated that such economic impact estimates are biased and unreliable (Baade, 1996). For example, Street and Smith’s SportsBusiness Daily refuted the DMCVB’s economic impact estimates of Super Bowl XL, reporting a $50.2 million economic impact (Sportsbusinessdaily.com, 2006).

Detroit city officials recognize that a local team’s success may lead to positive economic and image outcomes. Fans want to be associated with a successful team, and are motivated to attend more games and buy team-related merchandise when their team is winning (Trail & James, 2001). In theory, when professional teams move past the regular season and into the playoffs, the opportunity for fan attendance and media attention increase, providing temporary positive economic benefits to local hospitality and tourism entities.

The purpose of this study is two-fold: (1) to explore the role that sport has played in the revitalization of downtown Detroit, and (2) to provide insight into how leaders in economically disadvantaged cities view sport as a means to revitalize their downtowns. This study is important because it contributes to the growing corpus of scholarship in the area of sport and economic development and illustrates the importance of viewing sport as part of the strategy for revitalizing downtown areas.

**Review of literature and theory**

For more than half a century, professional sport teams in the United States have been the center of a fierce competition between cities to attract them. The building of sport facilities for professional teams has been the cornerstone of various cities’ development efforts (Rosentraub, 1999, 2000). Such efforts can be traced back to the 1870s when the Chicago White Stockings was formed as part of the urban development strategy of Chicago (Pelissero, Henschen, & Sidlow, 1991). Cities and local communities have advocated for, and supported the building of, new sport facilities due to the general belief that the facilities and the franchises they are home to may improve image and contribute to the economic development of the city and the surrounding area. However, Buist and Mason (2010) question the credibility of such support and provide evidence that public beliefs are influenced by the local media, and subsidization of professional sport stadia is not necessarily economically beneficial. Similarly, other scholars have illustrated that sport facilities may not contribute to the economic growth in urban settings (Coates & Humphreys, 2003). Sport teams and facilities may enhance the city image and identity, and revive certain areas of the city (Austrian & Rosentraub, 2002), but the tangible economic benefits are questionable.

The presence of professional sport teams in the community creates opportunities for entertainment, which in turn boosts the image of the city and produces civic pride (Short, 1999). Building a new stadium brings national attention to the city and the local community. For example, cities such as Baltimore, Boston, Cleveland and Indianapolis have utilized sport as a tool to enhance the image of their downtowns (Nunn & Rosentraub, 1997). Cleveland and Indianapolis relied “on sports as an integral component of strategies to revitalize downtown areas” (Austrian & Rosentraub, 2002, p. 551), but they also utilized other elements of the hospitality industry in order to achieve this goal. Indianapolis was particularly successful due to the strategy of not only investing in facilities for professional sport, but also hosting major sport events as well (hosting 330 sports events between 1977–1991) (Gratton, Shibli, & Coleman, 2005). As a result, these two communities were able to maintain tourism-related jobs in the downtown area. In addition to entertainment opportunities and civic pride, sport teams create an atmosphere in which the local community develops emotional ties to the team(s) (Pelissero et al., 1991), which contributes positively to community spirit and leads to increase in civic pride.

Despite the fact that cities receive intangible benefits from having professional sport teams, scholarly work has provided evidence that benefits such as additional tax revenues and job creation tend to be overstated (Austrian & Rosentraub, 2002; Baade, 1996; Humphreys, 2001; Rosentraub, 1999). As Nunn and Rosentraub (1997) stated: “for the most part [sports] remain a small business with a modest ability to affect economic development” (p. 67). The main argument is that the money spent by patrons disperses quickly beyond the sport facility’s vicinity. In addition, very few full-time jobs are created and the majority of created jobs are part-time, low paid and low skilled. Similarly, Baade (1996) claims that professional sports do not increase income and do not create jobs in the areas hosting the teams, and illustrates that it is the owners and players who benefit, not the public. Adding a professional sport team or stadium has a neutral effect on job creation, and
the fan base is mostly local, therefore leading to a minimal increase in city real per capita income (Baade, 1994). Therefore, the rationale for subsidizing a professional sport team cannot be grounded solely on the basis of economic development and job growth.

When discussing sport as an economic development tool, it is imperative to clarify that the academic consensus that sport has no significant impact on local economies could be “a dangerous generalization that ignores the importance of context” (Santo, 2005, p. 178). In other words, sport facility location (downtown vs. suburbs) could affect the success of stadium investments. For example, in a study examining nineteen cities, Santo (2005) provided evidence that in six of these cities positive economic benefits were realized due to the facility location in the downtown area. The important distinction here is that sport could be a catalyst for downtown revitalization, but it does not necessarily translate to overall economic impact on the city.

Many economic growth strategies adopted in the 1970s and 1980s promoted growth through high profile initiatives, such as large-scale facility development. However, in recent years city marketers have adopted new strategies emphasizing the creation of sport zones and their value to the development of urban areas (Smith, 2010). These strategies are initiated in order to bring about positive social, economic and environmental regeneration outcomes. For example, Indianapolis has adopted the sport zone approach by encouraging visitors and residents to visit the city center where new facilities were built (Rosentraub, 2003). The primary benefit of such regeneration is the enhancement of a city's image in the minds of residents and tourists (McCarthy, 1998; Smith, 2010). This image enhancement could assist in attracting tourists, conferences, sporting events, investors, entrepreneurs, and global capital (Avraham, 2004; Hughes, 1998; Kavaratzis, 2005; Kotler, Haider, & Rein, 1993; Tasci & Gartner, 2007).

City (place) image

The past three decades have witnessed an increase in the number of cities worldwide attempting to promote a more favorable and attractive city image. City image (or place image) is defined as “the sum of beliefs, ideals, and impressions people have toward a certain place” (Kotler et al., 1993). The overarching thought is that a city possessing a favorable image will reap economic benefits through the attraction of new residents, tourists, investors, and entrepreneurs (Avraham, 2004; McCarthy, 1997). While the question of how image is formed is widely researched and debated, two primary components, information sources and personal factors, play a large role in image formation (Beerli, 2004; Tasci, Gartner, & Tamer Cavusgil, 2007). Information sources are found in different forms such as Internet, television, and print advertising, or from word-of-mouth information exchange between people (Avraham, 2004; Beerli, 2004). Personal factors are comprised of lifestyle, values, motivations, and experience, to name a few (Dann, 1988; Tasci et al., 2007). Withstanding all that has changed in downtown Detroit over the last decade the question emerges of whether sport played a meaningful role in helping the downtown area bounce back. The research questions posed in the next section guide our inquiry.

Research questions

Based on the profile of the City of Detroit, the review of literature and the conceptual framework the following research questions were developed to guide the study:

1. What are the perceptions of local leaders about sport as a viable economic development catalyst for downtown Detroit?
2. What are the challenges that constrain the use of sport as a catalyst for revitalizing downtown Detroit in the view of local industry professionals?

Methods

Case study methodology utilizing a panel interview was used in this study. Case studies permit a diverse means of data collection and data analysis that can be appropriately used in qualitative research (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2003, 2009). The primary purpose of the panel interview was to explore perceptions about sport as an economic development tool that could be used to revitalize the downtown area of Detroit.

Four stakeholders whose organizations play a major role in promoting sport and economic development in the downtown Detroit comprised the “expert” panel. City and county economic development officials were extended an invitation to participate in the panel interview but declined. A review of the organizational websites of the panelists emanated to ensure that: (1) the organization's core business was economic development; (2) part of their work was related to promoting sport in downtown Detroit; and (3) each of the organizations represented by the expert panelists had a continued stake in the continued economic well-being of downtown Detroit. Table 1 provides a summary of the information related to the panel.

To guide the interview, 12 structured and unstructured questions were developed from a review of the literature and some key topics that appeared in the Detroit Free Press from 2006–2012 that related to sport and economic development. The interview was conducted using an “audio bridge” in a high-tech conference room located in the communications department on a land-grant university in the southeast. Panelist dialed in to join the interview. To ensure confidentiality, panelists were reminded to use their assigned pseudonyms during the interview and that they would have an opportunity to “member check” their respective comments in the transcript within ten days of the completion of the interview. Upon completion of the interview, the deliberations were audibly verified for quality and content and then transcribed by an external transcriptionist. Upon receipt of the transcripts they were reviewed and sent back to each panelist for verification as a means of member checking (Yin, 2012).

Narrative analysis was utilized since it provides for an evaluation of central details of stories or events in order to gain meaning from them (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). More specifically, meaning condensation was the type of narrative analysis used for this study. Long passages of...
interview transcripts were analyzed and shortened to meaning statements (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The researchers read through the interview and determined natural meaning units, then restated the theme of the meaning unit and examined each unit as it related to the study. Constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was used during data analysis of transcript. The constant comparative method compares "one segment of data with another to determine similarities and differences" (Merriam, 2009, p. 30). Data were then grouped based on similar qualities and assigned a category to identify patterns or themes within the data. Each theme was combined with similar themes to avoid redundancy with the aim of constructing the perceptions of the panel.

Results and discussion

Upon analysis of the interview data three themes emerged: (1) Sport facilities and franchises as an economic development catalyst of downtown; (2) Sport's role in enhancing the image of downtown; and (3) The realities of sport in revitalizing downtown.

**Theme 1: Sport facilities and franchises as an economic development catalyst of downtown**

This theme revolves around the view that sport and sport facilities play an important role in the revitalization process of downtown Detroit, as participant C indicated:

A new baseball stadium and along with that came the owners of the Detroit Lions and from that came side by side stadiums with a promise that the fact that they were downtown Detroit and not in the suburbs people would, visitors from the region and from outside the region and state, would come in to downtown Detroit for major sporting events.

In addition, the development of one particular sport facility led to the development of others, which in turn has the potential to facilitate even further sport development in the area. This effect is mirrored by participant C who stated, "The development of first the baseball stadium and then the second stadium was a catalyst in the development of, along with that, we will soon see a new hockey arena near the two arenas in place."

Sport facilities serve multiple roles in the revitalization of downtown Detroit as they not only house professional sport teams, but they also attract other large-scale events. This is illustrated by participant B who commented, "...those stadiums have been a catalyst to attract other major events to the region." Additionally, sport facilities could have led to business growth in the downtown area, as participant C shared: "The side by side stadium complex attracted additional restaurants and in fact more hotels have come into downtown Detroit." Similarly, participant B pointed that "...new businesses have opened due to the stadiums that have been built with the potential new arena ..." The role of sport facilities as the catalyst for additional business development is also indicated by participant C who shared, "I think they [stadiums] have been an important part, not just emotionally, what has taken place here with people, companies putting a stake in the ground saying this is where they want to locate."

The comments cited parallel what researchers such as Rosentraub (2010) and Santo and Mildner (2010) posit, that sports, entertainment and culture are crucial in transforming downtown areas. Relatedly, Santo (2010) argued that in this era major cities are compelled to have a sport development strategy to revitalize struggling downtown areas that lie adjacent to stadia and arenas.

Economic development encompasses the direct economic impact and the opportunities that arise for additional development due to the vital role sport plays in downtown Detroit. More specifically, economic impact reflects the financial benefits gained from having sport facilities in the downtown area. Some of these benefits are directly related to the games within the professional leagues, as indicated by participant C:

Every time we have somebody coming in to downtown Detroit to a sporting event, whether it be a baseball game on a Saturday afternoon or a hockey game on a Tuesday night, they spend about $175.00 per person downtown Detroit on the average...if you start crashing those numbers and you think about what 3 million people at Comerica Park might mean or 60 thousand people at Ford Field might mean on a Sunday afternoon and you multiple that times $100 or $175, even if it is only half of the year, it has a dramatic impact.

In addition to the regular season games, the fact that Detroit hosted the Super Bowl was viewed as another factor that contributed to the positive economic impact. This is illustrated in a comment made by participant C: "The Super Bowl had an economic impact of the region of somewhere between 250 and 300 million dollars for that one event alone." When all numbers are compounded, the impact from having three sport franchises is substantial, as participant C pointed:

So you know, when you add it all together, I am guessing you could probably say that professional sport in downtown Detroit is probably worth somewhere between 500 and 700 million dollars a year in direct spend...The three teams of Detroit probably have an impact of billion dollars on downtown Detroit.

Having sport facilities and franchises in the downtown area has provided some benefits for the hotel industry.

### Table 1

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(Note: The table content is not directly transcribed from the text, but is inferred from the context and general formatting of the document.)
This is demonstrated in a comment by participant C who stated, “We have certainly seen, in this short period of time, the amount of hotels in downtown Detroit double what had previously been 2500–5000.” Similarly, participant A provided an invaluable insight into the role that sport plays in the revitalization of downtown Detroit:

Ten years ago maybe patrons of those stadiums and arenas might not have stopped at a downtown business on their way to or from a game; they are much more likely to do that. We definitely have a very active business climate in the downtown area during football, hockey, or baseball season. There have been a number of new businesses opened around the stadiums, but I wouldn’t say it has been a tidal wave. It’s definitely a selling point for new housing developments in the pipeline. We were a bit off track due to the 2008 recession . . . but things are definitely on the upswing again.

A historic insight into Detroit’s intentionality about using hospitality and sport as economic development tools was provided by participant C who noted:

I can tell you from my real life experience, I was at the board table at the Detroit Metro Convention and Visitor’s Bureau the day that the Wayne County Assistant Executive walked in and asked the hoteliers to support a bed tax that would help lay the foundation to build Comerica Park.

The economic impact from sport facilities and events, and the optimism about the positive role sport plays in the development of downtown Detroit, could be summarized best by a comment made by participant B: “The fact that [discretionary income] is spent on sports is significant because this is the best sports town in the country in my opinion.” Along the same lines, participant A provided a comprehensive description of all the activities taking place downtown that are contributing to the economic development:

We are 95–99% occupancy in all the rental housing and all the greater downtown and being able to walk, both in terms of businesses locating down here and people moving down here the selling points of you can walk to the river, you can walk to a football game, you can walk to a Tiger’s game, you can eat in a nice restaurant all within steps of your office or apartment or condo are definitely selling points so I think they are really important part of the ingredient but they haven’t necessarily directly, on their own, by themselves delivered a lot of new investments. But definitely without them we would be at a disadvantage, there is no question about that.

The above comments illustrate the potential sport has as an economic development tool in downtown Detroit. Sport facilities, professional sport franchises and large scale events play an important role in bringing people back to downtown Detroit. Based on the comments of the panelist, people are spending money in downtown as a result of attending sport events, but the overall economic impact is yet to be determined.

Theme 2: Sport’s role in enhancing the image of downtown

The image of a region, city, or downtown area is an important factor in attracting sporting events that create business activity and catalyze tourism. The importance of overall image as a magnet for revenue is illustrated by participant A’s comment:

Being able to give a broad sense of the community as a reason to come down here and to like it and to have a good time (is important). It means that Detroit is not just for pioneers or [people] who just have to live here but it really can be a city that’s for everyone.

However, the brand image of a city must be carefully crafted. An authentic image is paramount to ensure the permanency of a city’s brand. Participant A echoed this sentiment when referring to the improvements made by Detroit in preparation for the 2006 Super Bowl:

All of the improvements that were made and everything that was made was made with an eye for longevity and not just trying to put lipstick on a pig . . . it was really to lay the ground work for a downtown that we would all be proud of.

When a city’s image is tied to singular entities, such as sport, the success of team has a direct impact on the image of a community, as noted by participant C, “. . .when these teams are winning and when people are coming into the community, the spirits are lifted and that sort of excitement takes place, it is a wonderful thing.” However, sport may be a precarious factor on which to base a city’s image upon, as participant A pointed:

. . . in a way we are both blessed and cursed to have our city identity tied up with the sports team and with the auto makers, depending on how folks are feeling about their favorite brand or favorite team. We are either riding high or not at all. But I think the Lions, their season that just came off of, they kind of improved spirits about their liability and people (are) just being proud of them again . . . People are coming and using the city again.

Comments related to city image reveal the importance of creating an image that is authentic and enduring. As noted by Tasci et al. (2007), when a city projects an image that is aligned with the values or lifestyle of residents and visitors, a positive city image is formed, leading to economic benefits. Similarly, the work of Avraham (2004) indicates that a city image must be carefully crafted and multi-dimensional to ensure authenticity and longevity.

Theme 3: Challenges to the role of sport in the revitalization of downtown Detroit

Despite the optimism expressed by the panelists over the role that sport facilities, winning teams and the programming of major events may have played in helping to revitalize the downtown area, there remains an air of concern. This concern lies in the beleaguered local economy of Detroit. For example participant D stated:

The biggest challenge associated with using sport as a mechanism for revitalization in Detroit is its volatility.
There is a direct correlation with success and revenue in sports. The teams you hear about losing money on a daily basis are almost always those teams that are not performing well on the field or are located in small market city. Like the stock market, the sports industry is a very volatile business where you can win really big but on the same accord you can lose really big. This volatility makes it difficult to invest all of your money into the sports industry and the hopeful success of multiple teams in Detroit.

Moreover, sport is not viewed as a panacea for the economic woes of the city, but there is an acknowledgment that if coupled with other strategies economic gains can be realized. The participants were very cognizant of the seasonal nature of sport, occupancy challenges for the existing stadia and arena, and the associated economic constraints. For example, participant B stated:

You also have to keep in mind that there are 365 days in the year and with 81 home baseball games, 41 home hockey games and 8 football games with the Lions, that is, I am not even going to do the math right now, but that is less than half the year and will you be able to sustain yourself as a small business or restaurateur. That is still quite a bit of a proposition to stay viable. Sport can certainly help that but it can’t be the “all and all” to sustain a strong business in downtown.

Similarly, participant C commenting on the complexities of assessing the convergence of the seasonal, programmatic, and performance-based elements of sport as an economic development diver noted:

With professional football games and two preseason football games, you know, that is ten days, so in order to keep the lights on they have got to have additional programming in that stadium, along with the baseball stadium. I think the second thing that really becomes a challenge, particularly in paying for the asset, is the performance of the team. If those teams don’t perform and they have a losing season, they are not going to draw the fans. If the fans don’t come down, meals are not going to be served in the restaurants and cabs are not going to be used and drinks are not going to be poured and the whole thing. So, a teams’ performance has a dramatic economic impact on the downtown area. Those factors combined make for a very volatile economic driver.

A final challenge that surfaced was the lack of a well coordinated consolidated plan that includes sport as a cog in the city’s economic development efforts. This point is perhaps best illustrated by a remark by participant C who stated:

If there is a plan, I am not aware of it. It kind of festered up from one individual’s desire to own the Detroit Tigers, major baseball team and his desire to ensure that, for the remainder of his life time, that they remained in the city of Detroit and from that, his involvement, along with political help and the community’s help ensured that a second major league team, Detroit Lions, would come back to the City of Detroit. The Detroit Lions had left Detroit for the suburbs in the late 70s and they chose to come back and so I think what has happened, person-

ally, is because one individual’s desire to bring this into the city, more people got on board and it kind of swelled.

Similarly, participant C, in talking about the development of the facilities used by the Detroit Lions and Tigers, alluded to the problem of planning with the following statement, “The two stadiums were not developed as part of a comprehensive economic development plan. They were really developed to fit in to our downtown, but other kinds of projects [housing] happened but were not part or their development plan.”

The candid comments provided by the participant support findings from previous studies indicating that sport facilities as a part of sport-based economic development are not a panacea for curing failing economies, nor is their use as a catalytic agent for economic development done in a vacuum (Chapin, 2004; Coates & Humphreys, 2003; Rosentraub, 2010; Santo & Mildner, 2010). Moreover, there are a multiplicity of factors such as the economy of the locality (Santo, 2005), the absence of a comprehensive plan for economic development that includes sport development (Rosentraub, 2010), the win-loss records of teams (Austrian & Rosentraub, 2002), and the seasonality of sport that may have a negative influence on sport-based revitalization efforts.

Conclusions

Cities are increasingly using sport as a catalyst for economic and cultural development.

The resulting research offers insight into how the connection between sport, economic development, and downtown revitalization is made. Moreover, there are lessons learned from Detroit that can be used by cities that are confronted with similar challenges - declining populations, loss of revenue, multiple sport franchises, and the need to revitalize downtown areas that lie adjacent to sport venues. Detroit’s population plummeted from 951,270 in 2000 to an estimated 717,000 in 2011 (Wisely & Spangler, 2011), while municipal income tax revenues dipped from $278.3 million in 2006–07 to $212.0 million in 2009–10 (Citizens Research Council of Michigan, 2011).

The findings of this study illustrate the importance of sport as a tool for enhancing the image of downtown Detroit by creating opportunities for entertainment, and support previous research focused on cities with a similar size and similar challenges (Austrian & Rosentraub, 2002). The researchers acknowledge the potential biases that the panelist brought into the discussion. We believe that they were earnest in their efforts to respond to our queries in a truthful and factual manner, within the limits of the information available to them. Their professional responsibilities also played a role in shaping their responses. Local leaders who participated in our study fully recognized the limitations of sport as the single cure all for ailing cities. This resonates with what academic research has found to be the case in utilizing sport as a mechanism for economic development (Baade, 1996; Rosentraub, 2010; Santo & Mildner, 2010). Sport should be taken as an integral component of economic revival strategy, and should be viewed through a more holistic lens. It is essential for city managers and developers to recognize the fact that major projects and