

II. Literature Review

Since the 1950s, the tourism industry has played an increasingly prominent role in urban economies. Its expansion has been driven by an increase in demand and in the efforts of suppliers.¹ The growth of tourist travel has been attributed to numerous factors. These include the rise of global, decentralized corporations, as well as “the thickening of linkages among people around the world through shared publications, the Internet, immigration, the prevalence of English as a second language, and a common discourse around interests that transcend local, and even national, boundaries.”² In response to this surge in demand, cities have vied with each other to capture part of the growing tourism market.

The rise of the tourism industry followed roughly the dramatic decline of the manufacturing sector in American cities. This decline, compounded by the reduction of federal aid to municipalities, left cities scrambling for ways to generate revenues at a local level. Many of them have turned to tourism for an answer, undertaking promotional campaigns and investing heavily in tourism infrastructure, hoping that these efforts will spur economic growth. Tourism redevelopment projects have tended to include a standard set of components—atrium hotels, festival malls, convention centers, aquariums, redeveloped waterfronts, new office towers, restored historical neighborhoods, and stadiums.³ Such projects can transform the physical landscape of cities, sometimes improving their image and marketability.

The capacity of tourism to promote economic expansion stems from the fact that, as an export industry, it induces new spending within the local economy. This new direct spending generates new jobs and secondary economic activity as new dollars ripple throughout the economy. In addition to these possible economic benefits, proponents of tourism redevelopment argue that, in celebrating local culture, these projects engender a sense of civic pride and cultural ascendancy that may elicit feelings of solidarity and well-being in the local populace. They also maintain that tourism redevelopment may result in enhanced services, improved infrastructure, and greater opportunities for entertainment and recreation.

In spite of such benefits, tourism redevelopment has inspired much academic debate. The following discussion addresses three major sets of arguments dealing with outcomes associated

¹ Fainstein and Judd, 1999a. pgs. 2-3.

² Fainstein and Judd, 1999a. p. 4.

³ Judd, 1999. p.39.

with this redevelopment strategy. The debates were chosen for their relevance to the plans for the redevelopment of Coney Island. They relate to questions of stratification, exclusion, standardization, and authenticity. With regard to the minor league baseball stadium that formed the first piece of the City's plans for the transformation of Coney Island, the discussion also considers literature that evaluates the economic impact of new sports facilities on cities, as well as the political processes through which these projects are promoted and implemented. Finally, the section concludes with an examination of the manner in which these discussions come to bear on my case study.

Tourist Bubbles

Tourism redevelopment within economically depressed urban areas has often produced enclaves of middle-class consumption that are cut-off from their comparatively impoverished surroundings. This spatial segregation can be maintained on a number of levels. On one level, private security forces and architectural design may physically exclude locals from the tourism space.⁴ On another, the prices of services and goods within this cordoned off area can effectively exclude those without the means to partake in such commerce. Finally, cultural symbols can demarcate control over tourism space and intimidate "undesirables" even as they impart a sense of familiarity on welcome visitors.⁵

Academic literature is largely critical of class-based fragmentation of urban space in the name of economic growth. While proponents of tourism enclaves defend such projects in terms of the new jobs they may generate and the economic spillover effect they may induce, opponents counter that these benefits are, at best, marginal. They describe tourism jobs as low-paying entry-level jobs with scant potential for promotion to management positions, and compare them unfavorably to the better-paying manufacturing positions formerly available in many redeveloped areas.⁶ Susan Fainstein and Dennis Judd, who have written extensively on the effects of tourism redevelopment, answer that such criticism is premised on romanticized images of highly paid and steadily employed unionized labor that are at odds with the deplorable working conditions, spells of joblessness, and acrimonious capital-labor relations that often characterized the industrial age.⁷ A more pragmatic assessment would perhaps avoid altogether the comparison to long-departed

⁴ Davis, 1992.

⁵ Reichl, 1999. p.171.

⁶ Hannigan, 1998. p.53.

⁷ Fainstein and Judd, 1999a. pgs. 270-271.

manufacturing jobs, recognizing instead that tourism jobs, even if bad, are better than no jobs at all. Nonetheless, Fainstein and David Gladstone argue that the quality of tourism jobs relates less to the industry than to the structure the industry assumes in particular locations. For them, then, job quality depends more on public policy and labor organization than on inherent attributes of the tourism industry.⁸

With regard to economic spillover effects, empirical evidence suggests they impact neighborhoods selectively. Studies of Baltimore's Inner Harbor revitalization, whose dramatic physical transformation and apparent success made it an early template for similar efforts elsewhere, find that there, the economic benefits did ripple throughout the city. These benefits, however, failed to reach most neighborhoods. Marc Levine, who studied this project in the late 1980s, concludes that its main beneficiaries consisted of suburbanites, high-income tourists, and new urban professionals. Residents of poorer neighborhoods, on the other hand, remained largely unaffected.⁹ The findings of a study of a more recent development in Providence, Rhode Island confirm the tendency of tourism redevelopment projects to produce "dual cities" comprised of haves and have-nots.¹⁰ Critical assessments, then, acknowledge that tourism does impart economic benefits, but conclude that such benefits have disparate impacts. Such criticism, however, raises the question of whether this tendency relates to the political context of particular projects or whether it constitutes an attribute inherent to tourism redevelopment.

Another body of literature directs its criticism of tourism enclaves at their spatial configuration and the exclusionary effect that this might engender.¹¹ Tourism redevelopment, it contends, has produced an urban form that facilitates the physical proximity that typifies city life, but only within an artificial, closed-off private or quasi-private environment. These "urbanoid"¹² spaces create a fragmented urban landscape that is at odds with values of diversity. This argument derives from the view, espoused by poststructuralist theorists such as Henri Lefebvre, that spatial configuration both defines and is defined by social relations.¹³ While well short of deterministic, this theory does treat spatial design as influential in orienting behavior. Proponents of this position implicitly contend that these "urbanoid" spaces constitute a further erosion of the diverse public spaces that have characterized cities in the past. Fainstein, however, counters that this

⁸ Fainstein and Gladstone, 1999. p.25.

⁹ Levine, 1987.

¹⁰ Walsh, 2003.

¹¹ Zukin, 1995; Reichl, 1999; Davis, 1992; Goldberg, 1996.

¹² Goldberg, 1996. pgs.140-141.

¹³ Lefebvre, 1991. p 286.

claim is premised on nostalgic and historically inaccurate versions of the history of American cities. She points out that segregation by race and class has been, if anything, more prevalent in the past than it is today. Fainstein further argues that this segregation has been reinforced by the very democratic processes that these advocates of public space profess to support.¹⁴ While she views spatial segregation as inimical to democratic values, Fainstein regards it as a possibly necessary way to mitigate the hostility that, given underlying social divisions, might ensue in more integrated environments.¹⁵

In his study of the Times Square redevelopment, Alexander Reichl partly concurs with Fainstein's assessment. He qualifies his agreement, though, by noting that the democratic processes that have yielded patterns of urban segregation may not have reflected the "real choice" of the majority, but rather its choice within the context of a complex set of public policies that have influenced patterns of urbanization and suburbanization. Reichl regards the creation and preservation of diverse public spaces as goals in and of themselves.¹⁶ By contrast, Fainstein maintains that integrating tourism enclaves would not only fail to address the underlying causes of social inequality, but may even increase the likelihood of confrontation.¹⁷ At the root of their disagreement lies the question of whether diverse environments engender tolerance or foster resentment. This question, however, cannot be answered in the abstract. The answer depends on the evaluation of a variety of empirical factors—factors such as the relative number of visitors and locals, the degree of inequality between them, the convergence of their interests with regards to the redeveloped area, the prevalent normative orientation of the local community, and the extent of the effective availability of amenities and services to its members.

Authenticity

The criticism that tourism redevelopment degrades public space is sometimes accompanied by the claim that this form of development replaces genuine urban space with a simulacrum of it. This argument takes various forms organized around several definitions of authenticity. As discussed in the previous section, some critics characterize "urbanoid" spaces as inauthentic spatial forms in that they appear to offer the physical proximity and diversity associated with city life, but instead

¹⁴ Fainstein, 2001. p.207-208.

¹⁵ Fainstein and Gladstone, 1999. p.27.

¹⁶ Reichl, 1999. p.176.

¹⁷ Fainstein and Gladstone, 1999. p.27.

offer only an artificial, private approximation. Fainstein effectively debunks this claim by noting that segregated spaces are, and have always been, features of American cities.

Other critics equate authenticity with lack of artifice, historical accuracy, and unmediated experience. Christine Boyer, for instance, in her studies of historically themed redevelopments, criticizes these projects for distorting history in order to promote consumption by capitalizing on consumers' nostalgic desires.¹⁸ Projects like New York City's South Street Seaport purvey an "inauthentic" experience and deprive visitors of a sense of historic continuity by physically separating them from "authentic" urban space and surrounding them instead with a spectacle of history made false—history whitewashed of its more unsavory episodes. Presumably, then, a more authentic experience would require forms of redevelopment that respect historical tradition by blending into the existing urban fabric and by repudiating artifice such as historic tableaux, which are determined more by market considerations than by historic fact.

Boyer's argument has come under attack from several scholars. Fainstein disputes the contention that bastardized historical recreations are, in and of themselves, inauthentic by pointing out that "faulty" imitations of the past have been a fixture of the Western architectural tradition since the Renaissance.¹⁹ Thus, far from signaling a departure from a historical tradition, the artificiality of projects like the South Street Seaport actually constitute the continuation of a time-honored practice. With regard to Boyer's criticism of stagings of the past that exclude representations of the historically exploited, some critics question pragmatically the suitability of such representations to tourism redevelopment. Hannigan, for instance, comments that:

while it is true [...] that today's "experiential placemaking" rarely addresses the historical experience of the powerless who have built the city with their blood, sweat, and tears, it is doubtful that this angle would play very successfully to touristic fantasy. After all, when we go to Caesar's Palace in Las Vegas, it is to see images of ourselves as sybarites at the Emperor's Court not as slaves rowing his galley ships.²⁰

Boyer's argument is premised on the unsubstantiated assumption that historic tableaux should be held to particular standards of historic accuracy and that such standards require the inclusion of narratives of subordination. For Boyer, then, historic representations are rooted not in political debate or rhetorical purpose, but in undisputable fact. Thus, deviation from historical fact renders

¹⁸ Boyer, 1992.

¹⁹ Fainstein, 2001. p.208.

²⁰ Hannigan, 1998. p.196.

themed projects inauthentic. Perhaps regarding the answer as self-evident, however, she never broaches the question of what constitutes a historical fact. This omission limits the general applicability of her evaluative criteria to tourism redevelopment.

Like Boyer, architecture critic Michael Sorkin decries the lack of authenticity of tourism projects. Unlike Boyer, however, he bases his criticism, not on lack of historic accuracy, but on the claim that themed environments offer an inferior fake in the place of an absent genuine.²¹ He argues that the simulacra that characterize these environments manipulate visitors by evoking images of authentic experiences that are always elsewhere. This claim has also drawn numerous academic rebuttals. Fainstein suggests that his argument is premised on utopic visions of unmediated experience.²² Theorists such as Robert Venturi embrace the aesthetic of the hyper-commercial landscape in all its “fakery”, and accuse detractors such as Sorkin of snobbery.²³ Yet other critics maintain that the postmodern sensibilities of contemporary travelers allow them to navigate “inauthentic” spectacles with savvy, subverting the market rather than being manipulated by it.²⁴

None of the above rebuttals establish an analytic distinction between the authentic and the inauthentic—a distinction that Sorkin himself fails to articulate in his argument. Drawing on the work of theorist Manuel Castells, Fainstein contends that, insofar as information technology and economic trends have increasingly dissociated dominant enterprise from its underlying cultural and local context, the ersatz world of Disneyland or Vegas actually represents an authentic reflection of underlying economic and social processes.²⁵ Fainstein further argues that the poststructuralist definition of authenticity rests implicitly on the Marxist concepts of alienation and commodity fetishism, which equate “producing for one’s own consumption” with virtue. The authenticity of a spectacle or product would depend, then, on the extent to which it is produced by its participants rather than built for their manipulation.²⁶

Sorkin’s notion of authenticity, however, goes beyond the question of mode or purpose of production. It brings to bear historical context. A landmark or a neighborhood’s authenticity relates more to its symbolic significance than to the circumstances surrounding its creation. A fake is a fake because it adopts the physical form of the original, but cannot summon the historic

²¹ Sorkin, 1992. p.216.

²² Fainstein and Glastone, 1999. p.31

²³ Venturi, 1977.

²⁴ Hannigan, 1998. p.67.

²⁵ Fainstein, 2001. p.209.

²⁶ Ibid. p.209.

associations evoked by the latter. Thus, authenticity is largely a matter of perception—matter that may very well be driven, as Fainstein points out, by images of a past that never was.

Nonetheless, the market respects perception and assigns an economic value to authenticity. This however, does not make authenticity a more likely evaluative criterion for tourism redevelopment since it is hard to conceive of what “authentic” new development would look like. This concept, though, may facilitate the evaluation of the degree to which new development undermines the symbolic and cultural worth of historic surroundings.

Standardization

Some critics argue that tourism redevelopment generally yields bland and homogeneous results that erode local vernaculars and “standardize” cities. This standardization occurs on various levels. Most broadly, tourism redevelopment has tended to produce similar types of projects (e.g., convention centers, stadiums, festival markets, etc.). Standardization, however, has also had an impact on the components of those projects and even on the features of those components. For instance, not only do redevelopment initiatives often feature festival markets, but they feature festival market that look the same and that sell the same merchandise. Some scholars have tried to explain this phenomenon by looking at the economic and political circumstances that propel tourism redevelopment. Others, looking at particular types of projects, have focused on the practical limits of the symbolic visual vocabulary at developers’ disposal. Yet others have put forth explanations in terms of a tendency by civic leaders and tourism entrepreneurs to rely on development models that have already appeared to work elsewhere.

In his study of the commercialization of urban spaces, John Hannigan, drawing on the work of sociologist George Ritzer, terms the homogenizing effect of tourism redevelopment “McDonaldization.”²⁷ By this term, Hannigan refers to the increasing dominance of rational techniques of production that characterize fast-food operations such as McDonald’s. He contends that tourism-oriented business has increasingly relied on an operational model that prioritizes efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control. This model offers various advantages. In terms of internal business operations, standardization reduces costs and therefore increases profits. In terms of customers, standardization offers reliability and familiarity—attributes that holds great appeal to tourists in unfamiliar surroundings.

²⁷ Hannigan, 1998. chp.5.

Despite the benefits of standardization, tourism depends to a great extent on the marketing of difference and on the capacity to offer extra-ordinary experiences. With this in mind, cities have sought to set themselves apart through projects that underscore their distinctiveness. These projects often feature design guidelines and unifying themes that evoke the history and meanings associated with their setting. Christine Boyer argues that these efforts generally rely on limited visual vocabulary consisting of trite historic forms and symbolic codes.²⁸ The nostalgic tableaux typical of these projects generally present stylized and stereotypical historic visions based on the projects' location (e.g., "old towns" in the East, "colonial villages" in the South, or "frontier towns" in the West).²⁹ Thus, even attempts at differentiation based on cities' unique history have often failed and instead yielded homogeneous results.

The failure to produce unique historically themed projects may stem from the fact that the history of most cities is seldom unique in marketable ways. It may also relate to the fact that these projects frequently involve the adaptive reuse of the same type of abandoned infrastructure. Still, cities could capitalize on their heritage in ways other than the restoration of historic neighborhoods and obsolete facilities—restorations that themselves could assume many different forms beyond the ones that have been typical. Some critics suggest that this lack of innovation in tourism redevelopment relates to a tendency by politicians, civic leaders, and tourism entrepreneurs to rely on models that have worked in other cities.³⁰ The political coalitions that drive tourism redevelopment, they argue, consist of risk-averse individuals. From the perspective of developers and tourism entrepreneurs, observing time-tested formulas and selecting tenants from the same short-list of tourism retailers presents a safer investment than trying to break the mold. From a politician's perspective, innovative projects may not have as much political currency as those that have enjoyed apparent success elsewhere. While new projects often come across as extravagant gambles with uncertain consequences, projects with proven track records are likely perceived as political accomplishments regardless of their eventual outcome.

Past success, however, offers no assurance of short-term success and even less of an assurance of long-term success. The continued reliance on a limited set of models will eventually erode their appeal and profitability by further undermining their uniqueness and by augmenting the supply of equivalent attractions. As more and more cities compete for the same tourist dollars with the same product, their relative success will depend increasingly on factors other than their

²⁸ Boyer, 1992. p.188.

²⁹ Ibid. p.191.

³⁰ Fainstein and Judd, 1999. p.13.

redevelopment projects. However, given the immediate political advantages and the apparent economic advantages of “proven” redevelopment projects, and given a possible lack of viable alternatives, the standardization of urban tourism districts may continue unabated gradually transforming contemporary cities into “placeless” tourist destinations.³¹

Stadiums

Sports stadiums have increasingly become a centerpiece of tourism redevelopment efforts. The willingness of cities to finance these projects derives from the perception, often shared by public officials, sport boosters, and city residents, that the presence of a sports franchise can play a determinative role in economy and reputation of a city. Franchise owners have taken advantage of this perception and requested massive subsidies for the construction of new venues for their teams. The following discussion examines the benefits and costs associated with sports stadiums, and then considers the political circumstances surrounding their promotion and implementation.

Benefits

Numerous studies show that stadiums are not self-financing projects. That is, they are unlikely to produce enough revenues to pay for their operating and capital costs, cost of land, and infrastructure.³² Thus, those who endorse stadiums as a tool for economic development must justify stadium subsidies in terms of additional benefits. These benefits fall into four categories: new spending, multiplier effect, new jobs, and intangible benefits.

New Spending

A portion of a sports facility’s economic impact consists of the new spending it generates. New spending, unlike total spending, refers only to direct spending that would not have occurred but for the operation of a new facility. For instance, if the amount spent on tickets at a new stadium had been spent on some other form of recreation if the stadium did not exist, that amount would not represent real economic growth. Instead, it would represent merely a relocation of spending within the recreation sector. A sports facility, therefore, increases the size of the economy only to the extent that it increases aggregate overall spending. This may happen under the following circumstances: (1) when the facility induces greater spending by residents; (2) when people from outside the jurisdiction come to the venue for an event; (3) when the venue deters residents from spending their money at another jurisdiction; (4) when visiting teams spend money during their

³¹ Hannigan, 1998. p.165.

³² Euchner, 1993.p. 66.