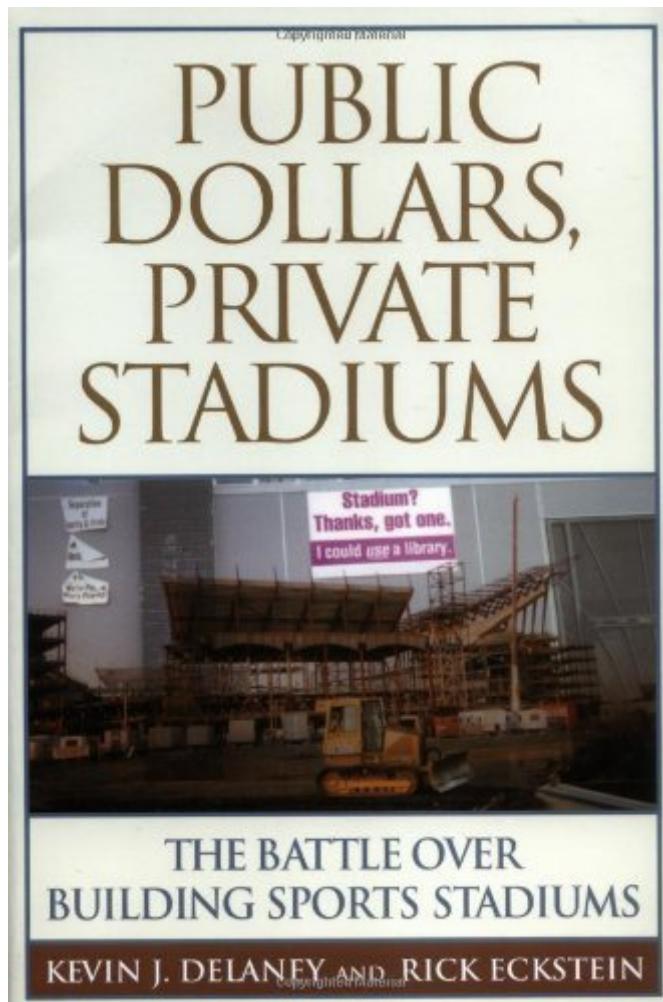


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Public Dollars, Private Stadiums: The Battle Over Building Sports Stadiums



Synopsis

The authors provide an eye-opening account of recent battles over publicly financed stadiums in some of America's largest cities. Their interviews with the key decision makers present a behind-the-scenes look at how and why powerful individuals and organizations foist these sports palaces on increasingly unreceptive communities. Delaney and Eckstein show that in the face of studies demonstrating that new sports facilities don't live up to their promise of big money, proponents are using a new tactic to win public subsidies—intangible social rewards, such as prestige and community cohesion. The authors find these to be empty promises as well, demonstrating that new stadiums may exacerbate, rather than erase, social problems in cities.

Book Information

File Size: 4529 KB

Print Length: 248 pages

Publisher: Rutgers University Press (November 5, 2003)

Publication Date: November 30, 2003

Language: English

ASIN: B000W7YZGG

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Not Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #918,446 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #125 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Business & Money > Economics > Public Finance #299 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Nonfiction > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Public Affairs & Policy > Urban Planning & Development #493 in Books > Business & Money > Economics > Public Finance

Customer Reviews

I picked up this book because my city is in the middle of a debate as to whether we should finance 65% of a proposed new arena by selling bonds. I am opposed to this proposal, though I am not opposed to public financing in principle--even (or perhaps especially) in a recession. Still, the proposal (and the details of the proposed agreement) seemed wrong-headed to me and I picked up this book to see if anyone had dealt with these of issues before. What I found in these very readable

204 pages amazed me. For not only was the dialogue I was hearing not at all new (this book was published in 2003 but substitute the city's name and the team's name and you have the conversations I am hearing every day) but the underlying issues are not new either. For the battle over the arena, the authors argue is really a battle over who controls the city: a network of corporations, led by banks or the communities of people who live in the city? And cities, the authors say, are controlled by corporations. To arrive at their conclusion, the authors examine nine cities (two of which have not succeeded in building a new arena) and try to determine: 1) who is pushing for these new arenas and why; 2) how do the people who live in the cities feel about the new arenas; 3) how much revenue do the arenas actually produce; and 4) what happens to politicians who push the arenas. They discover that the people pushing these arenas (business networks usually headed by major banks) are interested in using them to either "attract high-priced corporate talent" to the city or to attract corporations to the city. As a result, business leaders want the city to be a tourist destination. They want good roads, plenty of parking, cultural recreations such as a sports stadiums, and good restaurants.

Although published only in 2003, this book seems strikingly dated now. In no small part that is because of the ongoing clamor over public financing for stadiums around the United States. Since this book's publication, this trend has continued as virtually every major league city has been held up by owners for new stadiums and indoor arenas. The authors, sociologists at Temple and Villanova Universities, offer cases studies in the debates over public financing of sports arenas and the enormous amount of dollars pulled out of government entities to make them possible. They focus on debates since the 1980s in Cleveland, Cincinnati, Minneapolis, Denver, Phoenix, San Diego, Hartford, Pittsburgh, and Philadelphia over the financing of stadiums. I should add that in virtually every case a new stadium eventually was built with significant taxpayer involvement. There have been only small success in these political debates in the last 25+ years. The authors note that any effort to build a new stadium comes first from the sports team owner, who always pleads that without a new arena the team will be unable to compete in the league and will have to move elsewhere. One may question whether or not this is true; in instances where information has come to light the teams are almost never as destitute as the owner states. The result has been, according to the authors, that an estimated \$10 billion in public funds has been spent on new sports complexes since the 1980s. Dave Zirin, a lefty sports writer, succinctly argues that if these teams are subsidized by public funds, then the public should have a say in their management.

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