Sports City, USA: A Case Study of Public-Private Partnerships in Frisco, Texas

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The benefits of high school sports extend well beyond the gym or field and impact both students and communities (Legg, Jones, & White, 2018). Participation in high school athletics has grown tremendously over the past 10 years with an increase of over 400,000 participants from 2008-09 to 2018-19, which has led to an increased demand for additional athletic facilities. Considering this and that state funding for public education continues to decline, it has become increasingly difficult for cities and school districts to keep up with the demands for the construction of additional or updated athletic facilities necessitating increased partnerships between school districts and cities.

The purpose of this research is to add to the body of knowledge surrounding public-private partnerships (PPP) in sport, specifically by employing a case study research design to provide a thorough description of those involving a public school district, a city, and a private partner. This case study will examine the partnerships between the city of Frisco, Texas, the Frisco Independent School District, and the professional sport organizations including the Dallas Cowboys, the Dallas Stars, and FC Dallas. Projects resulting from these partnerships include Roughriders Stadium, the Comerica Center, Toyota Stadium, the Ford Center at the Star, and most recently the PGA of America.

Research questions include:

What was the step-by-step process used to develop the Frisco, TX PPPs?

What were the critical components (vision, financing, construction, community support, stakeholder relationships, benefits) of the Frisco, TX PPPs?

What was the return on investment (organizational, economic, community, tourism, intangible) for the Frisco, TX PPP and how is it measured?

Semi-structured interviews with multiple stakeholders in the five different partnerships will be conducted. Interview protocol will be developed and strictly followed to enhance reliability (Bhattacherjee, 2012; Yin 2018). Questions will be related to the vision of the project, financing, construction, gaining support from the community, relationships between stakeholders, and return on investment (organizational, economic, community, tourism, and intangible).

Purposive and snowball sampling methods will be used to select three to five interview participants per public and private organization. Participants will include leaders and stakeholders in the private businesses, present and past school district administrators, present and past school board members; and present and past elected city officials who were directly involved in the establishment of the partnerships.

A thematic analysis of interview data will be conducted to determine constructs (transparency, trust, responsibility, quality, accountability), overall themes, and relationships. Further, a survey about the strength of partnership relationships and level of trust, and their perception of the success of the partnerships will be given to all interview participants. Other data to be collected and analyzed include copies of the contracts, archives, and financial data such as initial cost to each partner, tax revenue, and savings based on alternative options to the PPP’s. Field notes will also be kept and will include impressions, informal observations, and cross-case comparisons as data is being collected (Eisenhardt, 1989).