

**Adaptive Reuse of Sport Stadiums and Collective Memories:
Rexall Place as a Site for the Continuation of the Oilers Dynasty and Civic Pride**

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Introduction

The construction of Edmonton's Rexall Place Stadium coincides with the rise of the stadium beginning in 1976 (Trumpbour, 2007). Professional sports experienced an increase in popularity, and sports teams began to become an integral part of many cities' identities. Along with the sports teams increasing importance to cities, the sites where they played also became more important. The architectural styling, the technology utilized, and the ideologies embedded within stadium construction became increasingly present as the rise of the stadium emerged. In this essay, I will present stadiums as culturally significant objects in order to illuminate their importance in society. I will then describe how the act of demolition and the adaptive reuse of buildings can be seen as social, and how it transcends the material nature of objects. I will conclude by applying the aspects of collective memory and identity to present Edmonton's Rexall Place as an important building that must be adaptively reused in order to continue the preservation of collective identity and memory in the city of Edmonton.

Stadiums and Architecture

Stadiums act to shape the identity of cities and reflect cultural attitudes. Katzer emphasizes the role that sports stadia played in developing nationalism and displaying international success in the post-war era, "[Stadia] were supposed to symbolize the superiority of the culture which created them" (Katzer, 2010). If stadia are looked at as representations of architectural ingenuity, it is surely not a stretch to see how the construction of sports stadium can be used to position nations on a global scale. Unique, iconic, or technologically advanced buildings can serve as objects that represent progress and dominance. Global sports mega-events provided, and still provide, the opportunity for nations to compete for superiority using material

objects. These objects can take the form of aquatic centers, housing facilities, transportation, and stadia.

The Houston Astrodome was opened in 1975 and included artificial turf and "the most elaborate scoreboard ever built" (Trumpbour, 2007). Some deemed the Astrodome to be the eighth wonder of the world and positioned Houston as a renowned "high-tech city" (Trumpbour, 2007). Sports stadia do indeed provide opportunities for nations to be known on the international stage. Not only do stadia act to display technological advancement and global dominance, they can be material representations of ideologies and political positions. Katzer (2010) uses the example of the Luzhniki Sports Complex in Moscow to demonstrate that sports stadiums embody "political ambitions," "programmatic claims," and "ideological framework[s]" along with "aesthetic considerations" (250). In this case, Luzhniki Sports Complex is iconic of the Soviet 1950s "socialist democratic" zeitgeist. The Luzhniki Sports Complex is a material representation of Soviet Russia's political leanings and ideologies.

Similar to Katzer's claims regarding stadia architecture and its connection with the zeitgeist, Horne (2011) posits that architecture serves as a representation of collective identities within society (218). In many westernized countries stadia are now reflections of capitalist ideologies. They are bought and sold as commodities in a marketplace (Horne, 2011). Contrasting Horne's ideas that contemporary western stadiums are indicative of capitalist ideologies with Katzer's 1950s socialist democratic Luzhiki Sports Complex, it is quite clear that sports stadiums are indeed reflections of the place, time, and social context of their construction. In addition to national pride garnered from stadium architecture, Trumpbour (2007) argues that stadia are also symbols of civic pride and have been so since around the 1950s.

Stadiums gradually moved from wood buildings to steel and concrete structures in the late 1890s, and a short while later in the 1920s, the public funding of stadium construction was introduced (15). By the 1950s public funding and stadium construction was commonplace and stadia were deemed to be beneficial for cities. The media had framed stadium construction as a form of civic pride, and municipalities and stadia were inexplicably intertwined (20). Many stadia construction projects today utilize some form of government subsidy, and as professional sports teams have become more integral to cities' identities stadia have also increased in importance (32). So not only are stadiums symbols of national pride, or cultural ideology, they have become objects of civic pride, and this is apparent through the public funding that has taken place for nearly a century. Stadia are significant material objects that represent distinct social histories.

Demolition and Adaptive Reuse

Unfortunately, demolition of stadia is often studied only in an economic context. Many economists ask questions regarding the efficiency, environmental impact, and economic impacts of the demolition of buildings and stadia (Bullen and Love, 2010). Social aspects regarding the demolition of structures are often not discussed, and instead, topics regarding adaptive reuse of structures are more commonly discussed (Horne, 2011; Barthel, 1996; Dickinson, 1997). Though no, or very little, academic literature exists that specifically focuses on the social dimension of stadia demolition, one thing that is quite apparent through research of news articles is the polemic stances that the public take on demolition. On one hand, many see old stadia as redundant, rundown and impeding development and growth, and are worthy of complete destruction (Staples, 2016; Press, 2016). Some, however, view old stadia as in need of

preservation due to their historical importance (Rosenblatt *Demolition Begins*). Some even go so far as to say that the demolition of stadiums would be a failure of civic imagination (Longman, 2016). Though the disparity of views regarding stadium demolition is worthy of further analysis, there is very little existing literature, and the purpose of this paper is not to look at narratives surrounding stadium demolition and repurposing. Instead, I will focus on the importance of repurposing or, as Bullen (2007) refers to it, adaptive reuse (21).

Defined by the Australian Government's Department of the Environment and Heritage (2004), adaptive reuse is a process that changes a disused or ineffective item into a new item that can be used for a different purpose (3). This definition is contested by various authors, as outlined by Bullen (2007), however, I believe that the Department of the Environment and Heritage's definition of adaptive reuse is the aptest and concise. Commonly, smaller urban buildings are repurposed to decrease environmental impact, preserve lifestyles, and to retain the value and character (Bullen and Love, 2010). Due to the size of sports stadia, adaptive reuse is often difficult to implement. Few stadia have been repurposed, but it is worth noting a few examples. Bush Stadium in Indianapolis was abandoned in 1996 and was turned into a storage facility for used cars, and in 2011 it was repurposed into lofts. Some demolition of structures occurred, but the aesthetic character of the stadium was mostly preserved (Bartolacci, 2016). Las Arenas in Barcelona hosted bullfighting until the 1970s when it too, was abandoned. The historical significance of the stadium necessitated preservation of the façade, but the inside was ultimately reconstructed into a shopping mall (Bartolacci, 2016). Lastly, the Memphis Grizzlies' Pyramid Arena was vacated when repairs were deemed too costly when compared to constructing a brand new arena. The iconic Pyramid Arena has now been repurposed into a

massive Bass Pro Shop (Bartolacci, 2016; Sainz, 2016). These mammoth structures were abandoned as they were deemed unfit to maintain their intended use, however, for reasons related to cultural or historical preservation they have all kept their aesthetic and architectural character in their transitions.

The desire to preserve social history is a commonality within much of the literature on active reuse and repurpose of buildings (Stickl, 2013; Jones, 2006; Horne, 2011; Dickinson, 1997; Barthel, 1996). Historic sites can act as "gateway[s] to the past" (Dickinson, 1997) for nations, cities, and cultures. They are remnants of past cultural practices, moments that changed society, and are vital to the collective memories and identities of societies. The collective memory of urban society is "composed of recollections tied to spatial representations reflecting the way it conceives and preserves itself" (Marcel and Mucchielli, 2010). Historical sites "anchor collective memories" (Barthel, 1996) with tangible and material confirmation of the past. Material architecture and the space that it occupies serve to maintain the collective memory of societies. The stadia previously mentioned reflect these ideas quite clearly. Bush Stadium was preserved because it remained a "beloved fixture" (Bartolacci, 2016) in Indianapolis since 1931. Las Arenas in Barcelona was a bullfighting stadium that was a "cherished civic structure" (Bartolacci, 2016) that represented regional identity. And the Pyramid Arena was at one point the third largest pyramid in the world and is still an iconic "symbol of Memphis" (Bartolacci, 2016). These buildings have gone under adaptive reuse because aspects of them are integral to the collective memory and identity of cities. As noted in the Stadiums and Architecture section, sports stadiums are often representations of the civic pride or civic identity of cities, and this solidifies the stadia as important objects within collective memory and identity.

In addition to the civic pride and collective identity tied to sports stadia, it should be noted that people often find structures tied to collective memory important to preserve because the very act of repurposing or preserving buildings is a political act that carries broad social implications (Jones, 2006). The function of the building certainly serves certain groups of people, and the continued material presence of the repurposed building stands to communicate a desire to preserve past memories or identities.

Rexall Place

Hockey was present in the city of Edmonton long before the Edmonton Oilers' incorporation into the National Hockey League in 1979 (Stewart, 2016). The dynasty, fandom, and historical sports achievements involving hockey, however, are most notable when the Oilers played in the NHL during the 1980s. The Oilers were home to some of the greatest hockey players in the game's history, such as Wayne Gretzky and Mark Messier, and accumulated numerous championship victories throughout the historic decade. Presently, the Oilers have not won a championship for 26 years and have consistently finished in the bottom of the league for the last five years. Yet, the attendance of Oilers games remains almost as high as it was during the dynasty years of the 1980s (Edmonton Oilers Yearly Attendance Graph). Edmonton's slogan "The City of Champions" is often credited to the Oilers' dynasty in the 1980s, even though many understand the slogan to represent the recovery efforts after a tornado devastated the city in 1987 (Osman, 2016). Several famous hockey play-by-play announcers are memorialized in the form of a large-scale mural on 50th Street and 100th Avenue. A blue, orange and white hat or shirt is a common uniform of the average Edmontonian, and knowledge of upcoming games or recent highlights are often essential small talk with acquaintances or

strangers. As well, five Stanley Cup rings representing the Oilers' championship wins are memorialized on the side of the building adjacent to Rexall Place, on the other side of the aptly named Wayne Gretzky Drive. The material presence of the Edmonton Oilers is certainly obvious throughout the city of Edmonton, and this material representation of the Oilers is indicative of the collective identity of Edmontonians.

Not surprisingly, Rexall Place has existed for the entirety of the Edmonton Oilers' duration in the NHL. It is the site where many hockey legends played, championship games were won and lost, and memories were created amongst Edmontonians. However, the last championship ring was won in 1990, "The City of Champions" plaques have been removed from Edmonton's municipal boundary signs, the Stanley Cup ring mural is now covered up with a cell phone advertisement, and Rexall Place is host to the Edmonton Oilers for the last time on April 6th, 2016. The Oilers are moving to the newly built downtown arena for all subsequent hockey seasons. The fate of Rexall Place is still undecided, though there is a strong push to repurpose the building as a multi-rink facility for future use as an ice hockey arena.

Using previously discussed topics such as nationalism in sports architecture and collective memory, I will elaborate on why it is important to the city of Edmonton for Rexall Place to continue to exist as a place for hockey. Jones (2006) notes that architecture should be seen as "a field of cultural contestation" (550). The new downtown arena in Edmonton is certainly a site of cultural contestation. Its "oil drop" design and the inclusion of shopping centers and hotels which reflect Alberta's energy economy and consumerist qualities juxtapose the nearby social services and the occupancy of the area by Edmonton's homeless population. Rexall Place, however, is not architecturally iconic, nor is it at a culturally contested site at face value.

Its design seems to be typical of any normal stadium—beige, cement, circular, and relatively boring. However, the decision to demolish or repurpose the stadium is certainly an issue of cultural contestation. As noted in the previous section, the repurposing of a building is a political act and serves specific people. The demolition of Rexall Place may very well have appeared to be an attack on the deeply embedded sporting history of the Oilers and the collective identity of Edmonton. Deciding to repurpose Rexall is a political act insofar as the municipal government and private organizations decided to preserve the material representation of local collective memories instead of erasing them.

Even though the architecture of Rexall Place is not abundantly unique, the space occupied by Rexall Place is certainly a space for sport. This is seen by the hockey figures attached to a pedestrian walkway leading to the stadium, the WHL hockey team Oil Kings' building adjacent to the stadium, the road named after former Oiler legend Wayne Gretzky, and the 15 feet statue of Gretzky himself directly in front of Rexall Place. By keeping Rexall Place a space for sport, collective memories will be successfully maintained. Choosing to preserve the stadium is choosing what kind of history to preserve, and therefore shapes the collective identity of the city. The adaptive repurposing of Rexall Place into a multi-rink facility also allows Rexall Place to be host mega-events of varying sorts. Large amateur hockey tournaments will be able to take place in the repurposed building, and Edmonton will have an opportunity to become "the hockey tournament capital of Canada" (Ramsay, 2016). A large, unique facility such as the proposed multi-rink facility will provide Edmonton with a building that can boost "global promotion and branding" (Horne, 2011). And on a civic scale, memories, culture, and identity will be preserved much like in the cases of Bush Stadium, Las Arenas, and Pyramid Arena.

Dickinson (1997) realized the importance of embodied participation in the evocation of the memory (4). Though the material presence of Rexall Place serves as a way to maintain collective memories, it is the act of playing hockey or sitting in the stands that can elicit the continuation of collective memory. Keeping Rexall Place as a space for hockey solidifies the importance of hockey in Edmonton's collective identity.

Conclusion

Stadia are important buildings within the context of city environments. They can be symbols of technological advancement, political ideology, and civic pride. Their construction and adaptive reuse are political acts that carry many social implications. By preserving stadia, the collective memory and identity of a city are maintained within the material structures. Additionally, there is a specific focus on repurposing historical structures and a definite lack of research done on the subject of stadia demolition and the social consequences. Rexall Place poses a compelling example of a material structure with many aspects of civic collective memory and identity embedded within it. The proposed adaptive reuse of Rexall Place into a multi-rink facility is necessary in order for the hockey-oriented identity of Edmonton to persist. It is in the physical acts of sitting in the stands, skating on the rinks, and visually seeing Rexall Place that Edmontonians will engage in the perpetuation of Edmonton's collective identity.