

**PUBLIC RHETORIC, PRIVATE DEVELOPMENT, AND URBAN GOVERNMENT IN  
THE POSTINDUSTRIAL CITY: THE CASE OF CHICAGO'S NAVY PIER**

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**ABSTRACT:** As revenue-deprived cities in the United States depend more on developments aimed at attracting visitors, the governing bodies controlling this infrastructure play a larger role in urban government. This paper explores the case of one such development, Chicago's Navy Pier. The author argues that the Pier's redevelopment as a festival marketplace, which was based on public rhetoric and space, necessitated the creation of a public authority that compromised this vision. The paper begins with a description of the postindustrial city, then outlines the history of Navy Pier and its redevelopment, and closes with a discussion of the role of public authorities in the contemporary city.

In 1986, Chicago and urban America generally, were in decline. The bedrock of federal urban funding had disappeared, middle class residents continued to flee the city for suburban enclaves, and manufacturing jobs that had once employed large portions of city dwellers were suddenly much scarcer. While cities searched for strategies to reverse these trends, most found great trouble in doing so. An urban regeneration seemed unlikely at the time, but cities would soon find ways to attract dollars, residents, and visitors back within their limits.

Seventy years earlier, Municipal Pier, a mixed-use development for shipping and entertainment, was constructed near the mouth of the Chicago River and Lake Michigan. The initial uses of the structure known today as Navy Pier symbolize the industrial and leisure activities taking place in a rapidly growing, and at times, carefree urban setting. In the decades to follow, the pier served as a Navy training base, the Chicago campus of the University of Illinois, and finally, as a landmark used intermittently for municipal gatherings and public events. During the era of urban decline, however, Navy Pier sat idle amidst a city on the verge of rebirth; plans for renovation had come and gone and it looked as though the Pier might never be of use again.

The ever-changing currents of urban America provided a different outcome. In 1990 a plan that would redevelop the Pier was accepted, and in the previous year, two factors ensured its success. The first was the plan's use of public rhetoric, which stood out from other festival marketplaces that had embraced private development exclusively. This can be attributed to the fact that throughout the city's history, Chicagoans have treasured their public space along Lake Michigan. A phenomenon best represented by Daniel Burnham's 1909 plan for Chicago, which placed an emphasis on beautifying the lakefront and rejuvenating the residents and city (Hall, 2002, pp. 193-194). Consistent with this tradition, the language of the 1990 plan made clear that Navy Pier would remain a resource for the people of Chicago and not fall into the hands of private developers. The second, and most crucial, factor was the creation of the Metropolitan Pier and Exposition Authority (MPEA), a state-created, public authority with the purpose of managing Navy Pier and the city's convention center, McCormick Place. Today, Navy Pier is consistently

the top destination for visitors to Chicago and many of the metropolitan region's residents. Over eight million people visited the Pier in 2003 and this is near the average attendance since its reopening in 1995.

This successful redevelopment project signaled Chicago's accession into the group of cities embracing a strategy of development aimed at attracting tourists and middle class residents back to the city during the late 1980s and 1990s. It served as evidence to Chicagoans, and particularly to Mayor Richard M. Daley, that the most productive way to rebuild Chicago was as a city dedicated to supplementing shrinking revenues with visitor-generated tax dollars.

In addition to the project's importance to Chicago, it is an imperative case for the study of urban politics, generally. It was a development based on public space and yet it necessitated the creation of a public/private authority, a form of government that some have argued reduces accountability of government to the public (Judd & Simpson, 2003), and which, I argue, reduced the project's ability to adhere to its vision of public space. Such a paradox makes Navy Pier a potential vision of pragmatic urban government in a future where accountability to public citizens has been all but replaced by a duty to enhance the private sector.

This paper traces the politics, economics, and spatial implications of Navy Pier's redevelopment and explores its impact on residents, visitors, and the City of Chicago. I argue that despite the emphasis on public space in the rhetoric of redevelopment proposals, Navy Pier closely resembles similar private developments in other cities that it was to differ from so greatly. The paper finds that the creation of a public authority, the MPEA, was the determining factor both in enabling Navy Pier's redevelopment and in reducing the public nature it was to include.

First, I introduce the postindustrial city in the United States and discuss the changes that have taken place in Chicago. Second, I trace the history of the Navy Pier development project—the forces that encouraged, clashed, and worked together to grant Chicago its festival marketplace. Central to this portion of the paper is the question of whether or not Navy Pier as a finished product is consistent with the rhetoric with which the plan was passed. Third, I analyze

the success of Navy Pier and discuss the consistency of the physical Navy Pier with the version in planning documents. I conclude with a discussion of the MPEA and the implications of public/private authorities for the politics of postindustrial, tourism-dependent cities.

### **Cities in Postindustrial Urban America**

In his history of urban planning, *Cities of Tomorrow*, Peter Hall succinctly maps the transition from the industrial city of the early and mid-twentieth century to a new type of American city. He lists among its characteristics a realization of the end of the industrial economy, the importance of service-sector role in urban economies, a wave of suburbanites returning to the city, the gentrification of the city by this flock of middle class group, and the conceptualization of the city as a tourist attraction (Hall, 2002, pp. 383-384). During this transition, and more specifically, in 1978, federal funding to cities peaked (Judd & Swanstrom, 2004, p. 323). Cities were forced to find new ways of adding to tax revenues and state subsidies in order to fund the high quality services that urban residents expect. The overwhelming pattern was to attract visitors through a new infrastructure of tourism, often leading to competition between cities in attracting the most visitors and revenue (Judd, 1999, pp. 35, 39).

Referring to cities' change in strategy, Hall describes a phenomenon he calls the "Rousification of America." This is a reference to the real estate developer James Rouse, who played a large role in reshaping cities across America with his malls and festival marketplace developments that emphasized retail development and attracting visitors (Frieden & Sagalyn, 1989, p. 259). This was a significant change from the strategies industrial cities had embraced earlier in the century, and was in part due to the massive loss of manufacturing jobs across the nation—and especially in Chicago (Judd & Swanstrom, 2004, p. 349; Abu-Lughod, 1999, p. 324).

The shift in focus toward city policies aimed at attracting visitors resulted in the construction of what Dennis Judd has called "tourist bubbles," which contain attractions targeted

to visitors within an area of the downtown that is very clean and heavily policed (1999, p. 36). The tourist bubble shelters visitors from images of urban decline (Beauregard, 2002) and consists of festival market places, enclosed malls, and sports stadiums, types of developments that have been compared to “theme-park building” (Sorkin, 1992, p. xiv). This development constructs a city very different from its industrial precedent, a city in which trademarks of public development become places to play (Judd, 2003a, p. 3; Spirou & Bennett, 2002, p. 17). City officials embraced this form of downtown redevelopment as it not only symbolized a locale’s rebirth and mayor’s success but could meet “some local need such as getting rid of an eyesore, saving a landmark, or creating a civic symbol” (Frieden & Sagalyn, 1989, p. 259).

The critics of such development find various flaws, three of which are listed here. First, some argue that tourist-driven development in postindustrial cities does not result in the benefits promised by developers. This is characterized by “tax payer bait and switch” in which voters are promised revenue increases and tax decreases for supporting large infrastructure projects but never see such returns (Eisinger, 2000, p. 326). Second, some find that it reduces the value of “place” in urban settings. That is, the postindustrial city is one where culture is the commodity and is marketed to a mass audience (Zukin, 1991, p. 41) and this leads to a decrease in uniqueness among places as “their game plans often have much in common” (Savitch & Kantor, 2002, p. 268). Third, there is concern that spaces within the city that were primarily public are now more conducive to private development (Zukin, 1991, p. 54).

Whether or not tourist-driven development has been good for the urban landscape, both aesthetically and socio-economically, is heavily debated. M. Christine Boyer’s description of South Street Seaport a festival marketplace in New York—similar to Navy Pier—suggests that its primary impact has been negative. Boyer argues that “these open-air bazaars and storehouses of heterogeneity, where one can buy anything from anywhere, have so concentrated geographical space and historical time that the uniqueness of place and the specifics of context have been erased completely” (1994, pp. 423-424). She posits that urban areas such as these capitalize on

historic pasts while ignoring more pressing urban problems (Boyer 1994, p. 449). In Boyer's conception, this results in cities with confused identities and inauthentic, privately focused, developments.

However, the residents and visitors of cities continue to flood the attractions Boyer so despises and this is the aspect that matters most to mayors and developers. Blair Kamin, the architecture critic at the *Chicago Tribune*, agrees with Boyer that such development might be aesthetically displeasing, but counters with a simple summation about Navy Pier's attendance record: "Say what you will, the crowds keep coming" (Kamin, 2000). Perhaps the fact that people enjoy these areas of themed leisure best explains why cities continue to build and promote them. Accordingly, a recent survey of cities found that the "arts, entertainment, recreation, tourism" area of development is the most important sector for 46 percent of the 446 cities that responded (Judd, et al., 2003, p. 61).<sup>1</sup>

In Chicago, themed events have become a major focus of city government. The budgets of the Department of Cultural Affairs and the Mayor's Office of Special Events, both of which plan and run city festivals and some events at Navy Pier, have exploded since the early 1980s when they were created. The Office of Special Events first appears in the city's budget in 1981 with a staff of 13 and an allowance of \$330,383; in 2005 the mayor recommended a staff size of 68 and a budget of \$25,007,360 (City of Chicago, 1981; City of Chicago, 2004). These are investments that cities must make, and they do pay off. Visitors to Navy Pier and other destinations within the city contribute a considerable deal to Chicago's tax revenue each year, an amount that was approximately \$165 million in 2003.

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<sup>1</sup> When only central cities are considered this figure jumps to 54 percent.

**TABLE 1:** Direct Impact of Travel to Chicago in millions of dollars, 1999-2003

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Total direct spending	\$9,065	\$9,727	\$8,741	\$8,488	\$8,739
Local tax revenue	\$165	\$180.4	\$163.4	\$160.2	\$165.8

SOURCE: Travel Industry Association of America

This is deducted from a massive \$8.7 billion that visitors handed over in direct spending (Travel Industry Association of America, as cited by Chicago Convention and Tourism Bureau website, 2004).

Navy Pier fits nicely into a discussion of tourist-driven development in the post-industrial city, but in many ways it has a mixed identity. Boyer would see it in the same light as South Street Seaport or Harborplace in Baltimore, but two elements distinguish it from such development. First, Navy Pier was built as a place of leisure for Chicago's residents nearly eight decades ago. Its redevelopment did not capitalize on the creation of a historical past for profit in the contemporary urban setting, but restored the Pier to its original use. Second, the Pier is a public space, operated by a government institution and its redevelopment was based on public space, not private development. A major effort was made to convince residents and politicians that a Chicago landmark was not simply being offered up for sacrifice to the urban consumption gods, and that Navy Pier would become more than another place for Chicagoans and tourists to shop while confined in a space of commodification. Whether or not this vision was executed as successfully as it was articulated can be seen in the story of Navy Pier's redevelopment.

### **A Failed Attempt at Privatization**

In 1979, Chicago's mayor, Jane Byrne, toured Boston's festival marketplace, Quincy Market. She returned from her visit determined to bring Chicago a similar development aimed at

engaging the region and nation as visitors to the country's third-largest city. Byrne's desire would materialize, but not in her tenure as mayor. At the time of Byrne's visit to Boston, Navy Pier was

**FIGURE 1:** Navy Pier Area Map



SOURCE: <http://www.navypier.com>

in disuse and sat as a reminder to Chicagoans that the city was not winning the game of urban development. The Pier was seen as a major resource gone to waste as it had not seen heavy use since it was used as a back-up convention center when the original McCormick Place burned down in the 1970s. Residents and politicians longed for a redeveloped Pier that would restore pride to what had been a cherished public space in its early years.

Municipal Pier, as it was called when constructed, first opened in 1916 as a mixed-use development for shipping and entertainment just north of Chicago's central business district, the Loop. The development was rededicated as Navy Pier in 1927 in memory of the sailors who had fought for the United States during the first World War (Navy Pier website, 2004). Appropriate to



its namesake, the pier was transformed into a Navy training base during the Second World War. Between 1946 and 1964 the University of Illinois used it as a two-year campus until the institution opened its site on the city's near-west side in 1965. It was designated as a Chicago Landmark in 1977, hosted conventions from time-to-time, and was the site of the ChicagoFest event from 1978 to 1982, but had no primary use (Navy Pier website, 2004). The Pier's inactivity was a thorn in the side of a city that needed revenue and had a huge unused resource but did not know what to do with it. Boston and Baltimore both offered models with Rouse Company-designed and managed waterfront developments, but private development was not first on Chicago's list of options for Navy Pier.

Byrne succeeded in attracting Rouse's attention to Chicago, however. By 1982, the Rouse Company was floating a plan that would make Navy Pier the next Harborplace—Baltimore's festival marketplace, which had opened in 1980 with great success (Millenson, 1982; Norris, 2003). The Rouse plan for Navy Pier would have been of mixed benefit to Chicago. Rouse would have provided \$217 million for the initial redevelopment project and would lease the property from the city for 30 years, with a renewal option for an additional 60 years (Ziemba, 1982). Once the project's debt had been paid off, the first \$2 million in revenue produced each year would go to the city, with the second \$2 million in revenue going to Rouse Company—any additional profits would be split evenly (Ziemba, 1982).

In the time between the Rouse Company proposal in 1982 and the city council decision to accept or reject it in 1984, there had been a revolution in Chicago politics. Harold Washington, the city's first black mayor, replaced Byrne in 1983, who had been the city's first female mayor. Washington's campaign "was unquestionably the largest independent political organization ever assembled against the machine" (Grimshaw, 1992, pp. 171-172). A split in the city council between the machine faction and Washington's reform faction emerged after the election and it was this conflict that spelled the end for the Rouse plan in Washington's first year as mayor.

According to the *Chicago Tribune*, both sides deserved equal blame for missing the opportunity. Initially, Washington did not see enough benefits for Chicago's poor community in the plan, but warmed up to it after further consideration. After Washington changed his mind, the machine factions in the council, led by Alderman Edward Vrdolyak, did not see the same benefits in the plan (*Chicago Tribune*, 1985), and one could speculate, did not wish to see the new, anti-machine mayor receive credit for the project. However, the disappointment for missing this opportunity was not large in scale. Aside from the *Tribune*, the editorials of which suggest it would have sold the Pier to the first bidder, the feeling in Chicago was that Navy Pier deserved better than a generic, private-oriented project (City of Chicago, 1985, pp. 3-4).

### **Harold Washington and the Rhetoric of a Successful Redevelopment Plan**

After the Rouse plan's failure, Washington created the Navy Pier Task Force with the goal of developing a plan for the site's revitalization (Newman, 1985). The Task Force was made up of public officials, private sector representatives, and community leaders, and its philosophy marked a turning point for the nature of redevelopment plans (City of Chicago, 1985). Washington's new spin on Navy Pier emphasized "total public use" and its development into something resembling an urban park rather than an outdoor bazaar (Neal, 1985). The plan's critics saw it as a utopian ideal that would neither generate revenue for the city nor draw visitors (*Chicago Tribune*, 1985). Supporters saw a unique development that would contribute something to a downtown that was already ridden with retail development (*Crain's Chicago Business*, 1986).

Though opinion was split on how Navy Pier should be redeveloped, it was the Task Force's 1985 report, "Window on the Future," which set the tone for its eventual redevelopment. It envisioned a Pier with minimal commercial development and optimized public use. Washington opened the report with a letter to citizens informing them that the report "does not view the Pier as a piece of real estate but recognizes the Pier's value to Chicagoans as a landmark

public facility” (City of Chicago, 1985). This emphasis on public space was the aspect of the plan that made it so appealing to both developers and residents and in certain sections adheres to a rhetoric akin to Burnham’s 1909 plan. Broadly, the Task Force recommended:

the development of the Pier as an urban park with extensive and innovative cultural, educational, and community activities. Specifically, it recommends a wide range of expositions, cultural exhibits, museums, educational institutions and entertainment events, along with limited retail activities. The task force also recommends passive and active park areas (both open and enclosed) and noncompetitive recreation facilities for year-round use. The task force envisions the Pier as a community center whose base would be the entire city of Chicago. Its programs and facilities would both serve and reflect Chicago’s diverse cultural life (City of Chicago, 1985, p. 1).

From this point on, the rhetoric of Navy Pier’s redevelopment emphasized public use.

Despite the popular rhetoric that had evolved, little action was taken to begin Navy Pier’s redevelopment during the remainder of the Washington administration. The fact remained that without the money needed to renovate the existing structure of the Pier, the Task Force’s vision of a new Navy Pier remained just that. A 1987 report found that Navy Pier needed over \$20 million in repairs before it could handle more than the everyday use for which it was maintained at that time (McCarron, 1987). The city needed new funds to bring Navy Pier back to life, and at this point in time had no way of obtaining them.

The *Tribune* happily reminded the Washington administration that private redevelopment might be the only option. The newspaper blamed Washington and his approach for the failure to redevelop the Pier, arguing that the only practical plan was to allow it to be privately funded (*Chicago Tribune*, 1987). The first step was to abandon the “dewy-eyed” vision of the Task Force which had “rambled on about a pier reserved for cultural pursuits and family picnics, bicycle paths and gardens” while ignoring the reality of the situation (*Chicago Tribune*, 1987). To salvage the Pier, the paper suggested, the city should get back on the phone with Rouse and hand over the landmark to a mall developer. The *Tribune* saw it as the only way the Pier could be saved—and paid for. Though some might argue that the final product of the redevelopment gave

in to such logic, it was not done without at least some use of the Washingtonian philosophy of public space and private exclusion.

### **Navy Pier, Born Again**

Harold Washington's death in 1987, shortly after he was elected for a second term as mayor, left his predecessor Eugene Sawyer, the city's second black mayor, with a mandate to carry on the transition in Chicago politics that Washington had started. Among other things, this meant one more try at redeveloping Navy Pier. Sawyer's vision of Navy Pier seemed to be a hybrid of Washington's public space and Byrne's privatized mall. He saw the potential for some commercial development, but said it should be limited, suggesting that he still held in high regard the priority of a public space on the lakefront (Strong, 1987).

By May of 1988, Sawyer had created the Navy Pier Development Corporation, and said that Navy Pier should become an entertainment market place but should not house a casino (Strong, 1988; *Chicago Tribune*, 1988a). No master plan was put in place, but Sawyer wanted the Pier's west end in use shortly and had decided that Washington's vision of a public Pier would have to be put aside for the time being (Strong, 1988). This led the *Tribune* to proclaim that Sawyer's Development Corporation, diverging from the public park proposed by Washington, must be on the right track (*Chicago Tribune*, 1988a).

There was some debate in the city council on whether or not Chicago should cede control of Navy Pier to another authority, but the idea was generally accepted and an ordinance creating the Navy Pier Development Authority was passed in October of 1988 (*Chicago Tribune*, 1988b). This can be seen as softening up the period for the MPEA's creation a year later; by then, it probably was not seen as unusual to put Navy Pier in the hands of a governing body other than the city. The Authority was quick to work; in December it commissioned the Urban Land Institute to conduct a study and hoped to have a plan in place by the end of 1989 (*Chicago Tribune*, 1988c).

It was an ambitious goal, but was a considerable step toward success compared with the fifteen (at least) other attempts to bring the Pier back to life (Cappo, 1988).

Sawyer's time in office was limited, however, and before long, Chicago would have a mayor with a familiar name and vision. Richard M. Daley defeated Sawyer in the 1989 primary and seemed to have the same development-driven vision for Chicago as his father, Richard J., the head of the Democratic machine and mayor from 1955-1976. Richard M. Daley had big ideas and the confidence that he could carry them out. Navy Pier served as his proving grounds that Chicago could again become a power in urban America, this time with a focus on attracting visitors.

Though the ball had already been rolling for some time, Daley was determined to be the mayor that turned Navy Pier into an attraction for Chicagoans and visitors alike. The work done by the Washington and Sawyer administrations made Daley's success possible, but it was the Illinois General Assembly's decision to create a public/private state authority, the Metropolitan Pier and Exposition Authority (MPEA), that enabled the redevelopment to materialize (Recktenwald, 1989). A 13-member board of directors appointed by the mayor of Chicago and the governor of Illinois would govern the MPEA, which provided \$150 million in revenue bonds that would finance the project (Recktenwald, 1989; *Chicago Tribune*, 1989). This gave public officials and developers the money and authority they needed to decide Navy Pier's future.

Daley announced the "official" beginning of Navy Pier's redevelopment in 1990, although the plan's official approval and groundbreaking did not occur until mid-1992 (*Chicago Tribune*, 1990; Davis, 1992). The final plan was a melting pot of the ideas that had come before it and the *Tribune* described the plan as "a bazaar of specialty shops, restaurants, art galleries and museums as well as a celebration of lakefront space, with pedestrian promenades and a winter garden" (*Chicago Tribune*, 1990). It seemed to promise everything that anyone had wanted since Jane Byrne's trip to Quincy Market in 1979, and perhaps before then.

The architectural firms of Benjamin Thompson and Associates (BTA), and two Chicago firms, VOA Associates, Inc. and Envriodyne Engineers were selected from thirteen finalists to redesign Navy Pier (McCarron, 1991). BTA, which oversaw the development of the big three waterfront developments, Quincy Market, Harborplace, and South Street Seaport, was the winner, while the other firms were added as Chicago-based “venture partners” (McCarron, 1991). BTA’s selection had mixed messages for the Pier’s fate. While the language and theme of its proposal were aimed at promoting a public Pier, the company’s past projects suggested that the renovated Pier might not turn out so different from the vision laid out by the Rouse Company in 1982.

The firm’s submission to the MPEA sounded very similar to that of Washington’s Navy Pier Task Force, calling for “a new civic environment” and a Navy Pier that “becomes a symbol of a humane city in the century ahead” (BTA, 1990, p. 3). The design plan also stated that “Navy Pier is NOT primarily about consumption or shopping in a mall, although unique shops will be among the things to see and enjoy...Navy Pier is largely about a new CIVIC SPACE on the waterfront that enriches the image of Chicago as an exciting place for people” (BTA, 1990, p. 3; capitalization in original).

Among the main concerns of BTA, were the images of urban decline that Navy Pier had to overcome in order to be successful. The section of the proposal dealing with these issues is quite detailed and takes a very serious tone, as opposed to the more relaxed, visionary, section that introduces a new Navy Pier. The four major areas to be confronted were: visibility, connections, easy access, and balance (BTA, 1990, p. 5). This included plans for trolleys and lighting schemes, but most important, BTA stressed a *balance* between civic and commercial activity, where “zones of activity” are to be integrated and those that want to utilize Navy Pier as a public park may do so without interfering with those that wish to use it as a place of consumption. Suddenly, it appeared as though the balance *between* private and public was the focus of the design, not the triumph of public *over* private. This change in priority is evident in the finished product.

Navy Pier reopened in 1995 and was a very different kind of landmark in Chicago. The final cost of the redevelopment was \$198.6 million, nearly \$50 million over the MPEA's allotment (Reardon, 1996). Costs aside, the Pier was no longer a reminder of wasted time and a historic past, but represented promise that Chicago was learning to play the game of postindustrial cities. The rules of this game have greatly altered the face of urban centers, including Chicago.

### **All Roads Lead to Navy Pier**

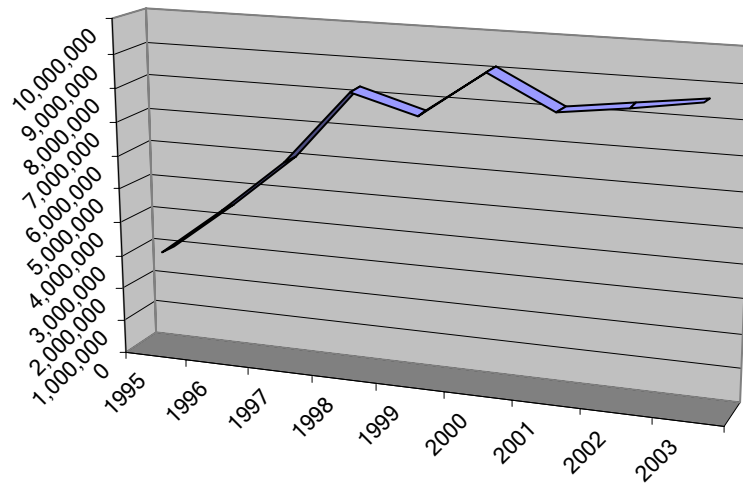
The years of effort that went into making Navy Pier a downtown festival marketplace have resulted in a city that funnels visitors and locals to an attraction of which Chicago is very proud. Thus, it has become hard to miss Navy Pier when visiting Chicago. This is evidenced by signage on the Chicago Transit Authority's Blue Line, indicating that the Grand Avenue station should be utilized to reach the Pier. However, this station is 14 blocks, or one and three-quarter miles west of the Pier itself (600 E. Grand)<sup>2</sup>. One might interpret the intended purpose of this signage not as an indicator to exit the train, but as a signifier to visitors that once they arrive in the Loop, the place to be is Navy Pier.

The indicators for visitors to see Navy Pier become much less subtle as people settle into their hotels. The October 2004 edition of *Where: Chicago*, a magazine found waiting for visitors in hotel rooms, mentions Navy Pier 34 times in its 88 pages—including advertisements and the front and back covers—recommending different leisure activities for those visiting Chicago<sup>3</sup>. The inside back cover sports an ad for Navy Pier that gloats, "There's Always Something Happening at Navy Pier." As pompous as it might sound, it is true.

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<sup>2</sup> The CTA's Grand Avenue bus goes directly to Navy Pier and is the intended transfer after one exits the Blue Line, but a visitor to Chicago might not know this upon arrival.

<sup>3</sup> This number was calculated by searching the text of articles, restaurant listings, and advertisements for the phrase "Navy Pier."

**FIGURE 2:** Navy Pier Attendance 1995 - 2003

SOURCE: Chicago Convention and Tourism Bureau, Mayor's Office of Special Events, Crain's Chicago Business, Museums in the Parks, and individual attractions.

This one ad boasts activities in October 2004 including firework display every Saturday night at 9 p.m., a running play at the Chicago Shakespeare Theater, a Halloween-themed feature at the Pier's IMAX theatre, and a new exhibit at the Chicago Children's Museum at the Pier's west end.

If a visitor does not reach Navy Pier using public transit, city officials have made sure other means are available. The Illinois-Grand Corridor Transportation Management Association and the City of Chicago offer free trolley services to Navy Pier from the commuter rail stations in the area west of the Loop and to the Red Line subway seven blocks west of the Pier. The stops near the commuter rail stations encourage use of the Pier by suburban families while the Illinois-Grand corridor trolley routes ensure that visitors have a cheap and safe way to return to hotels throughout Chicago's "tourist bubble."

Strategies aimed at herding visitors to Navy Pier have worked. Since its redevelopment, the Pier has consistently drawn the most visitors among Chicago's major tourist attractions (Chicago Convention and Tourism Bureau, 2004). Though annual visits started roughly around



the 3.5 million average that officials had predicted it quickly mushroomed to a figure that reaches the eight million mark annually and peaked in 2000 at 9.1 million (Chicago Convention and Tourism Bureau, 2004). The massive attendance is a sign that developers did something right and reassured the city that the wait for the redevelopment of Navy Pier might just have been worth while.

Navy Pier today, however, is not the one seen in the plans, despite its success. It is heavily dominated by consumption activities, and though it does leave some room for leisurely recreation, one is most apt to shop once at Navy Pier. Where is the new civic space that was to be invented? The answer is best found at the west end of Navy Pier in an open space one level above the lake and main promenade. In the BTA plan, this area was set aside as an “urban park” where “active sport areas alternate with quieter areas for families and children, for seasonal gardens, watery landscapes, and irresistible places to walk and sit in contemplation of lake and city” (BTA, 1990, p. 34). Looking for this park on Navy Pier today, one wanders to the spot where it was to be placed, now called Pier Park, and finds instead a carnival space, filled with a miniature golf course, a ride that whirls airborne visitors in circles, and the Pier’s trademark Ferris wheel.

Looking more closely at the Ferris wheel’s cages, one sees the small logo of the McDonald’s arches, and to the left of the line for the six-story ride finds Mickey D’s at the Wheel—an abbreviated version of McDonald’s restaurant. A large donation by the fast-food chain made it an official sponsor of the Pier and created a shrine to mass marketed culture instead of the path-breaking civic area it was supposed to be. The amount that McDonald’s paid for the sponsorship has not been disclosed, though the MPEA said in 1995 that it was receiving \$1.5 to \$2 million per year from corporate sponsors (Kendall & Cohen, 1995). This symbolizes the ways in which the redevelopment of Navy Pier strayed from its objectives and became just another festival marketplace among a string of others. Navy Pier’s unique features are granted to it by the city looking over it, rather than the activities upon it. As Blair Kamin writes in a 2000 critique of the Pier focused mainly on aesthetics:

Navy Pier teaches a lot of larger lessons about urban waterfront developments—and despite the sea of smiling faces on Dock Street, not all of them are happy ones. Designers can make all sorts of promises about urban waterfronts, but executing them with élan is another matter. Having a public authority rather than a private developer in charge of a waterfront project is no guarantee that it won't become overly commercialized. Still, the pier symbolizes how cities in general and Chicago in particular have succeeded in renewing themselves. If only it excelled at the art of architecture as it does in the choreography of public space (2000).

### **Conclusion: New Cities and New Governments**

In an era marked by low levels of federal funding for cities and increased necessity for spending, developments such as Navy Pier are a required feature of a successful city's landscape. Navy Pier, despite its downfalls, is good for Chicago. The money, visitors, and residents that it attracts to the city keep it afloat while funds from other sources become scarcer. However, the paradox created by the promise for new civic space and the creation of a privately dominated attraction managed by an unaccountable arm of government, in some sense outweighs Navy Pier's success. By these standards, Navy Pier is not an exception to the rule in urban government. More and more government tasks, from provision of the most basic services in cities to the building of stadiums and entertainment districts have been made the responsibility of less democratic, more privatized, special authorities (Judd & Swanstrom, 2004, p.337; Judd & Simpson, 2003, pp. 1060-1061).

Throughout the history of urban governance, a lack of democratic qualities such as this has led to reform movements that changed the structure of governing institutions. Navy Pier certainly does not prompt visitors and residents to call for institutional reform after an afternoon spent there, but further consideration of how power is delegated might. There was no public vote on the Navy Pier redevelopment and one must wonder what it might have looked like if there had been. Proposals and politicians spoke much of public space but never of a public voice, and perhaps this is because most entertainment-focused projects that are put to referenda fail (Eisinger, 2000, pp. 323-324). Despite the lack of public input Navy Pier and McCormick Place have become two of the most crucial sources of city funding and the MPEA a more important

institution. So why is the public voice absent in their practices, while required in electing the mayor, aldermen, and legislators? Justification for such autonomous action is found in the argument that projects so crucial to cities' economic development cannot afford to waste time settling the group conflict characteristic of urban politics (Peterson, 1981, p. 134). On the one hand, a public voice in such matters might reduce skepticism of such authorities and cries to end what some have called the "privatization of government" (Siewers, 1992). On the other, it might prevent them from being created in the first place, a chance most developers and city officials are not willing to take.

Navy Pier's redevelopment serves as an excellent entry point into such a discussion as it was based on the rhetoric of public space. It is an indication that the public space of industrial cities is not applicable to so-called public space in the new American city, and that government institutions require a changed perception as well. If cities continue to develop these new public spaces governed by special purpose authorities and governments, the ethos of urban governance must be reconsidered and the study of governance must be expanded beyond the traditional realm of the city councils and mayors of municipalities. Only then will the furthest reaching implications of development projects such as Navy Pier be understood and applied.

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