Rural parks in neoliberal America: can rural parks adopt urban funding strategies?

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Abstract

Many high-profile urban parks in the US are experiencing a resurgence not seen since the late nineteenth century due to an influx of funding from private philanthropic organisations. Conversely, despite being essential spaces for rural quality of life, rural parks have struggled to attract private funding. This article compares two urban and two rural case studies to reveal this funding discrepancy. The comparison is used to identify the many roles urban parks play, which make them ideal opportunities for philanthropic funding, and, subsequently, the limitations that rural parks face when attracting similar investment. Ultimately, this article finds that rural parks struggle to attract private investors because rural areas' inherently boundless and jurisdictionally ambiguous reality fails to provide most corporate philanthropic organisations and municipal leaders with a clear and mutually beneficial suite of financial and political benefits.

Introduction

Since the 1990s, urban parks across the US have undergone a renaissance akin to the rapid increase in large urban parks in the latter half of the nineteenth century.[1] High-profile contemporary urban parks, such as Millennium Park in Chicago, Illinois; Buffalo Bayou Park in Houston, Texas; and the High Line in New York City, New York, are often hailed as innovative symbols of urban design, community investment and economic development.[2] The eye-catching design of these parks, which are referred to in this article as 'urban destination parks', has made them popular tourist destinations and internationally recognised symbols of their respective cities. Those parks have become so iconic that other cities across the US are developing their destination parks as status symbols.[3] Adrian Benepe, the senior vice president of the Trust for Public Land and former parks commissioner for New York City, said, 'There is a peacetime arms race as cities compete. Having a great public amenity like a park helps draw residents and investors to a city.'[4]

Rural parks perform many similar functions to urban parks, although they garner far less attention from scholars, tourists and philanthropists. Driving this attention discrepancy is an urban misconception about the need for rural parks. To many urban residents, the rural landscape is inherently natural, despite the industries that activate and define the land's use.[5] In reality, most rural spaces in the US are neither natural nor accessible for human recreation; they are industrial spaces that have been manipulated to extract resources.[6] The industrial reality of rural spaces means that rural parks play a critical role in the production and sustainability of rural life. Similarly to their urban counterparts, access to rural parks significantly affects rural residents' health.[7] Specifically, rural residents with access to parks have lower rates of chronic health diseases such as obesity and diabetes, two of the leading drivers of rural mortality.[8]

Given that parks contribute to both urban and rural residents' health outcomes, ensuring access to public park space remains an important social investment. This research explores park funding in the US within an economic environment of limited financial support and investment by local governments. Using four examples, funding sources are compared between urban and rural parks, with similarities and differences between these parks highlighted (see Figure 1). Local social, political, geographic and economic conditions are outlined for each case, with a view to identifying barriers to and/or the potential of rural parks in adopting funding strategies like those deployed in urban areas. To contextualise this research, a brief discussion of how neoliberal policies from the 1980s onwards have impacted on park funding in the US is provided, along with an outline of funding obstacles unique to rural municipalities. This is followed by an introduction of the four case-study sites with a focus on their development history and summaries of their funding.

Urban park development in neoliberal America

Starting in the early 1980s, the US adopted a suite of economic theories collectively known as neoliberalism. Unlike the policies of the preceding six decades, which favoured ideas of worker-focused government intervention, neoliberal policies favoured the capitalistic expansion of corporations.[9] In the US, neoliberal economic and political theories were enacted through tax cuts for corporations, deregulation, the downsizing and privatisation of public services and broad fiscal austerity measures.[10] As a result, state and federal tax revenues decreased.

The peak of 'White flight' – the mass migration of mostly White, wealthy individuals from urban centres to suburban and peri-urban areas – coincided with neoliberal austerity measures.[11] The dual pressures of decreasing local tax revenues and the gravitational pull of expanding suburbs forced many municipalities to scale back public services. As city budgets shrank, park and recreation programmes were often the first to be cut, leading urban parks to visibly decline.[12]

As global industrial systems and structural employment changed in the 1990s, cities competed for highly educated 'creative class' employees. Corporations and the wealthy elite, recognising that their cities lacked the financial capital to construct attractive municipal amenities, worked with political leaders to fund large-scale public projects (for example, libraries, art centres or museums).[13] Civic architecture's mix of environmental improvement and employment benefits became an 'irresistible cocktail' for private investors, politicians and cultural producers.[14] Private investors turned to urban destination parks as sites of cultural identity when it became clear that cultural architecture was an effective branding and economic development strategy.[15] High-profile parks like Bryant Park in New York City, New York (renovated in 1992) and Millennium Park in Chicago, Illinois (built in 2004) proved that private investment in public parks could bring significant returns on investment.[16] Competition and an eagerness to shape cities in their image drove the corporate elite of other cities to fund an explosion of high-dollar urban destination parks (for example, Buffalo Bayou Park in Houston, Texas, and Riverfront Park in Nashville, Tennessee).

Figure 1. Case-study locations within the continental US

Rural park development in neoliberal America

Initially, White flight migration patterns increased the rural population in the US.[17] By the early 1990s, however, rural industrial shifts, land price increases and agricultural technology advances decreased the demand for rural workers. Young rural residents, facing limited job opportunities and increasingly attractive urban living conditions, migrated to urban areas at a fast rate.[18] Facing decreasing populations and neoliberal budget cuts, many rural-majority municipalities, counties and states slashed rural park and recreation funding. Despite those cuts, few rural parks closed, leading to a steady decline in the quality of park programming and amenities, further exacerbating outmigration.[19]

Many rural leaders employed economic development strategies to reverse the outmigration trend. One preferred option was the expansion of rural quality-of-life amenities like parks and trails. Studies show that rural growth in the US has occurred almost exclusively in areas with exceptional natural amenities, such as mountains or large lakes.[20] Other studies show that younger and highly educated people value parks and trails more than older and less-educated people.[21] Therefore, many rural communities invested in recreation opportunities to retain and attract educated young people. Many

small towns also attempted to amplify their local culture to attract tourists. This investment strategy aimed to transition or expand a rural community's industry from resource extraction to service by adding hospitality, dining and retail opportunities. Many rural areas, and small rural towns in particular, based their tourism identity around ancestral culture (for example, German, Czech or Danish heritage) and agricultural traditions.[22]

However, the lack of financial capital hindered many rural areas. Private funding for rural parks was limited because few corporations have headquarters in rural locations, meaning fewer wealthy philanthropists to represent and benefit from the rural locale.[23] Instead, most rural leaders turned to state and federal grants to compensate for neoliberal retrenchment, although competition made acquiring public funds difficult. Complicating matters further, many rural agencies lacked the expertise to write successful grant applications or the budget to pay for an experienced grant writer, putting those agencies at a disadvantage compared with other, better-funded and often urban or suburban agencies.[24]

Case studies

The Gathering Place: Tulsa, Oklahoma

Tulsa, Oklahoma (population of 411,000 in 2021),[25] was known as the 'oil capital of the world' due to the Oklahoma oil boom between 1975 and 1982, which created thousands of energy sector jobs and hundreds of new oil and gas companies. However, oil production in the state has steadily declined since the mid-1980s. The number of oil- and gas-related jobs in the Tulsa metro area dropped by 76 per cent between 1982 and 2000.[26] Despite having over a thousand energy companies in the 11-county region around Tulsa in 2019, the city struggled with the loss of its oil capital identity.[27]

In the early 2000s, the philanthropic community in Tulsa self-organised to address this identity problem. A key focus for their new identity was the Arkansas River, which flowed through the city's centre but had been lined with oil and gas refineries since the early 1900s. In 2009, former oil executive and billionaire George Kaiser and his philanthropic organisation, the Kaiser Family Foundation, purchased a 27-hectare property adjacent to the river. The Kaiser Family Foundation, the River Parks Authority (RPA), a local public/private recreation trust and the City of Tulsa collaborated to develop a vision for the property.

George Kaiser wanted to create a recreation space where everyone could unite, despite racial, ethnic or socio-economic differences.[28] After public input meetings, a final park design, named The Gathering Place, was presented to the public. The design called for a lake and boathouse, adventure playgrounds, sculptures, a lodge and two restaurants, along with other amenities (see Figure 2). In referring to the park, Mayor G.T. Bynum remarked, 'We keep calling it a park because it's a large outdoor space in the middle of a city, but this is not a park like most of us would think with grass and a jungle gym. This is going to redefine what parks are for the world.'[29] Construction on the first phase began in 2014, and the park opened to the public in 2018.[30]

Figure 2. Playgrounds at The Gathering Place (Source: Elizabeth Stapleton, used with permission)

A total of $400 million was invested in The Gathering Place by the RPA, with the City of Tulsa donating $65 million through in-kind infrastructure improvements (see Figure 3).[31] Half of the RPA funds came from the Kaiser Family Foundation in the form of a $50 million land donation, a $50 million construction donation and a $100 million endowment for ongoing park maintenance. The other half of the RPA funds came from over 80 other Tulsa-based individual and corporate donors. Donation amounts from the non-Kaiser Family Foundation donors have yet to be released, although a list of all donors to the project is available (see Figure 4).[32]

Figure 3. Funding sources and amounts for The Gathering Place; total cost: $465 million (Source: Canfield 2020)
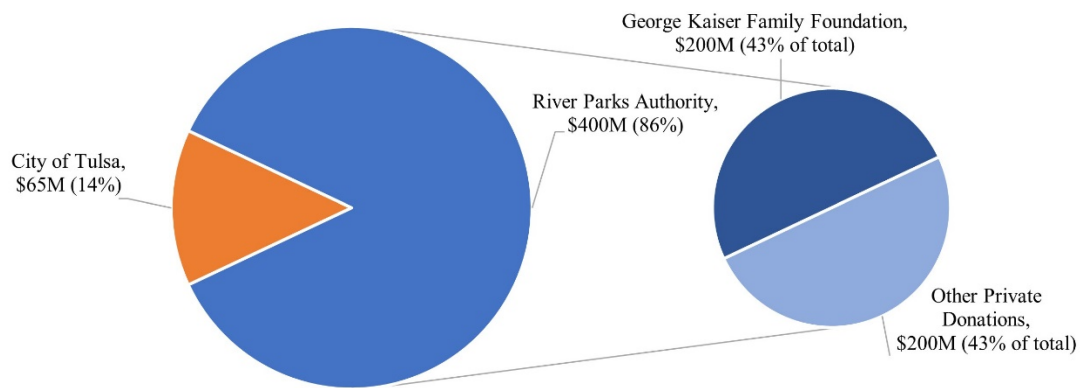
Figure 4. Quantity (and percentage) of corporate and family/individual donors contributing to The Gathering Place, grouped by industry or source of wealth (Source: News On 6, 2016)
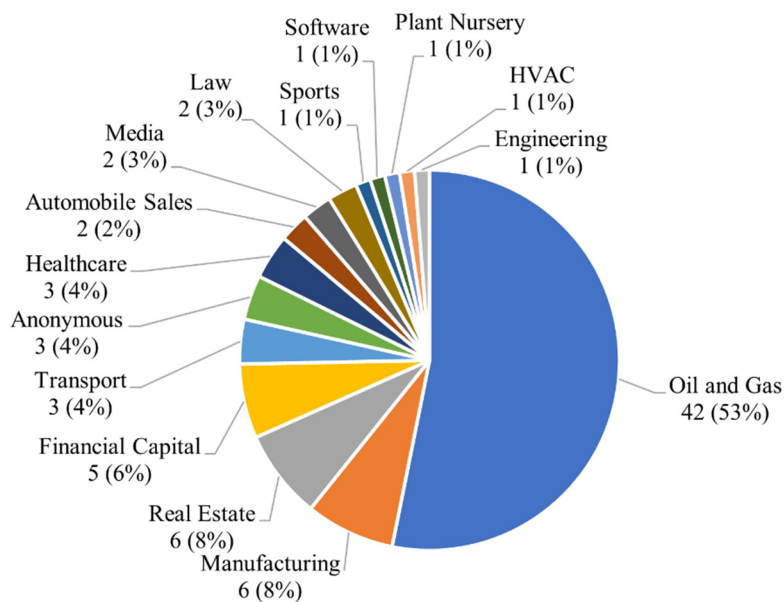
The Gene Leahy Mall: Omaha, Nebraska

Omaha, Nebraska (population of 487,000 in 2021),[33] expanded rapidly in the 1860s as the headquarters of the Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR). While UPRR is still headquartered in Omaha, the city is home to several other Fortune 500 companies, many of which are located in the city's downtown. At the centre

of the downtown area is the Gene Leahy Mall, a six-block urban greenspace linking the commercial and corporate heart of the city to the Missouri River (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. The Gene Leahy Mall

The noted landscape architecture firm Lawrence Halprin & Associates designed the original Gene Leahy Mall in the 1970s. The park was not intended for mass recreation; the original design featured a large sunken water feature that prohibited almost all recreational opportunities, except walking. As White flight ended, the demand for downtown residences grew; between 2000 and 2020, the number of residences in the downtown area doubled.[34] With that rise came a desire to expand the recreational possibilities of the Gene Leahy Mall. The City of Omaha, which faced continuous water-feature maintenance challenges, agreed and funded several park redesign projects. Separate park renovation plans were proposed in 2004 and 2012, although few improvements were implemented.[35]

In 2016, a new non-profit public–private partnership called the RiverFront Revitalization Committee (RRC) was created to re-envision the broader riverfront access in Omaha and its neighbour across the river, Council Bluffs, Iowa. Members of the RRC included staff from both cities and leaders of some of the most influential businesses and philanthropic organisations in the metropolitan area.

In 2018, the RRC selected the office of James Burnett, the landscape architect who designed Klyde Warren Park in downtown Dallas, Texas, to develop design proposals for the riverfront redevelopment project. Public input meetings aided in producing a final design – the RiverFront Revitalization Project – which called for the complete renovation of 36 hectares of riverfront property, including the Gene Leahy Mall. The proposal raised the mall's elevation to add a festival lawn, dog park, custom playground and several small pavilions. The Gene Leahy Mall was the first of three construction phases that started in 2018 and finished in July 2022,[36] with the final two phases slated for completion in late 2023.

Funds for the $325 million RiverFront Revitalization Project came from the Downtown Riverfront Trust, a private non-profit organisation (NGO) created to collect funds from private donors and the City of Omaha. Of that total, $50 million came from the City of Omaha (see Figure 6).[37] No public funding campaigns were requested or utilised throughout the project.

A wall erected in the park lists 47 donors to the RiverFront Revitalization Project, although donation amounts have not been made public. Figure 7 illustrates the breakdown between donor types, with donors listed under 'Other' – including the City of Omaha, the Iowa West Foundation (an NGO from neighbouring Council Bluffs, Iowa) and one anonymous donor.

Figure 6. Funding sources and amounts for the RiverFront Revitalization Project; total cost: $325 million (Source: City of Omaha 2022)
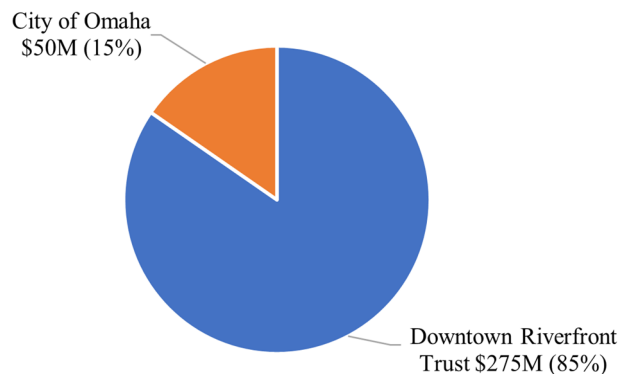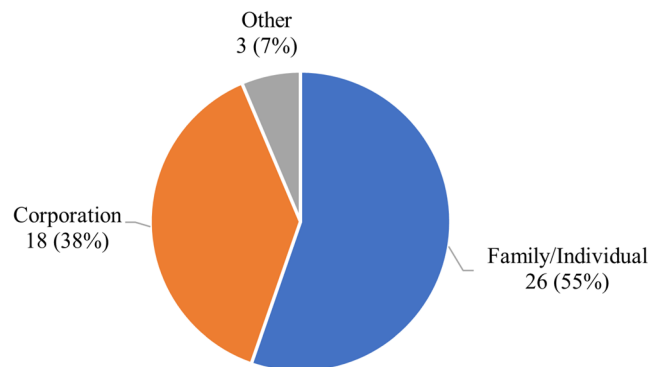

City of Omaha
$50M (15%)

Downtown Riverfront
Trust $275M (85%)

Figure 7. Number (and percentage) of donors who gave to the RiverFront Revitalization Project

Other
3 (7%)

Corporation
18 (38%)

Family/Individual
26 (55%)

The High Trestle Trail Bridge: Madrid, Iowa

The High Trestle Trail Bridge is a 1.6 kilometre pedestrian bridge located near the rural town of Madrid, Iowa (population of 2,550 in 2019).[38] The area's history of coal mining inspired the artistic steel 'cribs' that appear to rotate as users cycle or walk across the bridge (see Figure 8). The non-profit Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF) instigated the project to connect its extensive rail-to-trail network across the Des Moines River valley. In 2003, the UPRR announced it would stop using the rail line and bridge between the small towns of Madrid and Woodward in central Iowa. The INHF immediately held discussions with UPRR and, in 2005, received a donation of 172 hectares from the railroad, including 32 kilometres of rail right-of-way and the bridge piers crossing the valley.

While the land transfer was finalised, the INHF obtained $5.6 million in federal appropriations to build the trail portion of the project. Federal appropriations in the US are specific line items that state representatives add to the federal budget for projects in their state. Trail construction started in 2007, and the two trail segments leading to the bridge opened in 2008. During trail construction, the design and engineering for the bridge and its artwork began. Plans for the bridge and fundraising campaigns were released to the public in 2018, and the project was fully funded in five months thanks to a $1.75 million grant from Vision Iowa, a state-run Iowa Economic Development Authority granting agency. However, because this was a matching grant, $550,000 was also raised through individual and corporate donations. The bridge construction began in 2009 and was completed in 2011.[39]

Figure 8. The High Trestle Trail Bridge

The High Trestle Trail Bridge has become a globally recognised symbol of Iowa.[40] After the project was completed, Madrid became a tourist destination, which prompted the construction of new businesses, bars and restaurants.[41] By 2018, the bridge was drawing 250,000 annual visitors and had quadrupled the economic impact of Iowa's trail systems.[42]

The High Trestle Trail project was funded from multiple sources, although 75 per cent was funded by public dollars (see Figure 9) through federal appropriations and grants. Most private contributions came in the form of donated land from UPRR.[43]

Figure 9. Funding sources and amounts for the High Trestle Trail Bridge since 2003; total cost: $15.5 million (Source: Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation 2022)
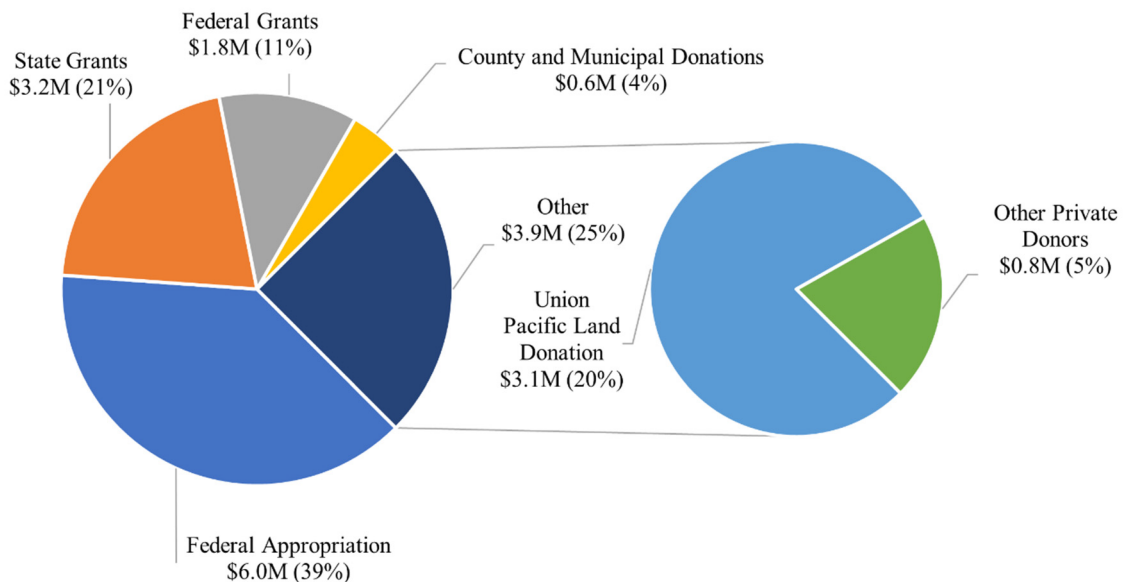
A complete donor list with exact funding amounts has been kept private. However, a plaque on the west side of the bridge names donors who gave more than $1,000. Figure 10 illustrates the number and percentage of funding sources and donors providing over $10,000 to the High Trestle Trail project since 2003.

Figure 10. Quantity (and percentage) of funding sources and donors who gave over $10,000 to the High Trestle Trail project since 2003

Federal Appropriations & Grants 2 (5%)
Anonymous 1 (3%)
Non-Governmental Organizations 2 (5%)
State Grants 3 (8%)
Municipalities 2 (5%)
Counties 5 (13%)
Family/Individuals 11 (29%)
Corporations 12 (32%)
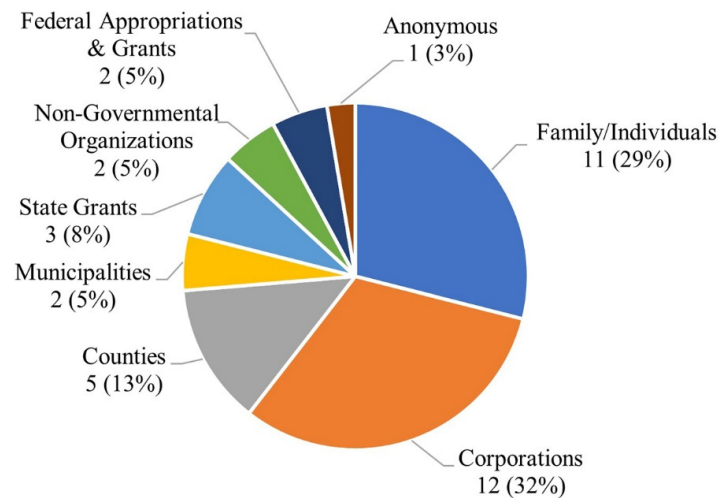
Honey Creek Resort State Park: Moravia, Iowa

Honey Creek Resort sits on a 344-acre peninsula on the 4,450 surface-acre Rathbun Lake in southeastern Iowa. The site features a 105-room lodge (see Figure 11), conference centre, restaurant, indoor water park, 28 cabins, RV camping, an 18-hole golf course, marina, trails, pavilions and playgrounds. The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) built the project to complement the 335-hectare Honey Creek State Park, which sits on a peninsula directly to its south. Together, the two sites were intended to create Honey Creek Resort State Park, Iowa's first 'Destination State Park', an enterprise initiative meant to spur economic development and recreation opportunities in rural areas by blending high-profile outdoor recreation opportunities with novel indoor facilities.[44] Not only was the park considered a destination for its amenities, but the resort is quite remote. It is a 90-minute drive from Des Moines, the next nearest major metropolitan area.

Figure 11. The Lodge at Honey Creek Resort (Source: Iowa Department of Natural Resources, used with permission)

After Rathbun Lake was constructed in the late 1960s, local businesses and residents – organised under an NGO called Rathbun Lake Resort, Inc. – started fundraising for a resort on the lake. Private developers,

however, routinely passed on the idea due to the relatively short tourism season and the likelihood of slim profit margins.[45]

In 2000, Iowa's governor, Tom Vilsack, working with the IDNR and Iowa's Natural Resources Commission (NRC), commissioned a series of studies that ultimately recommended Honey Creek as the ideal location for Iowa's first destination park. The state further completed a series of master plans, financial analyses and environmental impact reports to attract a private developer who would fund the project's construction and manage the resort. However, the IDNR could not secure such a developer due to the risk involved with construction and management in such a remote rural setting.[46] Instead, the IDNR and the Iowa State Legislature created a state bonding agency, which secured $3 million in state appropriations provided the IDNR obtained $4 million in local matching funds. In 2006, local counties, public utility cooperatives, resort support groups, corporations and private donors gave the matching funds. With initial funding for the project secured, the bond authorities issued $28 million in tax-exempt revenue bonds to fund the remainder of the construction budget.[47]

Construction started in 2006 after a private developer was hired to manage the project. Due to high costs and insufficient budgets, several design elements had to be removed from the project.[48] The lodge, aquatic centre and convention centre were opened in 2008. In 2009, 28 cabins were built; in 2010, an outdoor pavilion, playground and activities building were finished. The project cost nearly $60 million (see Figure 12).

Figure 12. Funding sources and amounts for the Honey Creek Resort; total cost: $56.7 million (Source: Iowa Department of Natural Resources 2007 and Daily Iowegian 2008)
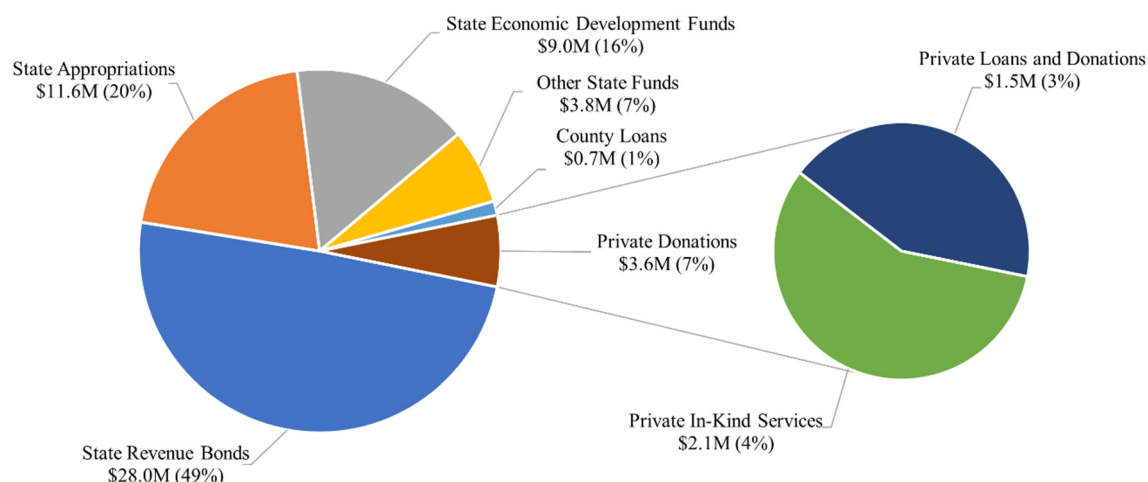

Figure 13 details the people and corporations donating over $30,000 as cash or in-kind services to the Honey Creek Resort project. The largest donors to the project were mostly local utilities that provided in-kind services.[49]

The Honey Creek Resort has yet to make a profit since it opened. In 2016, the State Legislature appropriated $33 million to pay off the project's outstanding bonds, hoping a reduced debt load would make profits more attainable. Later that year, a new resort management company was hired to make changes to ensure a profit. Sadly, neither effort worked, and anticipated profits were still unmet. As of the time of writing, the IDNR is exploring selling the resort.[50]

Discussion

Over 85 per cent of the urban park construction budgets examined here came from private sources (see Figures 3 and 6). Most private funds came from corporate donations and private family/individual philanthropic organisations. The remainder came from their respective cities. This primarily private funding strategy matches that of many other high-profile urban parks built in the US in the last 30

years.[51] In contrast, over 75 per cent of the rural projects' budgets came from public funding sources (see Figures 9 and 12), with the remaining 25 per cent coming from in-kind services, donated land or corporate and individual donations (see Figures 10 and 13).

Figure 13. Donation amounts (and percentages) of donors who gave over $30,000 to the Honey Creek Resort; the asterisk indicates in-kind service (Source: Daily Iowegian 2008)
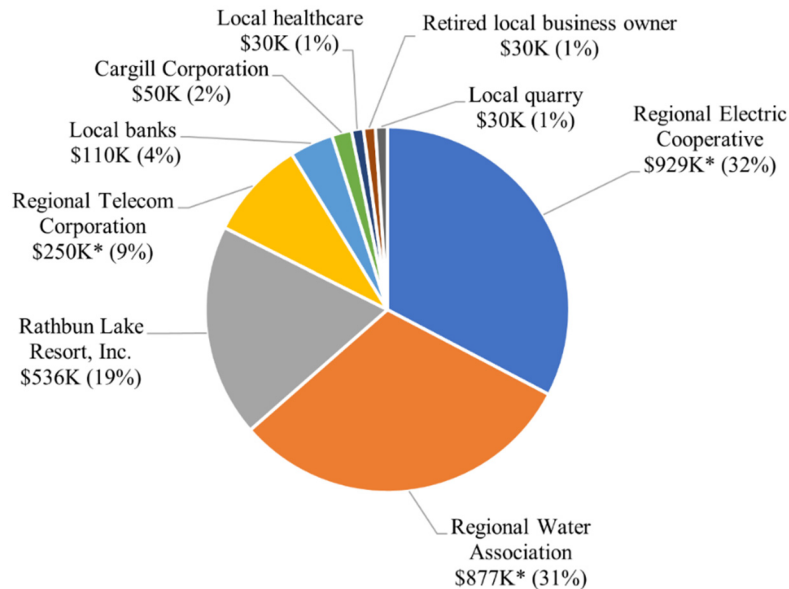
The consistency of private funding strategies employed in the urban case studies, which mirrors the funding of several other contemporary destination urban parks mentioned in this article, suggests that private donors have found a reliable and worthwhile return on investment in urban parks. Additionally, rural parks' reliance on public support suggests that private returns on investments are not as consistent or effective for them; if they were, private philanthropists would fund more rural parks. These assumptions can be explored and reinforced further by identifying the beneficiaries of high-profile urban parks.

The literature on neoliberal urbanism and privately funded urban parks identifies several beneficiaries of urban destination parks, including city leaders, corporate philanthropists, family/individual philanthropists, tourists, residents and the natural environment.[52] Each group profits from the park differently, meaning that urban parks fulfil numerous roles simultaneously. With these groups in mind, six primary neoliberal urban park roles are proposed.

The first role is *park as environmental benefit*, meaning the park provides environmental and ecosystem services like pollution control, stormwater management, carbon sequestration and habitat creation.[53]

The second is *park as quality-of-life amenity*, where the park provides recreational amenities to improve health and wellness outcomes.[54] Like almost all parks, this study's four projects successfully played these roles.

The third is *park as economic development*, meaning the park's purpose is revenue generation. Corporate investors and developers are the primary beneficiaries of this role because they use the park to attract customers and tourists, which provides a return on investment through increased sales and property values.[55] All four case studies were created for economic development, although their intended beneficiaries differed greatly. The two urban parks were created to boost economic development in their neighbourhoods, benefitting property-owning corporations and individuals. The two rural parks, however, do not have adjacent businesses or residential properties. Instead, they were built to create or expand a recreation industry that could supplement existing extractive economies and, ultimately, extend the longevity of nearby rural communities. Urban developers probably see rural parks as

less-than-ideal investments because there is limited residential or commercial real estate from which to make a profit.

The fourth role is *park as legacy*, meaning the park symbolises personal or organisational values. The primary beneficiary is the donor who wants to be recognised or remembered for improving the world. Scholarship suggests that legacy-building is a primary motivator for family/individual donors.[56] All four park projects have donor recognition walls or plaques, so all were used to build legacies. However, the urban parks in this study offered legacy-building opportunities to only a select group of wealthy philanthropists, differentiating and elevating these donors as park providers. The rural parks offered the chance for legacy-building to anyone who could donate. Because many rural residents and businesses provided financial support to the rural parks, the park symbolised their dedication to themselves – making it appear more conceptually accessible and democratic.

The last two roles appear as significant differentiators between the urban and rural case studies.

The fifth role is *park as political tool*, which allows a park to symbolise political engagement and effectiveness. Although many politicians play a role in developing urban parks, city leaders (for example, mayors, city administrators) often have the most to gain because destination parks can be used as a campaign promise and a symbol of constituent support.[57] City leaders who have spoken extensively about the parks and their impact provide evidence of this.[58] The rural case studies, however, symbolise the efforts of many political leaders due to the multiple jurisdictional scales that overlap in rural areas.

Though rural parks can significantly impact on one jurisdiction, such as Madrid, the overlapping jurisdictional boundaries inherent to rural areas allow the park to concurrently affect and represent the county, state and region. For example, the rotating square pattern of the High Trestle Trail Bridge appears on signs and bike racks within the town, making the bridge the brand identity for Madrid. Additionally, images of the bridge are emblazoned on the front page of the Boone County Parks website[59] and the state-wide Travel Iowa website.[60] As the scales shift and boundaries are blurred, the values and perceptions of the amenity shift as well because it is incorporated with and contrasted against other cultural icons.

The jurisdictional overlap inherent to rural areas also impacts on the sixth park role, *park as quality-of-life symbol*. This role allows urban destination parks to symbolise the quality of their city. Importantly, this role can be played without actual park use.[61] Instead, it often relies on curated signs of the park (for example, social media posts, news stories or city websites) to symbolise the city's quality. Although city leaders benefit from this park role, corporate donors profit most because the park's symbolic image can attract and retain the employees that corporations need to stay competitive.[62] When signs of the destination park are used as a symbol of the city itself, the corporation becomes the cultural production source, transforming the *civic city* into a *corporate city* where the quality of life is directly tied to and even reliant on corporate benevolence.[63]

The urban parks in this study are relatively new, but their cities and corporate donors already employ the parks' images as quality-of-life symbols.[64] Donation from Casey's Convenience Stores to the High Trestle Trail Bridge suggests that rural parks located near urban areas can also symbolise urban life. The company, headquartered in Des Moines, has outlets in nearly every small town in Iowa, including Madrid. Neoliberal urbanism literature would suggest that Casey's donated to the High Trestle Trail Bridge because the park's image could be adopted as a symbol of Des Moines' corporation-subsidised quality of life.[65] The fact that the High Trestle Trail Bridge is not in Des Moines suggests that urban areas may have a sphere of influence around them that symbolises the city, regardless of being outside the city limits.

Interestingly, Casey's did not donate to the Honey Creek Resort, even though the park was built as a destination for Des Moines residents and corporations. Furthermore, the potential for economic return was high, considering that eight Casey's stores are within a 45-minute drive of the resort. A likely reason for this decision involves the distance from Des Moines; the Honey Creek Resort received no donations from Des Moines-area corporations because it was too far away to symbolise their generosity.

In contrast, Cargill Corporation, a worldwide agricultural company headquartered in Minnesota, donated to the Honey Creek Resort but not the High Trestle Trail Bridge. Cargill's donation suggests a role specifically for rural parks; instead of symbolising corporation-provided quality of life within a centralised and bounded context (corporate city), Honey Creek Resort can be viewed as a symbol of corporation-provided quality of life in a decentralised context (corporate rural). Importantly, corporate donors to rural parks, such as Cargill, probably prefer overlapping jurisdictions and undefined influence

boundaries because their influence extends to all the spaces outside cities. If Cargill can be seen as promoting and sustaining the rural quality of life at the local, statewide and regional levels, its donation is having that much more impact – even if that symbolism is nebulous and disconnected from a single place.

Conclusion

The urban parks in this study benefitted from a concentrated pool of high-wealth corporations and individuals working with city leaders who mutually benefit from the park as a symbol and a recreational space. The urban parks, funded through city/philanthropist partnerships, were designed to appear altruistic and constituent-driven. Because urban destination parks are multifaceted and play numerous concurrent roles, the parks were indeed altruistic and constituent-driven. However, scholars and the public should not stop the interrogation there. The urban parks also signify corporate benevolence and culture creation for the city, directly provide economic benefits to the corporate donors through increased property values and the attraction and retention of high-quality employees and symbolise the political effectiveness of city leaders. In short, the many concurrent roles urban destination parks play make them ideal places for philanthropic investment because they can appear generous and be self-serving at the same time.

Rural parks play many similar roles to their urban counterparts; however, they are not ideal places for philanthropic investment because rural areas are inherently boundless and jurisdictionally ambiguous. This reality means that the opportunities for corporate investors to use the park as a symbol of their generosity and influence are diminished. Rural parks can still receive corporate investment, provided the corporation has a vested interest in rural residents. However, the number of corporations that rely exclusively on rural residents is small and may even get smaller as rural outmigration continues. Therefore, rural parks will most likely rely on public funding for the foreseeable future.

Notes

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[3] Evans, 'Hard branding the cultural city'.

[4] Brown, 'Transforming Tulsa'.

[5] Edwards and Matarrita-Cascante, 'Rurality in leisure research'.

[6] Theobald et al., *Loss and Fragmentation*.

[7] Bedimo-Rung, Mowen and Cohen, 'The significance of parks'; Reeder and Brown, *Recreation*.

[8] Reeder and Brown, *Recreation*, 17.

[9] Peck, Theodore and Brenner, 'Neoliberal urbanism', 50.

[10] Peck, Theodore and Brenner, 'Neoliberal urbanism', 50.

[11] See Wrede and Adams, *Denatured Visions*.

[12] Cranz, *Politics of Park Design*.

[13] Tuan, *Space and place*; Evans, 'Hard branding the cultural city'.

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[15] Peck, Theodore and Brenner, 'Neoliberal urbanism', 49–66.

[16] Madden, 'Revisiting the end of public space'; Gilfoyle, *Millennium Park*.

[17] Cromartie, 'Nonmetro outmigration', 35.

[18] Lane, 'What is rural tourism?', 7; Jones, Kandel and Parker, 'Population dynamics are changing'.

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[22] Luloff et al., 'Assessing rural tourism'.

[23] Klier and Testa, 'Location trends'.

[24] Hernandez, 'A rural capacity map'.

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29 Butler, 'The Gathering Place set to open'.

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34 Gonzalez, 'Once a novelty'.

35 Meigs, 'Goodbye, Gene Leahy Mall'.

36 Meigs, 'Goodbye, Gene Leahy Mall'.

37 City of Omaha, 'Thousands visit Gene Leahy Mall'.

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42 Bolten, 'Report'.

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45 Rahe, 'Building prosperous communities', 79.

46 Chariton Valley Planning & Development, 'Monthly post'.

47 Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 'Honey Creek Resort State Park history'.

48 Rahe, 'Building prosperous communities', 88.

49 Daily Iowegian, 'Donors help build Honey Creek Resort'.

50 Rood, 'State prepares to sell Honey Creek Resort'.

51 See Loughran, 'Parks for profit'.

52 See Loughran, 'Parks for profit'; Evans, 'Hard branding the cultural city'; Harnik and Crompton, 'Measuring the total economic value of a park system'.

53 See Sadeghian and Vardanyan, 'The benefits of urban parks'; Konijnendijk et al., *Benefits of Urban Parks*, 15.

54 See Sadeghian and Vardanyan, 'The benefits of urban parks'; Konijnendijk et al., *Benefits of Urban Parks*, 15.

55 Konijnendijk et al., *Benefits of Urban Parks*; Loughran, 'Parks for profit', 171.

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65 See Peck, Theodore and Brenner, 'Neoliberal urbanism'; Loughran, 'Parks for profit'; and Evans, 'Hard branding the cultural city'.

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Research ethics statement

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Consent for publication statement

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