



ECONOMIC VITALITY

How the arts and culture sector catalyzes economic vitality

David J. Murray

Terms such as “creative economy,” “creative class,” and “cultural economy” are becoming more common among urban planners, arts administrators, economic developers, and business and municipal leaders.¹ These terms reference a variety of types of jobs, people, and industries, including the sectors of visual, performing, and literary arts, as well as applied fields like architecture, graphic design, and marketing. Whatever label is used, this use of terminology linking culture and the economy indicates recognition of the connections among the fields of planning, economic development, and arts and culture.

The activities of the arts and culture sector and local economic vitality are connected in many ways. Arts, culture, and creativity can

- ◆ improve a community’s competitive edge
- ◆ create a foundation for defining a sense of place
- ◆ attract new and visiting populations
- ◆ integrate the visions of community and business leaders
- ◆ contribute to the development of a skilled workforce

To pursue economic development projects with a creative approach, there are four key points to consider:

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KEYPOINT #1:

Economic development is enhanced by concentrating creativity through both physical density and human capital. By locating firms, artists, and cultural facilities together, a multiplier effect can result.

KEYPOINT #2:

The recognition of a community’s arts and culture assets (and the marketing of them) is an important element of economic development. Creatively acknowledging and marketing community assets can attract a strong workforce and successful firms, as well as help sustain a positive quality of life.

KEYPOINT #3:

Arts and cultural activities can draw crowds from within and around the community. Increasing the number of visitors as well as enhancing resident participation helps build economic and social capital.

KEYPOINT #4:

Planners can make deliberate connections between the arts and culture sector and other sectors, such as tourism and manufacturing, to improve economic outcomes by capitalizing on local assets.



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KEYPOINTS

Competition, definition, attraction, integration, and continued development are all pivotal aims for economic development professionals. Traditional outcomes of economic development in planning include job creation, increased tax revenues, increased property values, increased retail activity, and more sustained economic vitality. These goals are often pursued through programs such as workforce development, recruitment, amenity packages for firms, local property investment, and policies that support business. When combined with creative approaches, these traditional programs can create a richer context for economic development.

Economic development approaches that integrate arts and culture are usually combinations of facility-centric, people-oriented, and program-based approaches. Development of an arena, cultural center, incubator

space, or creative district is an example of a facility-centric method, while a people-oriented approach could include facilitating arts professionals' development by approving live-work spaces, supporting arts centers, creating cooperative marketing opportunities, or commissioning artworks. Program-based approaches target a specific issue within a community, such as developing an arts program—whether gardening, mural making, or public art displaying—to address the issue of vacant property; promoting health education through a local arts festival, exhibitions, or performances or plays with health themes; or displaying artwork in vacant storefronts to attract passersby and enliven an area. Whether targeting economic improvement through facilities, people, programs, or all three, creative strategies can strengthen economic vitality (Table 1).

Each key point is explored in greater depth below, with examples and connections to the strategies in Table 1.

Table 1. Creative Strategies for Improving Economic Vitality

Strategy	Description
Promotion of Assets Development	Promoting cultural amenities for the purpose of attracting economic investment and skilled workers
Revitalization	Promoting community development through artistic, cultural, or creative policies
Economic/Job Clusters	Promoting community and neighborhood revitalization through artistic measures and strategies that emphasize creativity
Education	Creating economic or job clusters based on creative businesses, including linking those businesses with noncultural businesses
Arts-Oriented Incubators	Providing training, professional development, or other activities for arts, cultural, or creative entrepreneurs
Branding	Creating arts-specific business incubators or dedicated low-cost space and services to support artistic, cultural, or creative professionals
Districts	Developing visual elements that communicate a community's character; using logo development and graphic design for advertising, marketing, and promoting a community
Live-Work Projects	Creating arts, cultural, entertainment, historic, or heritage districts
Arts-Specific and General Public Venues	Providing economic or regulatory support for combined residential and commercial space for artists
Events	Providing public or private economic or regulatory support for marketplaces, bazaars, arcades, community centers, public places, parks, and educational facilities of various types
Urban Design and Reuse	Using celebrations or festivals to highlight a community's cultural amenities
Public Art	Implementing the reuse of existing sites or buildings for arts and culture purposes
	Supporting temporary and permanent public-art projects

KEYPOINT #1:

Economic development is enhanced by concentrating creativity through both physical density and human capital.

Concentration of culture-sector firms and highly skilled workers, along with related facilities and business, enables partnerships and cooperative projects to develop. Concentration also facilitates the marketing of skills and products. The physical density of creative and cultural firms promotes the sector's prosperity, which is in turn economically good for the local area as a whole.

Clusters of culturally oriented businesses and workers can breed innovation and new specializations. Places where innovation is prized are naturally attractive to innovators and conducive to creativity of all types, as the frequency of exchange promotes creative activity. Planners can develop projects that deliberately locate creative professionals in a facility or area. Density or concentration of creative facilities can occur on a range of scales, from a single building to a streetscape, neighborhood, or district.

Concentrations of cultural enterprises and creative workers in a geographic area provide a competitive edge, likely by elevating the quality of life, improving a community's ability to attract economic activity, and creating a climate in which innovation can flourish.

The Crane Building in North Philadelphia is an example of a facility-centric redevelopment for creative businesses and artists. Originally built in 1905 as a plumbing warehouse, the building today houses Crane Arts (www.cranearts.com), with four floors of artist studios and suites and a variety of project spaces available for community programs and cultural development. Facilities include an art-restoration studio, a ceramics studio, a multimedia studio, and a printmaking, painting, and sculpting studio. One of the office suites is a cultural coworking space opened by Peregrine Arts (www.peregrinearts.org) for entrepreneurs, consultants, artists, writers, visionaries, and anyone working in design, media, history, the arts, and cultural heritage. The building has been successful enough that Crane Arts is considering opening another building. As an economic development tool, the building is beneficial not only to the creative occupants but to adjacent communities and the design profession as a whole. For example, during the recent economic recession, local architects with few or no incoming projects participated in a gallery exhibit at Crane Arts in an effort to "get back to the act of making things."² The exhibit was an effective tool for marketing and design.

In Tampa, Florida, a local developer designed and created the Sanctuary Lofts (www.sanctuarylofts.com) as an urban revitalization project to concentrate creativity and attract residents back to the downtown. The project began with an early 20th-century Greek Revival church in the Tampa Heights historic district that was transformed into loft apartments with space for creative-studio rentals. Many of the existing materials were salvaged, including doors, windows, pews, and hymnal racks. Sanctuary Lofts now serves as workspace for painters, artists, photographers, designers, and architects. This unique living space can assist in facilitating communication between creative organizations and the public and can create a stronger sense of identity for community residents.

KEYPOINT #2:

The recognition of a community's arts and culture assets is an important element of economic development.

Recognizing and strengthening existing assets are vital parts of community development and can contribute to economic development.

Assets include those related to entertainment (e.g., theaters, performing groups), personal development (e.g., community centers,

bookstores), and education (e.g., schools, museums), as well as more directly to job creation and industry (e.g., translators, designers). Cultural and creative amenities are assets as well as excellent tools for identifying and promoting other community assets.

Creative-class theory suggests that a high-tech, highly educated workforce prefers a location with creative amenities.³ A flourishing arts and culture sector can affect where workers in the information economy, especially younger ones, want to live and as such is important for workforce recruitment and retention strategies.⁴ To promote local culture and creativity, communities can deem an area or part of town as an arts, cultural, or creative district. A district is technically a designation to name and centralize creative assets by locating and drawing attention to cultural assets throughout the community. There may be economic incentives to live or work in such a district.

For example, Taos, New Mexico, has a number of designations intended to promote it as an arts and culture magnet. The State of New Mexico has designated Taos an Arts and Cultural District.⁵ The New Mexico Arts and Cultural District Resource Team reviews the state of the creative economy and emphasizes building upon current assets to develop economic well-being. At the federal level, Taos is designated as part of the Northern Rio Grande National Heritage Area. Additionally, Taos is pursuing the New Mexico "Quality of Life" local option tax (a tax incentive to improve energy and water conservation, sustainable building, employment benefits such as job-training programs and employer-provided child care, and other quality of life factors) to support the continued formal existence of the Arts and Cultural District. It is also considering the construction of an arts-incubator space, to complement its affordable housing project, ArtSpace.⁶ Taos's approach to economic development is based on asset recognition and directly connected to the arts and culture sector.

Another way to recognize assets and capitalize on them economically is to find ways to publicize and display the community's existing artistic talent and related amenities, such as ethnic foods, costumes, and visual arts and crafts. For example, in New Orleans the cultural heritage of Louisiana is celebrated through the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival. This festival increases tourism through a showcase of music of every kind—"jazz, gospel, Cajun, zydeco, blues, R&B, rock, funk, African, Latin, Caribbean, and folk to name a few."⁷

KEYPOINT #3:

Arts and cultural activities in an area can draw crowds from within and around the community.

Arts and cultural activity can increase attention and foot traffic to an area, including attracting visitors and increasing the length of time and money they spend, thereby contributing to continued development. Similarly, the presence of public art

and related streetscape amenities such as artist-designed lighting, signs, and benches is a way to attract pedestrians.

Arts and cultural activity often attracts attention, whether for casual perusal or artistic investment. Such activity can include events at culturally specific facilities such as theaters, museums, music clubs, and galleries, as well as cultural activity in venues such as arenas, public parks, community centers, and schools. Communities can also develop creative ways to make artistic activity happen in vacant or underutilized spaces. Several communities have embraced the practice of promoting creative activity in vacant retail windows and storefronts as a revitalization tool.

An economic redevelopment process can often last several years. In an attempt to temporarily transform a street scheduled for redevelopment in Brooklyn, New York, by the local BID, the local arts group Ad Hoc Art (<http://adhocart.org/site>) transformed a row of vacant stores into a street art gallery. Known as Willoughby Windows, the block of Willoughby Street between Bridge and Duffield was turned into a temporary art exhibit, which included a photography-themed screenprint where a camera store used to be, woven paper maps, and a large cash register (representative of the perceived financial mistakes of Wall Street).⁸ This temporary, creative art exhibit transformed an otherwise vacant eyesore into an interesting space for pedestrians.

Boston Art Windows is a collaboration between the city and local artists aiming to fill vacant storefronts in the Downtown Crossing area with exhibits that draw pedestrians.⁹ The space is a streetside art gallery incorporating interactive video, lighting, and sound to encourage passersby to pause and enjoy the spectacle. One artist's camera records the movements of pedestrians and plays them back in time-delayed video loops that eventually cover a screen. The redevelopment authority involves curators with the storefront show, seeing the exhibit as an opportunity to facilitate changes to Downtown Crossing as economic development continues.

In Grand Rapids, Michigan, local artists, business owners, and the public engage in an annual creative event called Art Prize (www.artprize.org/home). Art Prize is an open contest in which any artist, established or emerging, can show work and any visitor can vote on it. In essence, Art Prize is the creation of a context for the city to become a temporary art gallery. During this informal creative event, public participation, interaction, and economic development are strengthened as more than 100 venues open for it (including local retail and business spaces). More than 1,000 people volunteer. The resulting relationships extend beyond the boundaries of the competition to strengthen interaction among retail shops, business owners, and the art world. Economic benefits of the contest include increased traffic and improved business.

KEYPOINT #4:

Planners can make deliberate connections between the arts and culture sector and other sectors.

Establishing opportunities for partnerships among various economic sectors and creative professionals is a way to promote economic development. The talents of artists (especially related to design and communication) can enhance the

value of local products and services and increase their dissemination.

Partnerships often begin with economic clusters that are closely related to or dependent on the design field; examples include marketing, tourism, high-end manufacturing, and filmmaking. These economic clusters are groups of organizations with related producers, suppliers, distributors, and intermediaries. Proximate organizations can take advantage of shared interests, relationships, and economies.¹⁰

Deliberate team building by planners can help artists, designers, and people in related economic clusters to their shared advantage. Connecticut, for example, has recently instituted Cultural and Tourism Partnership Grants that encourage interdisciplinary collaborations among tourism, historical, film, and arts organizations.¹¹ The goal is to help localities develop relationships and strategies to improve tourism, an important goal in economic development.¹² The grants support projects such as film and arts festivals, development of garden and museum trails, seasonal crafts and events, and theater packages. Lead applicants must be nonprofit organizations, but they can partner to seek funding for both profit and nonprofit ventures.

Brooklyn, New York, is experiencing an economic transformation as a result of food. A growing gastronomical entrepreneurial energy is transforming once industrial, underutilized pockets of Brooklyn into culinary oases. Entrepreneurs in their 20s and 30s, who often have a strong sense of community and creativity, are opening restaurants, bars, pubs, specialty shops, butcheries, coffee shops, and other food production and processing facilities throughout the borough. These businesses are not only meeting the growing local and regional demand for locally produced and wholesome foods but also creating an incubator for culinary quality, craftsmanship, and artistry. For example, the outputs of Cut Brooklyn, a knife-making business, become the inputs for Brooklyn Kitchen, a specialty store; cacao nibs, a product of Mast Brothers Chocolate, and Ethiopian coffee beans from Gorilla Coffee are added to beer at Sixpoint Craft Ales; and root vegetables purchased from a nearby farmers market are combined with wort from Sixpoint to make relish at Wheelhouse Pickles.

This new collaboration between business owners is resulting in increased economic vitality and sense of community between merchants as well as residents.¹³ In February 2010, recognition of the economic, environmental, health, and social impacts of food production, processing, access, consumption, and waste disposal prompted residents of New York City and the Manhattan borough president to develop “FoodNYC: A Blueprint for a Sustainable Food System,” a report that establishes goals and provides recommendations for improving and balancing the health, economic, and environmental needs of the city. This report recognizes the untapped economic potential of the region’s food system, as well as the health, equity, and environmental challenges of this economic sector.

CONCLUSION

The economic development field has changed in the last decade from one that primarily emphasized location and firm-based approaches to one that more overtly acknowledges the development of human capital. Human capital refers to the sets of skills, knowledge, and value contributed by a population and has become a recognized asset as firms choose where to locate (and cities choose what to advertise and develop and whom to recruit) and entrepreneurs develop economic activity.

Members of some sectors of today's workforce seek certain characteristics in the places they choose to live. Places with entertainment options, public interaction, lively streets, and recreational and educational amenities are preferred, along with arts and culture activities and amenities. Leaders in the field of planning and economic development are developing noteworthy, creative approaches to making places of any scale more satisfying to this workforce, while increasing economic viability and competitiveness.

This briefing paper was written by M. Christine Dwyer (senior vice president, RMC Research Corporation) and Kelly Ann Beavers (PhD candidate, Virginia Tech, and American Planning Association arts and culture intern), and edited by Kimberley Hodgson, AICP (manager, Planning and Community Health Research Center, American Planning Association).

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Arts and Culture Briefing Papers

This is one in a series of briefing papers on how planners can work with partners in the arts and culture sector and use creative strategies to achieve economic, social, environmental, and community goals.

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