

Arts, Culture, Recreation, and Venue as Community Revitalization Tool

Arts and cultural programs make significant contributions to local communities and they are essential factors in developing and sustaining the communities that they serve. The Joint Urban Studies Center examined the need for arts and culture as part of a community revitalization package for the area and its study will be released soon. Art and cultural centers promote local tourism while stimulating economic growth for the entire region. Many cities and municipalities throughout the United States have benefited from these types of initiatives. Decaying small and large cities have been rebuilt using arts and cultural programs as the cornerstone of their revitalization program. When implemented correctly, these programs contribute to a city's overall image, economic value, tourism, and a community's well-being.

JUSC believes that there are many arts and cultural organizations in northeastern Pennsylvania that would benefit from partnering with one another for marketing and planning purposes. Coordinated schedules could provide travelers with a variety of arts, cultural, and recreational options to entice them to stay overnight. Cooperative marketing could help reduce costs for those in the nonprofit arts sector. Due to the close proximity of municipalities in our region, it would be more beneficial to individual organizations to cooperate with scheduling of events in order to have limited competition.

There are many reasons why a community should invest in arts or cultural activities. The primary reason for investment is the potential for a return on that investment. People that patronize these activities usually spend more on food, souvenirs, and the like, to enhance their experience. This leads to job creation and revenue in other sectors.

Pride and image enhancement are also factors that are derived from investment in the arts. Both of these contribute to positive economic development and become catalysts for community "cleaning and greening" efforts. Another positive impact of arts, culture, recreation, and venue is that these activities create audiences or crowds at their venues, or in public places. The presence of participants and audiences could be a crime deterrent.

There are many communities that have used arts and culture as the foundation for reinventing their economy: San Diego, California, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, Asheville, North Carolina, and Paducah, Kentucky, to name a few. With some careful planning, and implementation communities in northeastern Pennsylvania can be added to this list of communities that are thriving both financially and culturally.

JUSC is a research-based think tank founded by Wilkes University. In partnership with College Misericordia, King's College, Luzerne County Community College, Penn State/Wilkes-Barre, and the University of Scranton, JUSC was formed to educate, strategize, and convene on urban renewal, community, and economic development.

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