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Investing in humans: Creating a Stronger Argument for Funding the Arts

Imagine a small community making the decision whether to build a new office complex, a new sports center, or making an investment in a new arts center. The theoretical office complex would bring in hundreds of jobs for the community, strengthening the local economy. The sports center would bring in tourism, from county and state games, and also strengthen the economy. The arts center would also bring in tourism, providing the same economic benefits. Let's say the community was more focused on tourism, so they ditch the office complex in favor of one of the new centers. The community is also more sports oriented, so they make the decision to build the sports center since it would provide a more immediate effect of economic gain. If you are in a similar community with a small creative sector (media and performers) how would you argue for the arts? You could say the arts bring in billions of dollars a year for the nation's economy. Giving the potential for economic growth. However, so does the sports industry. In 2015, art attendees brought in \$63 billion (AEPV 1). However, sports attendees brought in \$63 billion too, that same year (Burrow). Tourism is similar between both industries. Both have the potential to bring in outside consumers to spend money in the local economy. So, what makes the arts different? Why should we be focused on funding the arts when so many other industries can provide the same benefits?

I don't write this to argue against funding the arts but to address the problem of how we go about arguing for them. If we are in the situation of having to convince a local government to invest in the creative sector over another more popular option, what do we say? In my undergraduate study, at Southern Utah University, almost every single reason for funding the arts that I've been taught can easily be applied to another industry; Increased tourism, bringing in outside money into the local economy; health and wellness, giving citizens an outlet for physical and emotional wellbeing; technological innovation, natural creativity can create innovative implementations for technology. However, none of these are special to the arts. So, again, what makes the arts different?

This is important to understand as an emerging artist. If we want to advocate for the arts, we need to be able to create strong unique reasoning about why the arts are the best way to improve a community. We also need to clearly communicate why these reasons are unique to the arts. Advocating for a new arts center, theatre, gallery, sculpture garden, or even a mural requires a strong reason as to why it would improve the development of the community.

This type of advocacy or city planning is called creative placemaking. Creative placemaking is when we use the arts to satisfy a need or requirement in city planning. According to Tom Burrup's book *The Creative Community Builder's Handbook*, one of the most positive and consistent outcomes of creative placemaking is workforce development. According to Burrup, workforce development is extremely prevalent in the creative sector over other industries (Burrup 23). The creative sector being manufacturing, the arts, and media. I thought workforce development would be the best place to start when looking for this answer.

Overall, my research will be divided into three areas. The first being an introduction to creative placemaking. Since this paper is geared towards emerging advocates, I thought

including an introduction to creative placemaking would be useful. I will be examining the different aspects and points of advocacy in the field such as tourism, economic development, and workforce development. The second area will be examining case studies of creative placemaking and their direct economic impacts in tourism, economic development and workforce development. Successes and failures. This section will be used to strengthen my argument that workforce development is the strongest point to use when advocating for the arts. The third will be applying these findings to the New Growth Theory. The New Growth Theory places community growth as a result of investment in human capital, innovation and knowledge (Cortright 2). Placing more focus on the sharing of ideas over the sharing of materials.

The goal is to provide the beginnings of an answer about what makes art different from other industries. Why it needs to be the biggest on the table in city planning. I'm in the arts industry. An industry that has been placed on the outside of economic discussions. In a 2018 commercial from SAP, it references how an actor could not possibly solve social problems (SAP). A commercial that was actually included in a lesson given by one of the business professors on SUU's campus. Solving this question will hopefully end the idea that art is not a solution to economic problems. This is not something that can be done by one person, but I hope to contribute to the conversation. It will be a dry paper for most artists, sure. Economics and workforce development aren't particularly interesting topics for artists. Normally, I wouldn't care for them either. However, it's an important place to start when creating an argument geared towards local governments. We should be able to say for certain that the arts are a great investment for economic growth and social change, in ways that are unique from any other industry. We need to start by looking at the current research around creative placemaking and how artists can take part in it.

Creative Placemaking is a term that is growing in popularity among art advocates, especially in the United States by organizations like Americans for the Arts (AA) and The National Endowment of the Arts (NEA). I've certainly had the term pounded into my head during my arts administration studies at Southern Utah University. We learned that creative placemaking is a way to use the arts to drive growth in a community or to serve a particular need. So, how can we best utilize something like creative Placemaking? There are so many different directions to advocate for when using it in community development; tourism, public health, education, economic growth, etc. When advocating for the arts in front of your local government, what argument will be most beneficial for them and make them more likely to publicly fund the arts in your community? Looking at the effects of Creative Placemaking, the different ways we can approach it and the New Growth Theory, I hope to begin looking for that answer.

Tom Burrep's book *The Creative Community Builder's Handbook* gives an introduction to starting a career in creative placemaking and how to better advocate for the arts. He also gives several case-studies of past creative placemaking projects and their expected and unexpected effects (Burrep). The Americans for the Arts' study *Arts & Economic Prosperity 5* goes into more detail of the effects of creative placemaking. Discussing individual US counties and how it has shaped their communities (AEPV). Ann Markusen and Anne Gadwa also discuss the effects of Creative Placemaking and the challenges it faces in an executive summary of Creative Placemaking from the NEA. She specifically looks into the components of what makes successful creative placemaking projects (Markusen and Gadwa). Ann Markusen goes into more detail in her own review *Arts and Culture in Urban/Regional Planning*. She looks into what policies are in place around the country regarding creative projects (Markusen). Such as a dedicated tax, similar to one enacted in Cedar City called the RAP tax. Involving a .01% tax that

will go towards Recreation, Arts, and Parks (Drake). Still referring to creative placemaking, Mary Waits looks into the various roles artists have in community development, specifically looking into economic growth due to the arts (Waits).

Felipe Buitrago Restrepo also looks into what makes successful placemaking but focuses on how workforce development is the best route for advocacy (Restrepo). Tom Burrop's book, mentioned above, also discusses the effects creative placemaking has on workforce development in his second and third chapters (Borrop 21-123). This is also mentioned in Stephen Sheppard's article from the *Community Development Investment Review* (Sheppard). He writes about how creative placemaking has made communities more attractive places to live, leading into a discussion that is similar to what the New Growth Theory aims to do.

The New Growth Theory is a city planning theory that states that the future of economic growth comes from the sharing of ideas rather than over sharing resources. This is explained in Joseph Cortright's article titled *New Growth Theory, Technology and Learning* (Cortright). It is further connected to the arts during a conference hosted by the NEA. The keynote speaker Edward Glaeser spoke about how the arts can create a place in which businesses and manufacturing would want to "set up shop" (Glaeser). It has the potential to develop a place where ideas are constantly being shared and free thinking is abundant. Which in turn leads to growth and innovation in technology and education. Furthermore, John Howkins describes the arts as a driver of new knowledge in his book *The Creative Economy*. Stating that "ideas" are used to create "more ideas" and in places where art is high, knowledge grows incredibly fast (Howkins).

These selected sources give a strong background to Creative Placemaking and the different ways it can be used to help build a community. They also help connect creative

placemaking and the arts to workforce development and the New Growth Theory. Allowing this paper to build a strong and reinforced backing that workforce development is the strongest argument for public funding in the arts.

It's important to be on the same page as far as what some these words mean before we start discussing them. Since words like culture can mean different things from place to place. I will be using definitions used by Tom Burrop in his book *The Creative Community Builders Handbook* and from the Americans for the Arts' *Arts and Economic Prosperity 5* report. *Community* in this paper will be referring to "the people and the natural and built environments within a geographically defined area" (Burrop). This could be as large as a city or even a couple blocks, as long as there is a shared idea that it is a functioning community. *Culture* will be used to describe the arts, customs or attitudes of a community or group of people (AEPV).

Creative Economy is a production sector of the economy that relates to the arts, publishing and design. This is sometimes attributed as the driving and attracting force for other industries to grow around. When we look at areas of a city that excel in growing their creative economy, it is often referred to as a cultural district. An area where multiple arts organizations are used to draw other industries into the city and support other local businesses (Burrop).

Back to the question of this paper; what is the strongest argument we can form to encourage local governments to publicly fund the arts? It needs to point towards sustainable growth and a long-term investment for the community. It also needs to listen to the community and not just a personal want of the advocate. After all, the financial success or social change success of art relies on its audience. Not the creator.

The term creative placemaking started being used to describe cultural planning in the early 1960's when infrastructure development and urban renewal was on full force (freeways, parking lots, etc.). Planning for the arts and more culture in cities was a way to combat the unappealing appearance of the concrete world forming all over the country. This was through the implementation of galleries, museums, and parks (Markusen and Gadwa). To advocate for these galleries, museums, or parks you can take several different approaches.

The most common direction to take when advocating for creative placemaking is the effect it will have on tourism. According to the Arts and Economic Prosperity 5 study conducted by Americans for the Arts, art attendees stay longer and spend more than other travelers. The study also states that the arts are the fourth largest driver of tourism in the United States (AEPV). This is precisely why tourism is used by advocates all around the country to advocate for the arts in their communities. Many local governments have also allocated local hotel taxes to the arts. Encouraging communities to grow via traveler dollars.

A case study to illustrate how the arts have affected the economic growth of a community is the Lanesboro Art Council in Lanesboro, Minnesota. With a population of only 788 residents it has a large history and entering into the town feels like "stepping back in time" (Burrop 38). The community's economy and population were in decline. In response, the city council started a campaign to advertise their towns historical assets and natural beauty's in 1989. This was done by solidifying the community's identity, cultivate artists in the community and recruit a creative workforce. They even renovated an old theatre space in the town which is still running today. Since this effort the community of Lanesboro, Minnesota has made \$1.2 million dollars from tourism.

However, this doesn't check all the boxes in the original plan for this argument. Tourism is temporary and sometimes a rather unreliable investment. If you were to build a theatre or museum in your community, tourism would depend on the exhibitions or performances at the time. It's not a consistent reliable income. When exhibitions or performances are not taking place, local income from those investments would slow down. Using tourism as a method of advocacy is also difficult because the community needs to have something of value to offer tourists. It works if you're like Lanesboro and can offer a rich history and identity to influence your art, music and accommodations. If the community is not sure of its own identity and culture, this method is very difficult to advocate for.

Another common method to use when advocating is using the arts to directly and quickly improve property value. This would include using public funds for murals and remodels of buildings for art spaces (museums, galleries, etc.). This is a great route to go, unless it is done too quickly and against the wishes of the community it is serving. Sometimes artists get too attached to a vision of what their local artistic community should be. When this is done too quickly it has a chance of displacing the community it is trying to serve (Grodach). The term gentrification is something all artists should be aware of. Gentrification is the rapid increase of real estate prices and property taxes which can negatively affect the local population.

Baltimore, Maryland has seen this effect greater than most. It has a rapidly growing art scene and has for several decades. In February 2018, a Baltimore-based organization, Leaders of a Beautiful Struggle, held a forum for the community addressing the problem of gentrification. The overall response was that the community and long-time residents were being ignored by city planners. Art related organizations were moving into old spaces, remodeling them, and opening them up for business with a much higher property value (Fox). The residents around these spaces

found themselves paying more and more each year just to stay in their homes. Making gentrification a huge argument against funding the arts in public spaces, or trying to utilize abandoned properties.

Workforce development is the final direction this paper will discuss. It is a responsibility that communities have to train and support workers in ways that make them more well-rounded individuals. When the arts are used through the lens of workforce development it creates workers who drive innovation and “excel at communicating in an ever-changing and swifter environment” (AEVP). Providing art and culture resources for workers in a community will help them grow creative thinking skills on top of the hard skills developed in their jobs. When developing these programs in the arts, it is important that they either answer needs of the individual or the community, not of the advocating artist.

This would be an investment in human capital and ideas. Creating a stronger, well-rounded workforce that drives the global economy and local production. If you are asking why ideas would be more valuable over material resources for community growth, it's because ideas can be shared and sourced where ever you are. Material resources depend strictly on location (Glaeser). The arts are the greatest example of creating a space where you can share ideas. We can actually see the sharing of breakthroughs and innovations. Creating a well-rounded workforce would be considered a long-term investment for a community. Since a community's workforce is what drives the growth of the community.

Fostering a community of artists allows for more creative thinking and creates a creative cluster. A creative cluster encourages innovation and community growth. This can be seen in the early days of Chicago when skyscrapers were popping up on each street downtown. They weren't created by one person, but a cluster of architects who were inspired by those around

them (Glaeser). Or during the 16th century with William Shakespeare and theatre. Artists and creative thinkers influence and encourage other artists and creative thinkers.

The New Growth Theory expands on this concept. It is the idea that human desires or creative ideas foster ever-increasing productivity. Businesses are attracted to areas of artists for their potential of creative thinking (Nyarko). If you are thinking this could cause the same problem of gentrification as directly improving property value, think about it this way; workforce development focuses on the population of the community, not the community itself. Humans over physical spaces. Listening to the needs of the community and helping them grow, allows them to rise with the value of the community.

It's what community builders want to hear. A focus on tourism or economic development doesn't cut it. A quote from Edward Gleaser says it best:

“I think the best reason for funding the arts is not local economic development policy at all. I think it is actually a mistake for the arts to try and sell itself too much as an economic development policy because the real reason to subsidize art is because art makes life worthwhile and has enormous intrinsic value.” (Glaeser)

It is about training creative workers and letting them develop the community and economy naturally. Since skilled workers attract other skilled workers, this allows the community to organically grow (Burrup). Developing the economy as a secondary result.

These development programs can be things like opportunities for community members to see or share their own art through classes, performances, exhibitions, etc. As long as the focus is on local art. If the primary focus is on bringing art from outside the community, we aren't

working towards workforce development. We are focusing too much on economic development. Encouraging people to share ideas is what the main focus of your new plan should be.

This is the strongest way to advocate for the arts. When you bring this in front of a city council or city planning board, it shows that you care about the community and the voices inside it while still paying attention to economic development. It promotes natural steady growth over the long-term with more security than just doing a single performance or exhibition. However, if you are trying to fund a single performance or exhibition it is still possible to frame it in this light. Using it as a contribution towards this side of arts advocacy.

Pushing for the arts by saying it will increase tourism and further economic development is a great way to gain public funding for community growth. However, it's easy to attribute these to other industries. Focusing directly on the people of the community and allowing them to grow with it is even better. Helping creative thinkers grow. It's one of the better ways to avoid mass displacement of communities while pushing the arts. It has the potential to create a community of ideas and grow the local economy. As an artist, I will be taking this approach as an art advocate. This is just a small step towards understanding what the arts can do for the places I love.

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