

The Catalysts for Intellectual Capital 2020



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Arts Enterprise and Economic Development

Leading from the Confluence

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Katlin Anne W. Richards

English and Global Cultures, Global Studies Minor

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Abstract:

Research has shown that a strong arts culture is an important aspect of education as well as economic development. Community arts programs are increasing in popularity within industrial cities in need of rehabilitation. Community arts programs centered on revitalization include workshops, public mural projects, city sculptures, performances, and building

Arts Enterprise and Economic Development

restoration/housing expansion. The programs focus specifically on connecting the community with local artists by marketing to community members the potential improvements artists could have on the area. Creating a larger social network to support a growing number of artists and their projects attracts and retains artists and those appreciative of the arts to an area. Both Binghamton University and the city of Binghamton are home to many talented artists in need of expanding outlets. By marketing programs and opportunities to one another, they can assist each other and become better known and more successful. Success of the programs can be measured in multiple ways including the creation of jobs, decrease in crime, increase in community involvement and development, and visual community revitalization. With such high rates of success, an escalating number of cities needing rehabilitation participate in community arts programs with the hope of economic development, city restoration, increasing quality of life and improved education.

Keywords: Arts; Culture; Enterprise; Community Arts Projects; Education; Rehabilitation; Restoration; Economic Development; City Kids.

Binghamton Keywords: BC Arts Council, Student Association; Harpur College; Fine Arts; First Friday; Upstate Dance and Arts Center.

Arts Enterprise and Economic Development

Introduction:

Located in Upstate New York, Binghamton University is home to some of America's best and brightest young talent. The University hosts more than 11,500 undergraduate students and 3,000 graduate students (<http://www2.binghamton.edu/about/binghamton-at-a-glance.html>). With a total student population of nearly 15,000, approximately 7,500 undergraduates and 1,500 graduate students attend Harpur College, the largest of six different colleges located within the University. Harpur College offers students degrees in nearly 130 different areas of study, many of which focus on the Fine Arts (<http://www2.binghamton.edu/harpur/>). Along with students pursuing degrees in the Fine Arts, there are over thirty-three different student groups related to the arts (www.paws.binghamton.edu). Student Association affiliated groups span a broad range of artistic endeavors including dance, music, painting, and even the circus arts. These art groups have very different and expansive needs such as stages, rehearsal space, studios, costume shops, painting and art supplies, and galleries to display their work. There has been increase in difficulty of finding rehearsal and meeting spaces for these groups due each club's expansion in size. Larger groups require more supplies, which the university cannot always support, thereby causing students to shop locally. Consequently, the growth of Binghamton University's reputation and recognition attracts thousands of students each year and with that the needs of artistic student groups.

However, Binghamton University is not the only place in Binghamton with a strong focus

Arts Enterprise and Economic Development

on the arts. In fact, downtown Binghamton hosts more than thirty five art galleries and art centers excluding those located in surrounding areas

(<http://www.bcartscouncil.com/galleryguide.htm>). Originally considered a thriving industrial city, Binghamton has had difficulty maintaining an economically successful environment. With a current unemployment rate of 9.7 percent, Binghamton community members struggle to find jobs and support themselves, causing even more issues within the community such as increased crime rates and movement away from the area (www.bls.gov). Although the city itself is struggling economically, there has been a major underground movement within the arts community. New artists are moving to the area with the hopes of finding their niche in an aspiring community. There has also been greater recognition of the artists as their numbers grow. During an with interview Sharon Ball, the Executive Director of the Broome County Arts Council, she painted a beautiful picture of Binghamton as a burgeoning artist's city that is aspiring to find greater success and recognition in the world of art. She stated that initially in 2004, Binghamton was home to seventeen different art galleries. This number has more than doubled and Binghamton now boasts close to forty art galleries and art centers (Sharon Ball). Dramatic increases in the number of art galleries in Binghamton indicate that Binghamton is attracting and retaining artists to the area, thereby creating a successful arts community.

The new goal of Broome County, the City of Binghamton, and Binghamton University is to use art resources in the community to attract and retain the young talent that comes through Binghamton University. As noted in *Artists vs. Blight*, "The worse things get, the more creative

Arts Enterprise and Economic Development

you have to become” (1). Attracting creative minds to a struggling area is important specifically in regards to architectural development. The City of Binghamton is home to gorgeous architecture that has been neglected and abandoned. The architecture can be beautifully restored through the creative and inspired mind of the artist, who can view such buildings and see their impressive potential as beautiful loft apartments, galleries, and art studios. These artists are in turn the ones who have the dedication, talent, and determination to restore these buildings for personal or commercial use or profit. Binghamton University is home to many bright young artists who can provide assistance to the local community through their own creative ideas and talents. A current issue is how to better connect these students within the community so that they feel like they have a place to call their own, and therefore create a greater connection with the local culture and feel more inclined to assist the community in which they reside.

Unfortunately, Binghamton University and the local community have had poor communication skills in regards to arts and enterprise and marketing to one another. The connection of arts and enterprise are essential in providing leadership opportunities to local artists in a creative economy. Because the arts attract a specific niche of people who can provide unique skills and talents to an economy, they offer a new area of business to communities. Both Binghamton University and the community suffer from under funding due to government budget cuts and the economic recession. This lack of funding causes a decrease in resources so it would be incredibly beneficial if the university and community came together to form a larger combined art network because they could use one another’s resources and create longevity within

Arts Enterprise and Economic Development

their programs. By uniting, these two venues could also increase their opportunities to boost the local economy, assist high-risk children in the area, rehabilitate the city, and most importantly, attract and retain young talent.

According to *Making Exact Change*, “The mainstream art world is constantly on the lookout for the next big thing,” (Cleveland 103). Binghamton has proven it has the potential to be this next big thing if it begins to focus on creating and maintaining relationships and avenues of communication between the university and local arts communities. Recognition of Binghamton as an artistically thriving city would help expand the name of both the university and city and thus attract more people to visit and stay here. Recognition would also attract a higher caliber of artists who could continue to assist in the process of economic restoration and development.

Art is typically overlooked but incredibly important to youth culture and development. A study done in Canada called *Learning through the Arts (LTTA)* monitored student attitude and achievement in relation to the arts. LTTA encompassed a large group of participants and included 6,000 students, parents, teachers, and principals. LTTA was designed “to determine if students in LTTA schools benefited from the program as evidenced by positive changes in attitudes towards the arts and learning and by achievement in mathematics and language,” and also “to link students’ school achievement with views and experiences of school subjects and out-of-school activities,” (Smithrin and Uptis 112). LTTA used a variety of programs to initiate different types of students in the arts and stressed that this was one of the most important factors in engaging students in school and keeping them engaged in their classes. When the study was

Arts Enterprise and Economic Development

completed, their “analysis provided strong indications that involvement in the arts went hand-in-hand with engagement in learning at school,” (120). Analysis of the results became particularly meaningful when those involved in the study learned that “LTTA students scored significantly higher on tests of computation than students in control schools” (109). Although some officials worry that art programs keep students from other studies, specifically math and language, the LTTA study clearly shows that art is overall a beneficial area of study. This indicates that art programs, whether held as in-school or after school activities, are an integral part of a student’s educational success and future development.

As people become more aware of the importance of art programs to communities and education, there is an increase in program development. Community arts programs are one of the latest and trendiest practices to rehabilitate and restore depressed cities. On-going programs in cities such as Cleveland, San Francisco, Dallas, Philadelphia, and Vancouver have been highly successful. They invite artists to make use of the resources a community already has with the hopes of revitalizing the city and attracting new talent. According to the article *Making Exact Change*, by William Cleveland, “Twenty-five years ago, advocates for community arts used terms like *beautification*, *quality of life*, and *community animation* to describe their work. These days, it is not uncommon to hear *conflict resolution*, *public safety*, *economic development*, and *community revitalization* expressed to describe the work,” (6). Many of these key words such as public safety, economic development, and beautification are words that community members and students alike can appreciate and work towards. Downtown Binghamton would serve as a fantastic venue

Arts Enterprise and Economic Development

for community arts projects because it is in need of assistance both economically and aesthetically. There is already existing beautiful architecture in downtown Binghamton such as the Old Binghamton City Hall and the Broome County Courthouse. These buildings could easily be marketed as potential lofts or studios to artists and become open spaces perfect for murals or sculptures. Besides beautification, community arts projects could potentially increase public safety and enhance the economy. Increasing the art community increases the number of people coming downtown which leads to more shopping and browsing at downtown stores. As more people visit downtown, there will be a demand for higher safety measures as well. An increase in the influx of visitors helps places such as restaurants, cafes, and boutiques have a much larger audience to serve allowing them to be vastly more successful.

Currently, one of the most popular ways to restore a city using community arts programs is to create small “art communities” within a few select blocks of the city. City governments allow artists to move into abandoned buildings for incredibly low rental rates with the hopes that the artists will attract others to the area. According to Alexandra Alter, “What began as a grass-roots movement, with artists gravitating to cheaper neighborhoods and making improvements, is now being embraced by city officials as a tool to revive neighborhoods reeling from vacancies and home foreclosures” (2). When artists move in they occupy previously empty space, create a new network of community members, and typically add visual appeal to the areas they inhabit. Many cities offer incentives for artists to relocate, such as tax breaks and inexpensive rent to attract and retain various artists to the area. More so, “With their interesting architecture and raw

Arts Enterprise and Economic Development

authenticity, these industrial districts provide an opportunity to create unique places,” (Kirk 55). Binghamton was an industrial city for many years and now due to outsourcing and changes in the economy, has many abandoned buildings in need of restoration. Binghamton University students interested in the arts are in desperate need of new rehearsal and studio spaces. Accessing these abandoned buildings would give students the space they desperately need, get more students involved in the downtown community, and fill abandoned spaces.

Another popular form of community art projects are community mural projects, which unite local community artists and at-risk students to teach them safe and healthy ways to express their emotions. Mural projects are increasing in popularity, “...especially in the US, where ‘new genre public art’ is ‘visual art that uses both traditional and non-traditional media to communicate and interact with a broad and diversified audience about issues directly relevant to their lives,” (Norman and Norman 510). By interacting with diversified audiences on issues relevant to their lives, mural projects give those involved a sense of belonging and pride about the area they live and the work they have completed. Mural projects also beautify the area and rehabilitate crumbling areas by providing a fresh breath of air and, “regenerate[ing] civic pride and visual pleasure in the city,” (Norman and Norman 515).

Best Practices:

Arts Enterprise and Economic Development

As views on community art programs change and evolve, it is time to look at some best practices in reference to Binghamton. A great example of a community arts program that has been very successful in Binghamton is the Broome County Arts Council. The Arts Council was founded in 1986 after it combined with the Community Arts Council. Broome County is only one of 56 communities in the nation with an active combined campaign for the arts. The mission of the BC Arts Council is to “act as a catalyst and coordinator to preserve the local heritage and to develop, enhance, advance, and sustain the multi-cultural life of the Broome County area, providing the community and particularly its artists, art organizations, and educational institutions with a network of support services” (www.gobroomecounty.com). The BC Arts Council promotes local artists and art programs and helps them to better communicate with one another to further their success. One of the most prominent ways the BC Arts Council assists artists and arts programs is through their United Cultural Fund Campaign (UCF), which collects money from various donors and then distributes these contributions to needy artists and programs through grants. In 2010 alone, the BC Arts Council raised over \$356,000 and assisted over eighteen different organizations through project and general operating support grants (www.bcartscouncil.com).

The Broome County Arts Council not only helps local artists, but also assists the local community and neighboring areas. According to the Broome County Arts Council statistics, their grant recipients return more than \$4 million back to Broome County’s economy (*2010 United Cultural Fund Campaign*). They also provide jobs to hundreds of people through placements in

Arts Enterprise and Economic Development

manufacturing, construction, performances, programming, and many other venues. Community members also volunteer to assist the different art programs receiving grants from the BC Arts Council gives grants. In recent years, community volunteer numbers soared to over 50,000 hours of annual volunteer work. The grant recipients provide services to nearly 200,000 residents and visitors, including 60,000 children, in Broome County. Through the grants they provide, the BC Arts Council allows thousands of community members to experience various forms of art that they may never have been able to experience in another city. The BC Arts Council is also a huge contributor to the area's economic development by actively engaging an educated work force, improving the quality of life, attracting people and money from outside Broome County, and anchoring the arts as a growth industry in Broome County (*2010 United Cultural Fund Campaign*).

The BC Arts Council provides services to local artists and galleries. Another company in Binghamton that is trying to reach out to a different group of artists, specifically dancers, is the Upstate Dance and Arts Center (UDAC). Founded by Susan Schneider, a Binghamton native and alumna from the inaugural Catalyst for Intellectual Capital class, UDAC strives to assist local performing arts students who could not typically afford to take trips to places like New York or pay for dance classes. According to their website:

Upstate Dance & Arts Center was founded to provide opportunity to people involved in the arts. We have commenced upon this mission by offering workshops, intensives, and performance opportunities to students studying performing arts in Broome County and

Arts Enterprise and Economic Development

its surrounding areas. These experiences are offered to all students regardless of where they study regularly. In many instances, we hope to create and offer opportunities that would not otherwise be possible. By students having access to world-class artists, we hope to inspire and motivate the students that will shape the art world of tomorrow.

(www.udac.biz).

UDAC is particularly important to Binghamton because it targets students of dance and fine arts. Dance studio classes are typically very expensive, putting them out of reach for many local students and families. UDAC allows these students to pursue their interests without fear of financial burden. UDAC offers students classes in diverse forms of dance including hip hop, ballet, and conditioning which allows them to have a selection in what style of dance they study. There are also technique classes to give students proper training as well as competition classes for those who are interested.

One of the most beneficial and unique things UDAC does for its students and the community is to invite professional dancers from the city and neighboring studios to come teach workshops. This gives students an opportunity to work with a caliber of dancer previously unreachable and possibly unknown to them. Visiting teachers include those such as Joyce King and J Ryan Carroll who have extensive training and have performed on and off Broadway (www.udac.biz). Having a business like UDAC in the Greater Binghamton Area gives the location credibility for its dancers and programs and further increases the economic development and enterprise of the area.

Arts Enterprise and Economic Development

Another program that is working hard to help kids is “CityKids” located in New York, NY. Laurie Meadoff founded CityKids in 1985 as a nonprofit, multicultural youth organization aimed “to solve the challenges young people face” (Cleveland 13). By motivating youth to improve their education and become involved in the community, they create children who actively change and advance their own lives. CityKids uses after-school, weekend, and summer courses to teach students to produce artistic works that market positive messages to their peers and has students perform these works locally and throughout the county. The best part of these courses is that they are free of charge, making them accessible to all.

CityKids is known for its “unique expertise in youth-to-youth communication” (Cleveland 14). They teach youth to include themselves in problem solving decisions and have found that “the impact is substantial when kids listen to kids” (Cleveland 14). Having found great success in New York City, CityKids has expanded over the last twenty years and currently operate programs from their TriBeCa Headquarters, New Haven program site, and ten New York City public high schools. Over seven-hundred youths ranging in age from twelve to twenty participate in the program and majority of them are African American or Latinos living below the poverty level (Cleveland 14).

Specific goals of CityKids revolve around creating a safe space for students, making use of youth-to-youth communications, and building multicultural bridges (Cleveland 15). CityKids strives to have their participants become community leaders and role models and have their participants be increasingly aware of issues relevant to youth. They encourage students to take

Arts Enterprise and Economic Development

responsibility for themselves by allowing them to run the programs they design. This increases a student's leadership abilities and self-esteem. Giving students of diverse backgrounds a safe and joyous place to learn and express themselves is immeasurably important to a youth's development and happiness. The students involved in CityKids grow and mature dramatically and can then express their development to other youth. Student involvement also propels the program and allows them to be so successful.

Recommendations:

I met with Sharon Ball, the Executive Director of the BC Arts Council, to discuss ways to connect university students interested in the arts with community artists and gallery owners. We have begun to discuss the concept of founding a sort of "Second Friday" program that will connect Binghamton University students with local artists and art centers. In order to organize the event, we will have a small meeting with a few student group leaders, members of the SA Board, Binghamton professors of the arts, and local artists and gallery owners to discuss the details. Our goal is to form a monthly networking session/showcase for students and local community members to meet and form relationships. There is a severe need for increased communication and relationships between Binghamton University and the community, specifically in reference to the arts. The monthly meeting would be held in the BC Arts Council's

Arts Enterprise and Economic Development

new apartment on State Street and would showcase a different student group or group of student artists every month. The “Second Friday” would be take place from five to seven pm with the hopes of getting students downtown during a timeframe that allows them to shop or eat. The major reason we decided not to hold this event in conjunction with the already established “First Friday” is to get students down at a different time and avoid competition with better known programs.

The “Second Friday” program will better inform both the community and students of what art programs are in the area. It can also create an avenue of communication between the university and community so that they can begin programs together. If the program proves to be successful, local restaurants and bars may want to become involved by offering happy hour dinner and drink specials to people who attend the event, but that will not happen for some time. “Second Friday” will get attract more students to the downtown area and convince them to further explore what it offers. It will also give them a more personal reason to visit downtown while giving students a sense of belonging. The relationships between students and community members will increase the number of students visiting downtown while also giving community members more incentive to visit campus. Attendees will be able to form an intelligent art network of people they can contact for support, space, assistance, or even volunteers.

Sharon and I have also discussed adding a new database to the BC Arts Council website. This section will be directed to BU students and will allow them to upload their personal or student group information and contact information so that they can better communicate with

Arts Enterprise and Economic Development

other artists. Our goal is to build bridges between the community and students through communication and relationships while assisting downtown Binghamton's economic development and rehabilitation. In addition, this program will also attract and retain young talent by giving art students better outlets and resources for their work.

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