

Culture makes neighbourhoods more affluent and desirable places to live

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This research was conducted by **Mark J. Stern and Susan C. Seifert** at the **University of Pennsylvania, USA**

Summary

This paper characterised neighbourhoods in Philadelphia and finds that a concentration of cultural assets can lead to a variety of other benefits. The authors took a range of data from surveys, box-office data, business databases and other methods to calculate the number of cultural assets within neighbourhoods in Philadelphia. They defined 'cultural assets' as: cultural participants; non-profit cultural providers, including unincorporated associations; commercial cultural firms; and resident artists.

The researchers gave each neighbourhood a cultural 'score'

Taking all of these data together they calculated a single cultural score that related to the cultural activity within each neighbourhood in Philadelphia. They then looked at where within the city there were concentrations of cultural assets and how cultural asset scores corresponded with other measures associated with assessing the economic strength and health of places (such as neighbourhood desirability scores and property prices). Places with high concentrations of cultural assets were named 'cultural clusters' (which are 'cultivated not planned' and grow organically from within communities rather than centrally-planned 'cultural quarters' created by policymakers or developers).

They then looked at how culture affected these scores over time

When comparing data from the late 1990s to the early 2000s the authors found that 'cultural cluster' neighbourhoods saw higher levels of growth in affluence and desirability than other parts of Philadelphia. The authors were able to isolate cultural assets as a key factor in generating this extra impact. They are cautious to point out that traditional types of economic impact (such as monetary spend, imports or employment) did not create this increase but rather suggest that cultural clusters are the sort of neighbourhoods with civically engaged residents and more sustainable and networked communities, which in turn make a place desirable to live in.

Something to keep in mind

The authors note that they are looking at impacts on neighbourhoods, and they cannot say whether increased affluence is as a result of poorer people being displaced by richer people, or poorer people becoming more affluent.

Keywords

cluster **USA** **placemaking** **economic** **neighbourhood** **assets**

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