

Capitalising on the public value of the arts in Denver, Colorado

Home > Impacts of arts and culture > Neighbourhood impacts of arts and culture

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Summary

This paper tells the story of what happened in Denver, Colorado after the local population voted to approve a small local sales tax to directly fund the arts. This was a popular move that bolstered the ability of arts organisations to fulfil a role that brought a range of instrumental benefits to the city.

During the early 1980s the city of Denver ran into financial trouble as the local economy collapsed

The city cut off funding to major cultural attractions that had previously been dependent on local support for their survival. They cut back on staff, introduced (or increased) admission charges, and reduced their activities.

Voters in Denver needed convincing that a local tax would compensate for these cutbacks

The successful and energetic campaign for the tax emphasised the benefits of culture to children, the economy and the community. As a sales tax it would keep pace with inflation and spread the burden to visitors and tourists. There was a clear strategic policy driving the campaign and its administration, it garnered support from the general population (not just arts advocates) and from business.

Evidencing the local impact of arts and culture

The economic impact of the cultural organisations in Denver (as reported in a long-running assessment funded by a local lobby group) suggested that the economic impact generated by the arts had doubled in the 10 years after 1998 and outstripped the average economic performance of the city during this time of growth. Denver attracted more tourism than before, nearly double the number of overnight tourist trips to the city took place between 1991 and 2006, and with an increase in visitors the cultural organisations were able to leverage more funding from businesses, foundations and the public.

Keywords

USA **subsidy** **tourism** **tax** **economic** **children**

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