

Investing in Creativity: How Arts and Culture Strengthen Communities

The Economic, Social, and Cultural Benefits of Supporting the Arts

INTRODUCTION

The arts and culture sectors play a pivotal role in driving economic growth and enhancing community well-being in British Columbia and across Canada. With a direct economic contribution of **approximately \$61 billion—representing about 2.7% of Canada’s GDP—this vibrant sector underscores the importance of cultural investment.** In British Columbia alone, the cultural industries contributed over \$8.2 billion to the provincial GDP in 2019, accounting for around 3.3% of the local economy.

Beyond economic metrics, the cultural sector supports over 700,000 jobs nationally, including artists, curators, and workers in various cultural institutions. In British Columbia, the arts and culture industries employed about 98,000 people, making up 4% of the province’s workforce. The benefits extend to tourism, where cultural activities significantly enhance visitor spending and engagement, with cultural tourists spending 2.5 times more than other visitors. Notably, 60% of tourists in British Columbia participate in cultural experiences, demonstrating the sector’s integral role in local economies.

Moreover, the impact of arts and culture goes beyond economic figures, fostering social cohesion, enhancing community identity, and promoting public health. Investment in arts initiatives cultivates inclusive communities, preserves Indigenous heritage, and supports mental well-being through community-based programs. Studies indicate that communities with higher levels of arts engagement experience stronger social ties and improved quality of life.

By establishing and nurturing artist spaces, performing arts centers, galleries, and learning environments, smaller communities can attract and retain residents, enriching their cultural landscapes. These creative hubs enhance the quality of life, promote local economic development, and encourage social connectivity, making them essential for fostering vibrant, inclusive communities. This introduction explores the profound economic and community impact of arts and culture in British Columbia and Canada, emphasizing the necessity of continued investment in these vital sectors.

ECONOMIC IMPACT IN BRITISH COLUMBIA AND CANADA:

1. Direct Economic Contribution:

- The arts, culture, and heritage sectors contribute significantly to the Canadian economy, with a direct impact of **\$61 billion** (about **2.7%** of Canada’s GDP) according to Statistics Canada.
- In **British Columbia (BC)**, the cultural industries contributed over **\$8.2 billion** to the provincial GDP in 2019, representing around **3.3%** of BC’s total economy.

2. Job Creation:

- The cultural sector in **Canada** supports over **700,000 jobs**, which includes artists, curators, designers, and workers in museums, galleries, and other cultural institutions.
- In **BC**, the arts and culture industries employed around **98,000 people** in 2019, representing **4%** of the province's total workforce. The sector not only provides direct employment but also supports many small businesses, creative enterprises, and tourism.

3. Tourism and Spending:

- Cultural tourism is a major contributor to BC's economy. Visitors who engage in cultural activities like festivals, heritage sites, and art galleries tend to **spend 2.5 times more** than other tourists, according to a report by Destination BC.
- **60% of tourists** coming to British Columbia participate in cultural experiences, such as visiting museums or attending festivals, helping to boost local businesses and community events.
- Nationally, **cultural and heritage tourism** in Canada contributes over **\$12 billion** annually to the tourism industry.

COMMUNITY IMPACT IN BRITISH COLUMBIA AND CANADA:

1. Social Cohesion and Community Identity:

- In **BC**, investments in arts and culture have been key to fostering **inclusive communities** and preserving Indigenous heritage. The **First Peoples' Cultural Council** supports Indigenous languages and cultural practices, which has been essential in cultural revitalization and community pride.
- Research by the **Ontario Arts Council** suggests that communities with higher levels of arts engagement are **2.5 times more likely** to have strong social cohesion. Similar findings are reflected in studies of BC's vibrant arts communities, where cultural activities often serve as a hub for social interaction.

2. Public Health and Well-being:

- Arts and culture participation is closely linked to improved well-being in **Canada**. A 2019 study by Hill Strategies found that **90%** of Canadians believe that arts and culture help foster individual well-being and improve quality of life.
- In **British Columbia**, community-based arts programs have shown positive outcomes in mental health, especially in rural areas. Programs like the **Arts and Health Project** in Vancouver have demonstrated how art can reduce stress and improve mental health for seniors and other vulnerable populations.

3. Youth Development and Education:

- Arts education is a significant contributor to youth development in **BC**. Studies by the **British Columbia Arts Council** indicate that students with access to arts education perform better academically and have higher graduation rates.
- In **Canada**, youth who participate in arts programs are more likely to develop **critical thinking** and **problem-solving skills**. This, in turn, prepares them for a

diverse range of careers and contributes to a **more innovative and resilient workforce**.

REGIONAL LARGER SCALE EXAMPLES:

1. **Granville Island, Vancouver:** A cultural hub in **Vancouver, BC**, Granville Island generates over **\$215 million** in economic activity annually. It is home to numerous artists, galleries, and performance spaces, attracting **millions of visitors** each year.
2. **Victoria, BC:** The capital of British Columbia is known for its vibrant cultural scene, which includes festivals like the **Victoria Fringe Festival** and numerous heritage sites. Cultural tourism in Victoria has a substantial impact, with cultural activities attracting over **500,000 visitors** annually, generating millions in local spending.
3. **Indigenous Cultural Tourism:** In **British Columbia**, the growth of Indigenous cultural tourism has become a vital part of the economy. According to the **Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada**, Indigenous tourism contributed over **\$705 million** to the national GDP in 2019, with a significant portion of that coming from BC.

These examples and statistics illustrate how the arts and culture sector drives economic growth, strengthens community bonds, and enhances the overall quality of life in **British Columbia** and across **Canada**.

NURTURING ARTISTIC SPACES: BUILDING VIBRANT COMMUNITIES THROUGH CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT

Building and nurturing artist spaces, performing arts centers, galleries, and learning spaces can significantly impact the recruitment and retention of residents, especially in smaller centers. These cultural spaces often become community hubs that foster creativity, social interaction, and economic vitality. Here's how they contribute to community growth and stability:

1. Enhancing Quality of Life:

- **Cultural Vibrancy:** Artist spaces and cultural centers create a sense of vibrancy and uniqueness in smaller communities. This enhances the quality of life by providing residents with local opportunities for cultural experiences that might otherwise be limited to larger urban areas.
- **Attracting New Residents:** For many people considering relocating to smaller towns or cities, access to arts and cultural amenities can be a major draw. A study by the Knight Foundation found that **social offerings, aesthetics, and openness** (including arts and culture) are among the most important factors in why people choose to stay in a community.
- **Improving Liveability:** For young families and retirees alike, the presence of cultural institutions contributes to a well-rounded, attractive lifestyle. Programs like artist workshops, gallery openings, and performances provide a variety of activities for different age groups.

2. Boosting Local Economic Development:

- **Supporting Local Businesses:** Cultural hubs attract foot traffic, which can support nearby restaurants, cafes, and retail shops. For example, an artist residency program or performing arts event can bring in visitors from outside the community, leading to increased spending in the area.
- **Creative Economies:** By supporting artist spaces and cultural venues, smaller communities can foster **creative economies**. According to a report by **ArtsBuild Ontario**, cultural infrastructure such as arts centers contributes to **local economic resilience** by creating job opportunities not only within the cultural sector but also in hospitality, tourism, and retail.
- **Retaining Creative Talent:** Investing in spaces that nurture local talent can help retain young creatives who might otherwise leave for larger cities. **Coworking spaces for artists**, shared studios, and makerspaces provide the infrastructure necessary for creative professionals to work locally, potentially preventing the "brain drain" phenomenon common in smaller centers.

3. Encouraging Social Cohesion and Community Engagement:

- **Building Community Identity:** Cultural spaces help small towns and cities develop a unique identity, which can foster **community pride**. This identity can be especially appealing to new residents who are seeking a sense of belonging.
- **Facilitating Social Connections:** Performing arts centers and galleries are gathering places where people can meet, socialize, and share ideas. This **social connectivity** can be a key factor in helping new residents integrate into the community, making them more likely to stay long-term.
- **Programs for All Ages:** Multi-generational programming, like art classes, concerts, and public talks, brings together different segments of the population, creating a more cohesive community fabric. This helps in making residents feel more connected to the place they live in.

4. Promoting Inclusivity and Diversity:

- **Supporting Diverse Voices:** Artist spaces and community cultural centers can be platforms for underrepresented voices, including **Indigenous artists, new immigrants, and marginalized groups**. This creates a more inclusive environment that can attract new residents who are looking for a welcoming and diverse community.
- **Celebrating Local Culture:** For smaller centers, preserving local culture and heritage through galleries and performance spaces can attract individuals who value cultural heritage and traditions. This might include people from nearby rural areas, or those looking for a community that honors local stories and history.

5. Education and Lifelong Learning:

- **Art and Cultural Education:** By offering **learning spaces** like community art classes, music lessons, and artist talks, smaller centers can attract families with children, as well as retirees looking for **lifelong learning** opportunities. Programs that foster creativity are valuable for all ages and contribute to personal and professional growth.
- **Training and Skill Development:** Establishing facilities that focus on skill-building in arts-related fields—such as digital media, design, and traditional crafts—can **equip local residents with marketable skills**. This can help boost employment opportunities and

make smaller towns more attractive to professionals seeking career development in a creative environment.

REGIONAL AND NATIONAL SMALLER SCALE EXAMPLES:

- **Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity (Alberta):** Though Banff is a smaller town, the Banff Centre has become a world-renowned cultural institution. It offers artist residencies, performances, and workshops, attracting creative professionals globally. Its presence has boosted local tourism and made Banff a cultural destination.
- **Art Gallery of Algoma (Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario):** This gallery serves as a cultural hub for the community, providing education programs, art exhibits, and workshops. It has helped to enhance the city's cultural profile and retain local artists, as well as attract visitors from nearby regions.
- **Arts & Culture Centre Network (Newfoundland and Labrador):** This network of cultural centers across smaller communities in Newfoundland and Labrador has helped foster local talent and provided spaces for performances and exhibitions, contributing to local identity and community engagement.

SUMMARY:

Investing in artist spaces, performing arts centers, galleries, and learning spaces allows smaller communities to cultivate vibrant, attractive environments that appeal to both new and existing residents. These spaces not only offer cultural and recreational opportunities but also strengthen social connections, stimulate local economies, and foster a sense of pride and belonging. This, in turn, enhances the long-term appeal of smaller communities, supporting sustainable growth.

If our region seeks to gather its own data, national organizations like the [Creative City Network of Canada](https://www.creativecity.ca/membership/css/) offer statistical services and research support.
(<https://www.creativecity.ca/membership/css/>)

SOURCES:

Statistics Canada
Destination BC
Canada Council for the Arts
Hill Strategies Research
British Columbia Arts Council
First Peoples' Cultural Council
Ontario Arts Council
Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada
Knight Foundation
ArtsBuild Ontario