

ECONOMIC & SOCIAL BENEFITS OF PUBLIC ART



"Kelpies" at night. Scotland.

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Public art offers a range of benefits and opportunities for enhancing the urban environment, increasing the use and enjoyment of public space, and building social cohesion.



Solace of the Wind. Taranaki Wharf, Wellington

Public art provides a means of celebrating a region's unique culture, diverse communities and rich history. It offers shared symbols which contribute to civic pride and help forge a positive identity for the area.

Through art, the region can project its collective identity and vision, while individuals and community groups are also empowered to express their unique identities.

Public art supports the creative industries, creating opportunities for artists and designers. Further, public art acts as a catalyst for development and economic growth through innovation, attracting visitors and stimulating investment.

Public art also

- Energises our public spaces
- Expands our thinking
- Transforms the places where we live, work and play
- Creates places of interaction
- Contributes to tourism offering, attracting new visitors.
- Sense of civic pride which research shows leads to less crime



Horizon Cartoon - Neil Dawson, Kaipara. NZ

The Art Effect

While often underestimated, the power that public art holds to transform our connection to a space makes it uniquely valuable. Arts are a highly cost-effective way of driving economic revitalization in urban areas. However, the arts not only spur economic development but also “shape our consciousness, create a collective attitude, inspire, remake behavior, and reduce stress.”

Urban planners frequently refer to public art as a tool for economic development: “Beyond enhancing aesthetics, incorporating public art into planning can enhance economic development, build community engagement, and create communities of lasting value that are both equitable and sustainable”



The Wind Wand, Evans Bay.

The Wellington City Council states in its Arts Policy ^{Ref:1} :

“Public art is the most visible and accessible form of art and is integral to what makes Wellington a stimulating and inviting place to be.

It is a key indicator of a city’s creativity, openness and quality of life. Public art performs an important social function by reflecting a city’s heritage and also its cultural diversity. Public art can shape regional identity – creating a sense of belonging and improving the look and feel of our public places.

Public art has an important role in social and economic change. It stimulates new thinking and activity that directly inspires innovative new businesses and social activity.

Public art can also be critical, provocative and can generate discussion about our cities and how we live in them.”



The Statue of Liberty, perhaps the most famous work of public art in existence, was once the subject of steep criticism. While the sculpture was gifted to the US by the people of France in 1884, their generosity did not stretch to footing the bill for the pedestal upon which the statue sits. Reluctance from the US Government to pay for the platform resulted in the sculpture's erection being delayed until 1886. Many in the US saw the statue as an affront to their patriotic views, believing that only American artists should create the public art on their shores.

And yet, the Statue of Liberty is now an icon for the values of the American people, its unique history adding to the pride and sense of community that it engenders.

The very idea that the cost of the pedestal was once seen as too steep now seems beyond belief, but is not entirely surprising given people often underestimate the worth of public art. The true value of something that is free and open to all will always be difficult to pin down, but it is certainly clear that public art has the capacity to change the way people connect with a space. This gives it a unique kind of power that shouldn't be underestimated.

Standing at 93 metres tall on Liberty Island in New York City. The Statue of Liberty received **4.44 million** visitors in 2017.

The Eiffel Tower, whose creator Gustave Eiffel also contributed to the construction of the Statue of Liberty, welcomes **7 million** visitors a year.



The Kelpies in Scotland are 30 metres high and weigh 300 tonnes each. They attracted **950,000 tourists in their first year**, twice the number originally estimated. **50,000 visitors** took part in paid tours.

“Communities that draw cultural tourists experience an additional boost of economic activity. Tourism industry research has repeatedly demonstrated that arts tourists stay longer and spend more than the average traveler.”

“A vibrant arts community not only keeps residents and their discretionary spending close to home, but it also attracts visitors who spend money and help local businesses thrive.”

Source: Creative New Zealand. *The Value of Arts: Arts Wellington Economic Impact Survey 2010*^{Ref2}

Visualising value

Lance Fung^{Ref:3} is a US based art curator and an expert in the realm of public art, having worked with famous international artists Tatsuo Miyajima, Anish Kapoor, Zaha Hadid and Yoko Ono during his career. According to Fung, public art is ultimately there to “enrich the lives of everyone that experiences it, and those who create it”.

“Many are unaware that, while public art is a free experience for anyone who passes by, it has very real economic benefits.”

Since the days of the Statue of Liberty’s construction, the notion of public art has gradually evolved. We are now much less likely to create commemorative statues, and more likely to dream up abstract or modernist works. Anish Kapoor’s *Cloud Gate* is a classic example: the liquid mercury-inspired, bean-shaped construction, which is now located in Chicago’s Millennium Park, mirrors the surrounding skyline, resulting in a dramatic experience for anyone walking past the site.



Kapoor's Cloud Gate, Chicago

Other works of public art are entirely different in character: the murals on the remains of the Berlin Wall, for example, have become an icon of the once-divided city. The scope of public art is ever-changing and can take many forms, beyond sculptures or murals.

For example, it increasingly invites some form of interaction, where the public's participation is an integral part of a sculptural installation.



"Crack the whip". Chicago

A question of worth?

As a very visible display of what is often public spending, public art can be an easy target for criticism. Many are unaware that, while public art is a free experience for anyone who passes by, it actually has very real economic benefits.

Public art has powerfully impacted places and communities, not only in cities but increasingly in regional areas as well.

Because of this economic potential, public art is often utilised in regeneration or large civic projects. In fact, such a project was the spark behind one of the UK's most famous works of art: the Angel of the North by Antony Gormley, which is located in Gateshead. The vast steel structure of a featureless angel, which has a ribbed exterior reminiscent of early airplanes, overlooks a major motorway, ensuring it is seen by tens of thousands of people a day. It has become a symbol of northeast England, sitting on the now-defunct coalfields that mark the entrance to a region that struggled in its transition out of the industrial age.



The Angel of the North in Gateshead, UK

The iconic statue has been credited with accelerating the pace of development in Gateshead, with an increase in investment, business activity and employment all coinciding with the start of the 'angel era'. Furthermore, the exposure Gateshead has gained over the years – while admittedly near impossible to quantify – would have cost millions of pounds in advertising.

One of the most recent large public sculptural installations in the world has just opened in Vietnam in July 2018.



“Golden Hand Bridge” Vietnam – opened June this year, 2018

Vietnam has experienced a tourism boom as more and more people discover the beauty of this remarkable country, the “Golden Hand Bridge” is a key part of a \$2 billion investment to bring even more than the 1.5 million visitors the area receives annually. Another excellent example of using “art” to stimulate economic growth.

The wealth of art is a factor that plays a hugely influential role in where businesses choose to locate. A survey by the US Joint Legislative Committee on Cultural Affairs found 99 percent of CEOs considered the availability of cultural activities to be an important concern in deciding upon a new business location.

Beyond Economics

While a convincing argument can be made for the economic value of public art works, focusing on such benefits ignores the driving factor behind public art. Fung told *Business Destinations*: “Art is really around to open discourse, engage and inspire people, and add to a particular situation.” As a curator, he is the brains behind many installations in public spaces around the US, including the Artlantic project, which transformed vacant lots in Atlantic City into a striking park system.

When asked what he sees as success, he said: “The artwork should be thought-provoking and create an ‘experience’ for the viewer – similar to a great performance or meal.”



Break Through From Your Mold, Philadelphia, USA



Dronestagram, Christchurch

Good public art is ultimately community-driven: it is space-specific, and its meaning cannot be separated from the space in which it is located. The benefits of public art are community inclusive – from community pride to historical marking. Moreover, studies have found the aesthetics of a place can lead to a sense of safety and belonging, leading to communities caring more about where they live.

Public art clearly contributes many intrinsic values to a community. Public art adds to its social infrastructure, creates connections and experiences, and attract visitors. At its very best level, the arts also foster originality and vitality, support diversity, and provide a source of inspiration that provokes innovative thinking. This leads to the creation of jobs and thus contributes significantly to the economy.

While public art will inevitably hold the risk of splitting opinion, it is far from a frivolous expense. The presence of good public art has an enduring and important impact on a location – one that continues over long periods of time.

Researched and prepared by
Marco Zeeman. 2018
Whale Song Charitable Trust
& the Wellington Sculptural Highway
marco@zeeman.co.nz
Ph: 027 493 3626



References

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Ref:2 Creative New Zealand – Arts Economic Impact

http://www.creativenz.govt.nz/assets/ckeditor/attachments/1025/arts_wellington_economic_impact_research.pdf?1410228205

Ref:3 Lance Fung – Curator

<http://www.fungcollaboratives.org/about/community/lance-m-fung/>