

Broadway or Bust

Cultural Facilities and the Future of Downtown

By

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A report submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of
Master of Urban and Regional Planning

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Queen's University
Kingston, Ontario, Canada
May 2010

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The downtown is a reflection of the overall health of a city. In 2005 the Ontario government identified downtown regeneration as not only a local but a provincial priority through its Provincial Policy Statement. The regeneration of each downtown is unique, and a number of initiatives have been utilized in an effort to return downtowns to their former glory. While it was once believed that only large metropolitan centres could sustain cultural activities, cultural regeneration is now promoted in cities of all sizes in an attempt to attract both people and capital back to the city centre (Strom, 2002). This movement has been predicated on the belief that, although culture alone cannot produce the social, economic or physical goals necessary to sustain a community, regeneration cannot be achieved without a cultural component (Evans & Shaw, 2004).

The City of St. Catharines, Ontario is no exception to the trend of incorporating arts and culture into downtown regeneration. The City has formed a partnership with Brock University to create a new arts centre in its downtown as well as to relocate Brock's existing Marilyn I. Walker School of Fine and Performing Arts to the downtown. The total cost of the Niagara Centre for the Arts is estimated at \$101 million (not including such costs as land acquisition, start-up costs and financing) and will be funded through a federal-provincial grant of \$36 million, \$18 million from the City of St. Catharines, a \$26.2 million grant from the province to the university, and private donations (including a \$15 million endowment to the university). It is intended that the Centre will "[a]nchor the redevelopment of downtown St. Catharines, capitalizing on the unique ability of the arts to support retail and commercial development, to draw people to visit and especially to live, and to catalyze other investment in the [Niagara] [R]egion" (City of St. Catharines, 2008, pp. 15-16).

Through a literature case study this report explores the role of cultural facilities in downtown regeneration, with the aim of answering the following questions:

- 1) What impact do cultural facilities have on the regeneration of downtowns?
- 2) What lessons can be learned from other cities to ensure the Niagara Centre for the Arts is as successful as possible in contributing to the regeneration of downtown St. Catharines?

Downtown regeneration is promoted largely because it “is viewed as one of the few remaining strategies for urban revitalisation which can resist (or embrace) the effects of globalisation and capture the twin goals of competitive advantage and quality of life” (Evans, 2005, pp. 2). There are a number of positive social, economic and physical impacts which justify large monetary investments in cultural activities and facilities. The impacts discussed in this report are listed in Table 1 and Figure 1 illustrates the desired impacts of cultural facility development.

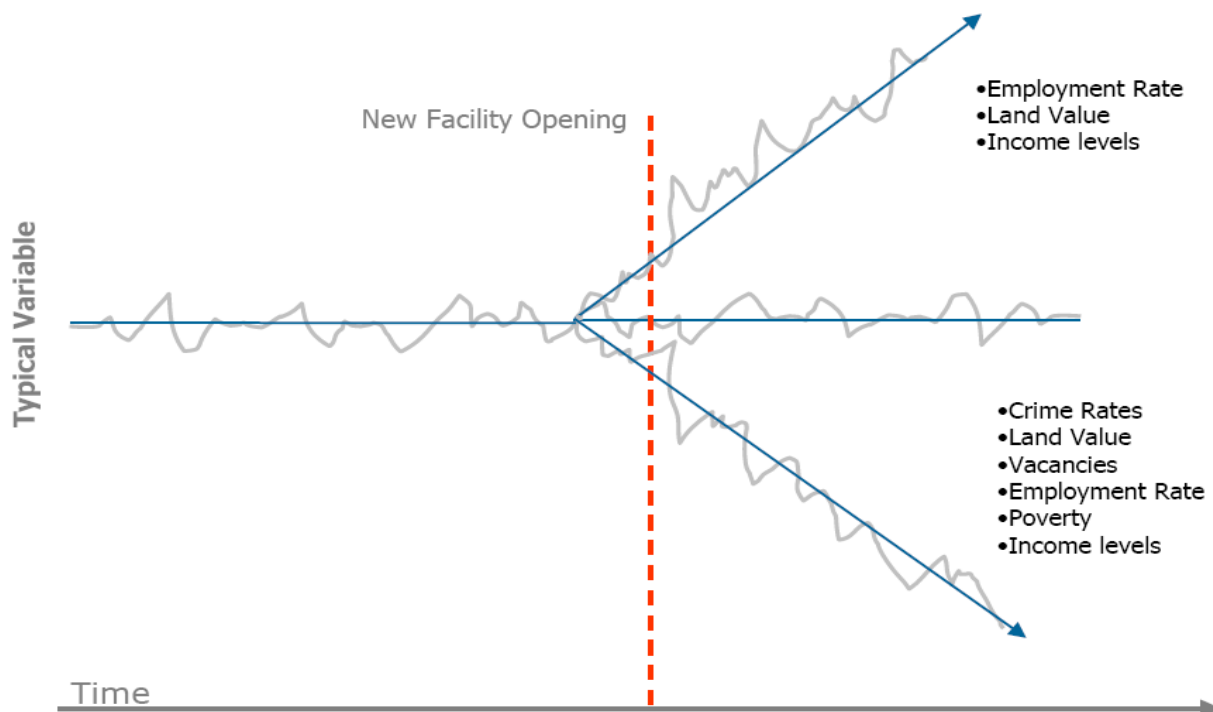
TABLE 1

Physical, social and economic impacts discussed in this report

Physical	Economic	Social
Quality of life	City image and attractiveness	Shared vision and understanding
Re-use of buildings	Creative class	Reduced crime and fear of crime
Reduced vacancies	Increase in and reallocation of spending	
	Business and employment creation	
	Evening economy	

FIGURE 1

Desired impacts of cultural facility development



Source: Centre for the Study of Commercial Activity, 2003

The findings of the literature review were supported through case studies, which were conducted for the John Labatt Centre located in London, Ontario; PlayhouseSquare Arts Center in Cleveland, Ohio; Esplanade Arts and Heritage Centre in Medicine Hat, Alberta; and New Jersey Performing Arts Center in Newark, New Jersey. Each case study provides an overview of the project, its intended impacts, and the impacts that each facility had on its downtown, these findings are summarized in Table 2.

A number of recommendations were developed through the literature review and case studies which should be considered in the development of cultural facilities, including the Niagara Centre for the Arts. In addition to those contained within the Project Development Guidelines (Section 1.1.2) of the Feasibility Study for the Niagara Centre for the Arts, project

TABLE 2

Summary of case studies

Facility	City	Desired Impacts	Experienced Impacts
John Labatt Centre	London, Ontario	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Contribute to the economic health, image and profile of the downtown 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Benefits to downtown businesses (especially food and beverage establishments) - Increase in private investment - Increase in building permits - Population growth and demographic changes - Increase in average residential sales values (freehold and condominium) - Decrease in vacancy rates (office and retail space)
PlayhouseSquare Arts Center	Cleveland, Ohio	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create a destination that is a superior location for entertainment, business and housing, thereby strengthening the economic vitality of the region 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improved image of downtown and city - Attracts out-of-town patrons - Growth in employment - Increase in population and number of housing units - Increase in real estate values - Decrease in vacancy rates (commercial and office space) - Business creation - Increase in private investment - Creation of an evening economy - Helped restore fiscal health of the City
Esplanade Arts and Heritage Centre	Medicine Hat, Alberta	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase pride in cultural assets - support downtown revitalization - Bring Medicine Hat to the next level of development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase in evening foot traffic - Benefits to downtown businesses
New Jersey Performing Arts Center	Newark, New Jersey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Transform the downtown into a cultural district - Encourage develop of nearby institutions - Support businesses and facilities, such as restaurants, retail enterprises and offices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improved image of downtown and city - Increase in private investment - Increase in real estate values - Decrease in vacancy rates (office space) - Furthered revitalization discussions

recommendations are as follows:

- 1) Cultural facilities should not be considered solely as tools for economic development. Rather, the economic, social, cultural and physical impacts of cultural facilities should be considered of equal importance.
- 2) Through their design cultural facilities should be incorporated into the city fabric, attract a wide range of individuals, and promote safety on the streets.
- 3) Ample parking should be provided by dispersed parking lots located throughout the downtown, forcing patrons to walk throughout the downtown and making them more likely to visit restaurants and businesses while creating a sense of safety.
- 4) The local community should be included throughout the development of any cultural facility so that it will meet their needs and desires. This is especially true of the local arts and cultural community for which collaboration and cooperation is vital to the success of such a facility.
- 5) Programming must be diverse and of high quality to ensure that patrons continue to visit the venue in the future as well as to attract new audiences.
- 6) In the creation and support of an evening economy, special care must be taken to make certain there are activities that appeal to all members of the community.

One of the greatest challenges in completing this report, and one of the major gaps in the literature on the use of cultural facilities in downtown regeneration, is the lack of empirical evidence of the direct impacts that art and culture have on a community. The measurement framework developed by Jones et al. (2003) in *The Spillover Effects of Investments in Cultural Facilities* should guide further research to address this gap and leading to more informed decision making at all levels of government.