

9-2010

Museums and Urban Revitalization: Regional Museums as Catalysts for Physical, Economic, and Social Regeneration of Local Communities

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***Museums and Urban Revitalization:
Regional Museums as Catalysts for Physical, Economic,
and Social Regeneration of Local Communities***

Robin Foster Westervelt

**Submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Museum Professions**

Seton Hall University

September 2010

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Abstract

*Museums and Urban Revitalization:
Regional Museums as Catalysts for Physical, Economic,
and Social Regeneration of Local Communities*

Robin Foster Westervelt

Current perspective in museum discourse tells us the traditional model of museum-as-steward is no longer enough, that in order to fully serve their communities and respond to contemporary societal issues, museums must engage in community-building and socially relevant endeavors. Why is the old model of museum-as-steward no longer enough? How can museums engage with their communities in socially relevant issues and partner with civic and other social organizations in order to address current social and economic needs? This thesis addresses these questions and provides insight as to how and why social relevance is critical to the sustainability of museums as cultural institutions. One way in which museums can engage with their communities is through urban revitalization projects. Much has been written about the *Bilbao Effect*; however this thesis will not address that issue. This author will not explore how the architectural wonder of many of the world's flagship museums have stimulated economic revival of their home cities, but rather how local and regional museums can partner with other community organizations for the purposes of physical, economic, and social revitalization, as well as how museums can act as the catalysts themselves for urban renewal. This thesis examines three Massachusetts museums, each of which has each created a web of partnerships within their communities to stimulate physical, economic,

and social revitalization of those urban areas - The Revolving Museum in Lowell, the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (Mass MoCA) in North Adams, and the Springfield Museums, in Springfield. Finally, this author offers suggestions for practical application of urban revitalization objectives.

Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the support and guidance of several individuals. I would like to thank Dr. Charlotte Nichols, my thesis advisor, for her critical editing advice and encouragement towards my subject matter. I would also like to thank my professors at Seton Hall University in addition to Dr. Nichols: Dr.'s Alexander Bauer, Petra Chu, Susan Leshnoff, Janet Marstine, Steven Miller, and Judith Stark, who each inspired me to critically examine issues relevant to museum theory as well as practical application in the field. Thank you also to Diane Testa, Executive Director of the Revolving Museum; Kay Simpson, Vice President of the Springfield Museums; and Joe Manning, author and historian of North Adams, Massachusetts. These individuals were extremely giving of their time and willing to share their personal experiences with me, while providing valuable insights into the communities and museums I researched. Thank you all very much.

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INTRODUCTION

In the world of the future, every institution, including a museum, must be judged on its distinctive ability to provide value to society in a way that builds on unique institutional strengths and serves unique community needs.

-Harold Skramstad, 150th anniversary of the Smithsonian Institute (2006)¹

Both the commitment and mission of the contemporary museum have expanded greatly since the inception of the modern museum in the nineteenth century. In the United States as well as abroad, museums continue to develop beyond their traditional service to stewardship and education and are more actively addressing what it means to be a social institution. This commitment to community, an outward focus on the social, economic, and environmental networks outside the walls of the museum, has been termed “external relevance” and is the focus of this thesis.

In efforts to determine how a museum can be more outwardly useful, museum professionals have in recent decades begun to rethink the traditional inward-focused approach (the collection) and turn towards more publicly directed initiatives with social ramifications. In cities committed to physical and economic revitalization as well as increasing social capital and community engagement, museums can act as powerful catalysts for urban regeneration not only by attracting new audiences and contributing to the regional economy, but also through public art installations and collaborations with other cultural and civic organizations. The three Massachusetts museums that I will

¹ Harold Skramstad, from E. Koster, “The Relevant Museum: a reflection on sustainability,” *Museum* (May/June 2006): 2.

examine in the following chapters - The Revolving Museum in Lowell, the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art in North Adams, and the Springfield Museums in Springfield - each seek to address specific issues and needs of their local communities and have undertaken a variety of collaborations and strategies to meet those needs. Each of the three institutions has been involved in urban revitalization initiatives in order to invigorate the physical landscape as well as the economic and social lives of their cities. As a museum seeks to understand what exactly its local community needs and how it can address those needs, collaborations with other community organizations and agencies must be nurtured. The underlying question behind all of these strategies must be *why does the museum exist?*

Each museum in the following case studies has found a way to dialogue with community stakeholders and local civic and social service organizations in order to address the needs of urban revitalization. Both The Revolving Museum and the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art have dedicated efforts to improving the urban landscape, economic viability, and the social lives of these two cities that suffered many decades of decline after early years as prosperous mill towns. In both communities, public art installations and downtown storefront exhibitions, for example, not only serve to create cultural cache in the community and contribute to physical beautification, but also create a sense that *something is going on* in a somewhat depressed downtown economy. The Springfield Museums are a consortium of five museums in downtown Springfield, each of which strives to invigorate community participation, increase social capital, and attract a global audience in an effort to revitalize one of the state's most economically depressed cities. Collaborations with public schools and civic

organizations encourage Springfield residents to explore their city and interact in an environment that fosters social cohesion.

This thesis will explore the ways in which museums are active in the physical, economic, and social revitalization of their cities, as well as offer strategies for other community and regional museums in their commitment to urban renewal. In presenting unique community issues and revitalization strategies, this author draws upon a variety of sources, including economic impact and redevelopment reports, current discourse in museum methodology, and personal interviews with relevant museum professionals and community residents. Whether a specific community is in need of public beautification, economic stimulus, revitalization of civic participation, or has specific issues of social relevance, museums are presented as potential strategic partners in urban revitalization endeavors.

1

MUSEUMS AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

One of the ways to adapt to the world's new circumstance is to change profoundly the way we think about museums' relationship to the public. We must begin to think that one of the tenets of our central mission is that we are at the service of our publics. --Elaine Heumann Gurian (2006).²

Why the Traditional Museum Model is No Longer Enough

The conviction that museums, as cultural and social institutions, not concern themselves solely with the preservation and exhibition of their collections, but also provide some form of social service to their communities, is not new. In 1909, John Cotton Dana (*The New Museum: Selected Writings by John Cotton Dana*, 1999), Director of The Newark Museum, advocated for social relevance and advised museum professionals to “learn what aid the community needs and fit the museum to those needs.” However, museums in both the United States and in Europe remained primarily inward-focused well through the first half of the twentieth century, with the collection itself retaining primary significance. While museums during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries engaged in original research and made scholarly findings available to the public via their exhibitions, the focus on education during this time was dictated, nonetheless, by museum scholars and based upon their own “expert” inclinations. Conn (1998) characterizes this position by explaining, “In a world understood through objects, and in a society wrestling with questions of citizenship and national identity, many hoped

² Elaine H. Gurian, *Civilizing the Museum: The Collected Writings of Elaine Heumann Gurian* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 78.

museums would assume a central and public role in the intellectual, and therefore moral, life of the age.”³ Museum collections were meant to impress and inspire, usually to an audience that already had some education in art and art history. While concerned with education and public access to scholarship, this is a very different platform than Dana’s counsel to fit the museum to the specific needs of its community.

Now, a century after Dana’s remarks on external usefulness, the call to social relevance and partnerships with other community organizations has become part of contemporary museum ideology. But why is the traditional museum model no longer enough? When did the shift from collections-based encyclopedic museums to museums as socially relevant and responsible institutions take place? Hudson (1998) illuminates this shift in ideology:

*The most fundamental change that has affected museums during the [past] half century...is the now almost universal conviction that they exist in order to serve the public. The old-style museum felt itself under no such obligation. It existed, it had a building, it had collections and a staff to look after them. It was reasonably adequately financed, and its visitors, usually not numerous, came to look, to ponder, and to admire what was set before them. They were in no sense partners in the enterprise. The museum’s prime responsibility was to its collections, not its visitors.*⁴

Museums and Social Relevance

Relevance is commonly defined as “pertaining to the matters at hand;” social relevance therefore relates to contemporary matters of social concern, such as poverty, racial equality, education, and social inclusion. While museums are not social service

³ Steven Conn, *Museums and American Intellectual Life, 1876-1926* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 16.

⁴ Kenneth Hudson, “The Museum Refuses to Stand Still,” *Museum International* 197 (1998)

agencies, they are cultural and social institutions and, as nonprofit organizations, are at the service of the public. Defining how museums should in fact be serving the public has been at the heart of this shift in ideology. Community engagement requires looking outside of the museum, and by reaching into the social and economic life of the city instead of simply bringing people in to the museum. Archibald (2004) advises “Our institutions have, or ought to have, concerns and objectives identical with those of the people we serve... we must be involved beyond our walls in meaningful ways if we are to bring anything important to the civic table.”⁵ This outward focus on community is the fulcrum on which this new balance between stewardship and social relevance might be established.

There are several reasons why, over the past fifty years, museums have evolved from primarily collections-centered monuments to social service institutions. One factor is due to the simple reality of economic necessity; for financial health, museums must increase their audience base as well as their spectrum of funders. In order to attract a larger audience (*i.e.* revenue dollars), a museum has to know what the public wants, and must offer programs and services to a wider audience than had been considered in the past. Museums not only require public support in the way of admission fees and membership dollars, but also depend upon corporate and philanthropic sponsorship in addition to federal, state, and municipal funding. In order to attract this necessary funding, a museum must be able to prove that it is indeed attracting a larger and broader audience. Museums that are socially relevant are likely to attract more substantial funding and thus increase their sustainability factor, especially in economic downturns when

⁵ Robert Archibald, *The New Town Square, Museums and Communities in Transition* (Walnut Creek: Alta Mira Press, 2004), 203.

available funds from corporations and philanthropic foundations are in short supply. Quite simply, funders are seeking a return on their investments, and want to see that these investments are serving to “make a difference.”⁶

In addition to economic necessity, changing ideology in the museum field has advocated for socially relevant activity in museum mission statements and practices. Professional organizations such as the American Association of Museums (AAM), the International Council of Museums (ICOM), and the Association of Science-Technology Centers (ASTC) have, over recent decades, put increasing pressure on museums to make a commitment to public service and community engagement.⁷ Weil (2002) suggests that older museums, those established via massive encyclopedic collections, might survive on their reputations alone, and therefore may be slower to engage in socially relevant collaborations within their communities simply because they don’t yet have to. But “for younger [museums], without important collections or any great prospects of ever acquiring them, public service may be their only future.”⁸

Traditionally, museums and their work have been defined by their collections, which generally look to the past. However, if museums want to be relevant to contemporary communities and perform more in the way of public service, they must focus attention on issues that affect their local regions, as well as those of global importance. Koster (2006) challenges museums to explore those issues that “profoundly matter in the world.”⁹ Likewise, at the Smithsonian Institution’s 150th anniversary, Skramstad (1997) offers a challenge to museums to expand their missions beyond the

⁶ Emlyn Koster, “The Relevant Museum: a reflection on sustainability,” *Museum* (May/June 2006): 6.

⁷ Stephen Weil, *Making Museums Matter* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002), 34-35.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

boundaries of collections, preservation, and interpretations, and to explicitly state their intended beneficial outcomes to the community.¹⁰

The American Association of Museums has carried the torch for museum-community collaboration and engagement for the past two decades. AAM's Board of Directors issued a statement on *Museums and Community Resolution* (2006) and, in doing so, urges "all museums to embrace their responsibility to be active and collaborative civic institutions and to respond to the aspirations and needs of citizens in their communities."¹¹ In this resolution, AAM described museums as not only stewards of collections and providers of education and scholarly research, but also as institutions that can profoundly change the way people view the world. Because of these particular strengths, AAM advises it is incumbent upon museums to "assume an expanded civic role in society."¹² AAM introduced the *Museums and Community Initiative* (1998) in order to challenge museums to break free of the traditional constraints of collections-based institutions and to become active participants in the civic life of their communities, as well as to engage in community-building activities.¹³ Museums have long been regarded as sources of scholarly research and intellectual and educational assets. Because they are trusted above other institutions and sources (government, media, books), museums are in the significant position to stimulate civic engagement and become

¹⁰ Emlyn Koster and Bauman, "Liberty Science Center in the United States: a Mission Focused on External Relevance," in *Looking Reality in the Eye*, by Robert R. Janes and Gerald T. Conaty (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2005), 86.

¹¹ AAM Board of Directors, "Museums and Community Resolution" 2006. <http://www.aam-us.org/sp/m-and-c-board-resol.cfm>.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ American Association of Museums, *Mastering Civic Engagement; A Challenge to Museums* (Washington D. C., American Association of Museums, 2002), 29.

involved in community issues.¹⁴ Due to the level of trust and respect which museums are generally afforded, Archibald (2002) contends, “Museums face unprecedented opportunities to exert even greater influence in society.”¹⁵

Social Capital and Civic Engagement

This idea of building social capital has become increasingly pressing in contemporary society. Harvard University’s John F. Kennedy School of Government defines social capital as “social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them.”¹⁶ It was early America’s predilection for the building and sustaining of social capital that so impressed Alexis de Tocqueville in the 1830’s as he studied American society for his tome, *Democracy in America*. Addressing the remarkable state of democracy in America, de Tocqueville (1840) concluded that it was participation in civic life that allowed democracy to flourish at all, and that among democratic people, “all citizens are independent and weak; they can do almost nothing by themselves, and none of them can oblige those like themselves to lend them their cooperation. They therefore all fall into impotence if they do not learn to aid each other freely .. In order that men remain civilized or become so, the art of associating must be developed and perfected among them.”¹⁷

¹⁴ Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (1998), found that respondents put more authority and trust in museums than in any other sources of information. AAM surveys have provided similar results and verify the trust that Americans put in our nation’s museums.

¹⁵ American Association of Museums, *Mastering Civic Engagement*, 5.

¹⁶ Harvard University JFK School of Government, “*Better Together The Saguaro Seminar on Civic Engagement in America*,” 2000. 2.

¹⁷ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. Harvey Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 492.

Research has shown that not only does social capital contribute to the healthy democracy extolled by de Tocqueville but positively affects the personal lives of individuals as well. Economic studies indicate that social capital makes nations more productive and prosperous; sociology experiments confirm that social capital decreases depression, drug abuse and juvenile delinquency while increasing graduation rates.¹⁸

Despite these benefits associated with healthy civic involvement, there has been a noted decline in civic participation in the United States since the late 1960's. In 2000, Harvard's JFK School of Government conducted a seminar on the current state of civic activity in America and in its report detailed the ways in which civic participation has declined in the United States over the past forty years (*Better Together: The Saguaro Seminar on Civic Engagement in America*, 2000). Since the mid-1960's, Americans have become less involved in civic activities such as voting, serving as an officer of a local community organization, attending school meetings, and charitable giving. (Total charitable dollars have increased, but percentage of personal income donated has decreased.)

The causes of this decline in civic activity in America during the second half of the twentieth century are primarily demographic. Putnam (1995) contends as an especially civic-minded generation of Americans aged, it was replaced by less civic-minded Baby Boomers and Baby Busters. The television boom in the 1950's and 60's, (the Saguaro report calls television "a veritable death ray for civic life") and later, the proliferation of personal computer use beginning in the 1980's, shifted entertainment away from downtown and into individual living rooms. Additionally, as increasing

¹⁸ Harvard University JFK School of Government, "*Better Together The Saguaro Seminar on Civic Engagement in America*," 2000. 4, 5.

numbers of women have entered the workforce each decade since the 1960's - thereby creating new opportunities for women - this also resulted in a drain on volunteer and community organizations which relied heavily on female leadership.¹⁹ During the economic boom of the late 1980's and through the 1990's, consumer-driven Americans spent longer hours at work, taking time away from other community activities and previous social commitments. Finally, the automobile-culture of the suburbs detracted from the previous generation's familiarity with the pedestrian-friendly town square, and neighbors found less opportunity for casual interactions, the basis for community participation.²⁰ Archibald (2004) points to our obsessive "automobile culture" as a detractor from civic life, and describes how the redevelopment of the traditional town square might breathe new life into flagging communities. What we need, says Archibald, is a sense of place.²¹

In order to reinvigorate civic culture and social capital, the Saguaro report stresses that "we will need a wholesale change in the *institutions* that structure our private, professional, social and public lives" and that "every institution must make building social capital a principle goal or core value."²² The report describes arts organizations as especially adept at building social capital due to the ways in which they bring people together to share in those aspects of culture that highlight our shared humanity. "The arts can nurture social capital by...helping communities to understand and celebrate their

¹⁹ According to a *New York Times* report, today, about 75% of women ages 25-55 are working or actively looking for work; this number is up from 40% in the late 1950's. "Women in the workplace," by Eduardo Porter, *New York Times*, March 2, 2006.

²⁰ Harvard University, "Better Together," 6.

²¹ Archibald, *The New Town Square*, 9.

²² Harvard University, "Better Together," 7.

heritage and providing a safe way to discuss and solve difficult social problems.”²³

Museums and other community organizations can work collaboratively in these community-building endeavors and, in fact, these partnerships allow for greater success in creating lasting change. Both museums and other social service organizations operate on the principle of building community, and thus share a natural affinity.²⁴

While the Saguaro report of 2000 may appear to show a dismal state of civic participation and social capital in the United States overall, localized successes present a different picture. The National Civic League presents its annual *All-American City* award to those cities that display innovative community collaborations and exemplary civic energy.²⁵ Collaboration among public, private, and nonprofit organizations seeks to solve community challenges and supports community projects. Cultural organizations can play a vital role in these community-building endeavors as community residents, local businesses and institutions, and elected officials work together to create initiatives and actions that address local concerns.

The Saguaro report’s call to all institutions to participate in the active building of social capital echoes Koster’s appeal for external relevance. Koster (2006) cautions that being relevant is not simply jumping on the current buzzword-bandwagon; a museum must be prepared to face challenging subject matters that address contemporary issues. The goal of the relevant museum is to encourage new behaviors in visitors.²⁶ However,

²³ Harvard University, “Better Together,” 29.

²⁴ AAM, *Mastering Civic Engagement*, 49.

²⁵ Past recipients of NCL’s All American City Award have gone to New Haven, CT; Ft. Wayne, IN; Lowell, MA; Lawrence, KS; Sparks, NV; Asheville, NC. Ten cities have received the honor each year since the award program’s inception in 1949. According to the program’s website, “To win, each community must demonstrate innovation, inclusiveness, civic engagement, and cross sector collaboration by describing successful efforts to address pressing local challenges.” www.allamericacityaward.com

²⁶ Koster, “The Relevant Museum,” 2.

expanded programming and attracting a larger audience are not enough to satisfy the call to community engagement. Although these efforts may result in an expanded audience base and may connect the museum with previously underserved populations, they are not necessarily civic-minded and do not exactly engage the audience or the communities in civic participation. Rather, museums must work collaboratively with other community organizations in reciprocal ways in order to utilize the assets and resources of all partners involved in the relationship.²⁷

Strategies and Sustainability

Community-focused initiatives and collaborations are the goals of socially relevant museum practice. Wood (2009) suggests seven strategies museums can employ when creating these community-based programs and initiatives. Wood advises shared discourse and shared responsibility by both museum staff and community stakeholders; ask *what does the community want? what does the community need?*; keep it local – address those issues that are important to the local populations.²⁸ These strategies echo those of Koster and Bauman (2005) who advise museum professionals to ask, *what are the human and environmental concerns of the local community?*²⁹

Sustainability is a critical factor in the future of any museum. As previously noted by Weil, large museums with massive encyclopedic collections may be able to rest in the comfort of their renowned collections for years to come. Most museums, however, must be able to demonstrate how they benefit the public and their local communities.

²⁷ AAM, *Mastering Civic Engagement*, 16.

²⁸ Carol Brown, Elizabeth Wood, and Gabriela Salgado, *Inspiring Action: Museums and Social Change* (Edinburgh, MuseumsEtc, 2009), 31-38.

²⁹ Koster, "Liberty Science Center in the United States," 86.

Koster and Falk (2007) put it bluntly; *why does the museum exist?*³⁰ Being able to answer this fundamental question is critical. Koster and Falk (2007) argue that a museum must not measure its value simply in its role as a conservator of the collection; rather, a museum's value is multi-dimensional and is comprised of the good that the organization provides to its visitors as well as its material and intellectual assets. A museum must provide benefits to the community *above and beyond* those derived from the specific collection of the institution.³¹ Museums are in the enviable position as leaders of scholarly and research-driven endeavors. As such, they can offer an "informed perspective" on a wide range of issues and provide a safe, civic space to do so.³²

The following chapter explores the role that museums can play in the economic, physical, and social regeneration of their communities.

³⁰ Emlyn Koster and John Falk, "Maximizing the External Value of Museums," *Curator* Vol. 5 No. 2 (2007)

³¹ Koster and Falk, "Maximizing the External Value of Museums," 193.

³² *Ibid*, 191.

MUSEUMS AND URBAN REGENERATION

Regeneration is not simply about bricks and mortar. It's about the physical, social and economic well being of an area; it's about the quality of life in our neighborhoods. In relation to the physical, this is as much about the quality of the public realm as it is about the buildings themselves.

– Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, United Kingdom (2001)³³

What good is this institute if it can't help my neighborhood, or my life, become better?—Anonymous 7th grader, Philadelphia (1996)³⁴

The previous chapter illustrated the current state of museum ideology as it pertains to social relevance and public service. In addition to the AAM, other professional organizations have called upon museums to engage in socially relevant activities and initiatives within their communities. But what does social relevance look like? How does a museum engage in public service? Before a museum can begin to address issues of social or economic concern, it first has to determine what issues are affecting the local community. A small community museum in rural Vermont will likely discover societal needs quite different from an urban museum in downtown Cleveland, but not necessarily. Issues of education, social inclusion, economic disenfranchisement, and teen drug use might be relevant to many communities, of all regions and demographics. But this initial research must be undertaken; communication with other

³³ Graeme Evans, "Measure for Measure: Evaluating the Evidence of Culture's Contribution to Regeneration," *Urban Studies* Vol. 2 No 5/6 (2005): 966.

³⁴ Portia Hamilton-Sperr, *Museums in the Social and Economic Life of the City* (Washington D.C., American Association of Museums, 1996), 18.

community leaders will provide museum staff with a range of issues facing the community, allowing museum leaders to ascertain which issues might best be addressed in light of the museum's own mission statement and resources. What does the community want? What does the community need? And what are the scale and scope of resources, both financial as well as human, the museum can depend upon in order to embark upon the necessary community collaborations that will be required in these endeavors? This chapter addresses these questions, which must be considered by museum stakeholders in order that possibilities for specific forms of community engagement can begin to emerge.

Impact of Cultural Organizations on Cities

While museum-community engagement can manifest in a number of ways, this paper is concerned with urban revitalization and regeneration efforts. *Regeneration* has been defined as “the transformation of a place – residential, commercial, or open space – that has displayed the symptoms of physical, social, and/or economic decline” (Evans, 2005).³⁵ Whether a city has experienced decades of economic decline due to local or regional industry shifts, inner-city drug and crime escalation, or an unexpected natural disaster leaving unforeseen widespread damage, cities across the country face problems of urban decay. Urban regeneration, in these cases, is concerned not only with economic growth and viability, but in creating a positive self-image for a city of residents who may have begun to feel the sting of years of economic and, in turn, societal disintegration. Cultural institutions, including museums, are at the center of many city revitalization

³⁵ Evans, “Measure for Measure,” 967.

programs, in part owing to the recent phenomena known as the *Bilbao Effect*, whereby large urban flagship museums have come to be seen as a driver for economic growth.³⁶ In these instances, culture itself has become a tool by which cities can become more attractive and competitive in a global marketplace.³⁷ While flagship museums are outside the scope of this paper, much has been written about the *Bilbao Effect*, and this concept that cultural organizations can act as a critical linchpin in urban revitalization efforts has become a respected position among both museum professionals and city planners.

Museums are good for cities. Apart from providing cultural attraction and contributing to a city's individual persona, that is, the *branding* of the city, museums contribute to their local and regional economies. In 1994, the National Assembly of Local Arts Agencies undertook the most comprehensive study to date on the economic impact arts organizations have on local communities. The study was conducted over three years and looked at 789 nonprofit arts organizations in 33 communities in 22 states (1990-1992). Indications of both *direct* and *indirect* economic impact were compiled, where direct impact refers to the initial fiscal impact that an arts organization has on its community in the form of supplies purchased for the construction and maintenance of the building, jobs created in the building or renovation of the building, employee salaries paid, etc. Indirect economic impact refers to increased tourism in the area due to the cultural attraction, increase in revenues among local businesses resulting from this

³⁶ The term *Bilbao Effect* refers to the economic revitalization in Bilbao, Spain, which is attributed to the construction of the Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao (1997). While the Guggenheim Bilbao has received both extensive praise as an architectural masterpiece, as well as eco-criticism regarding the resources required to operate such a facility, the Museum has, so far, succeeded as a tourist draw and economic engine for the revitalization of Bilbao, which had suffered years of economic decline. Flagship museums are created for the specific purpose of economic revitalization in a declining city or region; they depend upon a *Wow!* factor and are usually an architectural triumph, where the structure of the building itself is as much of a tourist draw as the collections inside the building.

³⁷ Steven Miles and Ronan Paddison, "Introduction: the Rise and Rise of Culture-Led Urban Regeneration," *Urban Studies* Vol. 42, No. 5/6 (2005): 833.

increased tourism, and increased property values as a result of general economic improvement. The study found evidence of local as well as national economic impact from these arts organizations. During the three years studied, the nonprofit arts industry nationally spent \$36.8 billion annually and supported 1.3 million full-time jobs in the United States. On a local level, average annual expenditures into the local economy were roughly \$63,000.00 per city or region.³⁸ In addition to the direct economic impact of expenditures into the local economy, the study found that arts organizations provide other financial benefits, in the way of personal income (salaries), job creation, and government funding to the organization and its city.³⁹

Cultural organizations are not simply *sidelines* to economic vitality, but contribute significantly to the economic lives of their communities. A more localized study conducted in 1992 by the New York-New Jersey Port Authority concluded the arts generated \$9.83 billion in revenues throughout the region, employed over 100,000 people, providing \$3.5 million in wages and \$325 million in tax revenues. In the New York-New Jersey region, these numbers depict an arts industry larger than advertising or hotel operations.⁴⁰ While most cultural organizations will not see a profit in their year-end fiscal reports, they often do serve as a springboard for profit in other sectors of the economy. Cultural organizations bring people into the city after-hours, which in turn generates revenue for restaurants, shops, and even housing developments. These indirect economic benefits are important, and most proponents of cultural organization development for urban revitalization will not claim that the arts will significantly spur the

³⁸ Jennifer Neiman, "Jobs, the arts, and the economy," *Public Management* Vol. 76, Iss. 9 (1994).

³⁹ Neiman, "Jobs, the arts, and the economy."

⁴⁰ Elizabeth Strom, "Let's Put on a Show! Performing Arts and Urban Revitalization in Newark, New Jersey," *Journal of Urban Affairs* Vol. 21, No. 4 (1999): 425.

local economy in *direct* measures, but rather that these arts organizations can very well act as a *catalyst* for greater urban revitalization (increase in real estate values, attracting new and varied businesses to the area, urban beautification projects, etc.).⁴¹

Acknowledging indirect economic and societal impacts, as well as *qualitative*, not simply quantitative, indicators of success, are critical in assessing the influence of cultural organizations on city revitalization efforts. Presenting her findings on the development of the New Jersey Performing Arts Center in Newark, Strom (1999) argues, “Quantification of economic costs and benefits...does not fully capture the impact of a cultural project intended to educate, enlighten, and change perceptions.”⁴² That is, direct economic improvement is but one piece of the urban renewal pie.

Museum-Community Relationships

Museums are good for cities, and lively cities are more likely to support a museum than are cities suffering from continued decline. The relationship between a museum and its city is symbiotic; the museum adds to the cultural and economic life of its city, but it also requires a healthy, thriving environment in order to flourish (tourists do not generally flock to destitute city blocks or neighborhoods; disenfranchised residents are generally concerned with more pressing matters than a visit to the city art museum). In addition to fulfilling a commitment to engage with their communities in socially relevant issues, museums situated in economically challenged neighborhoods will find urban renewal strategies essential to their own survival. Strom (2002) emphasizes the vested interests that art museums have in urban revitalization, not least of which is the

⁴¹ Strom, “Let’s Put on a Show,” 432.

⁴² Ibid, 432.

fundamental fact that cultural organizations need to attract their audiences to them. It is in the museum's best interest that the surrounding city area is attractive and accommodating for visitors to want to come in the first place. Additionally, museum board members are often local business owners and prominent people in the community who are invested in the life of the city. In addition to serving as board members, wealthy individuals and corporations usually direct philanthropic giving to their local hometowns; if these same individuals and corporations leave the city due to urban decline and all of the problems associated with it, cultural organizations suffer in the form of decreased contributions. Finally, when museums become a part of urban redevelopment strategies, not only do they help to ensure the economic viability of the city and of their own institutions, they can also experience even greater benefits when they are perceived as being *contributors* to the city's economic health.⁴³

Museums, certainly, cannot solve the problems associated with urban decline on their own. As was discussed in the previous chapter, collaborations are critical to the success of any community-wide effort, especially true in urban renewal projects, which often involve urban planners and city government. Randy Cohen, Vice President of Research and Information for *Americans for the Arts*, counsels, "[Cultural institutions] as a tool for economic revitalization are best when part of a mixed economic revitalization strategy. [They] are not a silver bullet. You need a broader revitalization plan. It needs to include local merchants, not just theaters or museums, but some kind of mix."⁴⁴ Cohen agrees that museums can act as a linchpin in urban renewal projects because, as the studies mentioned above show, they attract pedestrian traffic downtown and, in turn,

⁴³ Elizabeth Strom, "Converting Pork Into Porcelain: Cultural Institutions and Downtown Development," *Urban Affairs Review* Vol. 38, No. 1 (2002): 9-10.

⁴⁴ Susan Breitkopf, "Museums as Economic Engines," *Museum News* (March/April 2005).

attract retail and other businesses to the area. “Once those cultural institutions start to get a foothold, the business environment starts to grow. You see more people coming downtown.”⁴⁵ Museums can and should partner with other community leaders, such as elected officials, business leaders, religious organizations, and education leaders, and see these individuals as allies in revitalization efforts. This strategy of collaboration cannot be understated; “culture” alone cannot turn a city around, it is not a cure-all, not an economic panacea. Miles and Paddison (2005) investigate the rise of culture-led urban regeneration strategies and caution, “If cultural planning is to be a success, culture needs to mean something, but in can and should not be expected to mean everything.”⁴⁶

Urban Regeneration and Community Partnerships

When we discuss *urban regeneration*, it is the revitalization of several aspects of city life that are at stake. Urban renewal is comprised of physical, economic, as well as social regeneration. Museum participation and initiatives, as we will see in the following case studies, can occur at all three levels. Physical regeneration is concerned with adaptive reuse of vacated buildings, redevelopment of public spaces, and urban improvements through public art and architecture. Economic regeneration is concerned with increasing local property values, increasing tourist and resident spending in the surrounding area, and job creation. Finally, social regeneration is concerned with improving residents’ views of their community, decreasing crime and anti-social behavior, increasing volunteerism and civic participation, and improving the public image of the community. More is at stake than simple economic outcomes; quality-of-life

⁴⁵ Breitkopf, “Museums as Economic Engines,” 2005.

⁴⁶ Miles and Paddison, “Introduction: the Rise and Rise of Culture-Led Urban Regeneration,” 837.

issues, support for the public good, support for community heritage and identity, and social inclusion are all within the scope of urban regeneration.

While increasing tourism is often one goal of urban regeneration, it is responsibility to the city's residents that must take precedence. That is, urban regeneration projects will not succeed in those aspects of social regeneration just mentioned if all efforts are directed toward the visitor class, with the goal of merely increasing tourism. In order that local artists and indigenous communities benefit from urban revitalization and cultural development projects, the lives of those people actually living in the city neighborhoods must be at the forefront of revitalization efforts. Miles and Paddison (2005) acknowledge the significant role that culture now plays in urban policy agendas, but go on to ask, how does the use of culture as a tool in urban planning actually affect the lives of those individuals living in these communities?⁴⁷ Similarly, Plaza and Haarich (2009) assert one of the necessary conditions for success in urban regeneration efforts is engagement with the local community. Museums and other community institutions must foster a sense of ownership among local residents if the renewal projects are to realize success and sustainability.⁴⁸

"Museums in the Life of a City;" Sample Programs

American Association of Museums

The American Association of Museums piloted the *Museums in the Life of a City* initiative in Philadelphia in 1990. This three-year project was created in order to examine the most pressing issues facing the city of Philadelphia and to provide a forum in which

⁴⁷ Miles and Paddison, "Introduction: the Rise and Rise of Culture-Led Urban Regeneration," 834.

⁴⁸ Beatriz Plaza and Silke N. Haarich, "Museums for urban regeneration? Exploring conditions for their effectiveness," *Journal of Urban Regeneration and Renewal* Vol. 2/3 (2009): 266.

to discuss ways that museums might contribute to solutions to these problems. “How can museums play a larger role in the social fabric of the community?” became the starting point for representatives from across the city. Some of the issues discussed at panel discussions included drug use and crime, housing and the homeless, at-risk youth, unemployment, education, racial disenfranchisement, and ways to promote civic pride.⁴⁹ Participants in the initiative included representatives from city museums (including the Franklin Institute, Institute of Contemporary Art, Please Touch Museum, Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies), community organizations (the Boys and Girls Club of Germantown, Philadelphia Housing Authority, Freedom Theater, Parkside Community Center), and cultural institutions (Afro-American Historical and Cultural Museum, Center for Intergenerational Learning, Temple University, Free Library of Philadelphia, Philadelphia Zoo).

Beginning in 1990, representatives from participating museums met with representatives from local community and cultural groups in order to determine commonalities in organizational missions, resources, and expectations. During the course of the three-year initiative, eleven pilot partnerships were launched, resulting in a diverse scope of community collaborations and programs. For example, a collaboration between the Germantown Boys and Girls Club, the Franklin Institute, the National Society of Black Engineers, and the National Organization of Black Chemists and Chemical Engineers created the *Partnerships for Achieving Careers in Technology and Science (PACTS)* program. *PACTS* was created as a summer internship program for twenty-five African-American high school students, boys and girls, during which they gained hands-

⁴⁹ Ann Mintz, “Exploring the Possibilities,” from *Museums in the Life of a City*, 9.

on experience in science and technology labs, while connecting with African-American professionals in these fields who could serve as role models and possible career mentors. Participating students worked with the science professionals at the Franklin Institute in a series of Saturday workshops, and were then assisted in the development of their own lesson plans so that they could teach science programs to younger visitors to the Franklin Institute as well as to children at the Boys and Girls Club after-school programs. Additionally, the students visited their mentors at their workplaces in order to get a better understanding of what a career in science or technology is actually like.⁵⁰ This program, one of the eleven created out of the AAM initiative, served to address not only educational needs of African-American teenagers in the community, but fostered increased self-confidence and entrée into in a field which many of these students previously felt was unavailable to them.⁵¹

From the outset of the initiative, project director Hamilton-Sperr (1996) notes that she had been met with skepticism and condescension on the part of some Philadelphia museums during the formative stage of partnership development. Many of these museum staff members wondered why they should be asked to take on more responsibilities when the institutions were struggling to survive financially.⁵² Often, representatives from community organizations were skeptical of the intentions and dedication to two-way dialogue from museum leaders. At the completion of the three-year initiative, professional evaluators interviewed each of the museum professionals as well as the community leaders involved in the program. During summative evaluation, most

⁵⁰ Hamilton-Sperr, *Museums in the Life of a City*, 21.

⁵¹ For a complete list of all participating organizations and descriptions of the partnership programs created during the AAM initiative, please see *Museums in the Life of a City; Strategies for Community Partnerships*, AAM, 1995.

⁵² Hamilton-Sperr, *Museums in the Life of a City*, 12.

participants acknowledged that the programs had been successful but that more time was needed to develop sustainable programs and lasting partnerships. The findings of evaluators pointed to several factors that might best support museum and community service partnerships over the long term, including compatible missions of both the museum and the community service organizations, leadership involvement on both sides, and sufficient time to allow permanent relationships to develop between the organizations, which optimally would go beyond the limits of one particular project.⁵³ The following comments summarize the views of many of the museum professionals and community leaders involved with the initiative: “These partnerships require serious commitment, and the goals must be small and achievable,” and “We came to understand the scope of change, what is required to create change, how slow it is but also how little things can make a difference.”⁵⁴

Museums in the Social and Economic Life of a City was a conference sponsored by AAM in Philadelphia in 1993. The aim of the conference was to explore experiences and findings from the *Museums in the Life of a City* initiative, specifically the eleven pilot programs launched through the partnerships created. How could other cities begin to create collaborations between cultural institutions, community organizations, and social service agencies? What were the successes and challenges of the initiative? In his keynote address to the conference, Raul Yzaguirre, Executive Director, National Council of La Raza, reinforces the position that using arts and culture to revitalize communities and cities has many positive, proven effects, including an increase in community pride and identity, increase in tourist and entertainment revenues, and increased public image

⁵³ Jim Zien, “Strategies for Long-Term Partnerships,” from *Museums in the Life of a City*, 37-39.

⁵⁴ Cynthia Primas, “Museums and Communities Speak,” from *Museums in the Life of a City*, 32.

of the community. Yzaguirre applauds the work being done in cities across the United States, in which many cities, including those honored by the National Civic League's *All American Cities* program, "have used culture, museums, festivals, and the arts to renovate neighborhoods" and to revitalize decaying areas of communities.⁵⁵

One of the chief complaints during the three-year initiative related to the lack of time necessary to build strong relationships between the partnering organizations. Carmen Febo-San Miguel, President of Taller Puertorriqueno, Philadelphia, confirms the need for sustained collaborations in order for all organizations involved to be able to serve the community past the short-term of any one particular project. Museum-community collaborations are beneficial to residents because of increased access to the shared resources of all organizations involved, and this requires a commitment of time. Reflecting on the initiative, Kelly Woodland of the Franklin Institute agrees that museums cannot simply outreach to community groups only when there is available funding to launch a particular program. Instead, relationships need to be sustained over the long-term, so that museum and community communication can be ongoing.⁵⁶

Participation in community revitalization clearly requires a commitment to strategic planning and dedication of time and resources. Dedicated staff, sufficient funding, and a commitment to creating lasting partnerships with other city organizations require significant contributions from all parties involved. How is success measured in these urban regeneration efforts? Economic regeneration might appear the simplest to measure, including increased tourist revenue to the city, job creation, and increasing property values. Physical regeneration might also appear a straightforward measure;

⁵⁵ Raul Yzaguirre, "Keynote Address," from *Museums in the Social and Economic Life of a City*, 9.

⁵⁶ Hamilton-Sperr, *Museums in the Social and Economic Life of a City*, 11-12.

renovation and reuse of dilapidated buildings, beautification of public spaces, and increase in public art throughout the city. Social regeneration is harder to gauge in the short-term and often requires more qualitative measures of success. Decreasing crime rates and increasing graduation rates are both measured quantitatively but may take years before a positive pattern begins to emerge. An increase in volunteerism and civic participation, as well as an increase in community identity and pride may require qualitative and perhaps anecdotal evidence and should not be expected to be evident right away. Each of these indicators requires an allowance of time before an initiative or program can be fairly measured.

Pittsburgh Cultural Trust

During the twenty-five years since its founding in 1984, evidence of positive impacts made by The Pittsburgh Cultural Trust have been documented both quantitatively and qualitatively. The Cultural Trust began with a mission to “Improve the quality of life in Pittsburgh by developing performing and visual arts facilities in a formerly ruined fourteen-square-block downtown area.” In the early 1980’s, this area of the city was a blighted district. The Trust’s plan was three-fold: purchase property in the area, establish arts and entertainment facilities in order to attract broader commercial interest and development, and develop supplementary facilities, such as parks and public spaces. According to Carol Brown, then Director of the Trust, “The economic benefits have been substantial”⁵⁷ (1996).

⁵⁷ Hamilton-Sperr, *Museums in the Social and Economic Life of a City*, 41.

Today, the Trust sponsors a (free) quarterly *Gallery Crawl in the Cultural District*, which includes not only gallery shows, but also free classes in the Trust Arts Education Center, live music performances, public art installations, free dance lessons, and video screenings.⁵⁸ The Trust is actively involved in real estate development in the downtown Pittsburgh area, including residential as well as commercial development. Façade restoration, outdoor murals, redevelopment of Riverfront Park, and outdoor art installations are all part of the Trust's physical regeneration program. Educational programs, internships, workshops for young artists and writers, and summer camps are sponsored by the Trust. Economic, social, and physical regeneration are ongoing commitments of the Trust, which continues its mission to bring residents as well as tourists into an area of downtown Pittsburgh that was, before the Trust's establishment in the early 1980's, a blighted district of urban decay. The city of Pittsburgh has spent several decades in urban regeneration efforts and has a strong cultural alliance, in addition to the Cultural Trust, as part of its urban renewal strategy.

To further demonstrate how current methodologies in social relevance and urban revitalization have realized practical application, the following chapters will explore three Massachusetts museums and their participation in urban revitalization efforts with community engagement: The Revolving Museum in Lowell, the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art in North Adams, and the Springfield Museums in Springfield. Each museum has taken unique and community-specific approaches to the physical, economic, and social regeneration of its community. Imbedded in each museum's mission and

⁵⁸ See the Trust's website, <http://www.pgharts.org> for detailed information on all programs and services offered.

implementation of programs is the concern for external relevance and a dedication to answering the question posed by Koster, *why does the museum exist?*

THE REVOLVING MUSEUM: CREATING A SENSE OF PLACE IN LOWELL, MASSACHUSETTS

Lowell has a rich story to share. After the decline of the textile industry and a generation of stagnation, Lowell entered a period of renewal and renaissance in the late 1970's that continues today. Its revitalization was neither accident nor coincidence, but the result of an active coordinated effort by federal, state, local, nonprofit and private stakeholders to reinvent the city.

– U.S. Representative Niki Tsongas (2010)⁵⁹

Our vision creates bridges and strategies that help civic leaders understand how culture can have an impact on urban revitalization. – The Revolving Museum⁶⁰

A Brief History of Lowell

The Revolving Museum is located in Lowell, Massachusetts, thirty miles northwest of Boston. Since the late 1970's, the city of Lowell has undertaken a concerted effort to revitalize this nineteenth-century industrial mill city into a postindustrial urban and cultural enclave. Lowell bears the distinction of being the first planned urban industrial city in America; a group of entrepreneurs and investors, the *Boston Associates*, led by Francis Cabot Lowell for whom the city was named, envisioned a planned industrial city that would integrate textile mills with residential housing as well as commercial businesses. Lowell, unlike the mill cities of England during the early Industrial Revolution, was to be an “enlightened” city, free of the plagues of social ills,

⁵⁹ Dennis Shaughnessey, “Lowell takes spotlight at city renewal forum,” *Lowell Sun*, June 18, 2010.

⁶⁰ The Revolving Museum, <http://www.revolvingmuseum.org>.

crime, and lack of moral integrity that so characterized living conditions in similar communities across the Atlantic.⁶¹ Hydropower from the Merrimack and Concord Rivers was used to power Lowell's textile mills, with the city's first mill opening in 1823. By 1850, Lowell was the second largest city in Massachusetts and the largest industrial city in the country. However, in the early twentieth century, the textile industry began its decline due to the overall deindustrialization of America, and, by 1940, 40% of the city's residents, who had relied on the textile industry as their primary source of employment, were on some sort of public assistance. In 1958, the last large mill closed, and, with it, the industrial economy of Lowell disappeared.⁶²

Urban decline spread throughout the city in the early to mid-1900's. The years 1920-1960 saw severe economic depression in the city, which led to an epidemic of dismal self-image among city residents. One popular nickname for the city at that time was "Low Hell;" another popular derogatory joke was, "The last one to leave Lowell, please turn out the lights."⁶³ The city was suffering from economic and social disintegration. However, while the economy of Lowell eroded, the physical infrastructure, for the most part, was spared. Unlike the fate of some other mill cities, like North Adams to the west and Manchester, New Hampshire to the north, most of Lowell's mill buildings, historic canals and falls, cobblestone streets, and historic architecture were left standing; however the physical decay of many buildings became an issue as the decades progressed. The city continued to suffer urban decline through the

⁶¹ Douglas DeNatale, "Federal and Neighborhood Notions of Place: Conflicts of Interest in Lowell, Massachusetts," in *Conserving Culture: A New Discourse on Heritage*, ed. Mary Hufford (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

⁶² National Park Service, "Lowell National Historic Park: 30 Years of Preservation and Innovation for Future Generations" (2008).

⁶³ DeNatale, "Federal and Neighborhood Notions of Place,"

1960's and 1970's, with abandoned mill buildings, crumbling infrastructure, high foreclosure and crime rates, and high unemployment plaguing the city. In 1976, Lowell suffered from the highest unemployment rate in the state of Massachusetts, at 13%.⁶⁴

The Era of Urban Regeneration

The turnaround point came in 1978 when the city received a \$40 million grant from the federal government for the creation of Lowell National Historic Park, the first U. S. National Park comprised of an urban landscape. This move saw the birth of urban revitalization plans and partnerships in the city, as well as the establishment by Congress of the Lowell Historic Preservation Commission.⁶⁵ That Lowell's urban revitalization efforts were founded on historic preservation has proven to be the foundation for this city's success in its innovative urban renewal initiatives. In looking to re-create a positive identity among city residents as well as project that identity to the rest of the nation, Patrick Morgan, one of the early founders of the 1970's revitalization efforts, observed that the city must build itself back up upon its own unique history:

*We found out that, as someone said, 'people that had no past have no future.' ... We had to look into what our composition was, what our city was, and find out if there was any positive thread on which they could give a decent future and a decent chance to our kids ... We found out that Lowell was a living exhibit on the processes and consequences of the American industrial revolution. What we were was a very important part of the story of the United States. So we had no reason to consider our background and what we were as negative. We had every reason to look at it as positive.*⁶⁶

⁶⁴ National Park Service, "Lowell National Historic Park: 30 Years of Preservation and Innovation for Future Generations" (2008) <http://www.nps.gov/lowe/index.htm>.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ DeNatale, "Federal and Neighborhood Notions of Place," 61.

In 2003, the Urban Land Institute issued a report on the state of Lowell's urban regeneration progress as well as recommendations for future endeavors to that end. The report applauded the collaboration of city leaders, public and private leaders in business, and cultural and community organizations in Lowell's urban revitalization efforts, observing, "The city's successful downtown revitalization efforts are the envy of other mill towns."⁶⁷ The report also commented on the strength of city residents' civic participation efforts,⁶⁸ citing "Lowell's civic community has succeeded in building a foundation for attracting people to the downtown through the construction of cultural and sports facilities and the creation of a very attractive historic downtown area."⁶⁹

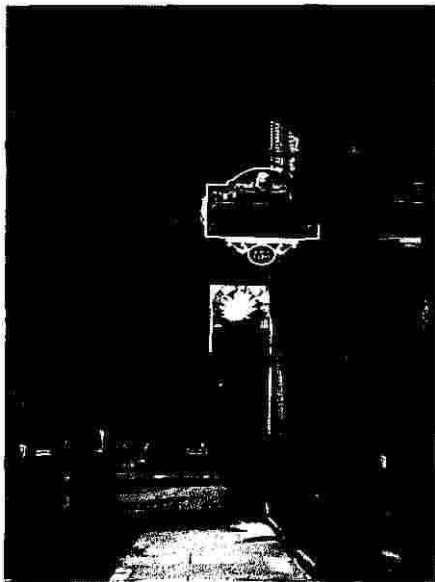


Fig 1: Merrimack Street, Lowell, 2010.



Fig 2: Adaptive re-use of textile mill buildings into renovated apartments, Lowell downtown district, 2010.

⁶⁷ Urban Land Institute, "Report on Lowell, Massachusetts," (2003), 10.

⁶⁸ Lowell was a winner of the 1999 *All American Cities* award discussed in *Chapter 2*.

⁶⁹ ULI, "Report on Lowell, Mass.," 16.

The Revolving Museum: "Making Space for Art and Community"

The participation of cultural organizations in Lowell's revitalization has been a critical component in this creation of sense of place in this city. Downtown Lowell today is a charming historic district filled with cobbled streets, street lamps, historic architecture, and public art installations. The city is proud of the preservation of its historic architecture, but more recent public art and beautification projects also help to create a distinct sense of identity here. The Revolving Museum (TRM) was founded in 1984 by artist Jerry Beck with his creation of "The Little Train that Could...Show" public art installation. Using twelve abandoned rail cars in Boston, Beck launched The Revolving Museum as "a nomadic institution dedicated to transforming abandoned and/or under-utilized public spaces into innovative community arts projects."⁷⁰ Beck's goals were to foster civic dialogue through the use of art, and to engage with the community in socially and environmentally relevant issues. From its early years in Boston, The Revolving Museum received recognition as a pioneer in working with Boston youth and promoting public art throughout the city. From 1984-2002, TRM operated out of a rent-free space in Boston; however, redevelopment of that area forced Beck to leave the space and find a new home. The city of Lowell offered the empty Lowell Gas and Light Building at 22 Shattuck Street, and TRM moved into the space and into the Lowell community in 2002. Since 2009, the Museum has been located within the Western Avenue Studios, a renovated mill building just outside the downtown district.

⁷⁰ The Revolving Museum website, <http://www.revolvingmuseum.org>.

Although Archibald (2004) does not discuss urban revitalization *per se*, he does point repeatedly to the fundamental need of communities to make a concerted effort to re-create a sense of place; missing, he says, since the suburbanization that began its sweep across America during the middle of the twentieth century. The Revolving Museum's dedication to public art and community participation in this art aims to anchor Lowell around these installations. The Museum has initiated or supported numerous public art projects since its inception; in fact, the creation and display of public art is at the heart of the museum's mission.⁷¹ In downtown Lowell, the *Merrimack Street Mural*, a 150-foot mural project that changes annually, is designed and created by Lowell teens involved with the Museum's art education program, who are "encouraged to collaborate to create images with positive messages addressing issues of drug abuse, teen pregnancy, domestic violence, racism, and the need to stay in school."⁷²



Fig 3: *Big Head* at The Revolving Museum
Photos courtesy of The Revolving Museum



Fig 4: construction of Harmony Park mural

⁷¹ TRM's mission statement: "The Revolving Museum is an evolving laboratory of creative expression for people of all backgrounds, ages, and abilities who seek to experience the transformative power of art. Through public art, exhibitions, and educational programs we promote artistic exploration and appreciation, encourage community participation and growth, and provide opportunities for individual empowerment and collective change."

⁷² The Revolving Museum website, <http://www.revolvingmuseum.org>.

In 2006, the Museum sponsored *Visionary Village*, a series of public art projects depicting the past, present, and future of the city of Lowell, highlighting themes of industry, the growth of the city, and ethnic pride. The Museum describes this series as “An illuminated landscape of historic architecture, public artworks, gardens, parks, and unique public spaces, [where] visitors are able to experience Lowell as a thriving, safe, and attractive center of public art, history, and community festivals.”⁷³ Additionally, the Museum’s iconic *Big Head* sculpture stands outside the entrance to the Western Avenue Studios and is decorated bi-annually by local artists and Museum art students, based on a topical theme. On Market and Merrimack Streets downtown, storefront window installations also serve to add an artistic presence to the city and are highlighted in the city’s annual *ArtWalk Lowell* event.

In addition to public art installations, The Revolving Museum has worked to develop projects with local artists and residents in other facets of urban revitalization. In 2004, *Building Vision: Industry and Art in Downtown Lowell* teamed local artists and teenagers in order to come up with creative ways to contribute to the economic and social revitalization of Lowell. One of the projects created during this series of workshops was called *Canoe Tours, Incorporated*, in which participating students artfully painted canoes and led guided tours through the historic canals of Lowell. This summer-long project garnered much attention throughout the city and promoted a clean-up of these historic waterways.⁷⁴

⁷³ The Revolving Museum website, <http://www.revolvingmuseum.org>.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

ARTventures

The Revolving Museum is a striking example of what a cultural institution can do to strengthen a community. Under Beck's leadership, the Museum has woven its work into the fabric of Lowell with a range of ... exhibitions ... and programs that stimulate community dialogue .. Jerry and The Revolving Museum have played an important role in making Lowell the vital city it is today.

– Mary Kelly, Massachusetts Cultural Council (2007)⁷⁵

In 2007, The Revolving Museum, led by Director Jerry Beck, created *ARTventures*, a series of public art and urban revitalization projects designed to transform abandoned buildings and underused public spaces into “provocative and highly enjoyable spaces” around Lowell. This collaboration of local businesses, city officials, and nonprofit organizations created the largest public art and urban revitalization project ever undertaken in New England.⁷⁶ The goals of the initiative focused on Beck’s desire to create and display “public art works that [would] comment on both Lowell’s storied history and on some of the major influential dynamics of 21st century American society,” as well as to produce urban beautification projects that would revitalize and enhance public access to and interest in these sites. Additionally, the series of art installations was intended to promote civic dialogue and increase community pride throughout the city. These art projects, including large-scale video projected on the city’s smokestacks along the Merrimack River, outdoor exhibitions, performances, and films, were installed at several key locations around Lowell, including the Lowell National Historic Park

⁷⁵ The Revolving Museum, “Revolving Museum Wins Commonwealth Award for Exceptional Achievements in Arts and Culture,” press release February 2007. <http://www.revolvingmuseum.org>

⁷⁶ <http://www.lowellartventures.org>.

Gateway, Mack Plaza, along French Street, at Lucy Larcom Park, along the Riverwalk, as well as mobile art at several moveable locations.

The Museum collaborated with several businesses and organizations in the Lowell area during the development process of *ARTventures*, including the Cultural Organization of Lowell, the Greater Merrimack Valley Convention and Visitors Bureau, Lowell National Historic Park, University of Massachusetts Lowell, as well as city hospitals, schools, neighborhood associations, local businesses, and individual donors. Over one thousand local artists, scientists, community members and civic leaders participated in the creation of the *ARTventures* series. In discussing his motivation for the project, Beck proposes, “Can art change a neighborhood? We’re trying to push the envelope.”⁷⁷ The founder/director underscored the importance of strong collaboration with the community in proposing any city-wide project, and he believed that inviting community residents to participate in the museum’s projects was critical for authenticity and sustainability: collaboration not only with community residents, but with city government as well. The City of Lowell has a history of dedicated collaboration with cultural organizations and has been a strong proponent of utilizing the influence of art in city life. The city seal of Lowell reads, “Art is the Handmaid of Human Good.”⁷⁸ Beck’s appreciation for the importance of collaboration with a variety of leaders from the public, private, and nonprofit sectors echoes those same observations made here earlier by Cohen (2005), Miles and Paddison, (2005), and Plaza and Haarich (2009) in that one of the necessary conditions for success in urban regeneration efforts is engagement with the local community.

⁷⁷ David Weber, “Lowell Museum Wants to be Agent of Change,” *Boston.com*, December 20, 2006.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

Following the May-October run of *ARTventures*, The Revolving Museum was named a winner of the Massachusetts 2007 Commonwealth Award in the Community category. The museum's dedication to community engagement, and physical and social regeneration of the city of Lowell, were thus recognized statewide.

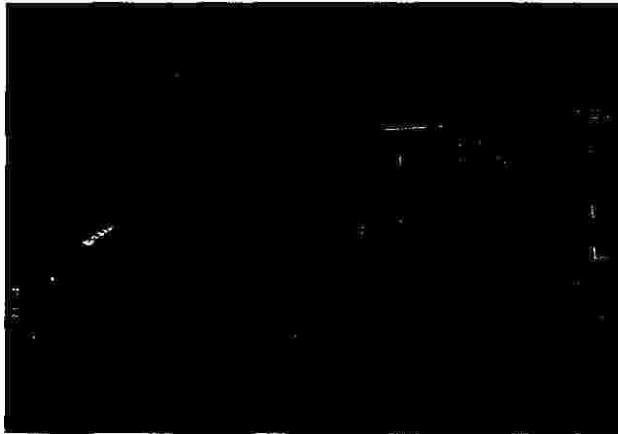


Fig 5: The Water Dragon, created by local artist Jay W. Hungate for the ARTventure series.
Fig 6: Opening festivities for ARTventures, with video projection on smokestack behind The Water Dragon and drummers. Photos courtesy of Ellen Lyons, Assistant Director Brush Art Gallery and Studios

Harmony Park

In 2008, The Revolving Museum “adopted” one of Lowell’s ninety city parks, called Harmony Park, located in The Acre neighborhood of the city. The park had become neglected, suffered from crumbling walls and tables, and was plagued with illegal activity.⁷⁹ The museum received \$30,000 in federal and local grants to renovate the park, with plans to build a temporary sculpture, a mosaic installation, carved wooden benches, and video and light shows. Neighborhood residents, including a number of

⁷⁹ Kathleen Pierce, “Revolving Museum’s Goal: Restoring Harmony to Rundown City Park,” *Lowell Sun*, August 1, 2008.

children and teenagers, were recruited to participate in the renovation effort, painting benches in bright colors and helping to create an open-air sculpture. Local artists known to TRM staff carved a ten-foot wooden sculpture as well as a performance area and wall mural. Said Beck, “What’s important to me is building relationships with people. It’s the people. It’s their neighborhood.”⁸⁰

Today, Harmony Park is a thriving public space, and is host to an annual spring festival. The Revolving Museum hosted the fourth annual Harmony Park Community Celebration in May 2010, which included dance, music, artists, and food from local ethnic and cultural communities. One of the founding tenets of TRM is that community members should be directly involved in the museum’s projects and initiatives. Community members, especially the youth of Lowell, take an active role in the planning and creation of these public art projects. L. Z. Nunn, Director of the Cultural Organization of Lowell, declares the museum “has mastered the art of gathering ideas from a host of community members, cultural leaders, and individual artists to produce something that bubbles with energy.”⁸¹ Still active in creating and maintaining city-wide partnerships, the Museum received funding from local banks, the University of Massachusetts Lowell, the City of Lowell, and local businesses for the Harmony Park annual festival.

Urban Land Institute Report on Lowell

The Urban Land Institute, a nonprofit research and education organization with a mission to “provide leadership in the responsible use of land and in creating and

⁸⁰ Pierce, “Revolving Museum’s Goal.”

⁸¹ Doreen Manning, “On the Move with the Revolving Museum,” *Public Art Review*, Spring/Summer 2008.

sustaining thriving communities worldwide,⁸² conducted a study in 2003 on the unique history of Lowell and provided recommendations for directions for future growth. In researching Lowell's urban regeneration initiatives since the late 1970's, the panel remarked on the size and scope of Lowell's "network of concerned and involved citizens." The panel was impressed by the depth and commitment of organizations dedicated to improving quality of life factors in Lowell. Throughout the interview process with city residents, it became clear to ULI research staff that Lowell's success in its urban regeneration strategies was the result of this depth of civic involvement.⁸³ The report confirms the position of Archibald (2004) that the active creation of a unique sense of place is a critical factor in creating and sustaining thriving communities, and that public art installations are an important element in this endeavor.

As part of the ULI report's marketing strategy for the city of Lowell, several arts-related recommendations were offered: (1) offer monthly art walks through the downtown district, with maps at selected locations, and invite museums and galleries to remain open during these designated times (along with restaurants and shops); (2) use empty storefronts as temporary art exhibition spaces where local and student artists can display their work; and (3) install temporary art installations throughout the city, utilize vacant mills as art spaces, and hold a juried show once or twice a year.⁸⁴ Since this report was issued in 2003, the city has instituted its annual summer event, *ArtWalk Lowell*, in which maps provide the locations of storefront window art installations throughout the downtown district, as well as a ballot where participants on the art walk can vote for their

⁸² Urban Land Institute, <http://www.uli.org>

⁸³ ULI, "Report on Lowell, Mass.," 19.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 26-27.

favorite artist and installation. Students of The Revolving Museum's art school have submitted work to the *ArtWalk* exhibition, and the museum has installed additional art works in storefront windows throughout the downtown district. The city of Lowell has also taken the report's recommendation to utilize vacant mills as artist's studios, and in fact The Revolving Museum has recently moved into one such facility at the Western Avenue Studios. Finally, TRM is continually involved with the installation of temporary art sculpture throughout the city, and installs new sculptures on a regular basis.⁸⁵

The Impact of Culture in Lowell

Whether initiating public art projects, renovating public spaces, or involving student artists in issues of social relevance, the Revolving Museum's goals have continued to focus on civic participation, community building, and urban renewal. Executive Director Diane Testa continues to lead the museum with a commitment to community-building and urban revitalization. Testa agrees that maintaining ongoing relationships with other cultural and nonprofit organizations throughout the city is fundamental to the success of the Museum's projects and exhibitions. The University of Massachusetts Lowell, Merrimack Community College, Lowell public schools, charter schools, nonprofit and other cultural organizations, and the Cultural Organization of Lowell all serve as potential partners when the development and implementation of new endeavors spring forth. Commonalities in project themes as well as the ability to garner funding for the proposed project both play a role when creating partnerships on specific

⁸⁵ Diane Testa, Director of TRM, informed this author that the city of Lowell offers temporary art permits for six months, but that as yet there is no permanent public art policy on record. After the six-month permit period is up, the installation has to come down.

initiatives.⁸⁶ Says the Museum's website, "Our vision creates bridges and strategies that help civic leaders understand how culture can have an impact on urban revitalization." In Lowell, the city itself shares the belief that art, *the Handmaid of Human Good*, belongs at the forefront of city life. The collaboration has been a successful example for other cities to follow; in June 2010, Lowell hosted the Innovative Cities Conference and was applauded for its best practices in urban development.

North Adams lies across the state from Lowell, in the northwestern corner of Massachusetts. While the cities have similar histories as prosperous mill towns during the early Industrial Revolution and both suffered decades of economic decline as industry and market shifts eroded the factory base, the routes to urban revitalization bear little resemblance to one another. In the next chapter, the economic and social regeneration of North Adams and the creation of the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art to spur this regeneration will be examined.

⁸⁶ Personal interview between Diane Testa and this author, July 3, 2010.

MASS MoCA: ECONOMIC ENGINE IN NORTH ADAMS, MASSACHUSETTS

Across America, cities that once struggled economically are reinventing and rebuilding themselves by investing in art and culture – a proven catalyst for growth and economic prosperity. By creating cultural hubs, nonprofit arts businesses help cities define themselves, draw tourists, and attract investment. Federal support for America's nonprofit cultural organizations must go on if we hope to continue enjoying the substantial benefits they bring.

– Louise M. Slaughter, U.S. House of Representatives (NY) Co-Chair,
Congressional Arts Caucus (2007)⁸⁷

The arts create and bestow community identity. A strong identity rallies confidence, hope, productivity, pride, and economic vibrancy.

– Mass MoCA mission statement⁸⁸

North Adams; a New England Mill Town



Fig 7: The Arnold Print Works Mill, N. Adams.



Fig 8: Sprague Electric moved in to the empty Arnold Print Works site in 1942. Photos courtesy of *Windowstohistorynorthadams*

⁸⁷ Americans for the Arts, “Art and Economic Prosperity III: The Economic Impact of Nonprofit Arts and Culture Organizations and Their Audiences,” (2007).

⁸⁸ <http://www.massmoca.org>.

North Adams is situated in the northwestern corner of Massachusetts, in Berkshire County. Like Lowell in the northeastern part of the state, North Adams has a history as an industrial city, sprung up along the banks of the Hoosic River in the nineteenth century as a prosperous mill town during America's Industrial Revolution. The story of North Adams' economic decline and attempts at urban renewal, however, is quite different from the dedication to historic preservation that revitalized the city of Lowell starting in the late 1970's. North Adams suffered not only economic decline due to the overall deindustrialization of America and changes in New England's industries in the early twentieth century, but suffered perhaps greater destruction during early attempts at urban renewal which involved widespread razing of the city's infrastructure and unique history. These early attempts at urban renewal in the late 1960's and 1970's created additional strains on an already declining community. The motivations, therefore, behind the founding of The Revolving Museum in Lowell and the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (Mass MoCA) in North Adams have emerged from far different places. Mass MoCA was conceived as a plan *specifically* to bring art and tourism to this neglected corner of the Berkshires and act as a catalyst for economic growth in the flagging postindustrial city. Mass MoCA's economic and societal impact on North Adams, in both direct and indirect measures, will be discussed below.

North Adams emerged during the Industrial Revolution as a New England mill town, active in textile, shoemaking, print works and tanning industries. Zukin (1995) has chronicled the history of North Adams and its rise and fall as an industrial New England town. The Hoosic River provided steam power to support the varied mill operations in North Adams, and a critical rail stop between Albany and Boston, made possible once the

21-year, \$21-million project to build the Hoosac Tunnel was completed in 1876, brought industry and residents to this corner of Berkshire County. The town was prosperous during the years 1860-1880, and saw its population peak in 1900 as the largest city in the Berkshires, with 24,200 residents. Like Lowell to the east, North Adams suffered economically as the deindustrialization of America and, specifically, New England, caused changes in industry and manufacturing in the early twentieth century. Falling prices in textiles and shoes in the 1920's, as well as lingering effects of the Great Depression, forced many factories across New England to close.⁸⁹

The economy of North Adams stagnated for a period, but experienced a second wave of prosperity in the 1930's with the appearance of the electronics industry. During the World War II years, electronics companies utilized empty mills for a new industry suited to the city's experienced factory workers. One of North Adams' largest early employers, Arnold Print Works, closed its doors in 1942 and later that year, Sprague Electric Company moved into the empty factory to the site that is now occupied by Mass MoCA.⁹⁰ During the 1940's and 50's, Sprague manufactured several electronic devices, including television components and flight control devices for the Air Force. At its peak in the 1950's, Sprague employed 4,000 workers in a city of 18,000. Eventual decline in sales led to downsizing at the factory and that number fell to 1,800 employees in 1979, when Sprague was sold to General Electric Company. During the early 1980's, what remained of Sprague-G.E. suffered further layoffs, four other manufacturing plants in the city closed, and thousands of workers lost their jobs. As the manufacturing base of the city evaporated, a service economy rose in its place, although the erosion of jobs caused

⁸⁹ Sharon Zukin and Philip Kasinitz, "A Museum in the Berkshires," in *The Culture of Cities*, S. Zukin (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishing, 1995), 85.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 86.

many town residents to move away. By 1990, the population of North Adams had declined from its height of 24,200 in 1900, to 16,797. Those who could find jobs in the service sector of the economy found that the largest employer of North Adams' residents had become Williams College in the neighboring town of Williamstown, North Adams Regional Hospital, and North Adams State College (now renamed the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts.)⁹¹

While North Adams was experiencing prosperity as an industrial town in the late 1800's and early 1900's, the rest of Berkshire County had become a retreat for wealthy elite from Boston and New York City. The bucolic region of western Massachusetts had become a summertime haven, complete with music festivals, theater, and art. Even during its prosperous years of industry, North Adams remained just that: an industrial town nestled in the Berkshires, surrounded by the summer enclaves of wealthy Bostonians and New Yorkers, but without any of the cultural cache of its neighboring communities. Writers such as Melville, Hawthorne, and Wharton had homes in the Berkshires. Summer "cottages" rivaled those in Bar Harbor, Maine and Newport, Rhode Island. After the Depression, the Berkshires saw a new wave of tourists – the middle class, interested in modern music and dance, seeking organized cultural attractions and summertime amusement. The formation of Tanglewood in 1937, summer home of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the Williamstown Theater Festival in the 1950's, and the Clark Art Institute, a small Impressionist museum, as well as the promotion of fall foliage season "antiquing," all served as cultural attraction to this new class of tourist.⁹²

However, while the rest of the Berkshires experienced increasing cache as a cultural

⁹¹ Zukin and Kasinitz, "A Museum in the Berkshires," 86.

⁹² Ibid, 88.

haven, North Adams remained a blue-collar town, politically and socially more conservative than the liberal and wealthy tourist and resident populations of Berkshire County in general.⁹³

Urban Renewal?

North Adams didn't change until they started tearing it down. It was the government's idea to tear it down. They paid for the urban renewal. People were upset. Most of the merchants went out of business. Some of the buildings should have stayed there, they were so beautiful. We used to go down there and watch them tear it down. They gave us the idea that it was going to be built up again, and that it was going to be wonderful.

–North Adams resident Venice Partenope⁹⁴

It was sickening to watch them tear down the buildings when they had the urban renewal. The whole south side of Main Street went kaput. There was three hotels; the Richmond, the Wellington, and the Sterling. There was very little blasting. It was all wrecking ball. It went on day after day, summer and winter. It took a couple of years, then everything was gone. People just stood out there and watched. You'd feel it inside. It was tearing something apart.

–North Adams resident, Lou Siciliano⁹⁵

In the 1960's, early attempts at urban renewal took the form of physical demolition of the city. Many of North Adams' structures and historic buildings were razed in attempts at modernization. The historic center of the city was bulldozed, including City Hall, as well as the Phoenix and Wellington Hotels. AK-mart was built

⁹³ Zukin and Kasinitz, "A Museum in the Berkshires," 89.

⁹⁴ Stephen Sheppard, Kay Oehler, and Blair Benjamin, "Mill Town, Factory Town, Cultural Economic Engine: North Adams in Context." Center for Creative Community Development (2006), 13.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 13.

on one of the razed sites in 1979. A shopping plaza named Heritage State Park was built in 1980 with state funding, but by the early 1990's, most of the artsy shops in the plaza had gone bankrupt and were vacated. A hotel built in 1980 remained vacant after 1986.⁹⁶

Although initially presented as a positive step towards revitalization, many residents saw this series of urban renewal projects as the literal destruction, on top of economic destruction, of their city. As the government-funded razing of the city continued, many local businesses left and never returned.⁹⁷ The economic impact of this "urban renewal" was disastrous for North Adams. And while the city eroded physically, economic erosion continued with the final closings of Sprague in North Adams in 1985, and General Electric in nearby Pittsfield around the same time, resulting in the loss of 3,600 jobs. 2,000 additional jobs were lost as the last of North Adams' textile mills closed.⁹⁸ By 1985, unemployment in the city was 14%, in sharp contrast to the boom of the high-tech dominated "Massachusetts Miracle" economic upswing of that decade.⁹⁹ According to U.S. Census Bureau data in 2000, North Adams was the poorest city in the region, with the highest percentage of household income below the poverty line. Stephen Sheppard, from the Center for Creative Community Development in nearby Williamstown acknowledges, "It [was] a community with significant poverty, as well as other social problems associated with post-industrial decline."¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Zukin and Kasinitz, "A Museum in the Berkshires," 89.

⁹⁷ These early urban renewal projects were funded in part by monies granted through the United States Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Act of 1968. During this era, municipalities would apply to HUD for federal monies to redevelop flagging neighborhoods. The HUD grants provided 75% of the project's financing (local communities and/or the State had to provide the remaining 25%) and "urban renewal" at this time often meant complete razing of entire city blocks. Per email correspondence with Kay Oehler, Center for Creative Community Development. August 2, 2010.

⁹⁸ Sheppard et al, "Mill Town, Factory Town," 15.

⁹⁹ Zukin and Kasinitz, "A Museum in the Berkshires," 84.

¹⁰⁰ Sheppard et al, "Mill Town, Factory Town," 15.



*Fig 9: Hunter Machine Demolition. 1960's urban renewal razing of Main Street, North Adams. Photo courtesy of *The North Adams Transcript* and Joe Manning.*

MassMoCA

In 1986, Thomas R. Krens, Director of Williams College Museum of Art in neighboring Williamstown, conceived an idea to bring a cultural institution to the flagging city of North Adams and, with it, to spur a tourist economy and redress issues of economic decline that had so plagued the city. This contrasts with the cultural revitalization occurring in Lowell, in which The Revolving Museum joined the Lowell community during that city's ongoing cultural and historic preservation renaissance. Motivations behind the founding of The Revolving Museum involved the use of public art, and community participation in that art, to knit a fabric of positive community identity throughout the city. The Revolving Museum thus grew out of one artist's desire to utilize public spaces to address issues of social relevance in the community. The

Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (Mass MoCA), however, was conceived and created *specifically* as a vehicle for economic regeneration.

During the course of the project's development and fundraising, two successive plans emerged, although both were built upon the belief that a cultural institution could positively impact a flagging economy "without demanding too much government support" as in more traditional economic relief/stimulus plans (Zukin, 1995).¹⁰¹ Krens' intentions for North Adams were to redevelop abandoned buildings and blighted property in the city's downtown district; to create a tourist industry, which had severely escaped North Adams; and to create jobs both in the Museum as well as in related tourist attractions such as local restaurants, shops, and hotels. In 1988 Krens became Director of the Guggenheim Museum in New York City, and continued to push for the Mass MoCA project, with the Guggenheim named as an operating partner. This first plan would create a sort of satellite branch of the Guggenheim in the Berkshires and also serve as a warehouse to store much of the Guggenheim's collection. The plan was to make Mass MoCA the largest contemporary art museum in the country.

This first plan eventually fell apart, as state government support waivered during the financial crisis that erupted in Massachusetts following the mid-1980's "Massachusetts Miracle" period of steady growth. As funding by the state could no longer be guaranteed, Massachusetts constituents seemed to lose interest in backing what the press began to refer to as simply a *warehouse of conceptual art* in the Berkshires. Finally, local artists did not feel that a Guggenheim satellite museum/storage facility would benefit them in any way. Local input into the plan was minimal. Without critical

¹⁰¹ Zukin and Kasinitz, "A Museum in the Berkshires," 80.

local support, and with cuts in state funding as well as an inability to raise necessary private funding, the proposed Mass MoCA plan required a major overhaul.¹⁰²

After the initial Guggenheim-backed plan fell apart, the second plan gained momentum in 1994, as the Museum's new Director, Joseph Thompson more thoroughly integrated the needs of the local community and created collaborations with local arts organizations.¹⁰³ The new Mass MoCA would be run by an operating consortium of arts agencies, located both in the Berkshires as well as across the country. Zukin (1995) observes the community-centered focus of the new plan, in which the goal was "to make an art center that is relevant to year-round residents of the Berkshires and build on the existing summer cultural economy of Berkshire County."¹⁰⁴ This new plan included the creation of studio and living space for local artists, who would hold teaching workshops onsite, as well as collaborate with local musicians and performers in museum-sponsored events.

As discussed above in *Chapter 1*, Wood (2009) advises any museum wishing to engage in collaborations with the community to ask *what does the community want? What does the community need?* as well as to address those issues that are important to local populations. The first Mass MoCA plan did not successfully integrate the needs of local artists or other local organizations into its proposal. The second plan, however, created collaborations between Mass MoCA and other local organizations, including Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, and the North Adams Collection, an artist-founded local museum. Collaborations with the Clark Art Institute and the Williams College Museum

¹⁰² Zukin and Kasinitz, "A Museum in the Berkshires," 97.

¹⁰³ Sheppard et al, "Mill town, Factory Town," 21.

¹⁰⁴ Zukin and Kasinitz, "A Museum in the Berkshires," 100.

of Art, both in Williamstown, would soon follow. The new Governor of Massachusetts, William Weld, was convinced of the value of the proposed Museum, and public and private funding was successfully realized. Renovations for the reuse of the old Sprague site began in 1995, and Mass MoCA opened to the public on May 30, 1999.



Fig 10: Mass MoCA, located at the former Sprague site. Fig 11: Main Street, North Adams, 2010

Measuring the Economic Impact of Mass MoCA on North Adams

The Center for Creative Community Development, a research and evaluation venture between Williams College and Mass MoCA, produced a series of reports on Mass MoCA and its social and economic impact on the local region in 2006-2007. But how much impact can an art museum expect to make on a beleaguered postindustrial city? As noted in *Chapter 2*, Americans for the Arts Vice President Randy Cohen (2005) cautions against the expectation that a cultural institution act as a silver bullet, and advises that involvement of cultural institutions in economic revitalization must be part of a broader plan. Similarly, Miles and Paddison (2005) agree that culture has to mean *something*, but that it mustn't be expected to mean *everything*. How, then, has Mass MoCA positively impacted its local community, and what other local organizations have

become part of the North Adams revitalization plan? C3D conducted a series of reports with the purpose “to analyze and discuss the results of North Adams’ attempt to regenerate itself by collaborating with the development of a major new cultural arts organization, Mass MoCA.”¹⁰⁵ A detailed explanation of the research and evaluation methods used by C3D is outside the scope of this paper, as are input/output analyses of economic indicators. For our purposes, it is sufficient to state that C3D used industry-standard indicators to measure direct and indirect effects of Mass MoCA on the local economy (Berkshire County).¹⁰⁶ C3D’s findings present overall positive economic and social improvements in North Adams since 1999, the year Mass MoCA opened.

In *Chapter 3*, direct and indirect measures of economic impact were elucidated; those terms will not be redefined here. The C3D study found that for 2002, Mass MoCA created \$9.4 million for the local economy, where \$5,619,128 came from direct economic impact, \$1,924,215 from indirect economic impact, and \$1,888,238 came from *induced* economic impact.¹⁰⁷ The study also examined non-local visitor impact on the economy, and found that in 2002, the 120,000 visitors to the Museum contributed an additional \$4,761,370 to the local (county) economy.¹⁰⁸ The total local economic impact of Mass MoCA (Mass MoCA direct/indirect/induced impact+ visitor impact) was therefore \$14,172,950 in 2002.

¹⁰⁵ Sheppard et al, “Mill town, Factory Town,” 2.

¹⁰⁶ For a complete description of the analysis used in calculating data for its report, please read Stephen Sheppard et al “Culture and Revitalization: The Economic Effects of Mass MoCA on its Community,” Center for Creative Community Development (2006) in its entirety.

¹⁰⁷ *Induced impact* refers to the spending habits of “new employees and the increased household income due to the direct and indirect spending of the company.” Stephen Sheppard, Kay Oehler, Blair Benjamin, and Ari Kessler, “Culture and Revitalization: The Economic Effects of Mass MoCA on its Community,” Center for Creative Community Development (2006), 10.

¹⁰⁸ *Americans for the Arts* conducted a national study of 40,000 museum-goers and found that average spending per non-local visitor to a museum was \$38.05 (food, souvenirs, transportation, lodging...) This average spending per person was multiplied by Mass MoCA’s annual attendance for 2002, based on IRS form 990 information, in order to arrive at the total dollar amount shown.

The C3D study also investigated which sectors of the local economy have most benefitted from the Museum’s presence in North Adams. The findings presented below indicate that it is not merely other cultural institutions or even restaurants and retail establishments that have reaped financial benefit from the inclusion of the Museum in the local landscape. Direct, indirect, and induced economic impacts of Mass MoCA reach more sectors of the economy than one might initially imagine:

Top Five Sectors Benefitting from the Impact of Mass MoCA on the Local Economy¹⁰⁹

	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
Direct	Museums \$5,619,128	Restaurants/Bars \$1,431,199	Hotels/Motels \$738,317	Transit \$543,325	Retail \$241,432
Indirect	Educational Services \$1,069,916	Real Estate \$259,733	Computer Services \$67,537	Commercial Printing \$63,137	Wholesale Trade \$58,231
Induced	Housing \$350,579	Hospitals \$249,844	Restaurants/Bars \$175,740	Doctors/Dentists \$169,592	Real Estate \$147,400

Fig 12

In addition to direct/indirect/induced economic impact, non-local visitor economic impact, and benefits to a wide variety of economic sectors, Mass MoCA benefits the local economy by stimulating increased tax revenues. While the Museum itself is exempt from federal income taxes (as a nonprofit 501c3 organization), it provides approximately \$2.2 million annually in state, local, and federal tax revenues in the form of personal income tax on employee salaries, excise tax, social security tax, increased property tax base as a result of increased residential land values, and other state and local

¹⁰⁹ Data from Sheppard et al, “Culture and Revitalization,” 12.

taxes.¹¹⁰ Increases in annual hotel tax revenues have seen an enormous leap since the years before Mass MoCA opened. In 1993, a mere \$743 was collected in hotel taxes from the sole hotel in North Adams. In 1999, when the Museum opened, hotel tax collections reached \$13,351. In 2001, The Porches Inn, a string of renovated Victorian row houses, opened across the street from the Museum and \$17,405 was collected that year in hotel taxes. In 2002, total hotel tax collections in the city were \$29,423. During this same time frame, neighboring towns (Pittsfield, Williamstown, Lenox) saw only modest hotel tax collection increases.¹¹¹

Finally, employment data from the U.S. Census Bureau shows that post-Mass MoCA, North Adams has experienced more new business openings and has higher rates of employment and higher average employee salaries. The following table summarizes these findings:

New Business Growth and Increased Employment Opportunities in North Adams since Mass MoCA (1999)¹¹²

	1995-1998	1999-2001
Number of businesses in N. Adams, average per year	401	445
Number of employees in N. Adams, average per year	5,173	5,428
Employee salary in N. Adams, average per year	\$24,991	\$27,114

Fig 13

¹¹⁰ Sheppard et al, "Culture and Revitalization," 13.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 22.

¹¹² Data from Sheppard et al, "Culture and Revitalization," 20.

Indeed, all findings from the C3D report point to an economically improved landscape in North Adams as a result of the establishment of this cultural institution. According to the report's conclusion, "The North Adams business community became broader and more diverse in the years following the opening of Mass MoCA."¹¹³ The goals of the museum set out to redress economic disintegration in this postindustrial city and to reuse blighted property and buildings for the advancement of the community. North Adams Mayor John Barrett III (who served as the city's mayor from 1984-2009), professed that the Museum "exceeded my wildest expectations... I tell new people coming in, you don't know how bad it was. In 1996, *Yankee Magazine* described North Adams as a sorry gateway to anywhere. That same magazine, five years later, [called] us one of the five hidden jewels... Are we better off than we were ten or twenty years ago? Yes. And Mass MoCA's been the catalyst."¹¹⁴

Impact of Mass MoCA on Social and Community Life

Improvements in a city's social infrastructure, such as parks, playgrounds, pleasant walking areas, recreational facilities, educational opportunities, and cultural variety are kinds of investments that would enhance the urban environment in a generally beneficial way. To the extent that these things lift human spirits and generate local pride, they may have more directly measurable benefits such as higher productivity and reduced crime and social tension... [T]he comfort of knowing that when out-of-town guests arrive, there are places of interest to take them [can be a source of local pride.]—Bruce Seaman (1997)¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Sheppard et al, "Culture and Revitalization," 21.

¹¹⁴ Geoff Edgers, "Mayor has seen it all, including the museum effect," *The Boston Globe*, May 31, 2009.

¹¹⁵ Bruce A. Seaman, "Arts impact studies: A fashionable excess," in *Economic Impact of the Arts: A Sourcebook*. Washington D.C. National Conference of State Legislatures (1997).

What does it mean to say that a community is “more desirable?” What makes a community a more desirable place to live? In addition to the economic climate of a community, those aspects of social life described above by Seaman (1997) have tremendous impact on creating desirability in a city. The C3D reports of 2006-2007 examined not only the economic impact of Mass MoCA on the community of North Adams as well as all of Berkshire County, but also examined the ways in which the Museum was actively involved in social regeneration of the local community.

During the mid-late 1980’s, North Adams had the unfortunate distinction of having the highest teenage pregnancy rate per capita in the state, high school dropout rates five times the state average, and the highest unemployment rate in the state, between 25-30%.¹¹⁶ These figures, combined with a downtown that had been partially demolished and left blighted and under-occupied, created a problematic social landscape in the community.¹¹⁷ While a single art museum alone cannot ameliorate decades of societal ills, the C3D study did find several ways in which Mass MoCA has actively worked to address these needs of its local residents. Mass MoCA is heavily linked with other “central organizations” in the North Adams community, above and beyond collaborations with other arts organizations, including elementary schools, the Clark Art Institute, Contemporary Artists Center, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, the United Way, North Adams Public Library, North Berkshire Community Coalition, Williams College,

¹¹⁶ Stephen Sheppard, Kay Oehler, Blair Benjamin, and Laurence Dworkin, “Network Analysis and the Social Impact of Cultural Arts Organizations,” Center for Creative Community Development (2007), 3.

¹¹⁷ “Starting in 1968, residents witnessed a devastating urban renewal program that wiped out most of its commercial and residential blocks downtown, many of them historic landmarks. Old-timers stood on street corners with their grandchildren and watched as buildings disappeared into dust; buildings these old-timers probably watched being built, stone by stone, with *their* grandfathers. Sadly, city officials were unable to deliver on the promise of new development. For many years, the south side of Main Street was in the words of one resident: “The most depressing place I’d ever been in... a big, dirty parking lot.” From Joe Manning, *Disappearing into North Adams*. Flatiron Press. 2001.

Williamstown Theater and Film Festivals, Inkberry Literary Arts Center, and the towns of Williamstown and North Adams. These organizations represent not only the Arts sector, but Education, Social Services, Leisure, and Public sectors as well. In addition to direct linkages between the Museum and these other community organizations, Mass MoCA acts as a potential coalition builder in that it can link members of these organizations to each other. In this way, Mass MoCA acts as a catalyst for community building.¹¹⁸

Museum-school collaborations are a critical component of museum programming and community engagement. The Education department at Mass MoCA has partnered with two local art museums, the Clark Art Institute and the Williams College Museum of Art, to reach over 10,000 local public school children per year. The three-museum program, called *Three Museum Semester*, serves every North Adams public school student from pre-Kindergarten through eighth grade, as well as students from the North Berkshire County region. During the course of the school year, students participate in programs at each of the three museums, as well as the creative studio *Kidspace*, located in the Mass MoCA facility. In this way, the Museum extends its commitment to community participation by providing enrichment programming to the city's youth population.

During the summer 2010, Mass MoCA will host two multi-event festivals on its thirteen-acre campus. In July, the Museum will host the ninth annual *Bang on a Can* contemporary music festival. This two-week festival is a forum for new music, public performances, recitals, lectures, workshops and music seminars. *PBS Newshour* reported

¹¹⁸ Sheppard et al, "Network Analysis and the Social Impact of Cultural Arts Organizations," 14.

“If *Tanglewood*—classical music’s far better known summer festival, just thirty miles down the road – is the bastion of tradition, *Banglewood* – as the folks here like to call this gathering – is home to the experimental, with everything from a contemporary duet to a Balinese monkey chant.”¹¹⁹ *Bang on a Can* is a nonprofit organization based in San Francisco, which began as a one-day festival and has grown into a national, multi-faceted organization. Following *Bang on a Can*, the Museum is sponsoring the *Solid Sound Festival* in August, a three-day music event in which 6,000 visitors are expected to attend, providing a healthy boost to the local summer economy. Multi-faceted events such as these serve to create a sense of vibrant, contemporary culture, which translates to an increase in the desirability factor mentioned above by Seaman, as well as adding to the economic vitality of this city.

On a rainy Saturday morning in July, this author enjoyed breakfast and conversation with Mark Petrino, owner of Petrino’s Café on Main Street in North Adams. Petrino has seen a marked improvement in business in just the past two years, and he owes the increasing vibrancy of downtown North Adams to the Museum’s presence. Says Petrino, “If it weren’t for Mass MoCA, I wouldn’t even be open today.” Indeed, the city seems to have reclaimed an identity lost during the demolition era of the 1970’s. According to author and historian Joe Manning, North Adams was a city that for many years identified itself through its existence as a mill town. Arnold Print Works dominated the economic and, to a certain extent, social landscape for four decades. When it closed, Sprague Electric took over the mill complex and was the city’s largest employer for an additional four decades. These manufacturing corporations put North

¹¹⁹ The Berkshire Beat, “July 14-July 31 marks 9th Annual Bang on a Can Festival of Contemporary Music at Mass MoCA,” July 13, 2010. www.theberkshirebeat.com.

Adams *on the map*; the final closing of Sprague in 1985 not only depleted the community of 4,000 jobs, but of an identity as well.¹²⁰

Mass MoCA has, according to Manning, reinvigorated North Adams with a new identity as an artist's Mecca; currently thirty-seven art venues occupy the downtown district, attracting tourists as well as extensive media coverage. The city enjoys a predominantly positive profile in the media and local residents on the whole welcome the attention. During the first half of the twentieth century, a child growing up in North Adams would generally look to the mills as his/her own certain future; now, with the influence of national and international attention focusing not only on the contemporary art exhibited inside Mass MoCA's facilities but on the entire town of North Adams as well, children growing up today can "see over the mountain."¹²¹ They are aware that possibilities beyond North Adams exist. Manning, a local man-about-town, observes a spiritual improvement in the community, although he admits this sort of revitalization is difficult to measure and certainly not everyone in town feels that the museum is necessarily *for them*. Second and third-generation low-wage earners in town do not tend to frequent the Museum, although the Museum does offer many social events unrelated to its art exhibitions (dance nights, outdoor movie screenings, popular music concerts). Perhaps no cultural institution can make itself relevant to all people; Manning does observe that monthly Main Street art events are well visited by thousands of residents. The Museum's social impact on the town appears to revolve around the creation of a renewed sense of community identity and local pride. Even for those residents who do

¹²⁰ Per telephone conversation between Joe Manning and this author, August 28, 2010.

¹²¹ Joe Manning refers to the Berkshire Mountains which dominate the landscape.

not frequent the Museum personally, the positive image of their city and the subsequent improvement in social cohesion is a boon community-wide.

A Unique and Community-Driven Mission

Part of Mass MoCA's mission, in addition to supporting the creation of new art, is "to leverage the arts as a catalyst for community revitalization: the creation of new markets, good jobs and the long-term enrichment of a region in economic need are all part of our driving purpose... The arts create and bestow community identity. A strong identity rallies confidence, hope, productivity, pride, and economic vibrancy."¹²² Mass MoCA was born from these fundamental ideals, and continues to strive to meet the needs of its community a decade later. In addition to the typical attractions, exhibitions, and programs listed at the Mass MoCA website, visitors to the site will find a link entitled "Real Estate/Find Your Dream Home." This portion of the Museum's website extols the beauty and attraction of living in the North Adams and North Berkshire County region, and provides links to local real estate agencies and home sale listings. Mass MoCA asks, "Why not buy the home of your dreams in the North Berkshires?" Far from being a warehouse for another museum's collection, nor as simply a satellite museum tucked away in the far corner of the Berkshires, Mass MoCA continues to inspire local and non-local visitor alike not only with its large scale contemporary art installations, but with a commitment to economic and community revitalization for those who live in the vicinity of this historic mill complex.

¹²² From Mass MoCA's mission statement. <http://www.massmoca.org>.

The following chapter will examine the city of Springfield, Massachusetts and that city's dedicated efforts to the physical revitalization of its downtown corridor. In addition to the physical redevelopment of Springfield's downtown district, the Springfield Museums' initiatives towards the cultivation of social capital and community engagement are observed as critical components of the social revitalization of the city.

**THE SPRINGFIELD MUSEUMS:
INVIGORATING COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION
AND INCREASING SOCIAL CAPITAL**

Scholars, government officials, leaders of nongovernmental organizations including the World Bank, the United Nations and business practitioners have increasingly recognized the essential contribution of social capital to the economic and social health of...regions, cities, and towns, to the success of organizations, and to individual accomplishment and well-being. [Studies] show the positive effects of social capital, the ways that people in relationship can reach goals that would have been far beyond the grasp of individuals in isolation.

- Robert Putnam (2003)¹²³

If 'culture' defines shared space, common ground, intersecting experience and memories, then culture is what creates community. And this is the purpose of museums... We exist to reinforce culture, build community, and define common ground; to facilitate community discussions about our burdens and our legacies and how to discern the difference, and to consider what we have done and what we can do better.

- Robert Archibald (2004)¹²⁴

Springfield: "City of Homes"

In 1886, both Lowell and North Adams were experiencing the economic booms that characterized those cities' golden years of the Industrial Revolution. Meanwhile, Springfield was proudly celebrating the 250th anniversary of its founding. By 1886, this

¹²³ Robert Putnam, *Better Together: Restoring the American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003), 2.

¹²⁴ Robert R. Archibald, *The New Town Square: Museums and Communities in Transition* (Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press, 2004), 172.

city in Massachusetts' Pioneer Valley had already enjoyed over two hundred years as a prosperous colonial community, with historic ties to George Washington and the Revolutionary War. In fact, the history of Springfield dates long before residents there took up the colonial fight to gain independence from England. Springfield figured prominently in King Phillip's War of 1675-76, in which over half of the town was destroyed. Following the war, Springfield was rebuilt and alongside neighboring towns of Longmeadow and West Springfield, grew into prosperity. A century after King Phillip's War had destroyed much of the town, General George Washington personally selected Springfield as the site for the first U. S. federal armory in 1794. After 174 years of service to the United States military as the leading manufacturer of small arms weaponry in the world, the Armory was closed by the Pentagon in 1968 is now home to Springfield Technical Community College as well as the Springfield Armory Museum.¹²⁵

Springfield was dubbed *The City of Homes* in the late nineteenth century, due to the proliferation of grand Victorian homes in the community. Glazier, travelling through Springfield on horseback in 1899, observed, "Springfield today is a thriving city of about 50,000. Someone, I think, has called it the 'city of homes.' Its streets are broad and well shaded by elms and maples; many of its residences are detached, and as a whole it bears

¹²⁵ The Springfield Armory was established by an act of Congress in 1794. After the second federal armory at Harper's Ferry was destroyed during the Civil War, it remained the sole manufacturer of weapons for the United States until the twentieth century. The first musket manufactured in the United States was produced in Springfield in 1795; production began at 245 muskets the first year, increasing to 1,000 per day during the Civil War. In 1820, while employed at the Armory, Thomas Blanchard invented a lathe that allowed for mass-production of variable sized rifle stocks. This lathe, first introduced at the Springfield Armory, revolutionized the manufacturing process of weaponry and allowed for a more cost-effective means of mass production. Blanchard's lathe resulted in a highly competitive edge in weapons manufacturing, whereby the Springfield Armory, and thus, the United States, became the leading manufacturer of small arms weaponry in the world well into the twentieth century. Mason A. Green, *Springfield 1638-1888; History of Town and City* (Place of publication unknown: Chas. A. Nichols and Co, 1888), 356. David Stephen Heidler, Jeanne T. Heidler, *Encyclopedia of the American Civil War; a political, social, and military history* (New York: Norton and Company, 2000), 1844.

the stamp of taste and refinement.”¹²⁶ By the early twentieth century, the city was actively cultivating a community of culture and prosperity at this intersection of the Pioneer Valley, the Connecticut River, and the gateway to the Berkshires. In 1896, the George Walter Vincent Smith Art Museum was the first to open in the city. The Art Museum was soon followed by the openings of the Springfield Science Museum in 1899, the Connecticut Valley Historical Museum in 1927, and the Michele and Donald D’Amour Museum of Fine Arts in 1933. Surrounded by the grand architectural structures of City Hall, the Public Library and the Springfield Armory campus, the Museums have been an integral component of Springfield’s aesthetic and cultural environment for the last century.

As will be discussed below, the city of Springfield has experienced a decline in economic prosperity as well as vigorous civic engagement over the past several decades. While the city has suffered from a high degree of negative public perception since the late twentieth century, this has not always been the case. The city has enjoyed roughly three centuries of positive public image. In 1886, during the three-day festivities that marked the 250th anniversary of the founding of the city, Massachusetts Governor George D. Robinson addressed the multitudes in attendance when he remarked,

Massachusetts would fail to express the force of her presence if she did not recognize her obligation to be here, and to express her full, cordial, and abundant salutation to Springfield... What shall be written of the next two hundred and fifty years? We shall not be here to witness their close... Though we may not be present, Springfield will be here... The present is all we can touch, and doing our duty properly in the present hour, seeing to it that we set as high an appreciation

¹²⁶ Captain Willard Glazier, *Ocean to Ocean on Horseback; being the story of a tour in the saddle from the Atlantic to the Pacific* (Philadelphia: Edgewood Publishing Company, 1899), 102.

*on private and public virtue as our fathers did; regarding personal character as of the highest importance in the estimate of citizenship...*¹²⁷

This call to citizenship, what might today be termed *civic engagement*, was noted by Governor Robinson as critical to the early successes of the city. The following section will examine how this same call to civic engagement, as well as the building of social capital, may be key to the current revitalization of Springfield. Later in this chapter, the Springfield Museums and their role in the cultivation of community engagement will be illustrated.



Fig 14: The Springfield Armory, Byers Street Gate. Photo courtesy of Springfield Photograph Collection, Lyman and Merrie Wood Museum of Springfield History.

¹²⁷ Green, *Springfield 1638-1888*, 557.

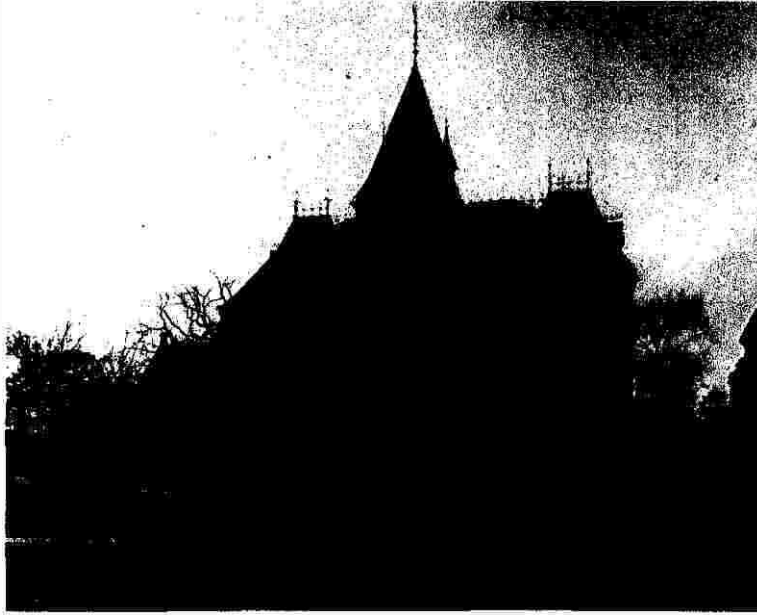


Fig 15: Springfield Public Library, 1871. Photo courtesy of Springfield Photograph Collection, Lyman and Merrie Wood Museum of Springfield History.

Social Capital

Putnam (2003) examines organizations and associations across the country dedicated to cultivating social capital and restoring community life. The concept of *social capital* has been described in a number of ways and does not have a singular, interdisciplinary definition, although Putnam's quotation at the beginning of this chapter alludes to the general qualities of the term. According to Claridge (2004), "The commonalities of most definitions of social capital are that they focus on social relations that have productive benefits."¹²⁸

Halpern (2005) has examined the numerous ways in which social capital impacts upon individual, community, and national life. The scale and scope of social cohesion within a community affect economic vitality, educational success, as well as personal

¹²⁸ T. Claridge, "Social Capital and Natural Resource Management", Unpublished Thesis, University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia (2004). From Social Capital Research, <http://www.socialcapitalresearch.com/definition.html>.

health and well-being. Healthy levels of social capital manifest economically by way of the sharing of information.¹²⁹ Halpern explains that the flow of information is “strongly affected by the size and character of social networks” and when social capital is lacking, this critical component of a healthy economy evaporates.¹³⁰ In postindustrial society, healthy economies depend upon the exchange of information; however when social capital, social networking, and social cohesiveness are weak, an information void results. Unemployed individuals are, in a colloquial sense, out of the loop, without access to vital information that might lead to new opportunities, which in turn triggers prolonged unemployment.

Buck (2001) shows that when overall unemployment in a community exceeds 25%, the chances of an individual rising out of poverty decreases drastically.¹³¹ The rate of joblessness in a region to some extent thus dictates an individual’s particular chances at gaining employment. The condition appears cyclical; poor social cohesiveness leads to an information void, which in turn limits employment opportunities for the individual. As the cycle intensifies, and joblessness rates in the region increase, opportunities for any individual in the community to improve his economic status are compromised. Poor social capital affects not only an individual’s opportunities for economic success, but further limits opportunities for the entire community. While the unemployment rate in Springfield has nowhere reached Buck’s critical marker of 25%, during the first half of 2010, unemployment in the Springfield region has hovered between 9.8 % and 11.5%,

¹²⁹ Also see Alvin Toffler, *The Third Wave*, which explores the “Information Age” that characterizes post-industrial society.

¹³⁰ David Halpern, *Social Capital* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 43.

¹³¹ Halpern, *Social Capital*, 51.

while the national average during this same time period has been 9.5%-9.9%.¹³² What is important to note from Buck's findings is the relationship between weak social networking, personal unemployment, and regional unemployment rates.¹³³ The cycle becomes, according to Halpern, "self-reinforcing."

Further problematizing the effects of poor social capital, low socio-economic status of a community negatively affects individual educational outcomes in children. Ainsworth (2002) has shown not only that "neighborhood characteristics predict educational outcomes, but that the strength of these effects rival those associated with more commonly cited family and school factors."¹³⁴ Findings from the aforementioned sources have been included here in order to illustrate the range of social and economic ills that can result from weak social capital. A critical component of urban revitalization, therefore, is the dedication of appreciable resources to the building of social capital in order to support a healthy socioeconomic environment. Civic organizations, neighborhood associations, religious groups, and cultural institutions traditionally aim to support this strengthening of social cohesion.

The remainder of this chapter will examine recent urban revitalization initiatives in Springfield, a city endeavoring to reverse its image as a crime-ridden city of urban blight.¹³⁵ High crime rates and an underutilized downtown district, negative public image, and one of the most depressed economies in the state have taken a toll on this city

¹³² United States Department of Labor. *Bureau of Labor Statistics*, "Economy at a Glance," Regional and U.S. unemployment data. http://www.bls.gov/eag/eag.ma_springfield_mn.htm.

¹³³ According to U.S. Census Bureau data for 1999, median household income in Massachusetts was \$50,502, while median household income for Springfield was \$30,417, with 23.1% of city residents below the poverty line. <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/25/2567000.html>.

¹³⁴ Halpern, *Social Capital*, 155.

¹³⁵ In 2008, Springfield was named in the Forhes.com list of the 10 "Fastest Dying Cities."

over the past several decades.¹³⁶ As occurred in Lowell and North Adams, Springfield's economic downturn was due primarily to shifts in manufacturing, as well as a decline in the local industry base as many factories in the city closed or left New England entirely. As illustrated above by Halpern and Buck, a depressed economic climate often leads to a weakening of social capital in the community. Halpern and Putnam have demonstrated the increases in personal and community health, well-being, education and civic involvement, as well as decreases in crime and anti-social behavior, which result from strong social capital. It is the arena of social revitalization where the Springfield Museums are active in regeneration efforts of the state's third largest city. However, as has been demonstrated earlier in this thesis, a museum's participation in urban revitalization efforts must be part of a broader plan. Physical redevelopment of a blighted downtown corridor was a critical precursor to supporting the Museums' ability to reach an expanded audience.

State Street Corridor Redevelopment

In *Chapter 2*, this thesis examined the symbiotic relationship between museums and communities. Museums are beneficial for cities because they contribute to the local economy as well as provide cultural attraction and promote the branding of the city. Likewise, lively cities are beneficial for museums as they provide a welcoming atmosphere for the museumgoer. Blighted downtown districts, crumbling buildings and infrastructure, and poor sidewalks and street lighting are neither pedestrian-friendly nor

¹³⁶ Citizens' Housing and Planning Association, and Massachusetts Association of Community Development Corporations, "The State of the Cities; Revitalization Strategies for Smaller Cities in Massachusetts," (2006), 37. This study reported that Springfield has one of the most depressed economies in the state, and is plagued by a high crime rate.

create a positive sense of place. In order for a museum to flourish in a flagging urban environment, physical revitalization of the surrounding area is prerequisite. However, the museum can play a vital role in encouraging pedestrian traffic downtown once safety issues have been addressed, and can act as a catalyst for creating a positive sense of place in the recovering physical and social landscape. As will be illustrated below, physical revitalization of central Springfield was absolutely necessary in order to create a more pedestrian-friendly and lively downtown environment, as well as a qualification for increasing museum attendance.¹³⁷

In 2006, the Urban Land Institute presented its suggestions for Springfield's revitalization efforts in a report entitled *Springfield, Massachusetts: Strategies for a Sustainable City*. The report notes that the city has suffered with a high-crime reputation for many years, although in fact crime rates have decreased over recent years (from 2005 to 2006 alone, the crime rate decreased 7%); when compared to other cities of similar size, Springfield actually has one of the *lower* national crime rates.¹³⁸ In light of these findings, the ULI report stresses the need for a concerted effort devoted to changing the public's perception of the city and restoring a positive public image. In addition to the perception that Springfield has an unusually high crime rate, members of the ULI panel were surprised to discover that many local retail and business owners held predominantly negative views of the city in general.¹³⁹ Both issues indicate a negative perception of

¹³⁷ Since the start of the State Street redevelopment project in 2008 and the opening of the Museum of Springfield History in 2009, attendance at all Quad Museums has increased an average of 30%. From Jack Flynn, "Civic Leaders See Lower State Street Corridor in Springfield Turning Corner," *The Republican*, January 9, 2010. http://www.masslive.com/news/index.ssf/2010/01/civic_leaders_see_lower_state.html.

¹³⁸ Urban Land Institute, "Springfield, Massachusetts: Strategies for a Sustainable City," (2006), 24.

¹³⁹ ULI, "Springfield, Massachusetts: Strategies for a Sustainable City," 14.

Springfield that is not necessarily based in statistical fact, and suggest the importance of a dedicated effort towards the rebranding of the city's image.

Regarding crime rates and even the perception of ubiquitous criminal activity, neighborhoods with depleted social capital tend to have higher average levels in both arenas. According to Halpern, in neighborhoods where residents are less likely to interact with and trust one another, turnover rates among residents are high and there is a lack of attachment to place, social cohesion and therefore social capital, is low. Evidence from several studies points to a causal role between social cohesion and neighborhood crime levels.¹⁴⁰ It therefore behooves policymakers to endorse and support those organizations and associations that aim to strengthen community relations and support social capital. Of course, legitimate data and measurable indicators are critical in determining what actually works to increase social capital and what might be considered statistically negligible. Effective research and evaluation tools continue to evolve, and many national and international statistics agencies are involved in the process to determine which efforts aimed at increasing social capital impact significantly and which do not.¹⁴¹

The ULI report's guiding suggestions to city leaders focus on the cultivation of civic participation, civic pride, and corporate philanthropy in Springfield in order for the city to become "vibrant and sustainable."¹⁴² These suggestions echo those made in 2000 by the John F. Kennedy School of Government's report, *Better Together: The Saguardo*

¹⁴⁰ Halpern, *Social Capital*, 124.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 287. However, quantitative data is not the only legitimate measure of success; findings from localized studies on the effects of individual programs are often used as a springboard for more widespread application, as in the *Museums in the Life of a City* report published by the AMA. Museums wishing to expand roles in their own communities often look to those programs that have already noted success as a blueprint or launching pad.

¹⁴² ULI, "Springfield, Massachusetts: Strategies for a Sustainable City," 8.

Seminar on Civic Engagement in America (see *Chapter 1*). Participation by the private and business sectors, in addition to the public sector (*i.e.* city and local government), is an integral component to cultivating community vitality. The ULI report stresses, “Government cannot be responsible for all things. Many more of its citizens must commit to stand up and help Springfield move forward. Such improvement requires public/private partnerships that reflect the city’s diversity.”¹⁴³ In addition to civic participation and these public/private partnerships, cultural events aid in the creation of community identity and strengthen urban revitalization: “Festivals and celebrations help create a sense of community, generate significant economic activity, and build a city’s reputation for diversity and livability.”¹⁴⁴

Several of the city’s major institutions are located along the State Street Corridor, including the Springfield Museums, the City Library, the Federal Courthouse, and the Springfield Armory National Historic Site. In 2008, the State Street Alliance, a local affiliation of business, community, and government groups, commissioned a study on the redevelopment of the State Street Corridor. The *State Street Roadway Improvement Project*, which began that same year, constituted a \$13 million plan dedicated to the physical revitalization of the city’s central commercial corridor. Physical improvements dedicated to creating a more pedestrian-friendly and welcoming downtown district included the installation of new sidewalks and streetlights, landscaping and streetscaping, the creation of more accessible parking, and safety improvements dedicated to bicyclists

¹⁴³ ULI, “Springfield, Massachusetts: Strategies for a Sustainable City,” 12.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

and pedestrians.¹⁴⁵ As was detailed in the ULI report, this downtown corridor was in a state of physical deterioration with vacant buildings, crumbling structures, poor sidewalks, and suffered from a negative image across the region. According to the *State Street Corridor Redevelopment Plan*, “The State Street Roadway Improvement Project is intended to improve the physical condition and the appearance of State Street and will be an important initial step toward mitigating negative perceptions and enhancing the street’s revitalization potential.”¹⁴⁶ The associated benefits of physical revitalization on community vitality have been discussed previously in this thesis (*Chapter 2*); mitigating the physical deterioration of the State Street Corridor was a critical primary step in creating a more welcoming environment downtown.



Fig 16: The Quadrangle in Springfield *Fig 17: Dr. Seuss National Memorial Sculpture Garden*
Photos courtesy of The Springfield Museums, Springfield, Massachusetts.

¹⁴⁵ The State Street Roadway Improvement Project was funded by the Federal Highway Administration, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and the City of Springfield. *State Street Corridor Redevelopment Plan*, (2008), 1.

¹⁴⁶ *The State Street Corridor Redevelopment Plan*, commissioned by the State Street Alliance (2008), 4.

The Springfield Museums

The Springfield Museums are comprised of five museums as well as an outdoor sculpture garden. The original four museums include The George Walter Vincent Smith Art Museum, the Springfield Science Museum, the Connecticut Valley Historical Museum and the Michele and Donald D'Amour Museum of Fine Arts. The Museum of Springfield History opened in 2009. Additionally, the Museum Association is home to the Dr. Seuss National Memorial Sculpture Garden, which opened to wide acclaim in 2002 (attracting 10,000 visitors during its opening weekend¹⁴⁷). The State Street redevelopment project has been a major component of revitalization efforts in the city, and the Museum Association (all five museums operate under the same umbrella organization, although several departments remain distinct to each institution) has contributed to the redevelopment project through the Museum of Springfield History's 2010 exhibition, *The State Street Corridor Project: Road to Renewal*.

The exhibition tells the story of the historic roadway between Boston and New York, its Revolutionary War origins, as well as the grand opening of the new Federal Courthouse. On display are historic State Street photographs alongside recent photos depicting the effects of the revitalization project. Connecticut Congressman Richard E. Neal attended the exhibition's opening reception, proudly stating, "From St. Michael's Cemetery, to the banks of the Connecticut River, the transformation of this important and historic urban boulevard is nearing completion. This exciting revitalization project celebrates our own unique past, but also makes a significant investment in Springfield's

¹⁴⁷ Per telephone conversation with Kay Simpson, Vice President of Springfield Museums, August 13, 2010.

future.”¹⁴⁸ Springfield Mayor Domenic J. Sarno attested to the value of illustrating the noteworthy, unique history of the city, reminding “Sometimes we lose sight that Springfield is rich in history in the birth of our nation and democracy.”¹⁴⁹ The Museum’s role in portraying a valuable shared history serves to define a common identity within the community. According to Archibald, it is this perception of a “common ground” that is the basis for healthy civic engagement and democracy. Not only does the exhibition chronicle the progress of the State Street redevelopment program, but it serves as a remembrance of the city’s past. Archibald (2004) notes the role remembrance plays in the creation of collective identity, calling it not only “a nostalgic look back, but rather an affirmation of who we are....Remembering further insists that those values that provided valid guideposts for human life in the past and the present will be equally valid in the future.”¹⁵⁰

Museums are in a notable position to support community-building endeavors and strengthen social cohesion, as they historically have been places of social gathering, celebration of heritage, and informal learning. The ULI report on Springfield was resolute about the need to build a strong civic base among city residents and to increase civic participation and pride. Museum education and museum-school collaborations have been, for several decades, dedicated to object-based, socially-mediated, and free-choice learning.¹⁵¹ In 2010, the new History Museum of Springfield collaborated with 11th graders from the Springfield Renaissance School to produce an exhibition entitled

¹⁴⁸ “Exhibit Traces the History of State Street,” City of Springfield, Massachusetts webpage. <http://www.springfieldcityhall.com>

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Archibald, *The New Town Square*, 54.

¹⁵¹ Regarding *free-choice learning*, Barry Lord, editor of *The Manual of Museum Learning* (2007) described this museum-friendly learning process as one in which “Visitors remain stubbornly free to take from the exhibit what they choose.”

Freedom Through Their Eyes. This student-developed and designed exhibition examines the Civil Rights Movement in Springfield and is told through the voices of local residents who were personally involved. Students conducted oral histories with long-time Springfield residents and presented the resulting interviews within the framework of the exhibition. In addition to the Renaissance School project, the Springfield Museums are engaged in an ongoing partnership with the Brookings Museum Magnet School, in which Brookings students engage in onsite fieldwork and teachers attend professional development workshops at the Museums.¹⁵² These programs between several generations of city residents, the public school system, and the Museums, illustrate the sort of collaborative involvement that serves to cultivate a stronger sense of local pride and collective identity.



Fig 18: Dr. Seuss National Memorial Sculpture Garden
Photo courtesy of The Springfield Museums, Springfield, Massachusetts.

¹⁵² Per telephone conversation with Kay Simpson, Vice President of Springfield Museums, August 13, 2010.

The Museum Association has created a variety of programs with a focus on strengthening community identity and highlighting Springfield's unique attractions. A *Saturday Walking Tour Series* is co-sponsored by the Museums and the Armoury-Quadrangle Civic Association, with the aim to bring people into the streets of the city, to explore neighborhoods and landmarks, and to enjoy the physical redevelopment of the downtown area. A free outdoor summer concert series, as well as the summer-long *Summer Festival Days*, provides family fun via live music and performances, puppet shows, art activities, and hands-on science activities. A spring lecture series on issues relating to the region and its history has included topics such as "Slavery in the Connecticut River Valley," "Crystal Products of the Frost King: Ice Harvesting and the Natural Ice Industry in New England" and "The Underground Railroad in Western Massachusetts."¹⁵³ When a community ignores its unique history, as was seen in the economic and social fall-out of the 1960's and 1970's early urban renewal program in North Adams, Massachusetts (previous chapter), community identity erodes and the city may begin to suffer in a number of socioeconomic ways. The Springfield Museums are dedicated to revitalizing community identity, creating a vibrant cultural atmosphere, and educating both the city's resident as well as visitors about its unique history and architecture.

Measuring Successes

While no reports are available on the social or civic impact of programs and collaborations initiated by the Springfield Museums specifically, museums across the

¹⁵³ Per Springfield Museums' website, <http://www.springfieldmusuems.org>.

United States and abroad have presented findings from their own collaborative strategies (AMA's *Museums in the Life of a City*, 1995; Brown et. al., *Inspiring Action; Museums and Social Change*, 2009; Janes and Conaty, *Looking Reality in the Eye*, 2005). Social revitalization encompasses themes of social capital, social cohesion, community participation, and civic engagement. Quality-of-life issues, community participation, and improving community identity and public image are all a part of urban revitalization, although quantitative assessment of these areas is a source of much debate in methodological literature (Cultural Ministers Council, 2004; Guetzkow, 2002; Kay and Watt, 2000). How then to determine the impact these museum programs and initiatives may have on the social health of their communities?

Several sources (Long et. al., 2000; Wavell et. al., 2002) note that longitudinal study of specific areas of social impact is required before direct claims of causation can be made. Other sources call for more input of "soft" *i.e.* qualitative data, since findings from many studies indicate "the themes have been consistent, and the large body of anecdotal evidence supporting the themes should not be ignored" (Jermyn, 2001).¹⁵⁴ Evans (2005) offers a matrix which details possible evidence of culture's impact on social regeneration, including such markers as decrease in crime rates/fear of crime, improved leisure opportunities, decreased truancy, increased rate of volunteering, population growth, a positive change in residents' image of their community, and increased attendance/participation in cultural events.¹⁵⁵ These are tangible markers of

¹⁵⁴ Cultural Ministers Council, "Social Impacts of Participation in the Arts and Cultural Activities; Stage Two Report," Prepared by the Australian Expert Group in Industry Studies, University of Western Sydney. (2004), 28.

¹⁵⁵ Evans, "Measure for Measure," 971.

improved social capital that can be measured longitudinally and are offered here as a benchmark for further research in the Springfield case study.

Social Revitalization and Creating a Sense of Place

The cohesive thread running through all of the Museum Association's programs and events is the organized encouragement of residents to experience and enjoy their city, engage with one another, and strengthen a sense of community identity. The Springfield Museums, like the Revolving Museum in Lowell, are dedicated to creating a sense of place. This form of social revitalization is as critical to urban renewal as are physical and economic revitalization. According to Archibald (2004), "The most profound dilemma of this new century, inherited from the last, is a deepening crisis of place...Lack of attachment to place disembodies memory, sunders relationships, promotes prodigal resource consumption; it threatens democracy itself..."¹⁵⁶

WFCR, a *Five Colleges* radio station operating out of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, annually recognizes those individuals and institutions "who have made a positive impact on the cultural landscape of western New England." In 2010, The Springfield Museums were awarded the WFCR Arts and Humanities award as an Outstanding Organization, honored for their instrumental role in the revitalization of Springfield.¹⁵⁷ This honor acknowledges the dedicated role The Springfield Museums continue to play in the social revitalization of a city committed to a renewed vitality.

¹⁵⁶ Archibald, *The New Town Square*, 1.

¹⁵⁷ 88.5 FM WFCR Press Release, "The Springfield Museums, Evelyn Harris, and Matthew Mitchell to Receive 2010 WFCR Arts and Humanities Award." March 12, 2010.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The three case studies documented here show that there is no singular path to community engagement, external relevance, or urban revitalization. Although guidelines have been offered as to how to begin to look outside the museum and determine those arenas in the community where museum collaboration might be most successful, there is no checklist to follow. Each community has a unique history, particular societal needs, and a range of organizational assets; individual strategies, therefore, will require community-specific resources and solutions. While community-specific strategies will have to be developed in order for a museum to best utilize its own resources in issues of local revitalization, some general trends have emerged during the research and composition of this thesis. It is this author's hope that museums and local historical societies will each re-examine their mission statements and institutional resources and investigate the needs of their own communities in order to determine how they might better engage with residents and local community organizations in issues of contemporary relevance. In this endeavor, this author offers recommendations to museum directors as well as museum education and institutional advancement/development professionals:

- (1) Ask, *what does your community need?* What contemporary issues are affecting local residents?
- (2) Your community may not have an actual town square, but your museum can serve as one; that is, a place for community gathering, civic discourse, and civic participation.

- (3) Ask, *why does your museum exist?* What value does the museum add to its local community above and beyond the value of its specific collections?
- (4) Who are your potential partners in community revitalization initiatives? Meet regularly with cultural, social, civic, educational, and other nonprofit leaders in order to stay current with these potential partners. Know the missions of these other organizations and look for ways in which two or more organizations might combine resources to address specific community issues.
- (5) Dedicate a generous allowance of time to any collaborative relationship. In summative evaluation reports, most participants responded that lack of time was the primary detriment to establishing successful ongoing partnerships between the museum and other local organizations.
- (6) Capitalize on your community's unique history and resources. What thread from your community's past can you use to create positive change today?
- (7) Create a visible presence of art in your community. Exhibit temporary art installations in public spaces around the city.
- (8) Support historic preservation.
- (9) While each community has unique needs and resources, commonalities most certainly exist. Look to other museum-community collaborations to see where creative successes have been realized.

A final note: The Hull Lifesaving Museum in Hull, Massachusetts, tells the history of the lifesaving and maritime industry. The Museum instituted its *Maritime Apprentice Program* over twenty-five years ago, in which individuals from a local

juvenile prison receive apprenticeships with local organizations involved in the shipbuilding trade. These organizations work together to train recently paroled individuals for jobs in shipbuilding. This project was the brainchild of Ed McCabe, founder of the Lifesaving Museum. McCabe's idea was this: if you can build a boat, you can build anything, and get any job in any sort of construction-related endeavor. The Museum partnered with approximately ten maritime-related industries in the area, including dry docks, boat builders, and marine trade schools, and their message was this: 'Give these kids a chance, provide internship programs, site visits, and valuable trade skills, so that they can acquire the means to achieve the American Dream.'

The Hull Museum's *Apprentice Program* continues to be one of the most innovative museum-community initiatives I have come across. Museum staff members are not, in my experience, expecting to work with their local State Penitentiary. However, in terms of urban revitalization, addressing the needs of recently paroled individuals certainly qualifies as a social and economic service to the community. I spoke with Mr. McCabe in 2008 regarding the *Apprentice Program* and asked how he had been able to structure the program within the parameters of the Museum's mission statement, which reads:

The Hull Lifesaving Museum, the museum of Boston Harbor Heritage, preserves the region's lifesaving tradition and maritime culture through collections, exhibits, experiential and interpretive education, research and service to others. The museum's open water rowing programs in Boston Harbor educate young people about themselves while developing a constituency that takes stewardship for its maritime history. The deeds, traditions, and ethics of nineteenth century coastal lifesavers—Skills, Courage, and Caring—are the foundation of the

*museum's exhibits and programs, and its underlying commitment to working to impact society, and individual lives, for the better.*¹⁵⁸

Mr. McCabe responded that he saw the program as a broader version of *lifesaving* and through this program, the museum was reaching out to people “in harm’s way.” To McCabe and the Museum’s trustees, this certainly fit within the goals and mission of the Hull Lifesaving Museum. I include this story here at the conclusion of my study on urban revitalization as a way of illustrating the seemingly endless possibilities incorporated within the term “revitalization.”

¹⁵⁸ Hull Lifesaving Museum, <http://www.lifesavingmuseum.org>

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