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Monica Carol Evans

[THE PLACE OF NEW URBANISM AND THE ARTS IN DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION]

This paper explores the place of New Urbanism, Main Street, the Creative Class and arts-related development theories in downtown revitalization. The conclusion suggests that communities find the use of New Urbanist, Main Street and the Creative Class strategies to be more effective than arts-related revitalization strategies.

Overview

Literature on revitalization opines that communities should use a combination of revitalization strategies that bring people downtown. Two scholars, Tom Borrup¹, in the *Creative Community Builder's Handbook* and Charles Leinberger² in *Twelve Steps to Revitalization*, have outlined steps that communities can take to create successful communities. This paper uses survey data that is specific to downtown revitalization to determine if communities find revitalization strategies that correspond with these scholars to be effective.

Revitalization Strategies

There are several schools of thought on how to create a successful downtown. The revitalization strategies that will be used in this paper were taken from New Urbanism, Main Street, and Creative Class theories. All three theories agree that communities should be working to bring people downtown to work, live and play. Revitalization strategies from these theories are compatible with some strategies that are outlined by Borrup and Leinberger.

Key principles of New Urbanism are walkability, connectivity, density, mixed-use, diversity, and sustainability.³ These principles are focus on pedestrian accessibility, multi-modal transportation, efficient delivery of services and resources, and having more buildings, residences, shops and services close together and having them mixed within neighborhoods, within blocks and within buildings.

Key principles of the Main Street revitalization strategy⁴ are organization, promotion, design, and economic restructuring. Organization refers to getting key stakeholders involved; promotion refers to marketing downtown to residents, investors, visitors, etc. Design refers to making downtown a desirable place to be. Economic restructuring means strengthening a community's existing assets while diversifying downtown's economic base.

Key principle of the creative class theory is that they are less interested in amenities such as sports stadiums, urban malls, and themed tourism/entertainment parks⁵ and more interested in amenities such as a thriving visual and performing arts community, outdoor recreation, ethnic and cultural diversity, and an attractive nightlife⁶. The creative class is attracted to communities that have embraced smart growth and new urbanism principles⁷. Cities that are successful in recruiting creative class workers and the jobs that follow them, are being successful because the local environment is conducive to creative pursuits, art, culture, technology and economics and are welcoming to diversity⁸.

In his book⁹, Borrup discussed 10 specific economic and social revitalization strategies that communities should use to create creative communities. Those strategies are

- ❖ Create Jobs
- ❖ Increase Cultural Tourism
- ❖ Create Live/Work Zones for Artists
- ❖ Diversify the local economy
- ❖ Beautify the property
- ❖ Promote interaction in public space
- ❖ Increase civic participation through cultural celebrations
- ❖ Engage the youth
- ❖ Promote stewardship of place
- ❖ Broaden participation in the civic agenda

In *Twelve Steps to Revitalization*, Leinberger¹⁰ lays out what he thinks communities should be doing step-by-step to revitalize downtown. His process determines that communities should create a master plan; have a private-public/partnership; create rules that make redevelopment easy; establish the necessary downtown districts and organizations to manage growth and master plan implementation;

create a downtown development company; create an entertainment district; create a housing market; create an affordability strategy; develop a local-serving retail strategy.

Methodology

The author designed a web-based survey instrument based on urban planning, economic and community development literature. Potential survey participant organizations were identified through the Downtown Research and Development Center's website.¹¹ The survey was administered to 1600 professionals across the U.S. who are responsible for downtown development in their communities. 435 surveys were started and 326 surveys were completed.

The survey is organized into three parts. The first part asks respondents which downtown development strategies they are using, and if those strategies are effective. The second part asks respondents to rank the effectiveness of each revitalization strategy. The third part asks what performance indicators are being collected and if those indicators measure downtown success. This paper analyzes the strategy effectiveness rankings.

The lists of revitalization strategies, performance indicators and downtown development agencies are not comprehensive. Respondents may not share the same view of downtown "success" or strategy "effectiveness."

Survey Respondent Demographics

More than seventy-seven percent of the cities in the United States have a population of less than 5,000, and over ninety percent of cities in the US have a population of less than 25,000.¹² Communities of less than 5,000 made up 20% of survey respondents. Communities of 5,000-24,999 made up 45% of respondents. Communities of 25,000-50,000 made up 11% of respondents. Communities of over 50,000 made up 20% of respondents. See Appendix B for complete demographic information.

Thirty-eight percent of respondents have a downtown development budget of less than \$100,000; 34% of respondents have a budget of \$100-\$249,999; 14% of respondents have a budget of \$250-499,000, 6% of respondents have a budget of \$500-999,999, and 7% of respondents have a budget above 1 million dollars.

Only 76% of participating cities have defined downtown district boundaries, so 24% of the participating cities engage in downtown development activities without clear downtown geographic boundaries.

Only 3% of cities do not have office businesses downtown and all surveyed cities have retail businesses located downtown. Eighty-four percent of surveyed cities report having entertainment and cultural attractions in their downtown district. A surprising number of cities (80%) reported having residential development in their downtown district, but only 65% reported having a downtown grocery or pharmacy to serve their downtown residents. Sixteen percent of participants noted that civic, religious and government organizations are included in their downtown district.

Findings

Borrupt

Two of the ten strategies that communities believe are the most effective revitalization strategies are strongly congruent with Borrupt's strategies. Seventy-five percent of survey respondents believe that

having downtown events or festivities is an effective redevelopment strategy, and 78% of respondents think that the revitalization should include citizen, non-profit and local businesses.

Additionally, two other strategies that communities say are effective are marginally related to Borrup's strategies. Marketing downtown as a destination was selected by 67% of respondents. It is possible that at least some part of marketing downtown as a destination is aimed at visitors rather than residents. Recruiting businesses downtown is likely to create jobs, which is one of Borrup's strategies.

Survey respondents did not respond that they were using housing as a revitalization strategy; this likely means that communities are not creating work/live areas for artists or any other subsection of the population. Additionally, communities do not find employment analyses effective, so they must be using some other strategy to insure that there is not a job/talent mismatch when they recruit businesses into downtown.

Leinberger

Communities responded that including citizens and other stakeholders and developing a downtown master plan are effective strategies; this is also what Leinberger found. Additionally, it could be said that Leinberger's idea of creating a public/private partnership would include funding responsibilities, which corresponds with the strategy of having a special financing mechanism.

Interestingly, other strategies that respondents said were most effective had to do with strategic planning and redevelopment financing, which are included on Leinberger's list as master planning and having a special financing mechanism.

More of Leinberger's strategies are among the strategies that communities responded were the least effective. Most respondents said that creating a Parking Authority or other organization to manage downtown growth and development are not effective revitalization strategies. These results are interesting as many of the respondents are Downtown Development Agencies, Chambers of Commerce, and Visitors' Bureaus or were otherwise created to manage downtown development.

The strategies that communities find least effective confirm that housing is not being used as a downtown revitalization strategy. The survey results also suggest that the affordability of commercial and residential space is not held in high regard by survey respondents. This is probably because many downtown development organizations consider downtown revitalization to be strictly an economic development tool, rather than a community development tool. Housing and space affordability are crucial for the arts community, whose members are often among low-income residents. Table 1 shows the top ten strategies that communities find effective.

Table 1 (below) includes the strategies that communities find most effective.

Strategies that communities find most effective	Number of communities voting	Percentage of total vote
Keep downtown clean	273	80%
Include citizens, local non-profits and the local business stakeholders	266	78%
Develop a downtown development master plan	263	77%
Improve downtown streetscaping	259	76%
Have downtown events or festivals	257	75%
Market downtown as a destination	228	67%
Encourage mixed use development	226	66%
Encourage the development of downtown restaurants	224	66%
Recruit businesses downtown	217	64%
Have a special downtown financing mechanism. (i.e. Special Assessment District, Tax Increment Financing, Business Improvement District)	216	63%

Table 2 below shows the ten strategies that communities find least effective.

Strategies that communities find least effective	Number of communities voting	Percentage of total vote
Create a commercial space affordability strategy for existing businesses	63	18%
Create auxiliary organizations to manage downtown growth and development	60	18%
Create one or more downtown district(s)	62	18%
Recruit technology/science businesses to downtown	54	16%
Create a strategy regarding density and style of downtown housing	53	16%
Perform an employment analysis	46	13%
Create a housing affordability strategy	38	11%
Define optimal density levels	24	7%
Create a Parking Authority	19	6%
Implement Inclusionary Zoning	17	5%

The strategies that were the “middle of the pack” were included not included on the most or least effective strategies. See Table 3. Only two of these strategies were voted most effective by more than 50% of respondents.

Increasing pedestrian access and encouraging arts organizations and galleries were the top vote getters from the “middle of the pack.” Encouraging arts organizations and galleries is directly related to Borrup’s list of creative community strategies. This suggests that while arts-related strategies are not the first strategies that communities find effective, they do see the value of the arts downtown. Increasing pedestrian accessibility is related to Leinberger’s notion that a successful downtown embraces walkable urbanism¹³.

Other creativity and arts-related strategies were used by between 50% and 30% of respondents. This suggests that many communities are not utilizing the arts and the creative community to revitalize their downtown. These communities may not be actively redeveloping their communities in ways that nurture their arts communities.

Table 3 below shows the perceived effectiveness of the “middle of the pack” strategies.

Strategies that correspond to the literatures	Number of communities voting	Number of total votes
Increase or improve pedestrian accessibility	206	60%
Encourage the development of downtown arts organizations and galleries	178	52%
Set goals to bring cultural amenities downtown	171	50%
Perform a retail market analysis	171	50%
Recruit creative businesses to downtown	158	46%
Encourage appropriate downtown nightlife (ex: bars and clubs)	144	42%
Know what the business/culture/residential mix should be. (ex: entertainment, rental housing, for sale housing, retail, restaurants/bars, office, grocery/pharmacy)	141	41%
Increase downtown public open space	116	34%
Develop downtown rental and for sale housing	109	32%
Implement a Public Art program	106	31%

Policy Implications and Conclusion

Borrup

Borrup has identified strategies that communities can use to create successful creative communities. This paper hypothesized that Borrup’s arts’-related strategies could be used to revitalize downtown. However, this research suggests that communities are not convinced that Borrup’s creative community strategies are effective downtown revitalization strategies. Only two of Borrup’s strategies were among the ten most effective strategies.

Artists tend to be urban pioneers, attracted by low cost underutilized buildings, and spaces in which they can both live and work¹⁴. These are the types of buildings that are located downtown at the start of a revitalization process. Artists tend to be among the first adaptable and adventurous of tenants¹⁵ in a revitalization process. It is unfortunate that communities are not utilizing artists as a resource to assist with the revitalization process. It is further disheartening to know that communities are not concerned

with ensuring that downtown remains affordable for low-income residents and businesses. It is these businesses and residents that are usually the tipping point that leads to a successful downtown revitalization process.

Leinberger

Leinberger has identified 12 steps that communities can take to successfully revitalize downtown. Only a few of Leinberger's strategies were included in the ten most effective strategies. Many of Leinberger's strategies require coalition-building, partnerships and cooperation. Additionally, several strategies on Leinberger's list require changes in the regulatory environment which will also require time and cooperation from the local government.

While Leinberger's strategies may be effective in the long run, his list may be impractical for a practitioner who has to be accountable to a board or citizen's group. In regards to accountability, especially for funding purposes, it is important to be able to show results quickly. Using Leinberger's list requires investments of time, money and patience, which some communities may not have.

¹ (Borrup, T. (2006). *The Creative Community Builder's handbook*. Saint Paul: Fieldstone Alliance.

² Leinberger, C. (2005). *Turning Around Downtown: Twelve Steps to Revitalization*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution.

³ New Urbanism. (n.d.). *Creating Livable Sustainable Communities- Principles of Urbanism*. Retrieved January 2009, from <http://www.newurbanism.org/newurbanism/principles.html>

⁴ National Main Street Center. (1997). *Main Street Success Stories*. Washington Dc: National Main Street Center.

⁵ Florida, R. (2005). *Cities and the Creative Class*. New York: Routledge.

⁶ Florida, R. (2002). *The Rise of the Creative Class*. NYC: Basic Books.

⁷ Florida, R. (2005). *Cities and the Creative Class*. New York: Routledge.

⁸ Florida, R. (2002). *The Rise of the Creative Class*. NYC: Basic Books.

⁹ (Borrup, T. (2006). *The Creative Community Builder's handbook*. Saint Paul: Fieldstone Alliance.

¹⁰ Leinberger, C. (2005). *Turning Around Downtown: Twelve Steps to Revitalization*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution.

¹¹ Downtown Development and Research Center *Links*. Retrieved January 2009, from <http://www.downtowndevelopment.com/links.php>

¹² National League of Cities (n.d.). [Cities 101: Number of cities and city populations](http://www.nlc.org/about_cities/cities_101/138.aspx). Retrieved March 2009, from http://www.nlc.org/about_cities/cities_101/138.aspx

¹³ Leinberger, C. (2005). *Turning Around Downtown: Twelve Steps to Revitalization*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution.

¹⁴ Milder, D. N. (1997). *Niche Strategies for Downtown Revitalization*. New York: Downtown Research and Development Center.

¹⁵ Milder, D. N. (1997). *Niche Strategies for Downtown Revitalization*. New York: Downtown Research and Development Center.

