



GCDN

Global Cultural Districts Network

An Initiative of AEA Consulting

CULTURAL DISTRICTS – AN INVESTMENT IN RICH CULTURAL LIFE SUPPORTING EVIDENCE: FACT SHEET

CASE STUDIES HIGHLIGHTING THE MULTI-DIMENSIONAL VALUE OF CULTURAL DISTRICTS

Cultural districts - and the organisations that manage them - come in all different shapes and sizes. The scale, mix, design, and audience of cultural districts vary considerably and are quite diverse. Cultural districts also range in their designation and financial models. Some cultural districts have existed for decades and even centuries. However, whether old or new, planned or “naturally occurring,” cultural districts are increasingly recognised for the synergies and critical mass that they foster, and the contributions they make to the quality of urban and cultural life.

Here is a non-exhaustive list of case studies exemplifying the immense value of cultural districts:

ARTISTIC VALUE

Situated in Southbank, the **Melbourne Arts Precinct** in Australia has one of the highest concentrations of arts, cultural and creative organisations anywhere in the world – and presents up to 3,000 performances and exhibitions in a typical year. The Precinct has been earmarked for further redevelopment including upgrades of existing cultural infrastructure and expansion of new buildings.

Arts Centre Melbourne sits at the heart of the **Melbourne Arts Precinct**. The Centre is committed to supporting the next generation of performing artists and arts industry professionals. It has several Artist Development programmes that offer artists the space and resources required to develop their practice, including networking, skills development, and performance opportunities.

It has also taken a leadership to support positive mental health and wellbeing for people working in the performing arts, initiating the award-winning **Arts Wellbeing Collective** in 2016 after the death of a colleague. The Collective now comprises a consortium of 400 arts and cultural organisations from around the world working together with subject matter experts, performing arts practitioners and clinical psychologists to co-design mental health initiatives to help people stay well and thrive in the industry. The Collective’s work is highly geared towards the needs of performing arts professionals; it is prevention-focused and evidence-based.

Since launching, the **Arts Wellbeing Collective** has delivered hundreds of workshops and presentations, worked with leadership teams to consider how best to promote positive

mental health within organisations, developed and delivered a range of resources for production teams, touring companies and performing artists, enabled professional help-seeking through the Support Act Wellbeing Helpline and rolled out tailored, accredited Mental Health First Aid training to hundreds of performing arts practitioners.

In 2020, **Arts Centre Melbourne** [developed several initiatives to sustain the performing arts industry through the Covid-19 global pandemic](#), recognising that the closure of the venue posed grave risks to thousands of individual artists, production technicians, front-of-house workers, arts administrators, and other employees. Soliciting donations to the **Arts Wellbeing Collective**, the Arts Centre secured additional investment of over AU\$500,000, which enabled training for at least 100 additional Mental Health First Aiders as well as the development of further resources like videos, support guides and new online wellbeing toolkits. Each resource was developed in collaboration with artists and arts workers, providing meaningful paid work to people whose other forms of income had stopped.

Click [here](#) to find out more about **Arts Centre Melbourne**, and [here](#) for **Melbourne Arts Precinct**.

EDUCATIONAL VALUE

East Bank is a new cultural and educational district in development on the **Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park** in London. Its cultural and university partners include Victoria and Albert Museum, Sadler's Wells Theatre, University College London, UAL's London Collage of Fashion and the BBC (Symphony Orchestra and Chorus and BBC Singers).

A key objective of **East Bank** is to improve the educational attainment of the local people and to become a world-leading powerhouse for innovation, creativity and learning. With nearly two-thirds of the local population in East London under the age of 34, **East Bank** believes that there is an important opportunity to harness the talents of children and young people by creating connections between local people and organisations that would otherwise not be available to them.

To date, thousands of young people have been involved in the **EAST Education programme**, which connects teachers and young people in East London to creative learning opportunities so that they can directly benefit from the cluster of global institutions moving to the Park. Since 2018, 614 young people have participated in Summer School programmes. In March 2021, East Careers Week was launched, a free online programme providing 705 young people with experiences and insights into future careers. University College London has developed a Tutoring programme, which to date has benefited 800 local young people. Approximately 800 students engage with East Education resources on a weekly basis. In addition, the **East Bank** partners have also collaborated on a Shared Training and Employment programme which offers routes into employment for diverse local talent. The programme is now on its fourth edition, with 36 young people having graduated from the programme thus far.

Click [here](#) to find out more about **East Bank**.

SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY VALUES



Kingston Creative is a non-profit arts organisation started in 2017 whose mission is to see the city of Kingston leveraging on its creative heritage and world-class talent to become a creative city in which everyone can realise their potential. At the heart of its vision is a vibrant **Arts District in Downtown Kingston**, historically the hub of Jamaican culture, especially in the fields of music, dance and the visual arts, and the home of many cultural institutions and public art. The aim is to revitalise the area through culture by nurturing healthy conditions for creative practice and community engagement. To do so, it has created new arts spaces and repurposes abandoned spaces as arts performance venues.

Community engagement and increasing social impact have been core objectives: **Kingston Creative** believes that leveraging the innate creativity of a wide community will encourage people to be part of the creative development of Downtown and build profitable businesses. It has delivered 4,000 free training opportunities to build capacity in the locals, particularly in creative business and digital skills.

In 2018, **Kingston Creative** launched “Paint the City,” a project to revive the neglected downtown district and support the local arts community through murals. So far, more than 60 murals by local artists have been developed, resulting in locals saying that the neighbourhood now feels safer. Many of the murals also showcase Kingston’s cultural heritage.

In spite of the challenges of the global pandemic in 2020, **Kingston Creative’s** Community Pod brought millions in investment to the community through various programmes, including the training of 50 young people from 5 communities as cultural hosts, several community Artwalks, and the inclusion of community creatives in grant applications and projects. In June 2020, two new creative spaces in downtown Kingston were also opened, and now offer the community essential creative resources from co-working locations to digital/podcasting studios. **Kingston Creative** was also a key partner for “Catapult,” [a Covid-19 Emergency Relief Programme for Caribbean creatives](#). This resulted in increasing the visibility of creatives and enabled 1,048 creatives to better navigate the digital environment.

Click [here](#) to find out more about **Kingston Creative**.

URBAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL VALUES

The **Quartier des Spectacles** (QDS) is the cultural heart of downtown Montreal. **QDS** is an all-season day and night destination with the highest concentration of cultural venues in North America. With a focus on eight public spaces, 40 festivals, 80 cultural venues, effervescent lighting and programming throughout the year, **QDS** attracts droves of Montrealers and tourists.

What is unique about **QDS** is that its public spaces are always kept lively through year-round activation and programming that often involves cutting-edge lighting design and immersive environments. The public spaces are well-equipped with permanent specialised equipment from video projectors to lighting structures, fog machines and wireless and fibre optic internet access. Luminous Pathway is one such public space – it operates as a year-round digital projections site, through 8 permanent digital media facades that are used at night to showcase interactive public art pieces. New video projections are presented regularly.



Individualised architectural lighting illuminate the facades of more than 20 buildings and sites, capturing the personality and unique character of each architectural canvas.

Apart from its vibrant urban night life, **QDS** is also an open laboratory for artist to experiment on creating digital arts and interactive experiences in public spaces. What helps is that since 2003, the district has developed a solid expertise in computer engineering and digital technologies, which assists artists and creatives in exploring interactive and experiential urban possibilities with ease.

To mitigate the negative impacts of the global pandemic on Montreal's downtown core in 2020, **QDS** expanded its activities much further than usual, working with the City and local creatives to establish an enhanced network of public squares and pedestrian zones in order to draw visitors and support live businesses. 2 public squares, 3 urban terraces and 7 pedestrian zones were developed within close proximity to 250 restaurants, which were animated by regular performances and public art that involved 30 local designers and creatives as well as 575 artists. All public spaces included sanitising stations. The objective of attracting visitors by offering them ways to rediscover public spaces safely was met – the initiative attracted significant media and social media attention, and foot traffic and visitors returned progressively to the downtown core.

Click [here](#) to find out more about **Quartier des Spectacles**.

ECONOMIC VALUE

Located in the northeast corner of downtown Dallas, the **Dallas Arts District** is a rare, walkable and vibrant urban space that unifies culture and commerce into a dynamic destination for locals and tourists alike. The 68 acre, 19 block area is home to over 13 venues, including the Nasher Sculpture Centre designed by Renzo Piano, the Meyerson Symphony centre designed by I.M. Pei and three more venues recognised with the Pritzker Award for Architecture.

An Arts and Economic Prosperity Study conducted by American for the Arts in 2017 showed that the economic activity of the **Dallas Arts District** tripled in five years, going from US\$128.6 million to US\$395.8 million. In addition to spending by organisations, the non-profit arts and culture industries in **Dallas Arts District** leveraged US\$113.6 million in event-related spending by its audiences. The study found that as a result of attending a cultural event, attendees often ate dinner in local restaurants, paid for parking, bought gifts and souvenirs, and paid a babysitter, with attendees from out of town often staying overnight in a local hotel. In the **Dallas Arts District**, these dollars supported 14,932 full-time equivalent jobs, generated US\$381 million in household income to local residents, and generated US\$43.1 million in local and state government revenues.

Click [here](#) to find out more about **Dallas Arts District**.

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