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Course: Composition II (992)

Date: 7/26/2024

The positive impact of Cultural Festivals on Communities

On a rainy day, as Palestinians continued to lose their lives, a Palestinian cultural festival was held in the gym of the Islamic school in Little Rock. The Palestinians organized everything; their main goal was to present Palestine and its culture, not merely to describe the circumstances that exist there. As volunteers, we were given different tables with descriptions of various topics, such as the religions practiced in Palestine, the significance of the olive harvest season, traditional dress, and more. Many visitors showed up knowing very little about Palestine other than that it was a country going through a difficult period, but they left speechless by what they learned about its food and culture. They all thanked the volunteers at the end, not realizing how much they had learned about the culture.

Why do we limit our attention to the negative aspects of particular cultures? Why do we allow the media to shape our views of them? Though our traditions and beliefs may differ, the world connects us all. Since everyone is simply trying to survive, why do certain people dislike other cultures when we are all developing at the same pace in the future? Cultural festivals

challenge stereotypes and support economic growth while promoting the traditions and customs of different cultures, helping to shape our society and increase public understanding.

Cultural events have a significant impact on society and the power to bring communities together. But for what purpose are they held? Cultural festivals are organized for various reasons, but the primary one is to educate the public about specific cultural traditions and heritage. They promote diversity and a deeper awareness of the world around us. The fact that cultural events can encourage trade and employment opportunities for individuals is one of the biggest things people are often unaware of (Kariuki). Many cultural festivals, particularly those organized by immigrants to celebrate their culture, provide jobs for the public. Many people display their businesses there, and people from different backgrounds open businesses based on their cultures, such as traditional clothing shops, restaurants, or hair salons. These businesses not only help the public find work but also strengthen the economy.

A country might have a wide variety of cultures. For example, Kenya is home to about 40 different ethnic groups (Kariuki). Through these festivals, we have the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the cultures of many countries and the reasons behind their traditions. Festivals are meant to be enjoyable events that showcase a culture's beauty to others. Cultural festivals are not just for adults. While many festivals are geared toward older audiences—which makes sense since many involve lectures and discussions—cultural festivals often aim to be accessible to people of all ages. Children can also participate in enjoyable games that highlight cultural elements. This allows everyone to experience the festival in various ways, whether through lectures or fun activities (Kariuki).

The first aspect is the economic influence of cultural festivals, which begins with attracting tourists. The more tourists a city or state attracts, the more economically successful it becomes (Grames and Vitcenda). As mentioned earlier, the economic impact stems from business and tourism, and many within that culture enjoy growing and promoting their businesses, all of which lead to greater economic benefits.

These festivals also improve connections within the community. It's important to have these kinds of festivals because they encourage people to meet and build connections with one another, which strengthens relationships within the community and fosters a better understanding of others. When people understand one another, a peaceful and safe environment is created for everyone, and many use that environment to form friendships and families (Grames and Vitcenda).

Cultural festivals also encourage arts and crafts. Every culture has a particular artistic style, and people can learn a great deal about it, which benefits the economy (Abbas). The thob, or traditional Palestinian clothing, is made using particular kinds of fabric and thread, which has drawn interest from many people and increased its popularity as both a fashion item and a craft.

Even with all of these advantages, some people find the idea of cultural festivals unacceptable. Risks, traffic, noise, and lack of parking (Abbas) are all valid reasons some may dislike cultural festivals. There is usually traffic, lots of noise, and potential risks since large crowds can attract danger (Abbas). There is also the risk of racism and prejudice, as some people may dislike a culture or believe stereotypes spread online. This puts people at high risk of being

attacked or targeted for verbal abuse, making them feel uncomfortable or even forcing them to leave out of fear for their safety.

However, cultural festivals are not frequent events. Many of them are highly secured, and the police are informed in advance to keep a close watch on everything. Despite parking challenges, many cultural festivals aim to create a welcoming gathering space for the local community to increase attendance and improve traffic and parking arrangements.

Some non-threatening people reject festivals simply because they think they are a waste of time and money, or that few people can afford them. However, cultural festivals are entirely dependent on community work. For example, food is prepared by members of the community at their own expense. Similarly, specific items sold benefit both the seller and the festival. If the community has enough funding, they typically hold the event in a larger, more spacious venue. If not, they host it at their community center. For instance, Little Rock's Islamic Center hosts free annual Arab and Islamic festivals. When the community works together to make the most of the event, there are more opportunities for truly affordable and enjoyable festivals.

Organizers also give thoughtful consideration to the event date and audience. Certain festivals target mostly teenagers and adults, so they tend to select indoor activities. However, when they want to include children, they choose outdoor activities with a summertime feel so kids have plenty of space to have fun and enjoy themselves.

Cultural festivals have positive rather than negative impacts on the community and its surroundings. There are many solutions to relieve people's worries about not enjoying these festivals, encouraging everyone to experience them worry-free. Cultural festivals are an amazing

opportunity to celebrate different cultures and educate people about others by enjoying their food, dance, music, and overall way of life. We should encourage and support these events more frequently.

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