

Cultural vs. Economic Investments of Tribal Casinos in Historical Perspective

This presentation will elaborate how tribal community leaders originally envisioned utilizing gaming revenues to fund cultural investments such as language retention or elders' programs, and whether they and their fellow community members assigned cultural investments a greater value than economic investments (e.g., infrastructure such as paved roads). Preliminary research suggests that leaders seeking casino or gaming site construction commonly identified cultural investments as an essential element of community development initiatives, and that they could be considered unique from and complementary to economic development initiatives. These and similar acts openly challenged the desires of state officials and national policy makers, who envisioned gaming revenues being utilized almost exclusively for economic development. Why is this line of investigation noteworthy? Notwithstanding the wealth of literature that has been produced in the last two decades confirming improved reservation infrastructure, among other issues, limited time and energy has been directed toward exploring the extent and scope of cultural investments; or elaborating why communities considered economically "poor" persevere (in certain cases) in privileging cultural investments over what outsiders and oftentimes reservation community members would characterize as critical infrastructure projects.

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