THE IMPACTS OF ARTS CENTERS ON COMMUNITY PLACEMAKING

John Delconte, MS
Doctoral Student
Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning
University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Carol Kline, PhD
Associate Professor
Hospitality and Tourism Management
Walker College of Business
Appalachian State University
Economic and Community Development through Arts Spaces

Grodach (2010 and 2011) found that art spaces:

- Serve as a *neighborhood anchor*, contributing to the local economy through tourism and increasing quality of life
- Serve as a venue for *participation* and as *support* for starting a business for marginalized populations
- Attract *diverse audiences* due to the wide array of offerings
- *Incubate talent* through shared office space and programs to build business skills
- Serve as a *space for artists* to share their work and receive mentoring, peer review, and other feedback
- Build *social capital*—the ability to network and enhance involvement and collaboration
The Arts Transform Communities

- Arts and other cultural assets draw creative types and knowledge workers (Florida, 2002; Hutton, 2009)
- Lead to increased tourism, relocaters, and retirees (Johnson, 1996)
- Improved housing market conditions (Stern and Seifert, 2010)

*Photo credit: Arts Council of Wilson*
Creative Placemaking

“Strengthening the social, physical, and economic fabric of a community through arts and culture.”

-ArtPlace America

Photo credit: Arts Council of Albemarle
Heritage Tourism

- The arts, humanities, and heritage create a sense of place that the tourism industry can market and promote (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2005)
- Cultural tourism accounts for 40% of international tourism (Richards and Wilson, 2007)
- A remembrance, celebration, and extension of place
Research Question

What impacts do arts centers have on community placemaking and heritage tourism?

Photo credit: Arts Council of Wilson
This Investigation

Arts Councils

Placemaking

Heritage Tourism

Photo credit: WRAL
Observing Impacts in Communities

The Community Capitals Framework includes seven forms of capital:

- human
- social
- natural
- financial
- built
- cultural
- political

(Flora and Flora, 2004)
Methods

- Study Area
- Data Collection
- Interview Protocol
- Data Coding and Analysis

*Photo credit: Arts Council of Wilson*
# Study Area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Rocky Mount</th>
<th>Elizabeth City</th>
<th>Wilson</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Arts center</strong></td>
<td>Arts Center at The Imperial Centre for the Arts and Sciences</td>
<td>Arts of the Albemarle</td>
<td>Arts Council of Wilson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Population of town</strong></td>
<td>57,433</td>
<td>18,698</td>
<td>49,297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Median household income</strong></td>
<td>$39,765</td>
<td>$34,532</td>
<td>$39,360</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Data collected from US Census (2010-2011)*
Data Collection

- Eighteen semi-structured face-to-face interviews
- Six community leaders per town:
  - Mayor
  - Executive director of the local visitor center
  - Executive director of business organization
  - Executive director of the arts council
  - Representative of one lodging property
  - Representative of one restaurant

Photo credit: Arts Council of Wilson
Data Coding and Analysis

- Results underwent content analysis
- Arts center programs and impacts were coded to the themes represented by the 7 capitals in the CCF model
- The town impacts were analyzed qualitatively by community capital
Results: Financial Capital

- **Increased tourism** (Informants 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, 13, 15, 16, and 18)
- **Free or affordable** access to programming (Informants 1, 3, 4, 8, and 16)
- **New businesses established** (Informants 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 16, and 17); attracts **new industry** (Informant 7)
- **Extended business hours** (Informants 4, 5, and 10)
Financial Capital

The arts council in Elizabeth City works with their downtown development agency to improve the economics of the downtown area:

“They've ridden on each other's coattails...[she] wanted to find a way to get people downtown. Arts of the Albemarle accomplished that, and in accomplishing that, [she] is able to sell more rental space and lease more space for businesses downtown because of the [arts] draw downtown...” (Informant 6)
Social Capital

- Children’s programming **draws diverse groups** together (Informants 2, 3, 7, 8, 11, and 17)
- Make the area more **livable and family friendly** (Informants 6 and 15)
- Which, in turn, helps to **retain residents** and **attract new residents** (Informants 6, 9, 11, and 17)
- **Transforms the image** of the downtown to a more vibrant and welcoming place (Informant 3)
- Gatherings lead to **increased community involvement** (Informants 6 and 16)
Social Capital

Children’s programming draws the community together:

“All of a sudden, it starts involving not just the child, but then the child becomes even more involved, then the parent becomes involved, and then the family is involved, and then their friends are involved.” (Informant 1)
Cultural Capital

- **Demystify art** for the general public (Informants 1, 3, 4, and 7)
- **Exposure to the arts** (Informants 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 13, 14, and 16) and **celebration of the local arts and culture** (Informants 8, 9, 11, 16, 17, 18)
- Creation of **new art/cultural venues** (Informants 2, 5, 6, 7, and 10)
- **Attract bigger-named talent** to the area (Informants 8 and 10)
- **Engage tourists** in the local culture (Informants 3 and 9)
Cultural Capital

The arts centers can play an important role in engaging tourists in the local culture:

“That's what most tourists want to do. They don't want to be tourists. They want to sit and be involved in the community...and I think that something like the art center allows them to do that. They're looking at art that's done by people that live in the community, so they're already appreciative of the sense or the style of art that our artists are creating.” (Informant 9)
Human Capital

- **Increased confidence** in their townspeople, particularly their youth (Informants 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, and 14)
- **Professional training in the arts** (Informants 1 and 4)
- **Pride in the community** as a whole (Informants 2, 3, 10, 14, and 18)
- **Foster positivity** or providing excitement for young people (Informants 6 and 13)
- **Extend the general education** offered by the public school systems (Informants 1, 4, 8, 11, 13, 14, and 16)
- A better **quality of life** for residents and visitors alike (Informants 8 and 10)
Human Capital

Positivity and hope provided by the arts center is a potential wellspring for community wellbeing:

“It is so much more than just the arts. It is about a celebration of community and the diversity of peoples in a community expressed through the diverse talents of people in a community.” (Informant 3)
Built Capital

- **Proximity to downtown** encourages patrons of arts center events to venture into the downtown before and after events (Informants 9 and 11)
- Helps visitors become **aware of the streetscape** (Informants 2 and 11)
- Triggers further **downtown renovation** (Informant 8)
- Increased traffic has led to **new apartments, studios, and a new park** (Informant 8)
Built Capital

Adaptive reuse of the centers can represent the transformation of the community from the industrial past to a more creative age:

“I think the arts center just represents the new way forward. To me, it was basically a mirror of what's going on. We took something old and turned it into something new...” (Informant 14)
Political Capital

- Events allow a **neutral ground** for discussion and decision making among various power-brokers throughout the city (Informant 14)
- Educational programming can be considered **a relief to county school budgets**, in a time where arts education is being cut (Informant 1)
One challenge for the arts center is making the public aware of their value:

“I think our art center does the best that they can do right now with what they have to do it with. I think still their biggest challenge, and probably the biggest challenge of any art center in a rural area, is convincing the community that it's an important investment that they need to make.” (Informant 9)
Natural Capital

Wilson Arts Council played a significant role in the annual Whirligig Festival, which has led to the establishment of the Vollis Simpson Whirligig Park in the center of downtown Wilson (Informant 15)
The Whirligig Park has received a great deal of press coverage, resulting in visitors from distant places:

“We've got a conservation center down here... We're going to put them on a lot about two blocks that way... people in New York City, or wherever else, knows about them.” (Informant 7)
Summary

- **Financial:** Arts centers served as economic engines for their communities, leading to increased tourism and new businesses. They also provided affordable access to art/culture, which was often free of charge.

- **Social:** Arts centers drew family and community members together, with diverse audiences.

- **Cultural:** Arts centers led to an exposure, demystification, and celebration art and culture, establishment of new art/cultural venues, and support to other art/cultural organizations.

- **Human:** Arts centers programming led to community pride and increased confidence, self-expression/self-actualization in individuals, and extended the general education provided by public schools.
Showcase locally made products and services

Attract new businesses and talent

Strengthen community and individual pride

Actively transmit culture

Bring diverse groups together

Adaptively reuse spaces

Positive sense of place

Heritage Tourism
Heritage Tourism

- Art Centers
- Improved sense of place
- Cultural tourist destination
Limitations

- Biased informers?
- Limited knowledge of informants
- Limited and homogeneous sample
Conclusions

- Arts centers impacted all sectors of society as viewed through the CCF
- Most discussed were impacts related to financial, social, cultural, and human capitals
- Arts Centers contribute to a vibrant, culturally rich locale
- They can therefore be regarded as significant heritage tourism draws
Thank you

Thanks to Drs Carol Kline and Carmine Scavo and Daniel Kariko.
Questions?