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The Social and Economic Impacts of the GlasStation on the Town of Farmville, North Carolina

(working paper)

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Introduction

The GlasStation is a creative placemaking partnership between the town of Farmville, NC, and East Carolina University. Housed in a former gas station, the GlasStation is a glass blowing studio where University and community classes are taught, public demonstrations happen, and artists work.

In 2016 prior to the opening of the GlasStation, partners from Farmville requested the East Carolina University's assistance in assessing the impacts of the GlasStation. Through a National Endowment for the Arts ArtWorks grant researchers conducted a multi-year, parallel, multi-stage mixed methods research project that included collecting ethnographic and economic data side by side, at two points in time. This research project was designed to answer the broad research question, "What are the impacts of the GlasStation on the community of Farmville, North Carolina?" A set of more discrete research questions are nested within this broad question and are based upon the partners' desires to understand how the creative placemaking efforts of the GlasStation impacted the rural, former tobacco town of Farmville.

Farmville, North Carolina

As its name implies, Farmville, North Carolina, is an agricultural community that, like many rural towns associated with farm commodities (in Farmville's case, tobacco), has been trying to reinvent itself in an era of declining values of agricultural products, rural-to-urban migration, and an aging population. In this sense, Farmville is similar to many other rural communities across North Carolina and the United States whose residents feel they have been bypassed by social, cultural, and economic development occurring in many urban areas. While its residents number under 5,000, Farmville is part of the Greenville metropolitan area and benefits from its proximity to Greenville and East Carolina University (ECU).

Collaboratively stakeholders from ECU and Farmville decided that a hot glass shop would enhance the academic offerings of ECU's School of Art and Design—adding a new field of study—and provide opportunities for the public to view hot glass work, take workshops, and purchase artwork. This creative placemaking partnership is the culmination of a ten-year relationship between the Dean of the College of Fine Arts and Communication at ECU and the community of Farmville, NC.

To launch the GlasStation, the Tabitha M. DeViscontnti Trust and the Farmville Group (a group of local business owners) worked with ECU representatives to identify an appropriate building, which was then donated to the Trust by local residents. The Trust worked with the Farmville Group and ECU to plan the new facility. The Trust and Farmville Group assumed the financial burden of renovating the dilapidated historic Gulf gas station in the heart of Farmville's historic main street. To launch the GlasStation, ECU purchased hot glass equipment, rents space in the GlasStation to conduct glass classes, and employs a glass artist who runs the GlasStation and teaches undergraduate and graduate coursework in glass. The GlasStation opened in January, 2017.

Research Motivation

Given its rural context and public-private partnership, the GlasStation provided a unique opportunity to evaluate the impact of creative placemaking on a small town's historic Main Street whose economy deteriorated with the decline of the tobacco industry decades ago. Creative placemaking advocates, grantors, and researchers (Markusen, 2012; Markusen, 2013; Markusen & Gadwa, 2010; Morley & Winkler, 2014), document that successful creative placemaking projects and assessment of their impact are most meaningful and effective when co-created by partners. Community partners the DeVisconti Trust and Farmville Group collaborated with ECU faculty, shaped the goals of the GlasStation, as well as this research project. Based on best practices in creative placemaking literature (Markusen, 2012; Markusen & Gadwa, 2010; Morley & Winkler, 2014), the research design collects primary and secondary indicators (data) through a transdisciplinary research design to assess the impacts of the GlasStation on the town of Farmville. Under the umbrella of creative placemaking, this mixed methods research design combines the disciplines of cultural anthropology, economics, and art and design to evaluate the varied impacts of the GlasStation on the community of Farmville. In mixing different theoretical lenses, primary indicators (qualitative and quantitative data from participant community members), and secondary indicators (quantitative economic data) the research design provides a novel, holistic assessment of the impact of the creative placemaking efforts of the GlasStation on the rural community of Farmville.

While a body of research exists to support the value of creative placemaking in urban settings, the research team was interested in studying the impact of a singular variable (the GlasStation) in a reasonably undeveloped historic business district (small town main street) that was largely unchanged for decades. This study mixed quantitative and qualitative methods during data collection and analysis (Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie, 2003). Quantitative approaches are indirect and reductive, while qualitative approaches are direct and holistic. The blending of paradigms permits the rich development of research instruments, the validation of findings between quantitative and qualitative analysis to create substantiated findings, and the integration of findings during interpretation (Castro, Kellison, Boyd, & Kopak, 2010; Creswell, 2003; Newman, Ridenour, Newman, & DeMarco Jr., 2003; Wooley, 2009).

Research Design

This research project was designed to answer the broad research question, “What are the impacts of the GlasStation on the community of Farmville, NC?” A set of more discrete research questions are nested within this broad question, and are based upon the DeVisconti Trust’s, Farmville Group’s, and ECU’s desires to understand how the creative placemaking efforts of the GlasStation impact the town of Farmville.

To answer these questions, the research team created a parallel mixed method research design to study the economic and social impacts of the GlasStation on the town of Farmville (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009; Avenarius & Johnson, 2014). Qualitative methods from cultural anthropology allowed for the collection of data directly from community members (primary indicators). In tandem, economic data was collected from online sources and existing databases (secondary indicators). The study was designed with two data collection and analysis phases spaced one year apart. This allowed for the collection of baseline data collected just four months after the GlasStation opened (May, 2017), and follow-up data and analysis one year later (May, 2018). Comparison between baseline and one-year data allowed the research team to identify changes in the social and economic conditions (e.g. impacts) of Farmville. Further the disparate data sets (qualitative and quantitative—primary and secondary indicators) were combined throughout the study to provide a holistic picture of the impacts of the GlasStation.

Qualitative Data

Ten open-ended interviews with people familiar with the GlasStation, six of which were recorded and transcribed, were conducted. We administered a short questionnaire to 40 participants who were, again, familiar with the GlasStation. In addition, we interviewed Mike Tracy, the GlasStation instructor and sat in on some of the classes he conducted as well as observed glass-blowing activities. The open-ended, key-informant interviews and participant observation were used to develop a code book the survey that was administered to 40 participants who indicated that they were familiar with the GlasStation.

Participants were selected with a snowball sampling technique, or through a process of early survey respondents and people participating in the open-ended interviewing recommending others who might be willing to participate in the survey. A list of individuals was developed and participants were chosen at random from this list. An initial question asked them whether or not they were familiar with the GlasStation; only those who were familiar with it were interviewed. Broadly, this questionnaire addressed the impact of the GlasStation on the sense of identity and community cohesion amongst Farmville residents, and how Farmville residents responded to the introduction of the GlasStation.

Qualitative data were analyzed by the research team using coding, focused on descriptive and sub-coding approaches to identifying threads and themes. These data will be analyzed using an emergent coding method (Bernard & Ryan, 2009; Creswell, 2003) to identify themes. Evaluation constantly moved between description, analysis, and interpretation. Emergent findings were continuously revisited in a mode of constant reflection. This method allowed for serendipity, being open to discovering the unexpected.

Percent answering in affirmative

Do you think the character of Farmville's downtown has changed in the past five years?	100
If yes, has that change been positive?	100
Has the GlasStation contributed to that change?	100
Has the GlasStation been a key part of that change?	95

In interviews with people around town, the following words and phrases have been used to describe the GlasStation. Please check all those that you believe apply:

Phrase/word	Percent Checked
Fun	80
Family-friendly	77.5
Brings visitors	95
Fascinating	65
Unifying	25
Economic catalyst	60
Busy	55
Educational	85
Impressive	80
Revitalizing	62.5
New destination	90
Asset	97.5

Question	Percent affirmative
Has the GlasStation created more foot traffic in downtown Farmville?	100
Do you believe that the GlasStation brings visitors to Farmville?	100
If yes, do you think these visitors stay more than a few hours?	77.5
If yes, do you think these visitors stay overnight?	5
If yes, do you think these visitors shop in the downtown shops while in town?	100
If yes, do you think these visitors eat in a local restaurant while in town?	100
If yes, do you think these visitors return to Farmville regularly?	90
Do you believe that the GlasStation encourages youth to stay in Farmville?	50
Do you believe that the GlasStation encourages people to move to Farmville?	67.5

The following statements were developed based on interviews with people familiar with the GlasStation. In most cases, they are reproduced verbatim from the interviews. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:

"The GlasStation has been the anchor of the downtown revitalization."	32.5
"Farmville has changed from an agricultural community to an arts community."	65
"There are more occupied storefronts in the town since the GlasStation came."	100
"The downtown does not look so rundown anymore."	95
"The arts have opened up new economic opportunities."	95
"More people are becoming involved in downtown."	100
"The GlasStation has made Farmville more tightly knit."	55
"Because of the GlasStation, art is finally getting the respect it deserves."	87.5

Quantitative Data

In tandem with qualitative data collection and analysis, evaluation of the economic impacts of the GlasStation were conducted utilizing methods from the field of economics. Input/output analysis using the IMPLAN method was used. Input/output (I/O) models have been broadly used in economic development and planning for a variety of businesses and purposes, including tourism and hospitality.

Property valuation data in the downtown historic area of Farmville were collected at two points in time, 2015 and 2019 to assess value change. To evaluate Quality of Life (QOL), Yelp.com reviews were collected at two points in time, 2016 and 2019. The research team utilized these data to answer questions the types of businesses and organizations exist within the historic district in Farmville, the rural quality of life (QOL) based on the city’s amenities, and the valuation, utilization, and rent prices of Farmville in the six-block historic Farmville business district.

The GlasStation in Farmville attracted approximately 1,000 visitors to the area annual for public demonstrations. VisitorNC estimated that day visitors spent approximately \$101.50 per person each day. The spending brought into the county by the visitor spending sparks economic activity that can be quantified as personal income, value of output, or employment using IMPLAN which is a software used by most state economists in the U.S. Visitor spending impacts are detailed below.

Economic Impacts on Personal Income from Visitors to Pitt County on the Regional Economies of North Carolina.

Impact Summary				
	<i>Personal Income</i>	<i>Output</i>	<i>Employment</i>	<i>Local Taxes</i>
Direct Effect	166,285	101,500	3.4	
Indirect Effect	7,273	25,043	0.2	
Induced Effect	11,415	38,746	0.3	
Total Effect	84,973	165,289	3.9	\$2,260

Visitor spending in Pitt County increased personal income in the county by \$166,285 directly. This spending reverberated through the economy via supply chains (indirect effects) and through household spending (induced effects). The supply chain effects increased personal income in Pitt county by \$7,273. The higher income sparked economic activity through household spending, increasing income by \$11,415 in induced effects. In total, the GlasStation brought in visitors who generated \$84,973 in personal income in Pitt County.

Another way of demonstrating economic impact is to look at the market value of output produced in the county. Output measures economic activity at the county level in the same way that GDP measures economic activity of the national economy. The GlasStation visitor spending generated \$101,500 in output directly. Visitor spending increased output through the production process by \$25,043

indirectly. As households earned more money, they spent part of it locally, increasing output by \$38,746 in induced effects. In total, the additional money brought into Pitt County from visitors to the GlasStation increased output by \$165,289.

In terms of employment, the GlasStation brought in spending that supported 3.4 jobs in Pitt County directly. Spending through the supply chains supported an additional 0.2 jobs locally and higher household spending supported another 0.3 jobs. In total, 3.9 jobs in Pitt County were supported by the visitors coming to the GlasStation and spending money in the county. The Pitt County government increased its tax base from the increased spending associated with the visitors to the GlasStation. The spending by 1,000 visitors generated taxable economic activity yielding an additional \$2,260 in revenue. This includes property taxes, vehicle licenses, and other taxes paid by businesses and households to the local government.

In evaluating the quality of life in Farmville, Yelp data collected from 2017 and 2019 yields interesting findings in Farmville. Data were scraped for Yelp reviews for 28 dining establishments in Farmville, 10 within the historic business district. Four closed between the 2017 and 2019, and two new restaurants opened since the 2019 data were collected. The number of reviews in 2017 was 48, and 139 in 2019. In 2017 the average star rating was 2.26, and in 2019 it was 2.75. Within the historic business district it was 2.65, and 2.92 in 2019. These descriptive statistics provide a single dimension of quality of life within Farmville.

As an additional secondary data source for evaluating economic impact, we examined the property value within the Farmville's historic downtown business districts through Pitt County Tax records. Researcher Michael Crane and a research assistant mapped and collected property value data from Pitt County tax records. In 2015 the average value was \$102,543 (2015); in 2019 it grew to \$106,852.

Data Collection Challenges

Like with most research plans, the team encountered challenges during the course of the project. First, one of the investigators left the University and was no longer able to continue work on the grant. As a result, a new member of the team was brought on to work on the qualitative, anthropological component of the project. While this new team member did excellent work, he approached the project with a slightly different perspective, and as a result the

original research design for qualitative data collection was not followed.

As the project progressed, the team discovered that the original plans for the collection of ethnographic (cultural impact) data were outsized for the town of Farmville, population 4,500. Rather than collecting a sample of approximately 600 spread across focus groups and online surveys, our final sample size was 40. Similarly, the online survey planned for the project was abandoned in lieu of a phone interview with participants. The researchers determined that the originally planned online survey was outsized to the realities of the town of Farmville and its population of 4,500. Therefore, phone interviews were collected instead. Further, beyond the initial participant observations and key informant interviews by David Griffith, the focus groups were not conducted nor were samples taken purposefully from different populations (students, social groups, etc.) Again, given the size of the town and potential participants, the team changed directions for data collection to suit the context of the research site.

Estimating Impacts of Regeneration

With the proliferation of dying and struggling small towns across North America, revitalization efforts have proliferated at nearly as dizzying a pace as the youth of these towns have been fleeing (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2019). In most cases, the process of revitalization, renewal, or resettlement of a community involves soul-searching regarding community identity—the attempt to forge a collective idea of where the community has been, where it is going, and what to do to move it in a positive direction. This is rarely merely a material process, dependent on influxes of private investment and public subsidy, and, in this sense, the quest for identity is a search for value from alternatives to markets, to wage labor employment, to government spending—in short, alternatives to capitalism. It can be seeking value in fine arts, music, and culture.

In New Orleans, following Hurricane Katrina, for example, Orgundiran (2019) indicated that Mardi Gras assumed an exaggerated significance in rejuvenating community identity, in part because the festivities, historically, have drawn on the city's rich African American traditions—the very populations that suffered most from Katrina. He noted that regeneration, manifested in holding the 2006 and subsequent Marti Gras celebration, was a process, a “continual act,” of social reproduction that

celebrated local culture, ritual, and identity while also highlighting the importance of repairing those components of the city's infrastructure—levees, dams, canals, pumping stations, etc.—that failed during the storm. It was, in short, both a symbolic and material celebration.

While many communities have attempted to improve their economic profiles with one or more of the above innovations, it is rare that any systematic attempt has been made to determine the social impact of any one innovation. Even with solid statistical data on such things as employment, income, population, housing, and other measures of economic development, it is difficult to attribute changes in a community to single causes. Simple infrastructure changes, such as the construction of a new highway by-pass, a bridge, or an optic fiber network, can influence trajectories of growth and decline far more than any planned attempts by city councils or county commissioners.

In North Carolina, along with Farmville, West Jefferson and Kinston have attempted to introduce the visual arts into their attempts to forge new identities. These efforts often reinforce others, complementing the arts with music or events such as Farmville's Dogwood Festival or taking advantage, like West Jefferson, of the Appalachian Mountains and a growing influx of fairly well-off retirees, some of them seasonal residents. Most communities focusing on the visual arts tend to approach the effort via a proliferation of galleries and public art such as murals, statues, and other highly visible artistic endeavors; the GlasStation is unique in the sense that, in addition to producing visual art products, it is a school and, at times, a center of performance art. According to an active member of the downtown revitalization associated with the local library, the performance dimension of the GlasStation has been one of its key attributes. In his words:

"He [Mike Tracy] blew some butterflies and some other characters [in children's] books. And then we did like a class on that, read books on what he blew. For the butterflies, for example, we read a book on butterflies and you know, he made a butterfly and things like that. We had to offer several of those sessions because space is very limited. And there was a great deal of people wanting to participate in those programs. So we offered several of those.

"A couple months before that we had a series of programs here at the library called 'Coffee and History,' where somebody in

town talks about something for an hour. So he [Mike] came and spoke about glass and the history of glass and that actually went over very well—so much so that immediately after the program he took everybody over to the gas station and started blowing, um, a vase. I think you'd be hard pressed to find any negative feedback about it."

It is clear from these statements that, as a center of performance art, the GlasStation is in high demand and well-received by children and parents in the community. The way in which the GlasStation integrates its art with the library's community outreach is something that came up again and again in the open-ended interviews: that is, the GlasStation seems to have been incorporated into the life of the downtown in an active capacity, playing a role in linking its galleries and community events to one another. Survey results, however, suggest that, however much the GlasStation has helped to promote integration among businesses in the downtown, and between events and activity centers, it has not been a particularly unifying force in the community in general. Nevertheless, it has much to recommend it.

The survey results suggest the perception that the GlasStation has had a largely positive impact on the community and particularly the downtown businesses. In cases where most or all of the respondents reacted in the same way to questions about a phenomenon, the variation is more interesting than the consensus. While most or all participants believed that the GlasStation increased foot traffic, shopping, eating, and visiting in the downtown, fewer believed it was successful in attracting overnight visitors, encouraging people to move to Farmville, or keeping youth in the community. We noted that participants did not see the GlasStation as a unifying force, which is clear from the facts that only 50% agreed with "unifying" as a descriptor and only a little over half said that it made Farmville more tightly knit.

By the same token, the participants did not agree that the GlasStation was the key source in the town's revitalization or responsible for respect the town has achieved lately. Only 60% called it an economic catalyst. These figures call into question the GlasStation's economic contribution to the community, yet they also pale beside the overwhelming agreement on many of its social impacts. Many of the themes that emerged during our conversations with residents about the GlasStation indicate that its benefits, in many ways, have a great deal of symbolic depth.

The economic impact data supports participants' perceptions that the GlasStation had a largely positive impact on the community and particularly downtown businesses. Between May 2017 and May 2018 183 individuals enrolled in continuing education glass classes at the GlasStation. Participants pay on average \$85 per class to attend a three-to-four-hour workshop to make an object such as a paperweight or garden ball. The traffic from these events, as well as the twice-yearly glass sales for the GlasStation drive foot traffic in downtown Farmville and feed increased traffic within the historic district. This traffic may contribute to the improvement and exit of businesses in the historic downtown through social learning occurring via Yelp and other online social media platforms. Indeed, the GlasStation's main vehicle for communication with the public is either drop-in foot traffic, or through its Facebook site, which announces demonstrations and when new continuing education classes open.

Economic data illuminate the cascading effects of the GlasStation. While we cannot draw a direct correlation between the GlasStation and these data, the increase in Main Street property and the increased star rating of businesses on Yelp show that since its opening in 2017 businesses and Main Street have flourished. Certainly, these impacts are the result of not just the opening of the GlasStation, but local residents and groups, such as the Farmville Group, to improve the economic conditions of the town. This assessment aligns with participants' perceptions that it was not the sole economic or social driver in the town's transformation. The quantified impact of the GlasStation does, however, provide a numerical value for the impact of this project on the town.

Themes and Implications

Discussions surrounding the GlasStation engaged multiple themes, many of which envision a break from Farmville's agricultural past, focusing on a new, rejuvenating identity emphasizing the arts. Formerly known for its principal agricultural commodity, flue cured tobacco, through much of the 20th century Farmville conformed to the image of independent family farming. The tobacco allotment system, which involved the institutionalized management of tobacco production and marketing until 2001, when the large tobacco companies lobbied to dismantle the system in favor of open markets and the removal of other producer protections (Benson, 2012; Kingsolver, 2010). Farmville suffered as

small tobacco farmers and many tobacco warehouses and auctions succumbed to the capital concentration that followed the break-up of the allotment program. In light of this, it may not be surprising to learn that many see the arts as the source of a new identity for the town that transcends, in many ways, the emphasis on commodity production.

Although this emphasis is not new, many residents perceive that the GlasStation added new stimulus to an old, perhaps latent, identity, bringing it to the surface and serving as a connecting hub of all kinds of artistic activity—performance glass-blowing, artistic and craft glass-blowing, painting, music, dance, ironwork, etc. In the words of one downtown merchant:

“The GlasStation has been kind of a neat part of an overall surge and the arts in Farmville. I would say, around 40 years ago, Farmville had a big arts and artistic movement. That was really strong until maybe for maybe 15 or 20 years after that. And for the last 15 or 20 years, it's dropped off, kind of coinciding with the loss of the tobacco market. At that time, the arts movement was more just like a hobby, more something for, you know—this is probably a bad way to put it—but almost a way a housewife could entertain or provide entertainment. It was maybe more secondary than primary. Now, you know, we're figuring out a way to make it a really vital, I mean, oh, a vital part of Farmville where it's not just background anymore. It's definitely, you know, the economy. It is.”

The perceived movement from a secondary to a primary part of Farmville's development has material dimensions. Although the town's symbolic identity may be beginning to revolve around the arts, rarely do people talk about the development of the arts without lapsing into talking about the development of town's economy. That new (or renewed) identity has various material consequences, drawing new residents, visitors, and businesses to town, creating shared space for artists to work, sponsoring community events and activities, and more, all of which play a role in generating revenue for the community.

Interestingly, the idea of glassblowing as an art rather than a craft is something that seems to transcend economic considerations. This sentiment emerged in multiple ways in the interviews, including considering glassblowing as a process, as performance, and as history. Again, in the words of a local public official, who knows the GlasStation well, speaking of witnessing glass artist Mike Tracy at work:

"I mean, he already has in mind kind of what he's going to be creating. He'll just talk about his history, the art of glassblowing while he's making it. It looks plain what he's doing, why he's doing it. He'll talk about how hot the glass is at certain points, why I'm using this chisel this certain way. Kind of explain the whole process. I mean, when they were just stretching off the glass and they kept going and going and I was like, this is unbelievable. Like I have never seen anything like this before. It's just, he makes, he makes it really fascinating. And I think it's, from an audience perspective, it's, it's really fun to watch if you, if you know nothing about glass or glass blowing."

Along with the performance glass-blowing, the GlasStation also serves as a community hub for the arts and organizations interested in promoting the arts. Its location in the downtown connects it to several downtown businesses, as does the events the GlasStation either sponsors or participates in. Indeed, the theme of connection emerged in the interviews as well, in particular the connections among arts, culture, and education.

"I think it [the GlasStation] has really made Farmville more of a destination, you know, there are a lot of things happening, a lot of other cultural and arts initiatives happening in town, but it [the GlasStation] might be leading the way.... We're definitely trying to reestablish identity. I guess we're trying to be the Carboro or the Chapel Hill of eastern North Carolina, which sounds very ambitious. But we are making arts and culture our focus and we have been for the past just a few years. Um, you know, as you know, the glass organization isn't the only presence. Our arts council is gaining, gaining steam, and in the library we have for the past several years as well. I think we're really trying to form this identity of an arts haven."

To fully understand the picture that this research creates, consider the cultural and economic findings brush strokes that outline the story of the GlasStation's impact on Farmville. Taken together, it is evident that the GlasStation drives traffic to and through the downtown historic district — from visitors who attend evening demonstrations, to students enrolled in continuing education classes, to University students and faculty who traverse Farmville as part of their semesterly duties. In alignment with participants' perceptions that the GlasStation contributes to Farmville's economic revitalization, secondary indicators — the increase in the overall rating of downtown dining establishments and the rising value of downtown property—

suggest the same. The economic impacts of the GlasStation, however, have clear limits in the eyes of the participants. They did not view the GlasStation as the anchor for economic development, nor contributing to overnight stays in town.

But perhaps more important is the GlasStation's contribution to the town's process of redefining its identity as a hub of arts activity. Other signs of this identity formation process are evident in the opening of new art gallery on Main Street after the GlasStation opened. This space began with a small, single store front and grew into the renovation and transformation of two storefronts with multiple stories. East Carolina Art Space was initially intended to attract recent university art graduates to establish studios and sell their work and as a means of supporting the growth of the arts in the region. However, rather than attracting recent ECU graduates, this space attracts established local and regional artists, such as commercial photographers, potters, a jeweler (University alumna), interior designer, and more. The transformation of the business owners' concept for the space, from fine arts studios to commercially focused arts businesses is perhaps reflective of the community's grappling with what it means to be a town that supports and has a thriving "arts" scene.

The community's perception of Farmville's recent growth as the restoration of an identity as an arts hub that dates back more than forty years is also visible within the town. More than ten murals have been commissioned and implemented in the historic downtown. Many of these murals are restored painted signs on the sides of buildings that celebrate the town's history as a tobacco production center. The focus on restoring these signs is a tangible connection between the resurgence of the arts in Farmville with its past—and serves as a physical connection between transformation and tradition. Indeed, the initial partnership between the Dean of the College of Fine Arts and Communication and the Farmville Group resulted from the long-term community interest in music — performing arts. The recent resurgence of the Farmville Arts Council, which had declined recently after an illustrious history focused on local and regional musicians and community theater, is yet another indication of the connection between Farmville's new direction and its past.

We can also connect the transformation of the town's identity with participants' changing perceptions of glass blowing as art rather than craft — given the utilitarian aspect of glass. Key to this are the demonstrations that local artist

Mike Tracy does. These performances both entertain visitors and educate them on the technical, historic, and aesthetic aspects of the art of glass. This aligns with University partners' initial interest in glass blowing as a good fit for catalyzing the arts in Farmville. The development of community members' perception of glass blowing as an art rather than just a craft also aligns with the glass artist's interest in glass as a fine art focused on education, rather than production glass. However, given the limited resources of one glass artist in residence at the GlasStation, this also produces tension between the community's and visitors' desires to purchase glass artwork. The glass artist's focus, as a faculty member at ECU, is on instruction and shop health, safety and maintenance. Producing items such as vases, glasses, paper weights, and other glass consumables is a small fraction of his responsibilities as a faculty member. The desire to purchase glass consumables is also complicated by North Carolina state law and University policies and limitations regarding the sale of items produced utilizing state funding. This remains an area that the partners — the University and the town — continue to work on resolving, both to alleviate the pressure on the glass artist to produce glass objects and to meet market demand for such items.

A prominent finding from this research is the theme of connection and connectivity. The GlasStation connects ECU to Farmville through a tangible physical space. Through this facility, the town — the families that donated the facility, the DiVisconti Trust that renovated and maintains the facility, and ECU who rents and uses the facility — have connected financial stakes in Farmville's revitalization and economic development. The GlasStation and the adjacent (and connected) DiVisconti Arts and Events Center function as a hub for the arts and organizations interested in the arts. The connection of the visual to the performing arts through the use of the adjacent arts center for performances such as local blue grass musicians and the University chamber music series. Additionally, an Agri-Cultural market was held on the lawn behind the GlasStation in Summer 2018 and there are plans to build a stage behind the GlasStation as a outdoor music venue.

Conclusions

One of the take-away lessons from this project is the concept of authenticity. Farmville residents view its recent arts focus as a revitalization of an historic tradition, which is likely a significant reason why the community has embraced this direction. The sense that the arts are intrinsic to the history and fabric of the town, and authentic to its identity has, perhaps, spurred the adoption of this approach to rethinking the town's character. Viewed through this lens, the arts are not an innovation but a restoration and a connection to the town's history. In other words, this creative placemaking endeavor has been successful not only because it has a beautiful new glass blowing facility, but because the arts and an arts-focused economy feel true and authentic to the community. The community's positive perception of the GlasStation and its contributions to the town's revitalization is the strongest indicator of the aspect.

One of the goals for this project was to evaluate the feasibility of the initial research design as applied in a rural context. In retrospect, one of the strengths of the research design was the parallel mixed-methods design and the combination of anthropological and economic approaches assessing the impacts of the GlasStation as creative placemaking. However, the planned sample sizes were significantly optimistic given the rural context of Farmville. If this study were replicated, smaller sample sizes for assessing the social impact are both realistic and feasible. However, the small sample sizes on the economic side pose limitations for generalizing findings — especially as secondary indicators of GlasStation's success. In replicating the study, a research design utilizing one—or many—control locations to compare social media data scrapes and findings would be an interesting approach. Further, other online data sources such as Google, Trip Advisor, and Facebook would add additional data points and create a more robust assessment of quality of life indicators.

Lastly, as a public/private partnership between a large regional university and a small rural community, this research led to the formation of an emerging theory regarding the development of community engagement partnerships. The development of this theory was a by-product of the principal investigator's work with one of the partners. The theory of "Anchor Partners" (Bukoski & Paynter) clarifies the roles of institutional actors focused on University community engagement projects, such as the GlasStation.

This emerging theory utilizes some of the principles of Weerts and Sandman's work (2008) on boundary spanning while extending it in to new scholarly and theoretical territory that may help community engaged scholars and institutions prepare for and navigate new partnerships. Boundary spanners help university and community partners understand each other's perspectives through teaching and learning within the relationship. Weerts and Sandmann posit that boundary spanners function within the contexts of task orientation and social closeness. Also within the field of the scholarship of university community engagement, Amey, Brown, & Sandmann (2002) identify the role that the leader in a multidisciplinary outreach/engagement academic project plays in working with community partners. The leader develops the vision that guides the team through their work, framing the work and guiding the formation of goals and objectives, and resolving conflict. Over time the leader's work could become more facilitating than managerial, which in this case would be the Dean of the College of Fine Arts and Communication.

In contrast, Bringle, Clayton, and Price (2009) describe three types of on-campus relationship types utilizing the SOFAR model. Their continuum model begins with exploitive relationships that lack closeness, equity, and integrity to transactional relationships that are focused around completing a task and finally transformational relationships that result in both partners growing and changing. According to the authors, these relationships can change over time—moving along the exploitive-transactional-transformational continuum in either direction. Further, over time social bonds will develop out of transformational relationships between partners. Frequency of interaction, the intentionality of interactions and their duration, and other factors contribute to this development which may be expressed through language, the development of memoranda of understanding, access to resources, and more. In other words, Bringle, Clayton, and Price theorize that university-community partners develop closeness over time.

In contrast, however, the theory of anchor partners posits that the inverse may be true—that anchor partnerships have strong social bonds that may facilitate partnership development due to the long-term interactions between the partners. Community partnerships evolve and change over time. Original partners may decrease

participation, or even leave a partnership, with new partners emerging and becoming involved. However, successful partnerships may often have “anchor relationships.” In our observations, these relationships are long-term interpersonal relationships that have some component of professional interaction. These relationships may begin as acquaintances focused in a professional context, but evolve over time as trust, understanding, and mutual respect between the two individuals builds. In the development of a new community partnership, the history of cooperation, work, and communication as the partnership emerges from primordial soup.

In the “shape-making” stage of community partnership development, the anchors—either knowingly or unknowingly—complete a number of key tasks. Anchors identify other potential partners, leveraging other existing relationships to collect resources (human capital, knowledge, fiscal, etc.) that may be engaged in the partnership. Anchors lead communication, sharing ‘do’s and don’ts’ with other partners, providing a central point of contact, and managing the definition, articulation, and scope of initial timeline(s) and proposed project(s).

The anchor’s interpersonal history with their co-anchor may better position them to know when and how to react to situations that may arise, raising a red flag if needed. It may be the anchors’ trust of each other that allows communication to function appropriately; mutual trust may allow the anchor to voice concern in a suitable tone. Anchors may also be adept at identifying tools that will facilitate the development of the partnership, such as knowing how quickly a response to a question or concern should be addressed (is a response expect the same day, or can it wait until next week?), when to implement a memoranda of understanding, knowing how resources can be allocated and/or requested, and more. Anchors may also be skillful at growing involvement in the partnership, including understanding who to bring in to a partnership, when to engage new partners, how to help new partners understand the existing partnership and situate their work within this context, and managing the expectations, contributions, and roles of new partners.

As universities continue to pursue community partnerships, understanding the nuances of partnership formation out of the oftentimes murky sea of collaboration will be key. Historical relationship with community partners, power relationships between campus and community,

availability of funding, institutional culture, and background of the higher educational representatives and partners are key issues to consider when working with community partners who may not feel empowered or suited to working with universities.

The primary investigator plans to further test the theory of anchor partners and ask questions about how access to funding streams/resources play into partnership development. Is the presence of anchors in an emerging partnership an “indicator species” of community engagement, could this indicate the potential for long-term success? If universities and communities such as Farmville endeavor to work together for common goals, such as community development and transformation, the theory of anchor partners may guide how universities approach partnerships, how community partners are engaged, and ultimately the success of these projects.

In closing, this research demonstrated that the combination of anthropology and economics to evaluate the impact of a creative placemaking project on a rural community can yield meaningful results. When combined, the disparate sets of data tell the story of a community whose revitalization was impacted by, but not solely reliant on the presence of a university glass blowing facility. While the GlasStation made an economic impact on the town of Farmville, perhaps the most important reason for the town’s arts revitalization is that this focus is authentic to the history and culture of the community.

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