

Cultivating Creative Communities: A Survey of Creative Placemaking in North Carolina

by

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### Abstract

In the practice of creative placemaking, arts, artist, and cultural organizations become essential partners with private, public, and non-profit organizations to help promote the character and wellbeing of a neighborhood, town, or city. In North Carolina, creative placemaking is occurring across the state through practices that celebrate the histories of communities, cities, and regions while also creating opportunities for improved livability for citizens and healthier local economies. Through interviews with cultural leaders in the state and research of the projects being executed by HandMade in America in Asheville, the Ashe County Arts Council in West Jefferson, Charlotte's Arts and Science Council and McColl Center for Art + Innovation, Greensboro's Elsewhere and Action Greensboro, the Department of Public and Cultural Arts in Chapel Hill, the North Carolina Arts Council in Raleigh, the Vollis Simpson Whirligig Park in Wilson, and the African American Music Trails in Kinston, creative placemaking in North Carolina can be characterized as a diverse practice that engages local communities in order to create distinct visual representations of place that celebrate local heritages while also acknowledging and strengthening communities' opportunities for economic advancement in coming years.

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### **Introduction**

“Place” as a concept is highly abstract, but places in particular are concrete, palpable, intimately meaningful. Each place is different. Each of us comes from just such a particular and unreproducible somewhere, and considers some place “home.”

—Wilfred M. McClay, “Why Place Matters”, 3

My understanding of place in North Carolina took shape through the frame of a car window. Since childhood, the roads, buildings, landscapes, and people I have seen from the passenger’s seat of a car have informed my view of place. My understanding of my neighborhood, town, and state was developed daily as I rode along with my parents through routines of school, work, church, and errands. When trips extended beyond the typical routes of our daily lives, it was to travel across the state to visit family, or swapping one end of the state for another with annual beach vacations. With each ride I took, I began to develop an attachment to the state in which I live. The landmarks I passed on a daily basis and the landscapes that flowed across my car window became part of my identity. Those scenes began to connect with one another to create an idea of the land, places, and people that make up North Carolina.

As an adult, the car rides I take continue to be experiences in viewing place. Just as my position in the vehicle has changed from passenger to driver, the range of experiences through which I see the world has evolved. My own education in the arts and the roles they can play in communities has brought me to consider North Carolina as more than scenery through which I travel. Now, as I make my way across North Carolina’s one hundred counties, I consider more deeply the places I am encountering. I find that when I visit a new

town, I am filled with curiosity about the character of the place, how the unique histories and viewpoints of the town and citizens are communicated, and what role the arts are playing in that storytelling.

My interest in the significance of arts and culture in shaping the communities of North Carolina reflects a curiosity in the concept of creative placemaking. In *Creative Placemaking*, a 2010 whitepaper published by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), Ann Markusen and Anne Gadwa researched the emerging concept of creative placemaking and the role it plays in American communities. According to Markusen and Gadwa, creative placemaking is a practice in which “partners from public, private, non-profit, and community sectors strategically shape the physical and social character of a neighborhood, town, city, or region around arts and cultural activities (Markusen and Gadwa 3). Through the development of arts-based community programs and the involvement of the arts in the visions for cities’ futures, creative placemaking “animates public and private spaces, rejuvenates structures and streetscapes, improves local business viability and public safety, and brings diverse people together to celebrate, inspire, and be inspired” (Markusen and Gadwa 3).

In North Carolina, the principle of creative placemaking is being implemented in towns, cities, and counties across the state in order to celebrate the state’s heritage while creating culturally-based experiences and partnerships that enhance the economic and social wellbeing of citizens and communities.

## **Understanding Creative Placemaking**

Creative placemaking is a process that responds to the unique circumstances and viewpoints that exist within specific communities. As a concept that is designed to respond to the unique character of communities, there is flexibility concerning the definition of the term. In addition to their support of Markusen and Gadwa's research, the National Endowment for the Arts describes creative placemaking, saying "Artists and community development practitioners across our nation – sometimes one and the same, sometimes working together – are striving to make places more livable with enhanced quality of life, increased creative activity, a distinct sense of place, and vibrant local economies that together capitalize on their existing assets" ("Grants").

In addition to the definitions embraced by the NEA, creative placemaking grant and research organization ArtPlace America defines the practice as one in which "art plays an intentional and integrated role in place-based community planning and development" ("Introduction"). The organization also takes care to note that the term "creative" applies to the process of placemaking, rather than the place itself. ArtPlace's description touches on the ways success is gaged in placemaking projects, saying "success is measured in the ways artists, formal and informal art spaces, and creative interventions contribute toward community outcomes" ("Introduction").

To further grasp the ways in which art can be applied to community development, an understanding of the assets present within a given community is critical. The 2008 research by Cornelia Flora and Jan Flora, professors of Sociology at Iowa State University, creates a structure through which the elements that create a sustainable community can be identified and utilized. Sustainable communities, Flora and Flora posit, are focused on encouraging the

development of “community capitals” (“Community Capitals”). The aspects of natural, cultural, human, social, political, financial and built capitals, when individually strengthened, begin to influence one another and encourage sustainable, cyclical community growth, as depicted in Figure 1.

## Community Capitals Framework

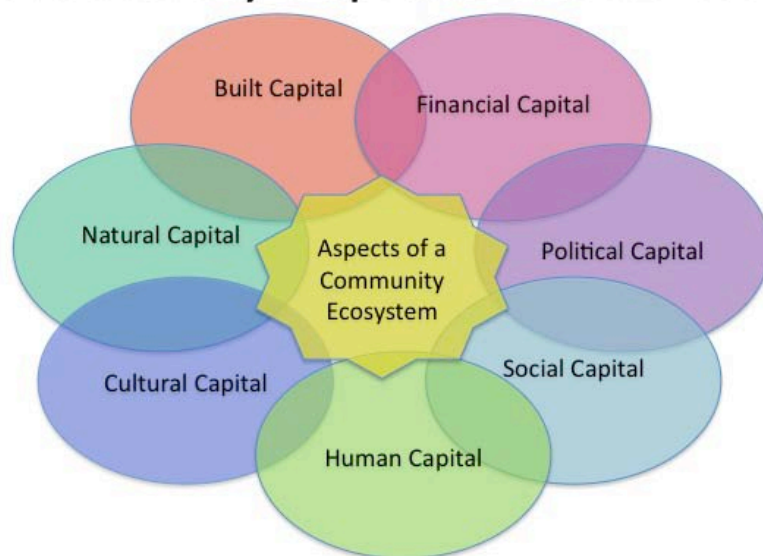


Figure 1

Built capital recognizes the elements of infrastructure present in the community. Elements of a cityscape such as roads, transportation systems, and power and communication infrastructures comprise the elements of built capital. The creation and maintenance of built capital impacts the effectiveness and well-being of a community, as well as the appearance of a particular place (“Community Capitals”). Within North Carolina, roads, buildings, and parks all contribute to placemaking efforts being undertaken.

Financial capital is comprised of the public or private funding available to contribute to the business, civic, and social health within a community. The financial capital of a

community is vital to both the public and private partners that are characteristic of creative placemaking efforts (“Community Capitals”). North Carolina’s communities are utilizing financial capital in a number of ways. Grant making on state and national levels are financing placemaking projects and informing long-term community planning in cities such as Greensboro and Wilson. Additionally, local tax-based Percent for Art programs in Charlotte and Chapel Hill are helping to finance public art initiatives that are activating community spaces across the state.

The ability of a community to inform the legal policies and regulations by which they are impacted is known as political capital. Political capital can be influence that a community possesses on a local, state, or national level (“Community Capitals”). Political capital is exhibited in North Carolina’s creative placemaking when arts-based initiatives partner with local governments for support, as when West Jefferson’s Town Council formally passed support of a plan to reconfigure a main thoroughfare to emphasize the visual appeal of a downtown space.

The connections among the individuals within a community create social capital. These connections, when properly utilized, create networks of community members and organizations invested in a particular project (“Community Capitals”). The concept of social capital is at the core of creative placemaking and is illustrated in communities across the state of North Carolina. In communities of all sizes, the arts are being made an active part of community planning through the communication and dedication of individuals and cooperation among citizens. Organizers of North Carolina’s craft and heritage trails in Asheville and Kinston use public discussions forums and interviews with local artists to inform the direction of their respective projects.



While social capital focuses on the connections between people in a community, human capital emphasizes the skills and knowledge possessed by individuals. These skills and abilities include citizens' capacities to grow and attain further knowledge that helps strengthen all components of community ("Community Capitals"). North Carolina is engaging human capital through the employment and involvement of its artists in the planning of community spaces, as seen in the development of public art and cultural districts in Durham and Chapel Hill. The Vollis Simpson Whirligig Park's development of training for local skilled workers to maintain and enhance art-based projects has created local jobs while creating celebrating the talent and artistry of Vollis Simpson.

Cultural capital addresses the common histories and practices among people within a community. These histories and practices inform the ways groups of people perceive the world and their individual roles within that world. As individuals understand the world and their own places within certain heritages, cultures, or groups, it impacts their own abilities to interact with people of different or similar backgrounds ("Community Capitals"). Creative placemaking in North Carolina commemorates and celebrates craft histories in Asheville and western North Carolina, agricultural histories in eastern towns such as Wilson and Kinston, and the industrial histories of cities such as Greensboro and Durham. Recognizing such shared histories among community members and using the arts to make those histories visible in towns and cities bolsters the already-rich cultural capital of the state.

Natural capital includes the natural landscape of a location and the resources that can be drawn from the land ("Community Capitals"). The unique landscape of the state of North Carolina sets it apart as a place and helps to inform the ways that placemaking is being employed to shape community. Craft and cultural trails that wind through the state recognize

the unique settings of the high country, foothills, eastern plains, and the Carolina coast. As smaller towns such as West Jefferson, Wilson, and Kinston strive to establish strong tourism industries, recognizing and embracing the unique character of local landscapes helps these towns communicate the benefits of visiting that particular place. Creative placemaking efforts in North Carolina towns are using natural capital to make themselves recognizable and to bring visitors into their towns, studios, and stores to engage local artists and energize local economies.

When coupled with the consideration of community capitals, the practice of creative placemaking allows towns and cities to analyze the histories and current assets of their communities. Once strengths within these capitals have been identified, the arts-driven community partnerships and planning indicative of creative placemaking can begin to take place in a way that sustains all vital aspects of a community.

### **My Exploration of Creative Placemaking**

In order to consider the variety of landscapes, towns, cities, and projects that are shaping the creative placemaking practice in North Carolina, meeting placemakers and listening to the stories of how they are contributing to the successes of their home communities was vital. Conducting interviews with arts organizers in Asheville, West Jefferson, Greensboro, Charlotte, Raleigh, Chapel Hill, Wilson, and Kinston allowed me to develop an understanding of the scope of placemaking that is enlivening towns across the state and how each community is uniquely approaching the integration of arts into the definition of place.

The selection of these sites was based on my desire to understand the types of arts organizations engaging artists and audiences across the mountain, piedmont, and coastal regions, as well as considering the differences between the rural and urban areas of North Carolina. The organizational profiles included in this research will guide readers across the state, from the Western mountains of Asheville to the coastal plains of Kinston.

Researching and interviewing organizations within each region provides a dynamic overview of the models that comprise the community of North Carolina arts organizations. HandMade in America, an Asheville-based non-profit organization, strives for craft-based economic growth in North Carolina by providing entrepreneurial education resources to artists and by trying to enhance craft-based tourism in the region through the creation of an extensive chain of craft trails. Arts councils in Ashe and Lenoir counties provide funding resources to local artists while also working with local residents, businesses, and governments to organize projects such as the creation of public murals on barns and businesses in West Jefferson, or Kinston's development of a public park and performance

space to celebrate local blues, soul, funk, and R&B heritages of an eight-county region. In Wilson, the Vollis Simpson Whirligig Park has established a spinning spectacle in its downtown to celebrate the talent of one of its unique residents. The North Carolina Arts Council, based in Raleigh, is working to connect county arts councils to one another while also developing the SmART initiative in towns like Durham as a catalyst for culturally-based economic growth. In Chapel Hill the local Parks and Recreation Department houses the public and cultural arts office as a way to integrate local art directly into the planning of local government. The Arts and Science council of Charlotte is working to develop an extensive collection of public art to enliven and enhance city spaces, while the city's McColl Center for Art + Innovation is connecting contemporary artists with local communities to serve as ecological problem solvers. Greensboro also provides insight into the innovative roles that museums and local governments play in creative placemaking. The living museum at Elswhere works to connect people to place through artist interventions within a single building, while the efforts of Action Greensboro and the Greensboro Partnership work to create artistic experiences throughout the city.

Understanding the variety of projects being undertaken by North Carolina cultural organizations, the goals of their organizers, and the varying locations in which these efforts are occurring creates an in-depth understanding of the artistic and community assets at work across the state. From this understanding, the individuality of each place and its projects are appreciated, while the common threads of partnerships, response to local economies, and acknowledgement of local histories, community engagement, and the visual representation of place can be evaluated to understand the current state of creative placemaking in North Carolina.

### **Asheville: HandMade in America**

My identification and exploration of North Carolina's creative placemaking began in Asheville. The city, known nationally for its scenic views of the Blue Ridge Parkway and its ties to creative spirits such as F. Scott Fitzgerald and Thomas Wolfe, is equally known for creative communities, such as the collections of artist homes, studios, and galleries found in the city's River Arts District. Within the landscape of the city's creative community one organization has produced a series of creative placemaking efforts benefiting the entire mountain region. HandMade in America, established in 1993, stands on the simple mission "to grow economies through craft and creative placemaking" in western North Carolina ("About Us"). Focusing not only on the city of Asheville or Buncombe County, HandMade's efforts promote the value of craft and creativity in the twenty-two counties that comprise the North Carolina High Country. Two of HandMade's myriad programs, the Craft Trails of Western North Carolina and the Small Towns program, illustrate the creative capacity of Western North Carolina and the region's potential for creative, place-based economic growth.

#### **Craft Trail Guidebooks**

Becky Anderson, former founding director of HandMade in America explained to me the significance of HandMade's focus on the rural counties of western North Carolina saying "In the world of craft, a great number of creators and makers live in rural communities" (Anderson). With her creation of HandMade in America, Anderson envisioned a system through which these craftspeople could enrich their communities by engaging travelers, celebrating the craft heritage of the region, and helping to develop their local economies. Through direct engagement and partnership with communities across Western North

Carolina, Anderson and the staff of HandMade in America created the *Craft Heritage Trails of North Carolina*. This guidebook leads travelers through the towns of Western North Carolina seeking out the artist studios, stores, restaurants, and scenery that create the unique character of the region and its towns. By celebrating the cultural heritage of the craft community of Western North Carolina and encouraging the patronage of contemporary craft artists and the galleries, inns, restaurants, and shops in the towns where artist are based, HandMade in America's guidebooks have engaged in placemaking by working with local artists and communities to define the creative skill and heritage of western North Carolina and to use those cultural assets as an impetus for economic growth.

The *Craft Heritage Trails of North Carolina* guidebooks are the product of an in-depth process of community engagement and planning. Anderson describes the guidebooks as a project that grew as a direct response to the voices of artists in the region. In her conversations with artists whose livelihoods are often based primarily on their successes at craft fairs across the region and state, Anderson continuously heard "the minute we leave our studios, we quit earning a living" (Anderson). The strains and frustrations felt by artists giving up valuable studio time to travel and sell their works inspired a system which would bring the craft market directly to studio doors.

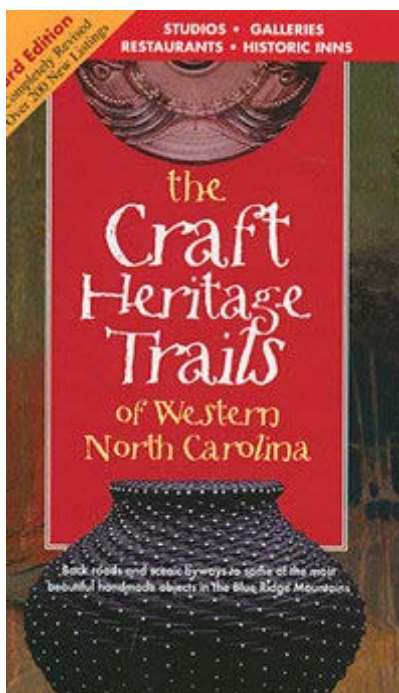


Figure 2: Handmade in America's 2003 edition of *The Craft Heritage Trails of Western North Carolina*

The development of the trail guides and a broader sense of what Anderson characterizes as “community-based tourism” began with conversations in the communities where craft artists were based. Community engagement and trust in the project was slow to build. Anderson recalls that meetings could fluctuate in attendance between as few as five or as many as twenty-five individuals. Regardless of the initial turnout at these meetings, hearing the ideas of communities was the core objective of community engagement. Anderson explains the organization’s simple but high-impact approach, saying: “We only ever asked three questions: Where are the sacred places in this community? Where do you not want a visitor in this community? And what would you want to share with visitors about your craft heritage?” (Anderson). The consideration of these questions allowed community members to see their communities and the assets therein in a new light. The responses received in these public conversations determined the focus of the trails and created further

trust and emotional investment from locals. Anderson recalls the tone of meetings as individuals began to share memories of their hometowns and identify locations that they valued, saying “Once citizens felt like they had a right to say something and people would listen to them, they were great...It was joyous to hear people describe what was sacred in their communities”.

The conversations facilitated by HandMade in America helped communities discuss commonly-valued spaces. Community reflection upon these locations, which often included churches, watering holes, historic sites, and cemeteries, built community buy-in to the trail project and investment in its success. Identifying these sources of community pride and value allows opportunities for individuals and groups to see specific locations not only as the places and spaces in which they live their lives, but as shared locations that have informed their life experiences and identities. This individual and community identification with shared spaces and experiences creates a collective investment in honoring the past of a town or community while building a shared interest in the well-being of the community’s future.

The trails and guidebooks developed from these conversation help to communicate the unique character of the craft artists of North Carolina and the places in which they live. This sense of place and character is absorbed by travelers who embark on any of the eight designated trails including the High Country Ramble, Farm to Market, Mountain Cities, or the Lake Country trails (Fields). Armchair travelers too are introduced to a sense of place through the language of the books. Readers of *The Craft Heritage Trails* begin their journeys reading: “This is more than a simple guidebook to craft. It is the story of people. People whose lives are colored by their art and whose art colors the lives of anyone who comes to



know their work. And where are these people? They're 'down the road a piece' or 'round the bend' or 'within shoutin' distance.' And they're in this book." (Fields 7).

In addition to creating a system to allow traveler engagement with the places and creative cultures of western North Carolina, a goal of the guidebook was to encourage and track economic growth as a result of the craft in the region. A tool developed by HandMade to gauge economic impact is a short survey in each guidebook. This survey documented the trails taken, the places enjoyed by visitors, the amount of money spent on craft during the trip, and recommendations for improvements in the trail. Similarly, HandMade sought to document changes in the sales percentages for craft vendors along the trail. Analyzing the impact of the trail guidebooks in the first thirteen months, a full season of tourism, HandMade found the craftspeople along the trails experienced a 23% increase in sales. From the surveys HandMade learned that between \$200 and \$400 was spent by the average craft trail visitors (Anderson). These figures offer insights into the impact that HandMade's placemaking efforts have on the towns in North Carolina.

By articulating cultural assets and valued histories within mountain towns, HandMade was able to understand the histories of these communities, their cultural strengths, and how those characteristics could help shape the future success of communities. Working with those communities to market the stores, scenery, and crafts people that make their towns unique, Handmade was able to broaden the region's tourism offerings and boost the economies of regional craft communities and the towns in which they are located.

### **Small Towns**

The effect of the guidebooks on community dialogue, tourist engagement, and economic development through craft encouraged HandMade in America to continue to

encourage small towns to take on projects that improve place-based economies. Janelle Wienkie, HandMade in America's former Community Economic Development Manager, describes the process of community engagement in the program as being similar to the model of engagement used to develop the craft trail system: "When we start working with a community, we get a group of citizens – whether they are connected to organizations, or their family has been there for generations and they just care – we get those people together and we talk about how they can start to organize themselves for their town's benefit." These conversations allow for the identification of specific community assets. These assets can range from built capital such as specific roads, buildings, or businesses to human capital including specific community groups or community leaders. The renovation of Jefferson Avenue – outlined in this paper's profile of West Jefferson, North Carolina – provides an example of the ways HandMade in America works with small towns throughout western North Carolina to develop community projects. In this project, the cooperation of HandMade in America with the Ashe County Arts Council, the West Jefferson Town Council, and downtown businesses helped create a development plan that makes the downtown more walkable and encourages cars passing through the town to stop and shop at in local stores and galleries, admire the town's many murals, and dine at local restaurants. By helping facilitate these changes in aspects of a community such as infrastructure, HandMade works to improve the livability and appeal of western North Carolina's towns, while also bringing arts organizations into conversations about community development.

The Small Towns program provides benefits beyond the growth within a specific community. Participation in the program allows towns opportunities to connect and discuss projects, progress, and challenges. Of the interaction that HandMade encourages through

regular small town cluster meetings and annual conferences in Asheville, Wienke believes “Peer to peer [communication] is invaluable in our programs, because when you get that many heads together in a room it’s a beautiful thing” (Wienke). The communication between placemaking organizations within a region offers a critical tool in the success of placemaking projects. When arts leaders and organizers gather and share the successes and challenges of their projects, they can learn from one another’s triumphs and setbacks. As individual cities and towns are strengthened as a result of such dialogues, the region becomes stronger. If creative placemaking and cooperation between organizations occurs across all of North Carolina’s regions occurs, communities across the state can become enlivened through the influence of the arts in community growth.

The futures of the Small Towns programs and Craft Heritage Trail Guide, however, are currently uncertain. HandMade in America is an organization that is undergoing significant changes. The rapid turnover of the three executive directors in four years and the significant loss of grant funding from sources including the N.C. Department of Commerce, the N.C. Rural Center, and the N.C. Community Development Initiative have both contributed to the decrease in staffing and programming. While such logistical setbacks are troubling, a problem at the center of the situation is an unclear vision of what the mission of the organization is. Since HandMade’s beginning focus in creative placemaking in rural communities, programming has expanded to include gallery exhibitions and sales, as well as craft market events. In a December 2014 interview with Asheville’s Citizen Times, current director Glenn Cox spoke about the need for renewed focus on the organizations mission, saying “We are not an arts council, we are not a gallery, we are not a studio, we are not an arts college. We are the business side... We’re an economic development organization that

uses craft as one of our conduits to reach out and improve communities” (Wengrow). As Handmade in America and arts organizations across the state continue to engage in creative placemaking, consideration of the mission of the organization and the focus of its projects should always be a primary concern.

HandMade in America’s guidebooks have created opportunities for travelers to experience history, culture and scenery of the mountains of North Carolina, while also allowing the crafts people and rural communities who call the region home to reap the economic benefits of the skills and entrepreneurship they offer. The Small Towns programs have continued to foster an entrepreneurial and civically involved spirit among small-town arts organizations and the communities in which they operate. Because the basis of HandMade in America’s creative placemaking efforts to honor regional heritages and improve the economic future of towns, a renewed focus on its placemaking and economic development roots will undoubtedly benefit western North Carolina.

### West Jefferson: The Ashe County Arts Council

Exploring the high country that HandMade in America promotes through its Craft Trail Guidebooks, North Carolina visitors and natives alike encounter a number of small rural towns. Each of these towns is the product of regional histories in agriculture, industry, regional craft, and a rich musical heritage. One such town is West Jefferson in Ashe County. A drive down the town's main thoroughfare, Jefferson Avenue, immediately introduces visitors to the town's heritage and artistic presence. The buildings that line the street house fourteen different murals with themes ranging from the area's national notoriety as a Christmas tree growing capitol, to the town's part in the regional bluegrass traditions. These murals, as pictured in figures three and four, are the result of more than two decades of development on the part of the Ashe County Arts Council.

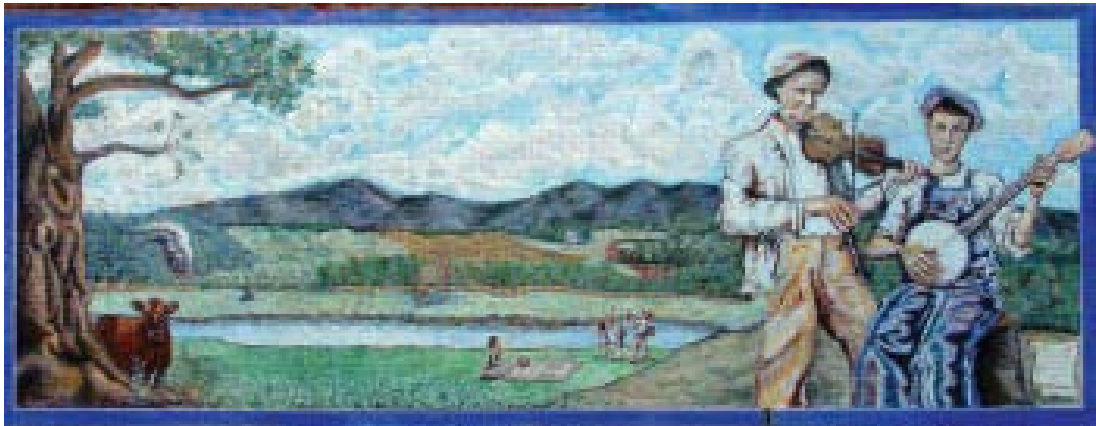


Figure 3: Marianne DiNapoli Mylet's *New River Traditions*, a downtown mural reflecting the scenery and cultural traditions of the region



Figure 4: *New River Traditions* enlivens the side of the Ashe County Chamber of Commerce

In 1998, as a member of the local West Jefferson revitalization committee, the Arts Council sought funding from the North Carolina Arts Council's Visual Arts and New Works Grant, as well as grant funding from HandMade in America ("Downtown Murals"). From the initial creation of two murals from those grant sources, the town's interest in and support of the mural program grew. The owners of vacant buildings along Jefferson Avenue worked with the Arts Council to enhance the appearance of their properties. Arts Council Director Jane Lonon describes the result of this collaboration, saying "Some were done on vacant buildings or some were done on buildings in slight disrepair. The minute you put a mural on it, it totally changed the face and impression of the building. Those buildings sold quickly".

In addition to enhancing existing infrastructure through the murals program, the Arts Council also sought to create a place which would attract artists. "The innate culture of craftsmen and musicians has always been revered", says Lonon when describing community support of the council's efforts to promote arts throughout the county and in downtown West Jefferson. This creative spirit within the town is bolstered by the influx of visitors generated

by local businesses and culture. Major drivers of the local economy include the local Christmas tree farms in the fall and winter and the Christmas in July festival, an event which regularly attracts thousands of visitors to Jefferson Avenue to celebrate the local agricultural and musical traditions. These visitors throughout the year come to West Jefferson to enjoy the local landscapes, shops, and restaurants. The downtown atmosphere is what has helped create the Downtown Arts District. The inclusion of more than twelve locally-owned art galleries along Jefferson Avenue allows Ashe County's artists the opportunity to show and sell artworks in the local setting, rather than relying on traveling the region to sell in larger towns or craft fairs. These spaces support creative placemaking as they activate downtown storefronts and attract tourists who generate income for the local economy by appreciating and supporting the arts of Ashe County.

Those driving or walking along Jefferson Avenue are often unaware that, in addition to the shops and murals that enliven the area, the road and sidewalks are themselves the product of arts-based development and a larger creative placemaking trend. As a town partnering with HandMade in America, West Jefferson sought the resources and advice of the organization to create a development plan for the downtown area. In 2004 the town of West Jefferson worked with HandMade in America and North Carolina State University to develop a plan to make the downtown thoroughfare more engaging for residents and visitors. This plan included the removal of stoplights and installation of stop signs as a way to encourage drivers to stop and look around at the businesses occupying the street. Additionally, the plan proposed the expansion of sidewalks to include more areas for benches and bump-outs that would provide space for the addition of vegetation to the streetscape. The primary goal of these intentional changes was to make the downtown space more

conducive to walking and gathering, as well as to encourage drivers passing through to stop in the town to shop, dine, and enjoy the character of the mountain community.

This plan was reviewed by the town and officially passed by the town council. Although the community had a vision of how Jefferson Avenue could change, a lack of funding within the town's budget kept the project from beginning. However when, in 2011, the North Carolina Department of Transportation began planning to resurface Main Street, the town was able to offer the vision outlined in their own plan (Lonon). Through partnerships with HandMade in America, the local arts council, and North Carolina State University, the town articulated the ways they wished the downtown space to improve the town's livability and the success of local businesses. The process of planning allowed the town of West Jefferson to use arts-based resources to define and advocate for changes within the place they call home.

Ashe County's artistic presence is not confined to main streets and local galleries. Rather, a program facilitated by the Ashe County Arts Council has allowed regional arts traditions to spread across the county in a visible way. A drive through the rural county brings travelers past a number of pastures, farmhouses, and barns. Since 2005 the arts council has worked to further activate these spaces with barn quilts. These large patterns hand-painted onto boards and mounted onto farm buildings pay homage both to the local agriculture and craft quilting practices. To date, the council has documented more than 150 barn quilts throughout the county ("Barn Quilts").

Ashe County's barn quilts provide aesthetic markers of the agricultural landscape that characterizes the county. The extensive collection of quilt squares has created a number of opportunities for the arts to intersect with the economy of the county. The local Arts Council



has devised a system of six trail loops that guide drivers past the quilts that dot the county's scenery. Lonon and the arts council staff hope to develop a guided group tour program as the demand for a regular schedule of tours for county visitors grows. All trail loops originate at the Ashe Arts Center in downtown West Jefferson, where the gallery shop sells locally made barn quilts. Buyers interested in personalized quilts can visit the two local businesses, the Quilt Square Girls and Everything Has a Story, that have developed to meet the rising demand for quilt squares in the county and from tourists. Through the barn quilt program, the Ashe County Arts Council has developed a way to bring visitors into West Jefferson to dine, shop, and boost the local economy, while also guiding them through the county to enjoy the natural beauty and artistic presence of the county.



Figure 5: A barn quilt in an Ashe County field

While creative placemaking organizations like HandMade in America face the challenge of frequent leadership turnover, Jane Lonon identifies the need for the continuation of strong, new cultural leadership as a potential challenge for places like Ashe County and

West Jefferson. She believes that involving and educating youth in regional arts and placemaking is a critical step in the continuation of creative placemaking. Many placemaking programs, like the North Carolina Arts Council's SmART Initiative, work to incorporate the arts into community development to enhance towns and cities so that they can attract young professionals who want to live and work in those places. Lonon believes that it is also critical to engage the youth who grow up in a town or city so that they are committed to helping their town grow, rather than moving away when they become professionals themselves. As placemaking continues to grow in North Carolina, the investment of millennials and subsequent generations in the projects being undertaken can ensure that the work continues and is strengthened in the future.

Of the role of the arts council in community development, Jane Lonon says "I think it's important for the arts, and therefore the arts council, to be at the table for many organizations and [governmental bodies] to always have that presence". The spirit of the arts council's role in the vitalization of the downtown space over the past two decades continues to be a priority for arts council. 2015 marks the town's centennial. This celebration of local heritage also provides an opportunity for local civic, business, and organizational leaders to look forward as they develop a strategic plan for the next ten years. For Lonon and the arts council, the significance of the arts in the 2025 vision is the task of "making sure that revering the heritage, the culture, and the character of what makes this place unique is at the forefront and is important". Lonon sees local placemaking as an effort that extends beyond the decisions of organizations and committees, and as an opportunity for the enrichment and empowerment of all citizens, saying "It's not just me or any staff person from any particular

organization, but an on-going educational process so that everyone feels empowered to celebrate those unique qualities of what makes our home place”.

**Charlotte: The Arts and Science Council and McColl Center for Art + Innovation**

Just as Ashe County has developed artworks to serve as vitalizing markers for its public spaces, the city of Charlotte is engaging its public art and existing museums and arts organizations to continue to bolster its community identity. As the largest metropolitan presence in the state, the city of Charlotte offers unique character within the landscape of North Carolina cities. Unlike other cities in the state, Charlotte possesses distinct markers of place and culture as the host of the Carolina Panthers football and Charlotte Hornets basketball teams, the home of prominent performance venues including the Blumenthal Performing Arts Center and the Knight Theatre, as well as the uptown arts and architectural presence of the Mint Museum and Bechtler Museum. As a city with major performance, sports, and cultural venues, Charlotte's efforts in creative placemaking are different from those in other towns and cities in the state. As placemaking efforts try to engage representing the city and shaping its future, the challenges are based in creating distinctive city spaces and using the arts to bolster livability for city residents. Two organizations within Charlotte's active cultural community are making concerted efforts to engage a placemaking practice in the city. The programming created by the Arts and Science Council of Charlotte and McColl Center for Art + Innovation is working to define the roles that arts and artists as creative problem-solvers in the city.

The Arts and Science Council of Charlotte serves as a resource provider for organizations promoting the arts, science, history, and heritage in Charlotte and Mecklenburg County ("Mission & Vision"). The council plays a fundamental role in the strategic planning of the community's cultural identity through partnerships with local museums and cultural organizations, while also actively working with local artists to shape the presence of public

art in the city. As the driving force behind the public art found in parks, plazas, pedestrian walkways throughout Charlotte, the Arts and Science Council is instrumental in creating spaces and landmarks distinctive to the Queen City.

Operating through a percent for art program, the city of Charlotte allocates 1% of its capital improvement funds to the Arts and Science Council to finance the creation of new public artworks (White). From these funds, a board made up of citizens from the Charlotte business, education, and arts community is responsible for the selection of sites, artists and artworks for upcoming pieces. This financing and development system has led to the creation of more than 130 works of public art throughout Charlotte and Mecklenburg County (“Public Art Program Overview”).

Public art created through the support of the Arts and Science Council works to enliven the cityscapes and infrastructures of Charlotte. Art’s ability to activate public space and enrich built capital is illustrated through the council’s involvement with the Charlotte Area Transit System’s (CATS) LYNX Blue Line. This transit line boasts sixty-nine pieces of public art. These works, integrated into the design of benches, shelters, sidewalks, and fences, create opportunities for travelers to engage with art and design as they go about their days and travel the city. The designs of artists like Shaun Cassidy work to reinforce the distinctiveness of place through reference to indigenous plants and maps of neighborhoods surrounding the transit line. Cassidy’s sculpture series achieves the goal of creating interaction between design and built capital. His steel renderings of local species such as Maple, Magnolia, and Dogwood are infused with the character of Charlotte, as maps of local neighborhoods serve as visible markers of place (“Leaf Fence Inserts”).



Figure 6: Shaun Cassidy's *Sweetgum* incorporates the imagery of indigenous fauna and a map of the neighborhood surrounding Scaleybark Station into steel railing.

Through partnerships with community organizations such as the CATS system, the Arts and Science Council works to integrate art and design into the landscape of Charlotte and the movements of its residents. In doing so, the places where people live, walk, drive, and work become distinct not only because of their function, but because of the visual character they create. According to Constance White, Vice President of the Arts and Science Council's Public Art division, public art offers a major contribution to creative placemaking because public artworks create sights and cities in which people can have a sense of pride (White). This sense of pride, she says, is key in creating the livability that placemaking works to create.

While the Arts and Science Council highlights Charlotte's distinct character through the creation of public art, the works of organizations such as McColl Center for Art + Innovation place artists in communities to serve as problem solvers. The programming of McColl Center "empowers artists to advance community through the creative process" through engagement with seven distinct "spheres of impact" ("About the Center"). The organization's spheres are comprised of beauty, business innovation, craft, design and architecture, education, environment, and health. These spheres represent distinct attributes of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg community that the center believes can be shaped or impacted by contemporary artists. As such, the center's artist residency program seeks to pair individual artists with specific spheres to create artworks and programs that directly involve the community in education or the creation of artworks. Of this pairing process and the role that the center wants to create for artists in the community, Associate Director Lisa Hoffman has written: "Artists are selected who are keen listeners, comfortable in diverse audiences, have a demonstrated ability to be nimble and self-directed, can build relationships across community segments, and who can inspire stakeholders to work together to implement a creative solution to the relevant issue" (Hoffman 125). The center seeks out artists from within North Carolina and throughout the United States, as well as working with international artists. By engaging contemporary artists whose media of choice vary and whose practices are based in diverse locations ranging from the Carolinas to Uganda, McColl Center seeks to promote artists as creative problem-solvers within Charlotte communities.

Such artistic collaborations and solutions have been realized in the center's partnership in the development of Charlotte's Brightwalk neighborhood, a project that has been nationally recognized through a \$400,000 grant from ArtPlace America. Brightwalk, a

98-acre mixed-use and mixed-income development works to bring housing, small retail spaces, greenways, and parks to a challenged Charlotte neighborhood (Stabley and “Master Plan”). The development of the Brightwalk community includes a partnership with McColl Center to create public art and community engagement projects. Hoffman has described the recent history of the Statesville Avenue corridor, the area that Brightwalk occupies, and the challenges that the development and its partnership with McColl Center for Art + Innovation hope to address, saying:

Although located only a mile away from uptown Charlotte, the Statesville Avenue corridor and site of the Art and Ecology Campus at Brightwalk lacks a sophisticated transportation infrastructure and adequate access to food and commerce for its residents. Its public schools consistently underperform. Recently, the area was known as the heroin capital of the Carolinas, plagued by blight, drug trafficking, and criminal activity. (Hoffman 124)

In an effort to re-imagine and re-direct the future of the Statesville Avenue corridor, the Art and Ecology Campus at Brightwalk encourages artists to create public works that activate green spaces in an effort to make them welcoming gathering places within the community while also creating commentary on Brightwalk’s environmental impact. Numerous artists have focused on the Brightwalk campus during their McColl residencies.

During the summer of 2014, artist Raganzu Bruno engaged with the Brightwalk Community as part of his role as McColl’s ArtPlace America Artist-in-Residence. Working with residents of the community to develop a design concept and install the completed pieces, Bruno created a playground installation within the community that incorporated re-used and recycled elements into a design that illustrates the lifecycle of a butterfly. In



addition to activating the Brightwalk's greenspace, the playground installation develops the natural capital of the community as a solution to the problem of water runoff so often encountered in highly-paved urban areas (Herrmann). McColl Center plans to have eight public artworks installed and engaging greenspaces in the Brightwalk development by the summer of 2015 (Hoffman 125). In May of 2015, Brightwalk and McColl unveiled artist Brandon Ballengee's *Love Motel for Insects*, a large-scale sculpture that uses LED lights to brighten a courtyard in the neighborhood, while also attracting insects to mate. Just as the public artworks organized throughout Charlotte by the Arts and Science council increase livability by creating sources of pride in place, the works at Brightwalk are activating spaces in the neighborhood, promoting ecologically-sound development, and providing visual markers of the places people call home



Figure 7: The May 2015 unveiling of Brandon Ballengee's *Love Motel for Insects* in the Brightwalk neighborhood.



Figure 8: Bruno and Brightwalk residents at the installation of interactive public artwork in the Brightwalk community

In a May 2015 *Charlotte Observer* article, a resident of Brightwalk discussed the development's intention to provide mixed income housing, saying that the Brightwalk's planning "needs to be done in a way that improves property values without displacing low-income families or existing small businesses" (Leggett). The potential for displacement is the greatest challenge that this project faces. While the revitalization of the Statesville Avenue area may be working to decrease crime rates and drug use, consideration has to be given to any displacement that may be occurring. Brightwalk must remain committed to its goal of mixed income housing in order to create opportunities for empowerment of all people within the community. Just as the sculptures of artists like Bruno and Ballengee work to maintain and enrich the ecosystem of the neighborhood, the Brightwalk neighborhood must revitalize in a way that respects the balance of the community in which it is being built.

As McColl Center focuses on creating opportunities for artist innovation in the Brightwalk neighborhood and the Arts and Science Council employs artists to enliven city spaces with reflections of the city's built and natural capital, the art of Charlotte is being

integrated in placemaking by working to create a city in which people want to live. In his essay “A Plea for Beauty: A Manifesto for a New Urbanism”, Roger Scruton encourages the creation of such livable cities, saying: “The suburbanized city is a city of absentees. Although people frequent it by day for the purpose of earning money, they vacate it at night, and therefore it cannot bring people together in activities of citizenship” (156). As creative placemaking is used West Jefferson or towns across Western North Carolina to promote tourism and economic development by bringing people into towns, the city of Charlotte is using its art to encourage people to stay. By revitalizing challenged neighborhoods and creating aesthetic representations of the distinct characteristics of Charlotte, creative placemaking is being used to make the city a home as well as a destination.

### **Greensboro: Elsewhere and Action Greensboro**

While a city like Charlotte is known for its metropolitan presence and continued growth, the city of Greensboro has faced a difficult transition from being a 20<sup>th</sup> century hub for sales in the tobacco, furniture, and textile industries (McKinsey & Company). Loss of these industries has left the city in economic transition in the new millennium. In 2000 a partnership between six Greensboro foundations prompted a study of the economic outlook of the city. Cooperation between the CEMALA Foundation, the Community Foundation of Greater Greensboro, the Cone Health Foundation, the Joseph M. Bryan Foundation of Greater Greensboro, the Phillips Foundation, and the Tannenbaum-Sternberger Foundation prompted the study “Building Consensus for Greensboro’s Future”, conducted by McKinsey & Company and commonly known as the McKinsey report. This report outlined that while the city’s loss of industry was significant, the health of the city was above that of comparable cities in the southeast, such as Durham, North Carolina; Columbia, South Carolina; Ocala, Florida; and Chattanooga, Tennessee. The study reflected positive movement in the city’s population growth, employment growth, and per-capita income growth and suggested that efforts to make the city more business-friendly and more livable and attractive to new employees would help continue these trends.

Since the 2000 McKinsey report, a number of development efforts based in arts and culture have factored into approaches to strengthening the well-being of Greensboro’s communities. The work of arts non-profit Elsewhere has created opportunity for artistic interventions within the South Elm Street neighborhood of Greensboro’s downtown. These artist-led projects enliven the streets of the city while also building partnerships between its businesses and citizens. Concerted efforts between private public entities throughout

Greensboro have also been developed through Action Greensboro, a division of the Greensboro Partnership that was created in response to the McKinsey Report and is supported by the same six local foundations that funded the report (“Our Sponsoring Foundations”). Programs developed by Action Greensboro are working to encourage business growth, increase the livability of the city through the development of public parks and greenways, and is working to improve the standards of local schools and universities in hopes to engage the ideas and energy of youth and young professionals in the city. These diverse efforts are enhanced through the incorporation of artistic interventions in public spaces such as the NEA Our Town Grant project *Over. Under. Pass.*, a light installation built into an underpass along the greenway in downtown Greensboro.

### **Elsewhere**

Creative placemaking in Greensboro is seen and felt in spaces ranging from public parks to single buildings where occupants are working to change the livability of their neighborhood. Elsewhere is an organization that characterizes itself as a “living museum” and works to engage material culture as a way of preserving the history of the community and using artistic practices to enliven the Greensboro’s South Elm neighborhood. The museum’s collection is comprised of objects and artworks that are the product of the building’s own history as a storefront since 1937 (“History”). As a former Carolina Sales Company surplus outlet, fabric shop, and thrift store, the space had become filled with material evidence of the building’s past when, in 2003, founders George Scheer and Stephanie Sherman decided to create a space in which the building and its objects could be reinterpreted (“History”). Today, Elsewhere attracts artists-in-residence with a range of local, regional, and international backgrounds to come into the museum space, interact with the

toys, fabric, books, furniture and history that the building holds, and reinterpret those materials into new installations, performances, and experiences for museum visitors and the larger South Elm neighborhood.

Director George Scheer believes that as Elsewhere's visitors engage with the history held in the building's space and objects, their experiences tie them to a sense of place within the museum and the wider community. Of Elsewhere's respect for the history of places and objects, Scheer says:

It's key to the notion of placemaking that there be a relationship with an identity and history that's there. What Elsewhere does is take that notion in a super radical direction by simultaneously committing itself to these [objects] whole-heartedly ...and [holding] itself to the importance of maintaining that history, and at the same time transforming those things in a way that radically changes its purpose and hooks into a different stream of cultural conscience.

Scheer believes that the sense of cultural conscience promoted by Elsewhere's projects is defined by the interaction between contemporary art and downtown revitalization. Works created by Elsewhere's artists engage and respond to objects, spaces, and histories of Greensboro's downtown and provide innovative ways for community members to contemplate and appreciate these histories and their own connections to them.

While Elsewhere's building offers unique connections to the history of a specific place, the museum's programming extends beyond the walls of the building and works to bring community members out into the streets to engage in artistic experience, visit local businesses, and become more active in the goings-on of the South Elm Neighborhood. Elsewhere's South Elm Projects work to bring artist-driven community development into the

neighborhood by creating opportunities for artists to serve as visionaries and organizers of revitalization and activation of walkways and greenspaces within the area. In 2014 Elsewhere and South Elm Projects were the recipients of a \$200,000 grant from national creative placemaking funder ArtPlace America (“South Elm Projects”). In 2015, Elsewhere is working with 14 national artists to continue efforts to revitalize public spaces in the downtown area.

In April 2015, Miami-based artist Agustina Woodgate worked with Elsewhere to create a hopscotch trail that led viewers through the neighborhood using hundreds of blocks that connect pedestrians to art and the economy of the local neighborhood. Elsewhere used the hopscotch trail as an opportunity to enliven the South Elm area during their monthly first Friday art crawl. During the first Friday event, community members followed the trail winding through the streets of downtown. As they followed the path, they encountered local businesses and storefronts where visiting Elsewhere artists were exhibiting their works. Woodgate says of her sidewalk intervention, “Hopscotch exists for the streets, transforming monotonous sidewalks into daily playgrounds”(Kane). By bringing this piece to South Elm, Woodgate creates memorable experiences for community members while also encouraging them to interact with local businesses, the built and natural capitals of the neighborhood, and creating a heightened sense of appreciation for the character of the neighborhood and the people who make up the community.





Figure 9: A section of Agustina Woodgate's neighborhood-wide hopscotch

Efforts of the South Elm Projects will extend beyond creating events to promote community engagement with South Elm's arts and businesses. As the projects move forward, Elsewhere has identified four sites within the neighborhood which have become inactive or dilapidated public spaces. One such site is depicted in Figure 10. The works of South Elm Projects will target these spaces as sites for redeveloped greenspaces and public gathering places. Of the potential for these spaces, organizers at Elsewhere believe "The art-scaping projects will integrate temporary and permanent creative works to enhance walkability, community investment, civic participation, and grassroots creativity" ("Sites").





Figure 10: One of four South Elm sites being reworked through Elsewhere's South Elm Projects

As the team at Elsewhere works to re-imagine the spaces of downtown Greensboro, they seek to organically improve areas through projects that beautify, engage the community, and serve to reference the history and distinct character of the neighborhood. Their goal, says Scheer, is not to make a “new” place. He contends that the term “placemaking” is a bit of a misnomer and that places cannot intentionally be made. Rather, he says, “Places exist quite naturally. Places are [what] people and communities inherently reference and relate to. Place is an...inherent meaning-based, identity based concept. It's something we know”. As Greensboro seeks to incorporate the arts into its development, the efforts of organizations like Elsewhere are creating artworks and experiences that make people want to know the city as a place of their own.

### **Action Greensboro**

In the same way that Elsewhere is reimagining public spaces and greenspaces in the South Elm Neighborhood, Action Greensboro, is incorporating artistic experiences into the

planning of a greenway that will encircle downtown Greensboro and create a physical connection between the city's many neighborhoods. As the 4-mile loop connects the neighborhoods that make up downtown Greensboro, it will also serve as a connector of the exiting built and natural capitals found in the more than eighty miles of existing trails that run through the city, as well as the state-wide Mountain to Sea Trail ("Downtown Greenway"). As this park seeks to connect the mobility of the community and encourage a city space that is attractive to businesses and new employees, artists are being included in the planning of the project to create unique aesthetic experiences.

A significant visual marker along the Greenway is the *Over.Under.Pass.* project. As a recipient of the National Endowment for the Arts Our Town grant, this project has received federal funding to create visually distinct spaces that encourage the growth of Greensboro and the well-being of its residents. The project, which has revitalized a dilapidated railroad underpass, serves as an enlivening aesthetic experience, while also providing a gateway that connects the neighborhoods located along the trail to the downtown area. In addition to increasing walkability, the underpass project turns a previously unused area into a space in which citizens can safely travel, exercise and congregate.

The project's lead artist, Greensboro-based sculptor Jim Gallucci, was selected by a panel of Greensboro's local governmental, public, and private stakeholders. Working with lighting designer Scott Richardson, Gallucci met with community groups in local schools, churches, and community centers to articulate a design for the underpass that highlighted its existing architecture ("Over.Under.Pass"). This design, a series of iron gateways that are colorfully lit by motion-activated lighting throughout the day and night, offers a symbolic representation of the function of the greenway within the community. As the trail activates

natural spaces and walkways, it also provides a gateway that connects communities within Greensboro and offers improved walkability and livability to individual citizens.



Figure 11: Action Greensboro's *Over.Under.Pass.* designed by Jim Gallucci and Scott Richardson



Figure 12: *Over.Under.Pass.* is incorporated into downtown Greensboro's greenway and creates a walkable connections between downtown Greensboro and surrounding neighborhoods.

Artistic efforts in Greensboro are creating spaces and opportunities for the beautification of the city and the creation of a city in which people want to work, play, and live. By creating such distinctive spaces, institutions like Elsewhere and organizations like Action Greensboro are demonstrating how the arts can be used to create impact and growth within a community. As this arts-based growth occurs, Greensboro communities are

strengthened through the recognition of the history of their places and spaces and how the arts can be utilized to ensure the success of the city's future.

### **Chapel Hill: The Department of Public and Cultural Art**

While Greensboro works to strengthen its future by honoring local history, the town of Chapel Hill steeped in its own history as the home of University of North at Carolina Chapel Hill. The university serves as an anchor for the economic health of the town because the student body comprises a significant portion of the town's population, generates revenue for local businesses, and provides knowledge and skills that give the town distinct advantages in the categories of social and human capitals. In addition to the economic and technical benefits that the university offers Chapel Hill, the university culture is a defining characteristic within the identity of the town. The attractions and interactions exhibited along the town's iconic Franklin Street provide a glimpse into that culture. The excitement of students clad in Carolina blue fills the array of restaurants, bookstores, coffee shops, and boutiques set against the backdrop of the adjacent campus creates a distinct experience and illustrate that the culture of the town of Chapel Hill is one defined by its connection to the university that calls it home.

As one surveys the bustle of a typical day on Franklin Street, the influence of community arts and creative placemaking efforts is among the sights to be seen. Downtown arts spaces such as Frank Gallery and the Ackland Art Museum offer ever-changing exhibitions, while performance venues Cat's Cradle and the Local 506 provide stages for local and traveling musicians to entertain Chapel Hill audiences. Public art is also seen throughout the landscape of downtown, as works such as Mikyoung Kim's sculpture *Exhale* activates Franklin Street's 140 West Plaza. The arts of Chapel Hill are even found in transportation, as seen by the Mobile Mural collaboration between the city's Department of Public and Cultural Arts and Chapel Hill Transit ("Downtown Art Program").

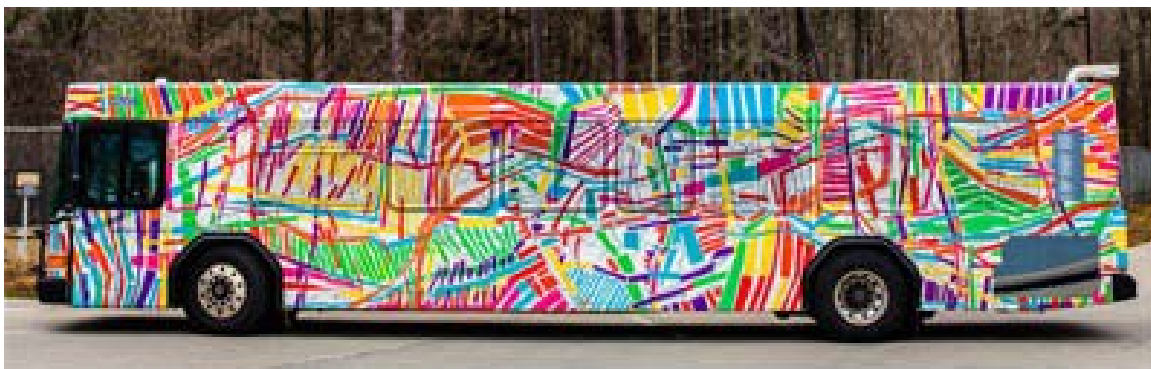


Figure 13: Mobile Mural, designed by Chapel Hill artist Mary Carter Taub, creates colorful patterns by overlaying local bus routes and road mark patterns

The public art that has been integrated into the landscape of Franklin Street and the daily lives of town residents is organized by the town of Chapel Hill's Department of Public and Cultural Arts. In a creative approach to the meeting of the community's arts presence and local government, the town's cultural and public art programming is included as a division of the Department of Parks and Recreation. Of the partnership between the town's arts and governmental entities, Public and Cultural Arts Administrator Jeffrey York says: "I think that speaks to how people, both in town government [and in the populous], feel about how art brings the quality of life they are looking for" (York). According to York, the town values its public art, allowing for a system in which local government supports artistic efforts and Chapel Hill's arts professionals are brought to the table in discussions of how the town is developing. This inclusive process allows for the arts to impact the local community and for local officials to understand how town changes will affect the arts community.

Acknowledging the distinct community culture and artistic presence that already exist in Chapel Hill, York says "In a way, we are starting with a good slate. We don't have to reinvent anything (York)".

With the existing health of the local art community in mind, the challenge for Chapel Hill is to continue to define spaces and opportunities for the arts to be integrated into the cultural fabric of the town. Through a successful percent for art program, and the development of structured efforts to discuss the future of the town and how arts are to be integrated into the Chapel Hill's planning, the Department of Public and Cultural arts is creating opportunities that further enhance the experiences of residents and visitors as they experience the town of Chapel Hill.

Like Charlotte, Chapel Hill's public art operates through a percent for arts program which allocates 1% of the town's annual budget to serve as funding for public artworks. Since enacting the program in 2002, 13 permanent works including public sculptures and mosaics have been created (York). In 2013 Mikyoung Kim's sculpture *Exhale* was created as sculpture to activate 140 West Plaza, a Franklin street mixed-use living, office, and retail space. In addition to the funding from the Town of Chapel Hill, the Department of Cultural and Public Arts worked with Ram Development Company to devote 1% of the site's development funding to the sculpture. This agreement was one based on incentive. The town approached developers with the idea by noting that a bold public artwork would make units within the complex more appealing to the residents and companies to which Ram Development was looking to sell (Beacham). Incentives like these are creative ways that arts organizers and local governments can work with city developers to integrate the arts into new public spaces.





Figure 14: Mikyoung Kim's *Exhale* incorporates lighting, water, and fog to activate 140 West Plaza

As York considers the future of Chapel Hill's cultural offerings, he sees room for improvement in the density of artists in the town of Chapel Hill. He notes that while there are numerous artists who live and work throughout Orange County, they are not concentrated in any one area. Recalling his own participation in a county-wide gallery crawl put on by the Orange County Arts Council, York says "I think I put probably 150 miles on my car just driving around to the different studios" (York). With the sprawl of local artists in mind, the Department of Public and Cultural Arts is playing a role in town conversations centered on how to concentrate the arts of the county in a way that attracts more artists and residents to Chapel Hill to live and work.

The primary solution being discussed currently is the development of a defined arts district in Chapel Hill's downtown. Currently, a plan is in development for an arts-focused district along Rosemary Street which runs through town parallel to Franklin Street (York).



However, challenges are facing the early stages of development. One challenge, he explains, is the availability of space in the town. Unlike many towns and cities in North Carolina, Chapel Hill's history is built around the success of the local university rather than the success of industry and manufacturing. As such, there are fewer opportunities for the creative reuse of existing built capital as seen in the revitalization of a storefront by Elsewhere in Greensboro or the reuse of former manufacturing centers like the American Tobacco Campus in Durham. Additionally, the existence of high rent prices in Chapel Hill's downtown create a barrier that prevents artists from living and working in a single downtown district.

In addition to the challenge of available space, York is concerned about the limitations that a cultural district would impose on the arts community. In his view the creation of a cultural district, while bringing artists physically closer together, also creates defining lines that dictate if an artist is within or outside an arts community. This concern for the division and exclusion caused by cultural districting is an interesting one because many creative placemaking initiatives, including the North Carolina State Arts Council's SmART initiative, encourage the development of distinct cultural districts as ways to provide live/work spaces for artists alongside, retail, dining, and performance spaces. As Chapel Hill moves forward with plans to make the town more appealing to artists, organizers will have to consider how the plans that they make will work to create a defined artistic place while also allowing for organic growth of community that does not alienate community members.

While creative placemaking in cities like Asheville or through organizations like Elsewhere is focused on reflecting the history of specific spaces or regions, the placemaking occurring in Chapel Hill respects the history of the experience of a place. As a well-developed college town, the culture of locations like Franklin Street is built to create

memorable experiences for the generations of students who live, work, and learn in and around the campus. By creating public artworks that activate spaces from buses to town plazas, the Department of Public and Cultural Arts is incorporating the arts into those memorable cultural experiences. As public works like Mikyoung Kim's sculpture engage the financial capital of local government and private funding, they also stimulate economic growth as they create distinct and appealing spaces the residents and businesses want to occupy. As the town of Chapel Hill moves forward with its development of a cultural district, the opportunities to contribute memorable experiences and opportunities to the culture and economy of Chapel Hill will continue. Through creative placemaking the Town of Chapel Hill contributes memorable aesthetic experiences to the residents' unforgettable time in the town.

**Raleigh: North Carolina Arts Council**

From my observation of placemaking in small museums, arts councils, and artist resource organizations in the mountains and piedmont of the state, the question of what connects all of these entities and projects on a larger level grew. Such unifying efforts are being organized by the North Carolina State Arts Council. As a grant funding and technical assistance organization for visual, performance, and cultural arts across the state, the NC Arts Council is devoted to providing resources and connections to arts councils and arts organizations across North Carolina. The council's efforts range from working directly with local artists and arts programs to connecting North Carolina with national arts resources, such as those allotted through the National Endowment for the Arts. One of the council's staff members working to enrich the efforts of arts across the state is Leigh Ann Wilder, Arts in Communities Director. Wilder's focus is based primarily on allotting annual funding to the seventy-eight local arts councils based in counties across the state and working to help support arts programming in the remaining twenty-two counties. The Grassroots Grant, funding organized by the state arts council, pulls from a 2.3 million dollar budget (Wilder). The division of funding within the program allows 20% of the budget to be shared equally among counties across the state, while 80% is allotted based on the population of a given county. The funds allocated from the state level to local arts councils are then matched local councils' own local funding sources. This combination of state-allocated and locally-raised funding is then granted to finance local community projects and the efforts of individual artists within communities.

Wilder believes that the decentralization of the Grassroots Grant is a great strength of the grant program and the NC Arts Council itself. She sees local arts councils as the most

equipped organizations to determine funding within their communities, because “They know their communities better than [the state arts council] ever will, so they have the opportunity to use that money to help fund [what efforts] they know are valuable to their communities” (Wilder). Through funding communities directly and encouraging local autonomy in allocating resources, the mission of the state arts council is to develop healthy artistic communities in every county across the state. Wilder sees the individual artists, musicians, and story tellers within communities as “The memory keepers and the people who teach us the importance and significance of that place”. By providing financial and technical support to organization across North Carolina, the NC Arts Council hopes to encourage programming and the continuation of the unique traditions and artistic spirits that characterize place across the state.

While the funding and technical support of the state arts council are being put to work in each county across North Carolina, a concerted placemaking effort is being undertaken within the council’s SmART Initiative. Started in 2010, the program places focus on community appearance and public art, cultural districts, private sector investment, arts and cultural tourism, and governmental involvement and support with specific towns and cities across North Carolina (“The SmART Initiative” 2). A primary focus of the initiative is creating sustainable economies by integrating the arts into responses to the recent changes in state agriculture and textile industries. The program goals are based on the belief that:

Our state needs another focus for its economy, one that takes advantage of our remarkable pool of artistic talent and the many strong indigenous artistic traditions from the sea to the mountains. We need an economy that serves natives and newcomers alike, that attracts and keeps not only the creative individuals who drive

innovation but also the enterprises that seek a culturally rich and diverse environment for business and a stimulating quality of life for their employees. ("The SmART Initiative" 4)

According to Chris Beacham, Senior Programs Director, the success of this response lies in the ability to of the arts to create places in which people want to live and work. Beacham notes anecdotally that his own children, nieces, and nephews “live in DC, Philadelphia, Boston, Brooklyn, Los Angeles, and New Orleans; they don’t live where they grew up”. In addition to utilizing art in a way that develops jobs and creates economic opportunity for artists, the SmART Initiative hopes to harness the character of cities and revitalize places so that that the youth of North Carolina as well as newcomers to the state choose to build lives in North Carolina towns and invest in the success of their communities.

To date, the SmART Initiative has engaged more than ten towns and cities across the state in developing arts-based economic initiatives. Two of these cities, Wilson and Kinston, are the subject of later discussion in this paper. Additionally, the initiative has worked with the cities of Durham, Winston-Salem, Shelby, Marshall, Charlotte, Asheville, and Greensboro to develop a range of projects including theatre revitalization, greenway spaces, the restoration of historic buildings in to mixed-use spaces for performance venues and artist studios, and the artist-led redesign of roadways and infrastructure.

In my interview with Chris Beacham, we discussed efforts currently being made in the city of Durham. In Durham, the SmART Initiative has encouraged public and private partnerships in the planning of a cultural district. Cooperation between the Capital Broadcasting Company that owns the revitalized American Tobacco complex, local government leadership, and the NC Arts Council has utilized existing industrial infrastructure

to serve as the foundation for a cultural district. Within the revitalized campus, arts and cultural businesses and venues converge with dining and greenspaces to create a destination for those who live in and around the city ("The SmART Initiative" 14). The campus is the former factory of the American Tobacco Company and has provided a unique opportunity for creative reuse that highlights the agricultural past of the town and region. Located within the American Tobacco Historical District, the complex provides space for National Public Radio affiliate WUNC, the headquarters of the Full Frame Documentary Film Festival, a YMCA, as well as restaurants and green spaces, while also being a short distance from both the Durham Bulls ballpark and the Durham Performing Arts Center ("The SmART Initiative" 14)



Figure 15: Durham's American Tobacco Campus repurposes a formal industrial center to house community greenspaces, restaurants, and offices

Currently, Durham is undergoing continued planning to create opportunities for connectivity across the city. Working with a team directed by landscape architect Mikyoung Kim, whose work *Exhale* can be seen in Chapel Hill's 140 West Plaza, efforts are being

made to incorporate art and aesthetic elements into the cityscape. In Durham, one end of downtown includes the major cultural attractions of the Durham Bull's Baseball Park, Durham Performing Arts Center, and the American Tobacco Campus. Two major roads and a railroad track separate these cultural venues from nearby restaurants, bars, and art galleries. According to Beacham, the railroad tracks that run through downtown Durham create a physical barrier that the SmART Initiative, local government, and local businesses hope to overcome. Kim is currently developing a plan for the downtown area that will aesthetically combat issues of walkability in the downtown area. By creating visual gateways, light installations, and public art pieces that activate walkways that provide access to these disconnected areas, Kim will create spaces that encourage pedestrian use and connect the cultural assets of downtown Durham.

Projects like Kim's in Durham offer an example of the ways that the NC Arts Council provides technical support for placemaking projects. As the state arts council continues to support creative placemaking through the SmART Initiative and the place-based projects of local arts councils, the organization should increasingly find ways to develop a state-wide network and dialogue that will enrich these projects. Just as HandMade in America's Small Towns program places specific emphasis on communication between towns, the state arts council can connect organizations across the state to create a discussion about how to strengthen and continue creative placemaking. As organizations share thoughts, approaches, successes, and failures in their own projects, placemaking practices across the state will improve and more towns and counties will have access to the resources and guidance needed to utilize local creativity in the growth of their communities.

Within the programming of the NC Arts Council, creative placemaking is encouraged through the one-on-one development of North Carolina towns, as well as through the connection of towns and counties to a unified state-wide effort for arts development. The SmART Initiative provides resources for individual communities to take on extensive placemaking projects that strive to improve livability and encourage economic viability by creating places that people and businesses want to call home. The system of local arts councils organized by the NC Arts Council creates an artistic presence within counties across the state and provides advocacy for each of those communities as they seek funding and technical support from the state level. Through the programming and support of the NC Arts Council, towns and counties throughout the state are empowered to celebrate their own cultural histories and to use the arts as a source of continued cultural and economic growth.



### **Wilson: The Vollis Simpson Whirligig Park**

The representation of community voice in public artworks, culturally-based community development, and arts programming is at the core of the creative placemaking practice. While creative placemaking initiatives often communicate the voices of many within a community, the vision of a single person can many times serve as the inspiration for widespread engagement. Such is the case in Wilson, North Carolina where the works of local vernacular artist Vollis Simpson are the basis for a public park and related development of Wilson's downtown neighborhood.

Vollis Simpson, a retired machinery repairman, achieved national notoriety with the construction of his monumental, brightly colored whirligigs. These whirligigs, drawing structural inspiration from windmills and weathervanes, create colossal kinetic sculpture measuring as large as 50' tall and 55' wide ("Wilson, NC: Vollis Simpson Whirligig Park"). As Simpson constructed his pieces, the collection grew into an attraction that brought locals and visitors to his farm to admire the playful spirit of these immense works.

In 2009, the city of Wilson began working with Simpson to reconsider of the location and preservation of his more than thirty whirligigs ("The SmART Initiative" 19). The solution developed by the city of Wilson is the Vollis Simpson Whirligig Park located in the town's downtown area. According to Jenny Moore, the Project Director, Simpson's farm had become an attraction for tourists but few visitors made the twelve-mile journey into Wilson to shop in local stores or eat in the area's restaurants. This disconnect, she says, created a "big desire on the part of a group of people to move the whirligigs into the downtown area, once the goal of having a park had been developed" (Moore).

Through partnerships between the City of Wilson, local community-development non-profit Wilson Downtown Properties Inc., and the North Carolina Arts Council, as well as a variety of grant funding including the National Endowment for the Arts Our Town grant, the preservation of the whirligigs and planning for the park is currently underway. Set for completion in 2016, the finished park will provide a public space for admirers of Simpson's work to observe the thirty-four sculptures in motion while also allowing the community the opportunity to live, work, and play alongside these unique pieces ("Wilson, NC: Vollis Simpson Whirligig Park")



Figure 16: The development of the Vollis Simpson Whirligig Park is activating vacant space in downtown Wilson

The creation of this public art space has been the result of economic development in the area and continues to strengthen the economy of the local community. The significant emphasis placed on the restoration and preservation of these lively structures required

workers trained in skills ranging from welding to documentation. Through partnership with St. John's Community Development Corporation, Opportunities Industrialization Center of Wilson, and the Wilson Community College, training programs were developed to equip local unemployed workers to with the skills to undertake the restoration phase of the project ("Wilson, NC: Vollis Simpson Whirligig Park"). The result of professional development and training has been the creation of 17 short-term and two-long term positions for local workers ("Wilson, NC: Vollis Simpson Whirligig Park").

The benefits of these newly-created positions and the training necessary to utilize local workforces have extended beyond strengthening local economic statistics. The training programs have also helped the project address social issues specific to the town. According to Jenny Moore, the community initially perceived the park as a “white project”. She explains “The real argument seemed to be that Wilson has a very high unemployment rate, especially among young black males, and there was the perception that dollars that could have been used to remedy that were being put toward the park” (Moore). While the training programs developed placed no specification on the racial backgrounds of participants, the training was completed primarily by young African-American men. The integration of the professional training program into this placemaking project allowed the park to address economic needs of the town of Wilson, while also increasing community support and the number of individuals who have personal investments in the success of the space.

In addition to creating economic opportunity for local skilled workers, the whirligig park project is also serving as the catalyst for the revitalization of spaces in downtown Wilson. Once known as the world's largest tobacco market, the once active downtown was blighted as the regional tobacco industry faded (Moore). This economic shift left multiple

large, brick warehouses within the downtown area vacant. Since the development of the whirligig park was announced, businesses have once again started to occupy vacant buildings and bring a new creative and economic spirit to the town. Two revitalized buildings adjacent to the park now provide mixed-use retail and housing spaces, as well as housing locally-owned restaurants and the Golden Leaf Brewing Company. Plans for a welcome center for the whirligig park are also among the upcoming uses for these revitalized spaces (Moore).

In his essay, “A Plea for Beauty: A Manifesto for New Urbanism” Roger Scruton comments on the need for cities’ identities and aesthetics to be based on the lives of its citizens, rather than mere reflections of the industries or attractions the place holds, saying “Cities degenerate when they are seen as mere instruments, temporary structures that are abandoned when their purpose is fulfilled” (Scruton 158). Wilson’s history as an agricultural center mirrors the experiences of many other towns across the state. Wilson and Kinston are towns built as hubs for tobacco sales, just as Greensboro and towns across the North Carolina piedmont grew from the presence of the furniture and textile industries. As the factories and warehouses that comprise the skylines and streetscapes of these towns are emptied out by the withdrawal of industries across the region, creative placemaking poses an opportunity to utilize the power of buildings and the people who live their lives in and around these structures.

By recognizing and valuing the cultural and human capitals represented in the sculptures of Vollis Simpson, the town of Wilson has created a project that is beginning to activate and utilize a variety of other community capitals. Downtown revitalization is engaging and harnessing the built capitals of downtown spaces. Financial capital of the community is now being strengthened as businesses begin to plant themselves around the

strength of the park as a tourist attraction and local gathering place. Growth of both social and human capitals are seen in the project's utilization of local, state, and national sources of technical and funding support as a means to employ and engage a broad segment of the local population. Through the creation of the Vollis Simpson Whirligig Park, the town of Wilson, North Carolina celebrates the creative ambition of one of its own while fostering opportunities for the cultural and economic growth of the town and its people.

### **Kinston: The African American Music Trails of Eastern North Carolina**

Just as HandMade in America's craft trails wind travelers through the mountains of North Carolina to encounter the craft history and contemporary practitioners of the region, a trail connecting eight counties in Eastern North Carolina creates a system through which visitors and natives alike can absorb the musical heritage of North Carolina. In 2013 *African American Music Trails of Eastern North Carolina* was published by the North Carolina Arts Council as a guide to the exploration of the traditions of jazz, funk, rhythm and blues, and gospel in Edgecombe, Greene, Jones, Lenoir, Nash, Pitt, Wayne, and Wilson counties ("AAMT: About the Project"). This trail system and guidebook is the product of research conducted by the NC Arts Council's Folklife division. The project brings together interviews of more than ninety musicians from the areas who discuss the history of the regional music tradition, the national and international musical successes whose roots are found in the communities of these eastern counties, and the ways that the traditions are being continued today.

Among the towns explored along the trail is the town of Kinston in Lenoir County. The guidebook suggests visitors participate in events such as the summer BBQ Festival on the Neuse, the state's largest barbeque cook-off. This festival, its own cultural tradition, also offers a time for a number of local festivities including the Kinston Community Council for the Arts' annual Evening with the Stars (Bryan and Patterson 27). This program offers gallery exhibitions and musical performances to the local community and festival attendees. Other events, like the Sand in the Streets Music Series create seasonal traditions in the form of concert series showcasing local musical culture.

*African American Music Trails of Eastern North Carolina* also directs trail-goers to cultural sites such as the local arts council, clubs featuring the performances of local musicians, and the South Queen Street cultural district. This district includes the Kinston Music Park. Set to officially open in the summer of 2015, the Kinston Music Park offers a unique aesthetic experience for those traveling the African American music trails ("Updates from the Music Trail").



Figure 17: Sculptural panels at the Kinston Music Park feature photographs and stylized imagery depicting the people and instruments of the African American music scene in Eastern North Carolina

While landmarks and events featured in the trail's guide provide an education about the history of music in the region and the people and places around which it developed, the creation of this park space activates a place specifically for use by musicians and the people of Kinston today and in the years ahead. Bill Myers, Wilson jazz saxophonist and recipient of the 2014 North Carolina Heritage award has said of the trail and park: "Now people will know the true history of what black people contributed... Those of us still living can remember it, and the younger folks can learn more about it and hopefully want to add to it with the talent they bring." ("Celebrate Black History Month with the African American

Music Trails"). Spaces like the Kinston Music Park serve visible markers within the community. These markers have the ability to both commemorate local history and, with design elements such as performance spaces, become specific places where Myers's vision of education and continuation of tradition can be realized.

For Sandy Landis, Director of the Kinston Community Council for the Arts, the music park and Kinston's participation in the African American Music Trail offer points of dialogue within the community. Landis says she believes that the projects highlight the local African American community's "ownership in a really significant project". In her view, the role that eastern North Carolina has played in the iconic sounds of James Brown's band or Rocky Mount native Thelonius Monk is often overlooked within in state and national histories (Landis). The music park and trail project amplify the musical voices that have shaped and been shaped by this region.

Sarah Bryant and Beverly Patterson's discussion of place and voices in the trail guide *African American Music Trails of Eastern North Carolina* highlights the significance of these voices across the state:

*African American Music Trails* begins in eight counties but it does not end there. Continue your exploration and you will experience a symphony of African American music throughout North Carolina. We hear echoes of songs that once accompanied the work of laying railroad track, priming tobacco, and raising nets filled with fish from coastal waters. Voices from the past shape voices of the present (181).

The presence of the African American Music Trail and Music Park in Kinston is using the voices of its past to continue to shape the identity of Kinston and its visual landscape. This



visual representation of the town's heritage, combined with popular local businesses and a budding arts district are working to create a town-revitalized through art-based efforts.

### **Arts-Based Development in Kinston**

In addition to meaningful discussions about the history of the town and region, and the significant role that the music of African American artists has and continues to play in the local culture, the trail and music park also create a unique opportunity for the cultural traditions of the region to create dialogues and partnerships with developing tourism and economic trends. The success of local restaurant Chef and the Farmer is due, in large part, to its role on the PBS Program *A Chef's Life* (Landis). This business, in addition to others such as Mother Earth Brewing, is creating a revitalizing force within Kinston's downtown area. As attractions like these increase tourism and attract potential residents, the potential of the park and trail to education and develop social capital expand.

The increased reach that growing tourism offers to the African American Music Trails program is supplemented by efforts of local citizens offer increased opportunities for arts in the community. Stephen Hill, local entrepreneur and owner of Mother Earth Brewing, is particularly interested in arts-based revitalization of Kinston. As of 2014 he had purchased 22 rundown homes in an area of town with a rising crime rate. Hill's vision for the area is ultimately an arts district in Kinston. Homes he purchased have since been renovated and are now being rented as affordable living and work spaces, in hopes that the \$300-\$600 monthly rates will attract artists to the area (Satira).

Jeffrey York's concern that arts districts in places like Chapel Hill can alienate community members is echoed in concerns for Kinston's development as well. As these live/work spaces are developed, the question of whether the spaces are truly affordable for all

community members must be considered (15). In *Creative Placemaking*, Markusen and Gadwa include displacement among the challenges that face creative placemaking projects such as the development of arts districting. As Hill moves forward with the renovation of homes within Kinston's neighborhoods, care must be taken to ensure that low-income tenants are not being priced out of their homes and neighborhoods.

Landis sees the development of the music heritage trail, park, and downtown attractions as part of an era of growth in Kinston. Of growth in the town, and particularly the development of a cultural district, she says: "I think it will be a source of tourism and a source of relocation for folks. Certainly right now is a time of redevelopment and an exciting time to live here". As arts play an ever-increasing role in the development of Kinston, one can see that the role of creative placemaking in the community is to preserve the heritages and well-being of the community and its people, while also working to enrich the economic and cultural future of the town.

## Characterizing Creative Placemaking in North Carolina

My exploration of the arts and cultural activities forming the creative placemaking practice in North Carolina has presented a wide variety of approaches across the state. Although placemaking is a practice that inherently caters to the unique characteristics of a given community, I have seen that the themes of response to local economies, acknowledgement of community histories, visual representations of place, community engagement, and partnerships recur across the state.



### Response to Economy

The economy of the state of North Carolina has undergone a great deal of change in the past twenty years. The loss of textiles and manufacturing industries in the mountains and piedmont has echoed the changes and losses in the tobacco and other agricultural industries

of the coastal plains. The creative placemaking occurring in North Carolina is responsive to such fluctuation. Through practices like creative reuse of architecture, engagement of underemployed workforces, and engaging in new business trends, the arts of the state are finding ways to strengthen the presence of artistic communities while also helping sustain local economies.

In Wilson, Tobacco warehouses are being reused to house mixed-use living and retail spaces, while in Durham landmarks of the American Tobacco company's past are being reimagined as performance venues, retail spaces, and cultural gathering places. These creative re-use projects offer opportunities to strengthen local economies and cultural presences. Additionally, these creative placemaking efforts reframe the meanings of local icons. As the smokestack of the American Tobacco Campus or the tobacco warehouses of Wilson become parts of repurposing efforts, the landmarks come to honor economic histories while also representing the renewed economic opportunity of the community's present and future.

While harnessing the potential of community spaces provides significant opportunity for citizens to renew identities and associations with place, creating projects that actively engage a community's workforce allows individuals to become invested in the success of arts-based placemaking projects. The efforts made by the Vollis Simpson whirligig restoration and park project in Wilson have provided a platform for such workforce development. By creating opportunities for training in welding, restoration, preservation, and documentation of the site's 34 whirligigs, the project has created 17 temporary and 2 long-term work opportunities for community members.

Using existing infrastructures or workforces within North Carolina's communities is supplemented by the efforts of regional creative placemaking to identify new economic opportunities that can benefit communities. North Carolina's continuously-developing craft brew industry is providing interesting opportunities for creative projects in towns across the state. In Asheville, Becky Anderson expressed her hope that trends in local brewing and the local food movements will create opportunities between these local industries and local craft artists. She sees potential in the use of local artists to design and produce handmade serving ware for local restaurants or hand-crafted beer mug series for local breweries. In towns like Kinston and Wilson, local restaurants and breweries are becoming critical partners in the process of the revitalization of spaces and serving as gathering places and locals and attractions for visitors. In Kinston, the success of Mother Earth Brewing and Chef & the Farmer restaurant are attracting visitors from across the country. This boon for tourism also provides unique opportunities to publicize and engage locals and visitors in the musical history of the area and educate the public through the African American Music Trail. In Wilson, the development of the Vollis Simpson Whirligig Park has encouraged the development of formerly vacant tobacco warehouses that sit adjacent to the park. Among the businesses occupying these renovated buildings is the Golden Leaf Brewing Co. ("Microbrewery on Tap for Downtown Wilson"). By engaging the possibilities of shared audiences and the benefits of partnerships with the breweries developing across the state, creative placemaking efforts have the opportunity to strengthen local economies and create unique experience that engage locals and encourage visitors to make the choice to call these places home.

## **Acknowledgement of History**

As creative placemaking responds to the economic climate of North Carolina, it also takes into account the unique histories of the state and its people. This acknowledgement of local and regional histories extends beyond the economic past. Projects across the state exhibit the fact that North Carolina Placemaking is based in an appreciation of the pasts of towns, communities, and the individuals who spent their lives in these places.

HandMade in America has spent twenty years developing programs and practices that use the craft heritage of western North Carolina as an economic driver and advocate for that history's role in determining the future of the region, its craftspeople, and their towns. Towns like West Jefferson actively communicate the histories of their places through the public artworks they use to activate buildings. The murals along Jefferson Avenue communicate the town's musical, economic, and agricultural histories, while the brightly colored geometric patterns of the barn quilts that dot the farm buildings along rural roads of Ashe County create an homage to both the local quilt-crafting tradition and the area's rich agricultural heritage.

In Greensboro, Elsewhere's form of placemaking uses the defined space of a single building to explore local histories and the history of the museum space itself. By creating installations based on objects left from the buildings history as a thrift shop, furniture store, an army surplus supplier, the organization's programming celebrates the history of the building, and how the objects there in are indicative of the history and changes along Elm Street and in Greensboro throughout the years.

In Wilson, the Vollis Simpson Whirligig Park is working to showcase the artistic spirit of the town by celebrating the work of one of its own unique makers. By creating a place for audiences to continue to experience the wonder of thirty-four of Simpson's

creations, the park preserves a particular history of the town in such a way that it can continue to inform the landscape of the downtown area, while also helping to shape the futures of the local economy and the nature of the town's public space in the future.

In a similar way, the African American Music Trails of Kinston and eight surrounding eastern counties document and celebrate the culture surrounding jazz, blues, R&B, and funk music in the region. In doing so Kinston is educating and engaging audiences in the unique cultural history of its townspeople. Kinston's African American Music Park defines a space in which the history of the music, the voices of musicians, and the contributions that both have made to the culture of the region can be visually represented through public sculpture that creates a specific place for public gathering and celebration.

### **Visual Representation of Place**

As creative placemaking develops across the state, a common factor within projects and initiatives is to create aesthetic icons that let citizens and visitors know that they are in a place like no other. Ranging from fifty-foot-high kinetic sculpture to murals created by local artists and depicting local scenery and history, the common factor of public art as a visual representation of place is one that relates locations across the state as they each develop unique approaches.

In locations like Wilson and Kinston, sculptures within public parks create striking visual definitions for towns. The Vollis Simpson Whirligig Park creates a setting in which viewers can experience the size, movement, and interaction of the sculptures, while also creating an instantly recognizable community landmark that allows audiences to create unique associations with the town of Wilson. In Kinston, the African American Music Park

creates a space that serves as a unique visual and experiential marker for the larger music trail.

Chapel Hill's approach to public art enhances the experience of residents and visitors who are already closely tied to the culture and pride associated with the University of North Carolina's Chapel Hill campus. Initiatives like the town's *Mobile Mural* project integrate the arts into the existing public transportation structure. Pieces like Mikyoung Kim's *Exhale* in Franklin Street's 140 West Plaza serve to create unique aesthetic experiences that also enhance the streetscape.

In Charlotte, the Arts and Science Council works to improve elements of built capital such as the (CATS) LYNX Blue Line. By integrating visual representations of natural capital and surrounding neighborhoods into the design of a setting such as the light rail station, the Arts and Science Council strives to use aesthetics to enhance the everyday experiences of individuals in Charlotte. The creation of such unique aesthetic experiences helps individuals tie specific interactions with art to their own identification with the town of Charlotte.

In West Jefferson, public murals enliven the appearance of downtown buildings and quilt squares work to create artistic interactions with the rural structures and landscapes of the county. By working with organizations like HandMade in America to develop a specific plan for the changes to Jefferson Avenue, the local arts and business presences have worked to create a main street which has an engaging visual appeal. Rather than having a downtown congested by stoplights and lined with sidewalks that limited accessibility along the avenue, private and public partners in the town worked to create a visually appealing new design for sidewalks and traffic patterns controlled by stop signs. In doing so, Jefferson Avenue is now a place that allows drivers to stop and taken in local shops, galleries, and public art.



Pedestrians also benefit from the change in the town's infrastructure, as the street is now easier to travel and offers places to sit and congregate. The picturesque main street of this small town is a visual marker enhanced by the local artistic presence and an asset in defining the place of West Jefferson.

### **Community Engagement**

In their discussion of creative placemaking, Markusen and Gadwa emphasize that distinctiveness of place can be based in the cultural histories, practices, or even problems of a particular place (19). The practice of creative placemaking in North Carolina works to define distinctive aspects through direct community engagement in the development and implementation of projects.

In the mountain counties of western North Carolina, HandMade in America has worked to listen directly to the voices of community members and to use those voices to inform the development of the craft trails of the region. In the planning of its craft trail guidebook, the deliberate efforts of HandMade to create conversations about the churches, schools, natural landmarks, and stores around which communities build themselves have allowed for understanding of the authentic histories of places and their people. Facilitating these conversations and valuing the responses of community members allowed projects like the trail guides to reflect the assets that communities share and value. Because voices of community members were significant to the creation of the books, the project garnered the goodwill of townspeople and ensured that they were excited to bring tourists into their communities.

Just as responding to the voices of communities in western North Carolina allowed HandMade in America to capture the character of towns along their craft trails, the

interviews conducted by the NC Arts Council's Folklife project to document African American Music Trails of Eastern North Carolina recognize unique experiences. Conducting interviews of jazz, funk, soul, and gospel musicians in Edgecombe, Nash, Greene, Lenoir, Pitt, Wayne, Jones, and Wilson counties sheds light on an often overlooked portion of the region and state's history. As the stories of the musicians and locations of this distinct North Carolina community are told, creative placemaking is used to create trail systems that introduce those cultural experiences for the wider public. By capturing and preserving the voices, songs, and experience of this vibrant culture, creative placemaking engages the African American community of Eastern North Carolina and promotes the visibility their experiences to the rest of the state.

In Wilson, the Vollis Simpson Whirligig Park has created opportunities for employment and community investment in the success of the project. By creating training for skilled workers to learn techniques to restore and preserve the whirligig sculptures, the project engaged the community's economy. The fact that the majority of the project's training and employment benefited young African American males within the community shaped an opportunity for a wider sense of community inclusion in the project. By engaging the community to learn the jobs and skills necessary to maintain the park, the project organizers have created community support and have set in motion the training and maintenance skills needed to sustain this project in the future.

### **Partnerships**

While engaging the communities in which projects are based is vital to the success of creative placemaking in North Carolina, the establishment of public and private partnerships is an essential step in creating viable placemaking within the state. The placemaking

practices developed by Handmade in America demonstrate a variety of partnerships. As the Small Towns program works to develop revitalization projects in fourteen communities in western North Carolina, the partnerships with local town governments are critical to developing support and resources for projects. The example of the organization's work in downtown West Jefferson illustrates that the partnership between a creative placemaking organization and a town council can create the momentum needed to support and implement a placemaking project.

West Jefferson and the Ashe County Arts Council also provide insight into the benefits of arts organizations serving as active civic leaders and partners. The Arts Council staff serves on a number of local boards including the West Jefferson Downtown Partnership (Lonon). This organization, comprised of local private business owners, public entities like the local library, and non-profit organizations including the Ashe County Arts Council, create a regular dialogue between members of the local business community. Additionally, this organization is responsible for the planning of major town and county events such as the Christmas in July Festival. Having arts organizations included in town business and planning conversations allows them contribute to and benefit from the pool of community resources found in these boards. The ability of arts and creative placemaking organizations to be included in the planning stages of town events and developments creates opportunities for those organizations to advocate for the arts' roles in community planning and to promote opportunities for local arts and culture to contribute to the success of a town or city.

While the participation of arts organizations in civic leadership allows for advocacy and increased resources on a local level, the ability to secure funding from prominent national agencies and foundations is beneficial to the long-term sustainability of programs

and the visibility of projects to a public outside of North Carolina. Placemaking in Greensboro, Wilson, and Charlotte has successfully engaged major funding institutions, with grants awarded from both the National Endowment for the Arts and ArtPlace America. In addition to providing critical funding for the greenway and whirligig park projects in Greensboro and Wilson, NEA Our Town grants actively publicize the projects. The NEA's "Exploring Our Town" website creates a platform for grant-funded projects to be extensively documented through writing and photographs of the projects' progress. Similarly, ArtPlace America's \$200,000 grant awarded to Elsewhere's South Elm Projects and the \$400,000 grant given to McColl Center's partnership with the Brightwalk community creates and publicizes records of the approaches and progress of these institutions and their projects. These nationally-circulated documents serve a dual purpose as they attract viewers and visitors interested in placemaking projects as they help create a set of resources that can guide and inform the way other communities develop their own visions for creative placemaking.

From the common factors of response to local economies, acknowledgement of community histories, visual representations of place, active community engagement, and the utilization of partnerships, one can see that creative placemaking in North Carolina, though varied in approach, reflects shared values and needs in communities across the state. Given the variety of locations and approaches included in this study, it can be seen that future creative placemaking projects in the state can consider these same factors in order to provide meaningful cultural experiences and community impacts.

## Conclusion

The thread that seems to link creative placemaking practices in North Carolina is the absence of a single common practice. Although each site I encountered responds to the cultural heritage of towns and cities as a way to grow local economies and communities, there are no two identical approaches to achieving this goal. The barn quilts and murals of West Jefferson offer handmade representations of local history, while Mikyoung Kim's undulating and steaming *Exhale* uses sleek metal and colorful lights to continue the tradition of memorable Chapel Hill experiences. The way the motion-activated lights of Greensboro's *Over.Under.Pass* engage and revitalize public space does not resemble the towering windmills of Wilson's Vollis Simpson Whirligig Park. While McColl Center's artists in residence are creatively solving ecological problems by incorporating sculpture into the Brightwalk neighborhood, Kinston is countering the under appreciation of the region's musical traditions by interviewing and honoring the African America musicians of eastern counties. As the North Carolina Arts Council boosts the cultural economy of Durham by bringing new businesses to the American Tobacco Campus, the Craft Heritage Trails of Western North Carolina find success in promoting the long-standing craft industry of the region. No two practices are identical, yet all illustrate the practice of creative placemaking.

As placemaking projects continue to develop across the state, challenges are abundant. Concern for how the creation of new arts districts and spaces can divide or alienate segments of the community must be carefully considered and addressed as projects are planned. As public and non-profit organizations continue to assume the roles of creative placemaking organizers, diligent planning and progress must be made to develop the human and financial capitals needed to sustain projects and organizations in the long term. Perhaps

more significantly, the focus on community goals and organizational missions must remain clear. Without consistent dialogue with community members and partners to assess the roles and successes of the organization in the community, creative placemaking efforts can become unresponsive to the community needs they set out to meet.

Despite the challenges it faces, creative placemaking in North Carolina reflects and celebrates the state as a place shaped by music, craft, agriculture, and industry. By celebrating the people, places, and practices that have brought towns and cities to the current place in time, creative placemaking shapes spaces in ways that attract new visitors and residents while sparking local and regional economies. As creative placemaking in North Carolina continues, it will not only create places that people experience, it will create places that people remember. Places that people call home.

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