

**Art and Culture in Athens-Clarke:
An Exploration of Stakeholder Perceptions and Community Indicators**



Citation for Art: Artist, Taylor Shaw, Greetings from Athens, 230 W. Clayton Street, Athens, Georgia [Photograph May 8, 2020].

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Introduction

Art and culture have the potential to contribute to community development and a thriving local economy.¹ Athens-Clarke County, Georgia is recognized as a destination for art and culture, including a nationally renowned music scene, popular culinary offerings, and institutions like the Georgia Museum of Art. The Local Government Practicum class in the Master of Public Administration program was asked to investigate the current state of art and culture in Athens. The questions guiding this task are listed in the box below. This investigation took place in May 2020, a time period in which the community continued to experience the effects of the global COVID-19 pandemic, business closures resulting from a statewide shelter-in-place order, and disruptions related to non-pharmaceutical public health interventions, such as social distancing. As documented in this report and in an unrelated survey conducted by the Athens Arts Alliance, the pandemic has consequences for both the creation and the consumption of art, music, and cultural amenities.² The investigation concludes art and culture are important to the local economy and social fabric of Athens, and recommends continued monitoring of key indicators to assess and support local art and culture in the months and years ahead.

Local Government Practicum Investigation:

Athens' creative community has long enjoyed an outsized presence on the national stage, but not a lot of effort has been expended to understand its impact on Athens itself. How do the artists, musicians, performers, crafters, makers and creators in our community inform the social systems present in Athens today?

This project is intended to investigate key aspects of our creative community's interaction with the overall populace. What are the specific community, economic and social benefits of keeping our town a place where creators feel included and are nurtured? As Athens continues to grow

¹ The word *thriving* is used purposively, as student conversations were informed in part by endowments described by the Thriving Cities Project: <https://thrivingcitiesgroup.com/project-and-research-library#endowment-briefs-research>.

² Athens Arts Alliance. 2020. Survey Report: Athens-Clarke County (ACC) Georgia Residents Artists' COVID-19 Economic Impacts April 2020. Available online: https://athica.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/FinalReport_ACC_ArtistsCOVID19EconomicImpacts_Survey_050520.pdf.

and change, how can we ensure that it continues to be an affordable, friendly space where creativity is respected, and the arts continue to thrive?

The class investigation was organized to investigate seven aspects of art and culture in

Athens including:

- Public Events and Festivals
- Music
- Visual and Performing Arts
- Food
- Maker Businesses & Creative Services
- History and Culture
- Open Space & the Public Square

Each section of the report explores the contribution of art and culture to the local economy and to social connectedness in the community, while also commenting on challenges and inequities identified during this investigation. Each team of student investigators conducted a series of interviews with key informants in the community and read background information to provide a short summary of the significance of the topic in Athens. The teams also identified a limited set of community indicators that may be monitored and reported on a period basis in order to understand change, challenges, and progress in the local art and cultural community.³ The indicators are briefly referenced in the report narrative and are documented in Appendix 2 of the report. The report concludes with a set of recommendations generated from the deliberations of the student authors, developed after reflecting upon their research in the community, and informed by theory in the field of community development. Appendix 3 to the report provides the class reading list, offering context for the team's investigation and follow-up inquiry.

This investigation has limitations that must be acknowledged. First, the work is the project of a team of students, meeting for a limited period of three weeks. This timeframe limits

³ Sung, HeeKyung, Roland J. Kushner, and Mark A. Hager. 2020. Exploring the dimensional structure of the arts in communities, In *Culture, Community, and Development*, edited by R. Phillips, M. A. Brennan, and T. Li. New York: Routledge.

the scope of community engagement and the number of interviews that illuminate the topic. Restrictions on interpersonal contact related to the COVID-19 pandemic also limited access to some individuals and organizations who might have provided useful insight. While the student teams made every effort to make their work inclusive and engage diverse voices within the community, the class acknowledges with more time, even more could be done to extend the scope of our inquiry. As a student team project, we also acknowledge that the ideas and recommendations presented here are the product of a university course and teams of student authors. The views expressed here should not be attributed to the University of Georgia, the Athens-Clarke Unified Government, or any of the individuals or organizations discussed herein. Any concerns about the content of this work should be directed to the instructor for the course, Dr. Eric Zeemering by email at eric.zeemering@uga.edu. Any valuable insights gained from this work should be credited to the students and the community members who generously took time to share their insights on art and culture in Athens.

Public Events and Festivals

Laura Oropeza and Loran Posey

Public events and festivals offer one-of-a-kind opportunities for members of a community to come together to socialize, network, and preserve or create new community traditions. By planning an event and experiencing it as organizers or spectators, then reflecting on the successes and challenges afterward to make improvements, it is possible for a community to come together to create something that anyone can appreciate. Public events and festivals also allow a community to share its culture and traditions with residents and visitors.

In addition to putting a community's culture and traditions on display, the in-person interaction afforded by public events and festivals generates revenue for the community's businesses and serves as an avenue for local artists of all varieties to showcase their craft and share it with others. During times of crisis, such as the one that the world is currently experiencing with the COVID-19 pandemic, it is increasingly important to provide avenues for people to partake and witness the arts firsthand as a short getaway from their problems. This emphasizes the importance of continuing to hold such events once the community is able to gather together in person again, because they not only benefit the community's overall wellbeing and identity, but also contribute to its economy in such a way that enables it to thrive.

Economic and Community Benefits

According to Melanie McElroy, Development and Outreach Coordinator for the Athens-Clarke County Unified Government Leisure Services Department, public events and festivals planned by the local government are a way of giving back to the citizens of the community, as they provide opportunities for people to gather and enjoy experiences they may otherwise not

have. One example of this effort to provide unique opportunities is the Above Athens Balloon Festival, held at Sandy Creek Park each fall. According to McElroy, this event was designed to give Athenians a chance to attend an event that was unique in the views and experiences it provided. In addition to bringing people together, these events have the potential to build community identity and attract non-residents to the community to spend money and become exposed to everything Athens offers, potentially creating future day-trippers or even residents.

Through the Spring Fling, which is held at Southeast Clarke Park, ACCUG has attempted to offer events in geographically diverse locations to draw a crowd that is both racially and socioeconomically diverse. This strategy brings people together in a way that can strengthen community relationships and identity. The Spring Fling event also provides opportunities for citizens to get out and play, especially for youth.

According to Ashley Travieso, Director of Twilight Criterium, the annual bike race is an important event for downtown restaurants. Many events are critical for businesses, especially during the summer when business is generally down due to the absence of most University of Georgia (UGA) students. For example, Travieso said the April Twilight event provides a boost to restaurants that helps them survive until June's AthFest. Those two events combined go a long way in sustaining business until students return.

Contribution to Social Systems and Community in Athens

As creators of a space in which different sectors of a community can come together to showcase their fun, artistic, educational, and cultural traditions, public events and festivals contribute to the overall social systems in Athens. Public events and festivals provide a unique opportunity for members of all sectors of the community to come together to actively participate

and enjoy the fruits of their work, while also sharing them with local residents and visitors who are not local. Public events and festivals also offer an opportunity for differing groups to interact with each other to find common ground in a way that will benefit the entire community.

A common link between each organization that we interviewed was the collaboration that must occur between organizations and local artists to make an event successful. McElroy spoke to her collaboration with key groups, such as the Athens Community Arts Council and Lyndon Arts House, to organize its main annual events. Travieso mentioned a strong relationship with the Athens Institute of Contemporary Art as one of Twilight Criterium's important relationship connectors in the community. She also emphasized the importance of continuing to strengthen Twilight Criterium's relationship with its sponsors, local nonprofits, and the local government to ensure that the annual event is successful.

Dr. Marisa Pagnattaro, chair of the UGA Arts Council and Vice Provost of Academic Affairs, further highlighted the importance of collaboration among diverse community partners by noting that the UGA Arts Council recently expanded its leadership to include individuals from the local arts scene. She stressed that trust within the community is essential, and the way to achieve that trust is by including members of the artistic community in the University's Arts Council leadership. By having community voices represented on the Arts Council, the University will be more inclusive of its surrounding community and crucial partnerships will be more easily attainable.

Public events and festivals make a significant contribution to the Athens-Clarke County community's social systems. Local organizations, nonprofits, artists, and Athens-Clarke County

all partner to create programming that benefits the community at large, thereby creating an opportunity for diverse interests to unify, and for relationships among neighbors to strengthen.

Steps to Advance Inclusive and Thriving Arts and Culture Community

There are several areas in which Athens-Clarke County is succeeding in advancing an inclusive and thriving community in terms of public events and festivals. One example is the decision to create the Partners Leading Athens Youth (PLAY) fund, which creates a more equitable public environment that removes a barrier to entry for youth. Athens-Clarke County should continue these efforts to improve accessibility and continue developing efforts to plan events in geographically and socioeconomically diverse areas.

According to McElroy, there were obstacles to partnership between Athens-Clarke County and the local artist community. On the other hand, Twilight depended on its strong relationship with ATHICA to partner with a local artist for the creation of their marketing material. ACCUG should attempt to build a foundation for coordination and mutual benefit between itself and local art entities.

One common area of challenge identified by each party interviewed was the struggle to secure adequate funding. Travieso emphasized Twilight's dependence on marketing and other grant opportunities available through the Athens Downtown Development Authority. While Athens-Clarke County depends on several intragovernmental partnerships, and Twilight depends on partnerships with businesses, ACCUG and nonprofits, UGA's Arts Council is aware that it needs to make more in-roads with the local community.

Music

Amanda El-Kadi, John Knowles and Gerena Walker

Athens-Clarke County (ACC) has a history of a highly engaged and creative music community. Eight members of the Athens music community, including a non-profit, UGA involved organizations, record engineers, vinyl producers and musicians have been interviewed to contribute to this section of the report. Expanding on the already well-developed music ecosystem in Athens can produce great social, cultural and economic benefits. Image 1 from Sound Diplomacy is a visual representation of how fostering the music community through education, community engagement, media and governance can positively benefit multiple cornerstones of a prosperous community. This section of the report details the economic benefits of developing the music economy and the contribution of music to social systems in Athens.

Economic and Community Benefit

Due to the dynamic landscape and demographics of Athens-Clarke County, the artistry of music serves with great economic and community benefit. ACC is home to a diverse scope of citizenry that includes a university, urban life, and suburban life; because of this, it serves as a unique social square for diverse exchanges of interactions and ideas, particularly with art. Additionally, this geographic dynamic of ACC inhibits the ability for innovative, and integrative placemaking for musicians. Musicians being in this social square provide their art as self-expression, to provoke and connect community expression.

While the musician puts their art into the community, performing and supplying music provides them income to be included in an employed art labor force. However, this is not the reality for current ACC musicians. There is a lack of venues for local artists to play that will pay the artists for their labor. Usually, local artists must resort to playing at local bars and are not as

present at bigger venues like the Georgia Theatre or UGA events⁴. Furthermore, performing at local bars is limited due to the bars' willingness to pay and support the artist through promotions of their music⁵. This creates an economic effect of decreased revenue for local musicians, which then creates the problem of affordability for the livelihood of a musician residing in ACC. Aside, the promotion of musical events not only brings income to the musician but revenue into the county due to entertainment spillovers of parking, food (restaurants), lodging, and shopping (including convenient stores and gas).

Additionally, from economic benefit of a musician and their art to a community, it also brings forth a collaborative community benefit providing community expression. There is no coincidence that musician Linqua Franqa is also Commissioner Mariah Parker being both an artist and public administrator for the people. Music has long stood as a connector between people and their realities expressing different emotions. Additionally, art has a way of connecting, illuminating, and promoting advocacy of inequities. Due to the demographics of ACC, music can be a social square to promote diverse exchanges enabling cultural democracy, if providing a space that accepts all identities and genres.

Contribution to Social Systems and Community in Athens

When looking at music's contribution to social systems and communities in Athens, the accomplishments and opportunities are endless. First, one can look at the contribution from musicians themselves. The music industry in Athens is an environment that creates opportunities for collaborations and partnerships between musicians of any sort. Furthermore, there are music-

⁴ According to interviews with Record Label Owner Mike Turner and Booking Agent & Planner Marie Ulher. Local musicians aren't usually able to book at a bigger venue.

⁵ According to interviews with Record Label Owner Mike Turner and Booking Agent & Planner Marie Ulher.

oriented organizations that are actively working to promote community and traditions of connectivity and wellness. A staple in the community that does such work is Nuçi's Space.

Nuçi's Space's vision and mission, mentioned on their website, is "to end the epidemic of suicide and to inspire a culture free of the stigma attached to brain illnesses and its sufferers by supporting a community-wide effort that focuses on education, prevention and access to appropriate treatment." It is a space, described by Operations Manager, Jesse Houle, for musicians to meet each other and where people can feel safe and comfortable in a coffee shop environment. They host support groups for survivors of suicide, mental health, and substance abuse. As the whole world has been affected by COVID-19, so has Nuçi's Space. They were forced to close in mid-March and have remained closed since. However, they see this as an opportunity to embrace a new culture. They are working harder than ever to raise money for the music community and through the Garrie Vereen Memorial Emergency Relief Fund, they have raised over \$100,000.

Furthermore, regarding the exchange of art, "Community [serves] as an 'Interaction'⁶" where communities are built on social interactions. An idea that a community consists of individuals from all backgrounds coming together to create something bigger. It then mentions that groups will organize around different interests, but the linkage between these groups creates a community. This is especially true regarding Nuçi's Space and music in Athens. They are networking not only between musicians, but also with organizations such as the movie theatre Cine, and Family Counseling Services on North Avenue to further the sense of a community.

⁶ Phillips, Rhonda, Mark A. Brennan, and Tingxuan Li. 2020. *Culture, community, and development*, Chapter 7. New York, Routledge. ISBN: 97113593961.

Steps to Advance Inclusive and Thriving Arts and Culture Community

Throughout the interviews conducted, the main challenges noted by the musicians were access to low rent and costs of living, a gap between the UGA and classical music scene compared to the “downtown” music scene, and the ability for artists to be fairly paid for their work. Recommended and established methods to create and foster a thriving music city include mapping out the existing music scene, instituting music friendly policies, creating a music advisory board or officer position, and establishing community support⁷.

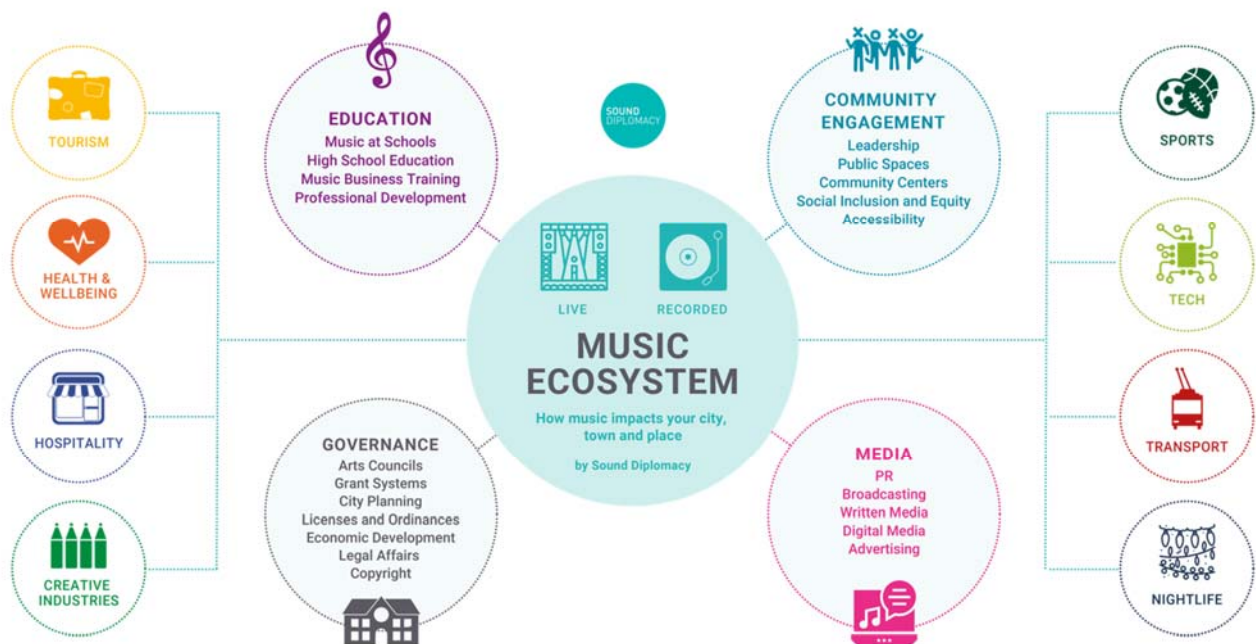
The first recommended step by Sound Diplomacy is to gather data and map out your existing music scene. Through reviewing and mapping indicators, such as the ones listed in Image 2, a city can ascertain the strength of their already existing music infrastructure. Measuring indicators that are fluid may provide a better marker of the health of the music scene over time. Image 3 is a good starting point of a fluid indicator, as it shows lays out the performance of the GA Theatre for the 2018-2019. Knowing when more performances are offered in Athens can assist with determining the opportune times for events and festivals. Mapping out the full Athens music ecosystem will act as a base for all the action items.

Once the mapping is complete, next steps can be considered. This should include reviewing what existing policies (including but not limited to licensing, planning, fair pay, and copyright support) Athens-Clarke has in place to support citizens active in the music scene is crucial. The creation of policies that will benefit musicians may include tangential opportunities such as reviewing existing business and liquor license policies, or something more direct such as creating an ACC Tax/License Break Incentive for Venues (Bars) to Pay Musicians. Another next

⁷ The Mastering of a Music City. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.ifpi.org/downloads/MusicCities_Infographic.jpg

step could be instituting a music advisor board or music officer position. This could be an opportunity to utilize well respected leaders in Athens to receive valuable feedback, garner trust, and create a known entity for people to go to. Lastly, this advisory board could be great for engaging the community through assisting with outreach events or working to initiate a communal creative space for Athens artists. While there are many approaches to take to move this initiative forward, any first steps taken will be a move in a positive direction.

Image 1:



Source: *Sound Diplomacy*. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.sounddiplomacy.com/our-services>

Image 2:

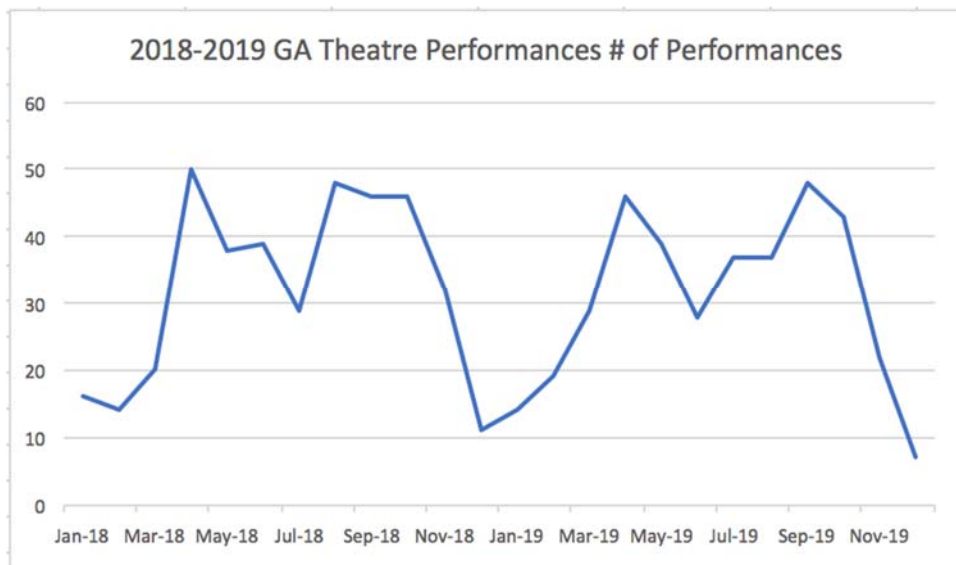


Image 3:

2018-2019 GA Theatre Performances	
Month	# of Performances
Jan-18	16
Feb-18	14
Mar-18	20
Apr-18	50
May-18	38
Jun-18	39
Jul-18	29
Aug-18	48
Sep-18	46
Oct-18	46
Nov-18	32
Dec-18	11
Jan-19	14
Feb-19	19
Mar-19	29
Apr-19	46
May-19	39
Jun-19	28
Jul-19	37
Aug-19	37
Sep-19	48
Oct-19	43
Nov-19	22
Dec-19	7

Image 2 Source: Micó, A., & Shapiro, S. (2019, October 9). *Music Cities - Insights Blog*. Retrieved from [https://www.sounddiplomacy.com/our-insights/tag/Music Cities](https://www.sounddiplomacy.com/our-insights/tag/Music%20Cities)

Image 4:



Visual and Performing Arts

Sara Del Valle and Josie Wang

Some of the most recognizable parts of arts and culture are the visual and performing arts. This category spans painting, photography, sculpture, textile design, comedy, theater, dance, and more. In Athens-Clarke County, one can enjoy the many public art displays, visit the Georgia Museum of Art, see a variety of art exhibits, or attend a number of artistic performances. In this lies the potential to bring together those of diverse backgrounds to both create and appreciate these forms of culture. By further developing community relationships and networks, the visual and performing arts contribute to the thriving Athens community.

Economic Benefit

Visual and performing arts have a clear economic benefit for Athens Clarke County (ACC), most easily visible through Census County Business Patterns (CBP) counts of arts, entertainment, and recreation establishments in the community. The numbers of these establishments have risen over the last several years, and the majority of them are small businesses and nonprofits with less than 5 employees. Along with this, the total amount of payroll and people employed by these organizations have also increased over time. In 2017, arts, entertainment, and recreation establishments in ACC employed 912 people, contributing roughly \$14.6 million to the community in annual payroll⁸. These make up about 2.14% of all ACC establishments and 2.86% of those with less than 5 employees, and these percentages increased over time. This shows that the arts sector is both growing in size and becoming a more vital part

⁸ <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/cbp/data/tables.html>, See Appendix 2

of the ACC community and economy. Tracking these statistics could help ACC better understand the economic impact and health of the visual and performing arts community.

In addition, ACC has become an arts and culture destination, for both tourists/visitors and creators; this designation was reaffirmed by interviews conducted for this project. In 2015, it was estimated that visitors in Athens spent \$292.3 million, 2,740 jobs, and \$20.17 million in state/local tax revenues⁹. While some of this was due to recreational cultural events, like UGA football games, the arts and culture scene in ACC also draws in significant tourism throughout the year. Unlike sports seasons, many of the visual and performing arts that draw visitors to ACC are available year-round, allowing for more stable visitor income for local businesses and taxes. Many creators will also come to build their skills and take advantage of the thriving creative energies in the area. Some arts establishments, like Canopy Studio, are so renowned in their field that they draw famous performers from across the country. Artists come not only to train from leaders in their field, but also for the entire creative network and support available.

ACC also encourages creative industries, which are composed of arts companies and nonprofit organizations. These help Athens citizens gather to form shared-interest communities and help artists to share their talents, hawk their wares, and display their dreams. Many younger artists or art managers like small communities because they can make a difference and feel their impact. As an example, ACC is a community that appreciates aerial arts, and many famous instructors and dancers are moving to Athens. Canopy Studio creates shows twice a year, and their audience continues to grow¹⁰. These artists like the creative vibe here and say that no other aerial arts center can compare. To track the creative industries, ACC can use data from

⁹ <https://www.visitathensga.com/media/media-kit/stats-facts/>

¹⁰ Interview with Melissa Roberts

Americans for the Arts (AFTA), a national arts non-profit. AFTA uses Dun & Bradstreet business and employment data for the arts sector to create maps of the creative industries¹¹. In 2017, Clarke County, GA was home to 232 arts-related businesses employing 820 people. This accounts for 4% of the total number of businesses and 1.3% of the total employment in ACC¹².

Community Benefits and Contribution to Social Systems and Community in Athens

The supporting network within the visual and performing arts community is vibrant, with many of the individuals, associations, and establishments working together, sharing resources, and making meaningful connections. For many, their arts involvement is a significant factor in their social lives, as they develop their networks through various arts groups, associations, and gatherings¹³. In addition, their career skills and prospects can improve from these connections. Staying involved allows artists to build skills to market themselves, learn more artistic techniques, stay up to date on and adapt to art trends¹⁴. Rather than relying on key individuals to tie together the community, artists are brought together by spaces and organizations, like the Lyndon House Arts Center, Athens Arts Alliance, Athens Institute for Contemporary Art, Athens Area Arts Council, Morton Theatre, Town and Gown, the Classic Center, and East Athens Educational Dance Center. Many of the arts call for shared space, marketing platforms, models, equipment, and creative energies, so the physical spaces and formal networks available to artists

¹¹ <https://www.americansforthearts.org/by-program/reports-and-data/research-studies-publications/creative-industries>

¹² https://seures21.brinkster.com/aftadc/Georgia/county/GA_Clarke_County.pdf, see Appendix 2

¹³ Interview with Mary Ann Cox

¹⁴ Interview with Didi Dunphy

are vital¹⁵. There is also consistent collaboration between artistic fields, such as the use of local musicians during performances, local makers for stage props/equipment, and other creative collaborations¹⁶. The arts community is much more than the sum of its parts; they frequently work together to reach new creative accomplishments and audiences.

Beyond promoting social connectedness and collaboration, the visual and performing arts also bring people of diverse backgrounds together to engage in crucial, yet often difficult, conversations. Artists use their creativity and creative networks to work to address issues such as domestic and intimate partner abuse, mental illness, suicide, and systematic racism. On top of using their platforms to create space for discussion on these topics, artists in Athens also use their networks to connect those in need to vital resources. The vibrant interpersonal relationships within the arts community amplify the impacts of these conversations and referrals because of the greater implicit trust between participants. Through this trust, more people are then able to connect with the help needed when they face personal crises. In addition, because many marginalized groups face additional barriers to participating in the arts, there are conscious efforts at improving representation of the diversity within Athens in exhibitions and performances, both as participants and audience members. This can help contribute to addressing systematic and deeply rooted divisions in society, setting the stage for better trust and collaboration between diverse groups within and outside the arts community in ACC.

The University of Georgia also provides unique assets to the arts and broader community in Athens. While it is not the only academic institution in ACC providing arts degrees and certificates, UGA awards significantly more of these degrees per year than Athens Technical

¹⁵ Interviews with Terry Powell

¹⁶ Interviews with Terry Powell and Melissa Roberts

College and has more resources as a larger institution. In 2018, roughly 314 visual and performing arts degrees were awarded per 100,000 ACC residents, with the vast majority from UGA¹⁷. This number can be used to track the formal educational ties to the arts community in Athens. Franklin College of Arts and Sciences faculty and their students offer arts expertise, creative talent, volunteer hours, advertising assistance, and general support to the artistic community. While many students are not permanent residents in the community, they still support and participate in the arts, bring outside exposure to the local arts, and sometimes stay long term after graduation. In addition, UGA's presence positively impacts the atmosphere of creativity, experimentation, and free artistic expression. The Georgia Museum of Arts, as a part of the University, contributes to this atmosphere and provides another avenue for the enjoyment of the arts to both creators and audiences alike. Both the University and the Museum further contribute to the designation of ACC as an "Arts Destination".

Challenges

While certain groups within the visual and performing arts have lively networks and connections, there are challenges present for groups to interact across certain demographic barriers. For example, one may have extensive connections with older adults but almost no interactions with younger artists, indicating a generational divide in the social connectivity¹⁸. This is not a unique challenge, as many communities struggle to connect younger and older

¹⁷ <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/use-the-data>, See Appendix 2

¹⁸ Interview with Mary Ann Cox

individuals¹⁹. In addition, many of the key locations for arts may pose barriers for members of certain communities to participate. There is a historical lack of trust between specific groups and the government in the US may limit their comfort in attending art programming in government buildings²⁰. Difficulty in securing transportation also can pose a barrier for low income individuals.

Art for free is no longer a viable option for most artists²¹. Cost of living, housing, and studio space have gone up in ACC, putting additional strain on many artists and pricing some out of the area. Athens has become a valuable piece in the development of a person's career in the arts, but it cannot continue to play this part if artists cannot make a living. Many in ACC say that they value the arts and culture community, but artists still struggle to get paid for their talents. It is not fair to ask those making less money and working multiple jobs to provide their craft for free. Both businesses and artists need to learn the monetary value of art and insist that this monetary value is respected in the form of payment. For this artists may need to master the business skills to market themselves, something that many struggle with. In addition, as gig workers, artists may not have a stable income during the year. They can lose their jobs easily, and the economic impacts of COVID-19 makes their financial situation worse. For example Athens Creative Theatre lost 3 productions and a month of camps to COVID-19, and Canopy Studio cannot provide classes right now, losing revenue for months.

¹⁹ Culture, Community, and Development Chapter 7 Brian McGrath and Mark A. Brennan, The Abundant Community Chapter 7

²⁰ The Abundant Community, Chapter 5; Culture, Community, and Development Chapter 9 Eoin Dolan, Pat Dolan, and Jen Hesnan

²¹ interview with Didi Dunphy

Food

Shayla Lee and Heather Howarth

The food and beverage industry plays a crucial role in the thriving community of Athens. The industry contributes to the community by providing jobs and opportunities for people from all backgrounds. Restaurants are places where people can gather and bond over food. Some owners and executives from Athens' restaurants participate in various philanthropic activities as leaders within the community. The food and beverage industry are related to the broader idea of a culturally and artistically driven community as discussed in this report because it serves as a creative outlet for makers. Restaurants experiment with different cuisines across cultures, bakers mix flavors and make edible designs, and brewers develop household tastes. These things contribute to the social systems and thriving community of Athens-Clarke County.

Contribution to Social Systems and Community in Athens

While providing jobs is very important, it is not the dominant benefit in making Athens a place where creators within this industry feel included and nurtured. Athens is well known for its diverse food and beverage options. Food and beverage seem to be a topic and factor in a community that people from diverse backgrounds can find commonality; this idea is a common trend that the leaders of the restaurant community identify. The questions that are most imperative in examining the influence of food in Athens art and culture are, "What is missing?" and "How can we make Athens a place where the food and beverage industry continues to thrive?" To answer these questions, the feedback from restaurant owners, chefs, and executives is necessary to understand the pulse of the industry and its link to the Athens creative and artistic

community. Interviews with leaders in the food and beverage industry provide insight into these questions (Appendix 1).

Our inquiry highlights two key ideas. First, there are opportunities for business owners to seek assistance and build a network in Athens through things such as the Chamber of Commerce, the University of Georgia's Small Business Development Center, and informal opportunities such as the service industry night at Creature Comforts and a listserv of restaurants designed to spread information informally. The issue that arises, is making sure that business owners, especially new ones, are aware of such resources. Secondly, finding the right location in Athens could mean the success or failure of your business. There are areas such as downtown and along Atlanta Highway that are very successful spots, however, the challenge for Athens-Clarke County is making sure spaces are affordable and information about obtaining them is more readily accessible for new businesses owners seeking to establish themselves Athens.

Economic and Social Benefit

In identifying how the food and beverage industry impacts the cultural and artistic intersections of Athens, economic and community benefits of the industries must be examined. The economic benefits of the food and beverage industry are seen through the jobs and revenue generated in the Athens-Clarke County economy. The diverse options of food are seen all throughout Athens, but heavily concentrated in the downtown area where we see high end restaurants, bars, and non-full-service food and beverage businesses. Businesses experience profitable seasons throughout the springtime and UGA's football schedule and generate a great amount of revenue during the daily lunchtime rush as well as the year-round nightlife of the college town. In addition to existing in their rental spaces, food and beverage businesses thrive at

festivals and various events held in Athens, especially in conjunction with Athens being a popular center for music. The music scene in Athens is diverse with different genres of music which brings individuals from many backgrounds to the city to take advantage of all the food and beverage offerings in Athens. Along with generating revenue, musical and artistic events cultivate opportunities for the food and beverage businesses to connect with other creatives which contribute to Athens' rich culture.

The food and beverage industry also contribute to various community benefits in Athens. These benefits can be seen in food donations, the space for social connectedness that these businesses provide to the public, and the philanthropic arm of some businesses. Many owners are supportive of the artistic and creative individuals in Athens by providing them with a space and opportunities that also promote their business. An example of a business that contributes to these community benefits is Creature Comforts. They have developed a strong philanthropic arm that invests in the Athens community through programs called, "Get Comfortable" and "Get Artistic." "Get Comfortable" is a campaign that raises money and awareness for nonprofit organizations that serve vulnerable populations. "Get Artistic" provides support to local artists in Athens in various capacities.

Creature Comforts serves as a great example for public and private entities to learn how to utilize their resources to create an environment that elevates social causes and combats inequities in local communities. Artists, restaurants, and nonprofits are partnering through programs like these to promote social causes and ultimately community development. Community development is important in Athens because it not only improves the quality of life for current residents, but it can in turn bring in new residents. Athens-Clarke County can get

involved in these efforts by working with these restaurants to get connected within their networks and what needs of theirs they can accommodate.

Steps to Advance Inclusive and Thriving Arts and Culture Community

Every interviewee that we spoke with had common thoughts about what they thought was missing in the food and beverage industry – diversity. Although Athens as a city is moving towards diversity every day, there is still a great lack of diverse business owners within the food and beverage industry. As the demographics of Athens become increasingly diverse, new initiatives may be required to diversify the realm of business owners. While the food and beverage industry support economic and social development, marketing Athens as a place where new business owners are welcome and supported may bring in a more diverse network of business owners. This support can take the form of making information about resources to start a business such as necessary regulations, networks, and consultants more easily accessible. The government can identify if Athens is progressing toward a place where more diverse businesses want to come to and in turn impact culture and community by reviewing the Athens-Clarke County Business Tax Listing to see what new full and non-full-service restaurants and food related businesses opened in Athens (Appendix 2) and who owns them. This will allow ACC to assess whether there has been an increase in diverse business owners after the initiatives they put in place have been in effect for a while. These indicators, among others, may provide insight into where the community may be headed.

Creative Services and Maker Businesses

Nettia Conyers and Ryan Miller

Maker businesses are firms that manage both production and distribution of their goods or services. These tend to be small-scale producers who take advantage of new technology, unique expertise, and crowdsourcing methods.²² Such a broad description could encompass virtually every small business, but for the purposes of this report, we restricted our research to only those in Athens' arts and culture. Aligning with the purposes of this report and Dr. Anna Marazuela Kim's research, we surveyed a more expanded definition of culture beyond just visual arts and music. To avoid redundancy with the other parts of this report, this section centers on creative makers otherwise left out. These include firms focused on tattoo artistry, vintage clothing, and specialty foods to name only a few. Maker establishments not only contribute directly to the local economy through commerce, but their "attention to product design and the act of making, habits of collaboration with peers, a sense of a social mission, and attachment to place" contribute positively to a sense of community.²³ Designers, advertisers, and other similar occupations assist makers in their creativity, and these are broadly defined as creative services. Makers offer a hospitable alternative to corporate America for many consumers and have great value for Athens.

Economic and Community Benefit

Maker businesses serve as a direct contributor to the economic and social health of Athens. One research group found that these kinds of businesses circulate local income, create

²² Wolf-Powers et al, 2017, pg. 369.

²³ Wolf-Powers et al, 2017, pg. 370.

export industries, and build quality of place.²⁴ Our indicators show that arts and culture businesses remain both a constant (the “share of all establishments” hardly changed from 2009-2017) and present (over 50 establishments per 100,000 people every year) influence on the Athens economy. Our indicators also provide an angle to monitor this sector’s economic health. For example, the “share of all employees” (SOAE) for 2017 was 0.91% while the “share of total payroll” (SOTP) was only 0.49%. This disparity compares to the same seen in 2009 (where SOAE was 1.14% and SOTP was 0.59%) which preceded a continued decline in the SOAE (0.69% in 2011, 0.4% in 2012, and 0.29% in 2013). A gap in pay and employment could reveal a coming decrease in arts and culture employment. Our further occupational indicators reveal at least two occupations, “Graphic Designers” and “Head Chefs and Cooks,” have been on a steady decrease since 2017. So while establishments have been rather constant, employment fluctuated which could hinder these firms’ economic contribution by undermining local circulation of currency.

Besides the direct economic impact, common maker traits foster establishments that are committed to improving the community. COMMUNITY embodies this by opening their doors to other creatives and vendors, believing as Andrea said that “the more we connect with [others], the stronger that everyone else is.” Mike described how the Rook & Pawn specifically serves as a haven for creatives like him, and it is not the only business like this in Athens. These maker establishments make Athens more “livable” which is what David said was a key to economic success. Maker businesses benefit our Athens economy and society, and the benefit to the latter multiplies the benefit to the former.

²⁴ Wolf-Powers et al, 2017, pg. 367.

Contribution to Social Systems and Community in Athens

An individual maker business' impact arises from all maker business contributions to the Athens community. Athens is widely recognized as a place with great food establishments, incredible music venues, and unique artistic opportunities (among other things). Athens' cultural eminence arose from makers with innovative and unique ideas, blending ideas and creating unique Athens establishments. A development that would not be possible without the accompanying creative services. Between Mike creating posters to advertise bands to begin his career and COMMUNITY filling their gift boxes with other vendors' products, one can see the vital interplay of creatives and makers. Through advertising and promoting Athens culture, creative services foster interconnectedness that assists in creating a community focused on collective growth. The created community allows individuals like Andrea and Mike to refine their craft, express their passion, and make a living. They can function as both makers and creatives because of the interconnectedness which only further benefits the Athens community and economy. Ideas from the creative community grew into places like Cine, the Globe, and Creature Comforts. These three examples and others created the downtown scene that David said "that you cannot get anywhere else." The distinctive maker businesses represent and distinguish Athens as a place of culture and community.

Steps to Advance Inclusive and Thriving Arts and Culture Community

Both our interviews and the literature point to two areas for creating a thriving community for these makers: space and communication. Makers are at a deficit of places to live and work in Athens. David and Andrea described in Athens the exact sort of gentrification Dr.

Rhonda Philips and her colleagues warned could undermine the positive effects of culture.²⁵ Andrea explained that higher rent costs inhibit artistic creativity, and David revealed there is almost no space for businesses downtown prior to COVID-19. People have to live and work further and further from the city's center, creating another obstacle for the creatives. Cultural growth occurs in urban areas largely because of proximity to one another, so Athens' capacity for this is stunted by pushing creatives further away. Andrea elaborated that "we have become spread out" which is "creating more isolation" and undermining the whole creative community. Without targeted efforts, place limitations will seriously inhibit the benefits possible from makers and creators.

Clear and instructive communication contributes heavily to a thriving maker community. Communication can be fostered amongst makers and between makers and the local government. Strong social connections empower existing makers and creatives through creating a community that embraces new enterprises and supports local ones.²⁶ Andrea and Mike each spoke about the positive impact of interconnection among creatives, so we must assure that this extends to all. Important voices are likely missing from the table and need to be given an extended hand. Maker-government communication is also vital. By way of example, David expressed that stores downtown often fail from misguided expectations, so ensuring open dialogue between experienced owners and newcomers may be beneficial. ADDA appears to do excellent work at mediating between city and business (Andrea, for example, commented favorably on David's presence in COMMUNITY), but makers outside their jurisdiction are likely at a deficit. Intermediary organizations, like the ADDA, assist makers in everything from "business technical

²⁵ Philips et al, 2020, Ch. 11.

²⁶ Kretzmann and McKnight, 1996; McKnight, 2010.

assistance” to “networking and community building,” helping the business survive and have a greater impact on the community.²⁷ Ultimately, our current pandemic begs for more maker-government communications as Andrea described: “Communication is probably the number one way that we will move on from this.”

²⁷ Wolf-Powers, 2017, pg. 370.

Historic Preservation, History and Culture

Taylor Ashe and Michael Rabalais

Rooting the present in a firm understanding of the past frames the challenges and opportunities faced by the citizens and visitors of Athens, GA in a different light. Dr. Scott Nesbit, Assistant Professor in the College of Environment and Design says engaging in historical and cultural preservation strengthens the city's identity by, "creating a sense of continuity." The city's history touches every aspect of its creative community, and supporting the preservation of that history contributes to civic pride and the benefit of all citizens.

Economic and Community Benefit

Two of Athens' most prominent and highly-grossing venues are both historic buildings. Ticket sales at the 40 Watt and Georgia Theater communicate citizens' and visitors' desire to experience arts in spaces that are historically significant both to local and national artistic scenes. Dr. Nesbit notes that although these buildings may not feel historic in the same way that the Cobb House does, there is a "kind of inheritance that one feels when you go into these two venues" (Personal communication, May 27th, 2020). Considering this strong support for such historic spaces, one may be surprised to see that our indicators report out of the five listed humanities/heritage nonprofits, only Historic Athens has received enough private and non-private giving above the threshold to require IRS documentation. We believe this highlights a lack of awareness between the efforts of preservation and the ways in which that intersects with the broad range of creative communities in town. However, local organizations and artists are working to make this connection more clear.

Beyond the reputation of the Georgia Theatre and the 40 Watt, the creative heritage of all of Athens' residents is increasingly being identified and celebrated. Broderick Flanigan, a

community organizer, entrepreneur, and visual artist whose murals can be found throughout Athens incorporates the history of Athens' Black residents to ensure "people are aware of these places and spaces" (Personal communication, May 28th, 2020). Andrew Salinas, Chair of the Athens Cultural Affairs Commission (ACAC) stated that the Athens Music Walk of Fame, a project slated to begin this year, will bring a physical marker of the intangible heritage into the landscape of Athens. Salinas said the goal is to reflect "the musicians that made Athens' legacy as a musical town known nationally, and globally." Although each of these previously-mentioned components highlight the many ways in which historical significance in Athens intersects with its creative culture, it's worth noting the relatively few historically-oriented nonprofit organizations recorded in our indicators. Salinas says the benefits of historic preservation are informative and "enrich our understanding of the present and our connection to the community" (Personal communication, May 26th, 2020). Therefore, as creative communities grow in the understanding of their shared heritage, a corresponding increase in humanities/heritage nonprofits with goals to preserve the wide-ranging narratives should be observed.

In its most recent annual report, the Historic Preservation Commission reported 170 Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) applications to restore or modify the built environment in historic neighborhoods, a 156% increase over 2018 (see Appendix 2 - Table 1). These applications signal a growing appreciation and acknowledgement of the city's historic buildings, and rising interest in their preservation. A parallel can be drawn between COA applications and the success of Athens' historic venues, expressing residents' desires to not only observe history from the outside, but also engage with it and therefore extend it into their current lives.

Additionally, Avid Bookshop has provided a list of books regarding Athens, its culture and its history (see Appendix 2 - Table 2). It's important to note that beyond cookbooks, the topic of "Athens History" has the highest number of sales, with most "Music" books also focusing on the history of Athens music. These texts serve as physical preservation of the Athens narrative, while also indicating blind spots that are missing from the mainstream conversations of the community. This indicator can be the beginning of quantifying the revenue generated from publishing Athens' history and serve as a bellwether for future initiatives to promote marginalized narratives.

Contribution to Social Systems and Community in Athens

The historic preservation community in Athens is anchored by several well-known organizations, including Historic Athens, the Athens Historic Society, and the unified government's Historic Preservation Commission. While these organizations ensure the historic landmarks and buildings in Athens-Clarke County are preserved and recognized, they admittedly provide a narrow view of the city's history and how to preserve the history of Athens in 2020. "There's way more to do when it comes to bringing people into this process," said Tommy Valentine, executive director of Historic Athens.

Several nonprofits and community-led groups such as Friends of Gospel Pilgrim Cemetery, Friends of Brooklyn Cemetery, The Linnentown Project, and Athens for Everyone also actively engage in the preservation and education of the history of Athens in an attempt to fill in those representational gaps. In conversation with Ashley Shull, an archivist at the Athens Clarke-County library, revealed the difficulty of neutral efforts to equitably preserve the history

and culture of the town. Preserving the history of various immigrant communities remains an issue, due to distrust of government and outside interest within those groups. Shull also detailed the difficulty of preserving the history of Athens in 2020 due to the proliferation of social media and the internet in communication and organizing within those communities.

Organizing and programming to showcase this side of the community has seen positive results, however. A music education event organized by ACAC to inform citizens about lesser-known artists and their musical legacy, such as Hall Johnson and his work with African-American spirituals, was reported as well-attended by Andrew Salinas. In addition, Historic Athens hopes to build capacity in a way that allows their public programming and community engagement to improve the representation of all citizens in historic preservation. “It is our job to ensure that our city celebrates the history and culture of Black owned businesses, neighborhoods and more,” said Valentine, adding that little has been done within the city to commemorate the history and contributions of the Latinx community or LGBTQ community.

Steps to Advance Inclusive and Thriving Arts Community

Any action taken to assist with the city’s historic preservation should come with an attitude of contrition and transparency towards minority communities that have not seen equal treatment from government initiatives or urban renewal. Direct assistance from the unified government could assist with efforts to preserve the history of Athens Clarke County in these communities. No capital is currently allocated for historic or cultural preservation projects, and targeted funds for minority citizens to build community-led preservation efforts can help mitigate the exclusionary effects of historic marginalization. Access to GIS information and documents

from the city's archive could also assist projects like the Linnentown Project, that seek to map or restore communities and neighborhoods that have been erased from the city's canon.

Parks and Open Space

Alexandria Perdue and Robert Walker

Within the local arts community in Athens-Clarke County, there are many disciplines, topics, and demographics represented. Each of these contributes to the creation of a unique community fabric that has existed in Athens for decades, the most prominent being the national music boom the city experienced in the 1980s. Other traditional arts and aspects of culture have also been thoroughly explored. In this section, we seek to explain how community development is also greatly impacted by less concrete and unconventional enforcements of art culture. Open, spaces, which stand to make room for expression and leisure, are where we turn our focus. Providing open spaces for local artists and community members is essential to sustaining the culture of Athens. This term can be vague, but in one instance, it can be used to define any free space in which artists are given a platform to showcase their talents and feel safe engaging in open expression. While space may not be, strictly-speaking, outdoors, it does represent an open space for artists. Because of the often-precarious economic situation, artists find themselves in free or minimal cost spaces to display or sell art which is crucial to sustaining a thriving arts community. In times of heightened social and political unrest, these open spaces also serve as safe environments for creatives and artists to generate pieces and conversations that reflect the state of the community.²⁸

The more traditional definition of open space would encompass outdoor spaces like parks, which have the added benefit of large groups of people flocking to them, not just those interested in the arts. This presents an opportunity to engage with folks that artists may not usually be able to

²⁸ Phillips, Rhonda, et al. (2020). Chapter 2: A Proposal: Stand for Civic Engagement. *Culture, Community, and Development*. Routledge.

reach. Parks also provide an opportunity to showcase the natural beauty of the community. The Garden City movement called for isolated green spaces and open public parks.²⁹ Alongside this push for open “aesthetically pleasing” spaces, is also the urgency to preserve the environment through these projects and create more environmental sustainability through litter prevention and conservation measures. Open spaces in the literal sense, offer opportunities for artists and citizens to engage with art, nature, and community sustainability all in one.

Economic and Community Benefit

The primary economic benefit of open spaces is to artists, who get a chance to advertise their skills and art in a way that does not levy any cost to them. This potentially allows for artists to not be as concerned with working another job to support their artistic career, which in turn gives them more time to produce art. For the community, these open spaces provide either a formal (such as an outdoor art show) or informal (someone painting in a park) way to engage with art and artists.

Open spaces managed by ACC Leisure Services also seek to engage younger people, to develop their interest in art from a young age. Stephanie Raines, the Arts Division Administrator for ACC Leisure Services, describes the goal of engaging young people, “[We’re] hoping that we’ll allow young people to learn more in-depth about the arts in a way they may not learn about extensively during high school. Arts are something they should be involved in their whole life and helping them realize that is important. We also want to encourage them to see that there are career paths in the arts.”

In terms of open green spaces, there is a trend in parks attracting business. According to a report from the City Parks Forum of the American Planning Association, a company's main

²⁹ Kim, Anna, et al. (2014). *The Beautiful. Thriving Cities Endowment Brief*. (pp. 7-9). University of Virginia’s Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture.

aspiration when looking to open a new facility is how well they will be able to retain talent within the designated community. Numerous studies show that “knowledge workers prefer places with a diverse range of outdoor recreational activities”.³⁰

Contribution to Social Systems

In providing open safe spaces for artists and creatives to flourish, the city stands to gain a more tolerant community that is more appreciative of the arts and different cultures. When free expression and open conversation is encouraged, local democratic participation increases and improves representation within the community. Nicole McConnell, the Assistant Director for the Office of Engagement and Leadership and Service at UGA, spoke of student programming aimed specifically to engage local community creatives. Various student organizations within this office have strategically partnered with local minority artists for concerts, poetry slams, painting classes etc. Much of the programming is designed to address disparities between the “thriving” university and neighboring communities through artistic and cultural events that bridge gaps in open safe environments.

Park spaces also have a great influence on social systems within the community. Lake Herrick Eco-Art Festival Founder, Elizabeth Wrobel, believes that outdoor open spaces “encourage citizens to collectively take care of the environment and provide alternative space for congregation”. She noted that communities will see an increase in the utilization of more open outdoor spaces due to the ongoing pandemic and social-distancing guidelines. In time, greenspaces can generate innovative socialization and increase environmental sustainability awareness.

³⁰ Lewis, Megan. (2003). How Cities Use Parks for Economic Development. *City Parks Forum Briefing Papers*. (pp. 1-3). American Planning Association.

Steps to Increase Inclusivity

One concern in Athens regarding the artist community is the rising cost of living. Should the cost of living continue to rise, it may become difficult for new artists to establish themselves in the Athens community while still living here. In the past, working at a downtown restaurant and performing in a local band was economically viable, but it could become impossible for artists to both make a living and support their artistic career. Athens would certainly lose a piece of its soul.

Athens also has a wonderfully diverse community, and open space resources must be allocated equitably to all members of the community. If this is not done, there is a significant chance that promising young artists may be discouraged from participating. The city is currently providing open studio membership for adult artists at a monthly fee of \$65 at the Lyndon House of Arts Center. Taking into account the social and economic disparities within the community, a free or cheaper alternative could serve to capture parts of the population seeking to engage with limited resources.

Lastly, it will be important to develop and maintain park spaces within all regions of the city as to not restrict minority or marginalized populations from access to beautification and leisure. There is often an elitist tone surrounding the concept of “garden cities” but it is important to preserve them as open spaces for all and provide equal access. Therefore it is necessary that parks be built or renovated in marginalized communities as well to ensure fair exposure to outdoor leisure opportunities.

Recommendations

After completing interviews with community stakeholders and reviewing indicators related to the current status of art and culture in Athens, student teams reflected upon what the class learned within the context community development. The following recommendations are informed by theoretical and concepts from course readings, as well as insights from the example of art and cultural institutions from around the country.

Art and Culture Indicators

In order to monitor and understanding conditions within the art and cultural community, we recommend selecting a subset of the indicators described in this report and monitoring for the purpose of annual reporting and reflection. Community indicators can help ground policy discussions in data. Indicators provide an opportunity for policy makers and community members to reflect upon shared performance goals, and methods to achieve those goals. A subset of indicators related to the local art and culture sector can be reported in a short annual report, or through a regularly updated dashboard interface that is publicly accessible online. Following insights from the field of public sector performance management, the list of indicators to be tracked over time should be developed with input from key stakeholders and city officials. Some of the indicators described in this report, some drawn from prior work on art, culture and community development, may provide a foundation for this discussion.

Creating an Athens Culture/Classic City Culture Shop

One possible pursuit is the creation of an Athens Culture “shop” through the local government solely or with the help of nonprofits. Imagine a downtown hub, revealing to visitors and residents alike the diverse and wondrous elements of Athens culture: local music playing

over the speakers, shelves lined with everything from crafts to cakes, decorations designed by our artists, every product labeled with contact info, and people from all backgrounds weaving through the shelves. “Shop” is intentionally placed in quotation marks, because it hardly applies to the venture. Profit and sales would not be the main motive. This place would serve as a haven for local creatives and makers to receive exposure, would be an attractive recruitment tool in showing Athens’ diverse landscape, and would ultimately demonstrate Athens-Clarke’s willingness to support the local culture. Robert Florida outlined that the best economic development policy for the creative class had three main elements: features small, low-cost, community-initiated, and bottom-up improvements; creates a “people climate” by attracting and retaining people across the board; and continues low entry barriers and welcomes through an attractive and distinctive landscape (Florida, 2014, pg. 202-3). This project would be relatively low cost and community-focused, foster a climate that both attracts and retains creatives, and remove a serious barrier inhibiting so much of our talent.

The culture “shop” offers numerous benefits to our city, but the benefits will not come without managing the serious challenges or considerations. First and foremost, the space needs to be for all the artists, makers, and Athens culture to shine, so special care and initiative will be necessary to ensure the space reflects the current and diverse body of Athens. As spoken to elsewhere, some artists feel marginalized and uncomfortable in certain spaces, so it is imperative that this does not become one of those. This effort must start from the very beginning, and the beginning will be the most difficult point. Finding a space, gathering the artists, and garnering enough support will be the greatest challenge. Once over this hump, the artists and makers themselves will be able to take the reins, and the government can step back and ensure that the mission and values are maintained. If done right, the space would offer an unmatched

opportunity to connect Athens culture to the economy and society. Incredible social connections would be forged among art communities. Potential customers could be exposed to local businesses. Residents can find pride here, and visitors can be impressed. The quality of place for Athens would be exemplified which is very attractive to talent and businesses alike (Florida, 2014). The space could be a valuable intermediary which benefits both individuals and the government and allows the culture and economy to prosper together (Warren and Jones, 2015). The collection of local art and culture could familiarize artists and makers with government procurement and, in turn, introduce the government to important sources for their own local purchasing initiatives. Successes with similar spaces in Santa Fe (Community Gallery) and Portland (Rockwood Makerspace) show that efforts like this could have an incredibly positive impact on Athens.

Programming and Connections

There is a plethora of assets in the arts and culture community in Athens, but there are barriers that prevent members from taking full advantage of that. Because of the importance of networking and accessing the same spaces to connecting individuals in this area, some groups face challenges in connecting beyond their personal network to the people, spaces, and resources needed. To address this, another step towards advancing arts and culture in ACC would be to provide more avenues for connecting the many its members across various demographic groups, creative outlets, talents, and resources. One route to do this is to incorporate and encourage cross-group programming. This could specifically target groups that are known to have difficulty connecting, like youth and older adult populations through a mentorship or apprenticeship program to pass along talents and creative capacity across generations.

These efforts could also be based on building additional trust across diverse groups in physical spaces that are used at different rates by different groups. Some groups have been historically and systematically mistreated across the nation, and much of this came at the hands of government officials and programs, creating an understandable level of distrust between individuals and towards government institutions. Since some of the key gathering spaces for artists to connect are part of Athens-Clarke County Unified Government, this poses barriers to connecting those with and those without trust and comfort in the space. To rebuild this trust to encourage diverse ranges of creators, ACC should partner with existing guilds, associations, and councils to seek engagement and understanding. They should proactively find who is underrepresented in these spaces and ask how they can improve access to and comfort in these spaces. ACC can also rebuild this trust and promote engagement through programs like those at Lyndon House Arts Center that bring arts professionals and programming directly to community members, rather than asking the public to come to the center.

Another route is to create a database of creatives in the community that is open to the public. This database would ideally be searchable and have information on the various assets, skills, and interests of the creative community, as well as some contact information or method of contacting individuals. Through it, businesses, individuals, and groups could better connect with and utilize the assets of the arts and culture in Athens. Youth and budding artists can find people to learn from, established creatives can find new connections for collaboration, and businesses can better utilize local skills when sourcing talent for creative projects. During an interview conducted for this project, it was mentioned that the ACC Economic Development Department is developing an artist registry, similar to this recommended database. However, this registry should be expanded beyond visual and performing artists to include more creative makers in

Athens, like chefs, tailors, crafters, and more. Due to potential issues of distrust with a governmental registry, much agency should remain with the creatives about whether they want to participate and when they can remove themselves if they wish.

An important thing to note is that the Athens-Clarke County Unified Government may not always be the best stakeholder to implement these recommendations towards a more vibrant arts and culture community. Some other local organizations may be better positioned with community members and existing programming to execute similar ideas, but they may not pursue them due to lacking financial support. Grants, scholarships, and other funding opportunities should be made available and easy to find for creatives and their organizations. These could potentially be incorporated within the database of the creative community for easier access to the information.

In Athens and many towns of the American South, minority communities have historically been displaced and disowned by governing bodies. This displacement over time, combined with systemic racism, language barriers, and other obstacles places their history at risk to not be preserved or remembered without direct action. Direct assistance in the form of grant opportunities from the unified government could assist with community-driven efforts to preserve the cultural and diverse history of Athens Clarke County, and help create continuity between atomized communities. Targeted funds for minority citizens to build arts-based, community-led preservation efforts can help extend the artistic legacy past the dominant narrative and become more inclusive.

The Athens City government could also serve to strengthen connections and programming through investment in outdoor spaces such as parks and greenspaces. This can be done by keeping parks clean, improving landscaping, and developing new recreational

infrastructure. Outdoor recreation provides a source of unity and congregation within a community. By providing aesthetically pleasing environments for outdoor leisure and enjoyment, the city will bring populations together that may not normally socialize. These outdoor spaces also can provide alternative environments to showcase art as opposed to indoor venues. As will be discussed in a later section, the growing concern of the pandemic has limited many social interactions. However, outdoor spaces are much safer due to less constrictive confines. Art displays and festivals may be planned in park spaces to reduce risk of exposure to the virus. Programming designed for outdoor displays can help preserve the personal feel and connection that the arts community has in Athens in a time when we are restricted from common interaction.

COVID-19 Recovery

COVID-19 has impacted arts organizations a lot. We're now in the midst of a global pandemic and national civil unrest, so the intentions to visit arts/cultural organizations among Athens citizens are declining. Here are some recommendations for this situation.

First, ACC government should keep our arts/cultural institute at the forefront of people's minds now but not invest more on the reopening issues. It's important to maintain high levels of interests to arts among citizens. The best way is to meet people online. Over 90% of people who prefer to stay home over the weekend also reported that the last time they did so, they spent time on the web. There will be a terrific opportunity for our arts/cultural organizations to make creative connection with our communities right now. We could hold concerts or perform on video-sharing platform, like YouTube, or start a live concert on Instagram or TikTok where young people like sharing their life and find their interesting content. In addition, ACC government could advise or help arts/cultural organizations to apply 360° virtual tour. For

example, it is not enough to only post productions as pictures on the website as an exhibition. The Georgia Museum of Art could set up a 360° virtual tour exhibition map or upload series of 360° virtual tour video on its website to attract audience. In the map tours and video tours, citizens may have chance to explore any area in the museum. This will stimulate people's curiosity of museum and its exhibitions because pictures are two-dimensional while 360° virtual tours are three-dimensional and that's a new way for audience to immerse in creative vibe. Also, curators and tour guides of the Georgia Museum of Art will be leaders or instructors to host a live video related to a topic and speak some pieces of productions in one exhibition. This way not only meets the requirements of COVID-19 policies but also let people in any regions participate the exhibitions and activate their intentions to come back to the museum after reopening. 360° virtual tour will be a technological way to get through the COVID-19 but it has sustainable function on advertising exhibitions in the museum and increasing attendance rate. Furthermore, in order to help artists get paid during the COVID-19 pandemic, ACC government could encourage arts/cultural organizations to open personal class online. This method provides opportunities for artists to continue teaching and creating innovations.

Second, ACC government should release a uniform guide to lead arts/cultural organizations. When the COVID-19 pandemic goes to end, reopening is the priority to consider. Intentions to visit cultural organizations within three months will recover and will be close to historic levels. Organizations want to be ready to immediately reactivate audiences when they reopen, and that means maintaining high levels of awareness and being top of mind in the meantime. ACC government need to make specific plans for different arts/cultural organizations types and investigate the intentions of core audience in each art field. Local perceptions and

tolerances are dependent upon factors such as how hard the region was hit with the virus, the political stance of local governments and residents, and messaging surrounding the coronavirus within that area. ACC government will consider reopening arts/cultural organizations to the public to proper extent volume of visitation at the end of the COVID-19 pandemic. Other regulations in the guide will be considered, like social distance when audience are visiting, whether wearing masks or not, who afford the masks (museum or government). The uniform guide includes considering organization types and its perceived safety risks, local tolerances and perceptions in Athens, how and what the organizations have done to communicate safety and maintain awareness, and the sensitivities of your core audiences.

Connecting Local Makers and Government

Many artists seek government grants as a source of funding to support or continue their work. However, some may not realize that they can also enter into business with the government to sell their product and further use their talents to benefit the community. Government procurement is not an intuitive process, and a lack of information regarding how to enter into business with the government may preclude an artist from seeking this additional source of income. The Athens-Clarke County Unified Government (ACCUG) should consider outreach efforts to actively inform and help local artists better understand city purchasing policies and approaches to connect with government procurement. By sharing this information and helping local designers, graphic artists, and makers of all varieties understand these complicated processes, ACCUG will be able to more readily enter into mutually beneficial contracts with local artists, rather than outsourcing these opportunities to non-local vendors.