The Anchor Project

By Karen Brooks Hopkins

Foreword

Arts and cultural organizations do not exist in a vacuum, they exist as part of the fabric of their communities. SMU DataArts recognizes this and regularly publishes research findings that emerge from its study of the arts and culture ecosystem. This network features a complex and interdependent set of relationships among individual artists, arts organizations, their communities and audiences, and the private and public funding that influences the production and consumption of arts and culture. We attempt to model all of these different factors in order to understand what drives the performance of individual arts organizations, as well as the interactions among arts and cultural organizations within communities.

Karen Brooks Hopkins' *The Anchor Project* shares important findings that emerged from her work as Inaugural Senior Fellow-in-Residence at The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, which provided support and guidance to her and her colleagues, Steven Wolff and Bruno Carvalho, for this project. Since we have the great honor of having Ms. Brooks Hopkins serve as Nasher Haemisegger Fellow with SMU DataArts, we asked permission to disseminate this project's findings, especially given how closely they align with our interest in understanding the relationships among different elements of the arts and culture ecosystem.

This work probes the meaning of anchor institutions and shows that they take a variety of shapes and forms. Any organization can fully embrace the role of anchor and emerge as a catalyzing force for and with its community. At the same time, it is important to note that a diversity of organizations in a community's arts and culture ecosystem provide value in different ways. This report underscores the notion that successful partnerships arise when institutions recognize their interdependence, are sensitive to power dynamics, and understand the critical importance of authentic, mutually beneficial collaboration.

– Zannie Voss, Director, SMU DataArts

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By Karen Brooks Hopkins

After retiring from my 36-year career at BAM in June 2015, I had the remarkable opportunity to serve as the Inaugural Senior Fellow-in-Residence at The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. The fellowship provided the time and support needed to reflect, consider and research issues that affect our field globally, including focusing on the challenges that we face as arts organizations adapting to new models for operating and embracing the diverse constituencies we hope to serve.

Soon after I launched my Mellon project I was invited by The National Center for Arts Research at Southern Methodist University (NCAR) in Dallas (now newly merged and rebranded as "SMU DataArts") to serve as their Nasher Haemisegger Fellow, which allowed our team access to their excellent supply of data and range of studies. This material enhanced our research significantly.

I was extremely fortunate that Steven Wolff, Principal of AMS Research & Planning Corp. and Bruno Carvalho, who, at the time, was the co-director of the Mellon Urbanism, Architecture and Humanities Initiative at Princeton rounded out our team. Bruno is now a Professor of Romance Languages and Literatures and Faculty Affiliate at the Graduate School of Design at Harvard University. And a special note of thanks goes to both, Mariet Westermann, Executive Vice President for Programs and Research and Susan Feder, Program Officer for Arts and Cultural Heritage, at Mellon who served as project advisers, as well as Zannie Voss, Director, and Glenn Voss, Research Director at NCAR.

After my years at BAM, serving as an active participant and leader in the transformation of our Fort Greene, Brooklyn location from desolate and grim to the "coolest" neighborhood on the planet, I would often think about the role of cultural institutions in low-income communities and communities in transition, and how they could make maximum economic, social and artistic impact. Delving into this question revealed important concepts about 'anchor institutions' and these became the central theme of the project. We learned about place-based organizations that are deeply rooted in and connected to community.

Brooklyn, as it was in the 80's, served as our foundation even though now, 40 years later while the neighborhood is certainly revitalized, there are new concerns related to gentrification and displacement that must be grappled with at the deepest level. For our research, we decided to investigate three sites: (1) New Jersey Performing Arts (NJPAC, in Newark, NJ), (2) AS220 (a smaller visual/performing arts incubation organization in Providence, RI) and MASS MoCA (a large contemporary art museum in North Adams, MA). Each of our sites has a different set of historical and community challenges and our work concentrated on how these "anchors" could fully embrace that role and make the greatest impact on both local residents and visitors to their neighborhoods.

We began by defining key terms, **Anchor[1]:** *Enduring organizations that remain in their geographic places, and play a vital role in their local communities and economies. Anchors traditional include colleges, universities, hospitals, libraries, parks/recreation, community foundations, and, can include, art organizations;* and **Anchor Mission:** *To align core institutional purpose with values and place-based, economic, human and intellectual resources to better the welfare of the community in which the anchor resides.*

> " Organizations must be open to change if they are going to remain relevant, successful and expansive in their service to audiences, artists and communities."
>
> *– Karen Brooks Hopkins*

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1   Adapted from work by The Democracy Collaborative

Some community stakeholders (residents, funders, government officials, etc.) contend that over time anchor organizations can become physically and psychologically distant from the communities they serve. As in Brooklyn and throughout the country, there is much ongoing discussion about dislocation and loss (or absence) of equity. Confronting these issues is important in considering the role or anchors institutions as they balance success and opportunity. In an article reporting on recent research from Nokia Bell Labs and the University of Cambridge, CityLab co-founder Richard Florida writes, "Culture is not a mere afterthought or an add-on, but a key contributor to urban economic growth. But in fueling neighborhood growth and development, it has also played a role in rising housing prices, contributing to gentrification." "The solution is not less culture or less development," Florida continues, "but ensuring that the cultural revitalization and redevelopment of our cities and neighborhoods can be channeled in more inclusive ways that benefit all urbanites." When a performing arts center or museum engages as a truly proactive, dynamic presence in its community, we believe the results can build bridges, boost morale, and create opportunity.

Anchor institutions come in many dimensions, from sprawling performing arts campuses to nimble storefront arts incubators. The institutions are most impactful when they strive for deep and multifaceted connections with their communities. Our team sought to reveal new strategies for how anchor cultural institutions in transitioning communities can make maximum social, economic and artistic impact. It was, at heart, a concept aimed at gaining more respect for both institutions and communities.

Key Take-Aways

Here are some key lessons learned after this three-year process:

1. Community Impact supersedes economic impact. As we consider all kinds of data, the special facts pertaining to both history and the daily obstacles citizens contend with in their own communities must be considered as we create a business model and program strategy. We examined data on segregation patterns and urban history, social and cultural characteristics, as well as demographic and socio-economic data.

2. Our field has evolved from stand-alone individual organizations to multi-disciplinary arts centers and cultural districts. The next phase might entail the formation of organically connected partner networks. A successful future is one where we join forces with partners of all kinds and scales, including neighborhood and cross-sector partners, to make a cultural statement that is deep and speaks in a loud and powerful voice.

3. The key to success in partnerships is human resources, ranging from bandwidth (hours of availability and raw skills), to potential board member exchanges, to existing social capital flowing from organizational affiliations. If this learning is embraced by the sector, the value of a partnership or coalition may no longer be described through purely financial metrics (though they are essential to the success of any venture) but also with time spent and individuals impacted.

Context

Our process began with AMS initially gathering organizational data (financial, ticketing, and program) to provide insight regarding the context within which our sites operate. Combined with NCAR data, summary observations include:

- Each anchor is located in a culturally rich area characterized by a higher presence of, and a greater demand for, arts and cultural programming along with a more robust supply of personnel, organizations, and support. But each is also located in an area with lower levels of employment, income, and educational attainment (see Figure 1).

- All three anchors operate in close proximity to (and often in partnership with) at least one major institute for higher education.

- A majority of ticket-buyers and audiences for all three organizations live within 50 miles of their respective anchors. Likewise, a majority of supporters are located within 50 miles of each anchor, but the majority of contributions are drawn from further afield.

- Staff view each anchor as an impactful contributor to their respective city identity.

- Based on our surveys of staff, Board and volunteers, it was clear that these groups believe that each anchor's facilities and its economic impacts take a back seat to the artistic content and less measurable, intangible concepts about how they engage the community. Of course, we agree that artistic programs define an organization, but what happens when we layer the anchor role on to the mission in a way that makes sense?

Figure 1: Arts RankIndex and SocioEconomic Index provided by NCAR

Figure 1. NCAR ArtsRank Index

Lower Index — Median of trade area — Higher Index

Figure 2. SocioEconomic Index
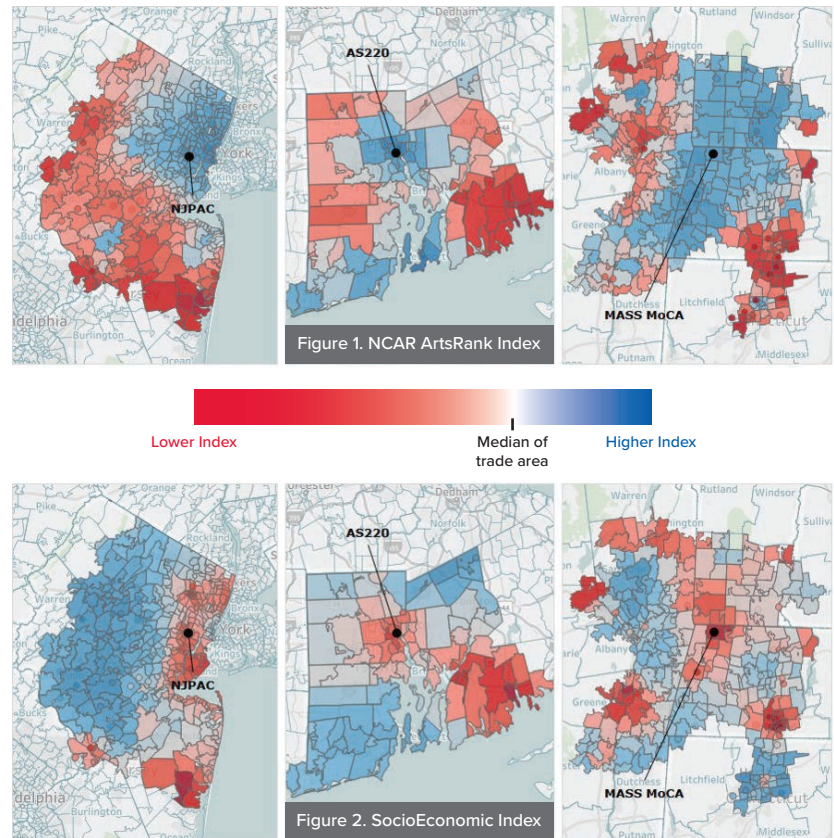
As part of our work, we also drilled down into what it means to adopt the anchor concept while keeping in mind the DNA of each individual community. Bruno Carvalho examined a wide range of the sociological and historical issues that defined the essence and character of our site communities. He reviewed data that went far beyond economics and looked at information such as:

1. Segregation patterns and urban history;

2. Social and cultural characteristics (including languages spoken);

3. Demographic and socio-economic data (health insurance, home ownership rates, etc.)

In each case, the three distinct communities we studied each had a history of de-industrialization, disinvestment and segregation. (See "**Appendix A**" on page 11, "Anchor Arts Institutions - Divided Cities," by Bruno Carvalho 6/29/2017).

Cultural Anchors Described

As the research progressed, we identified key attributes that we believe exemplify the "anchor role."

- First and foremost, program leads the way.

- An "intimate" relationship between arts programming and marketing in an institution is crucial to realizing an ambitious and sincere institutional vision.

- Again, the creation of partnerships that are mutually respectful, financially fair, and inclusive are other intrinsic components of the anchor role, and there must be various entry points for community involvement.

- The anchor institution must also have a unifying visual that exemplifies its mission and brand, promoting its persona as a 21st century cultural entity and status as both as a local asset and a visitor destination spot.

Some of our findings were surprising, especially when we explored what personnel perceived the areas of anchor impact to be. For example, we learned that all three of our sites scored high numbers related to city identity (residents/visitors are aware that these centers exist – see Figure 2 below), but the results were much lower in the areas of "civic leadership and economic development."

Figure 2: Areas of perceived impact
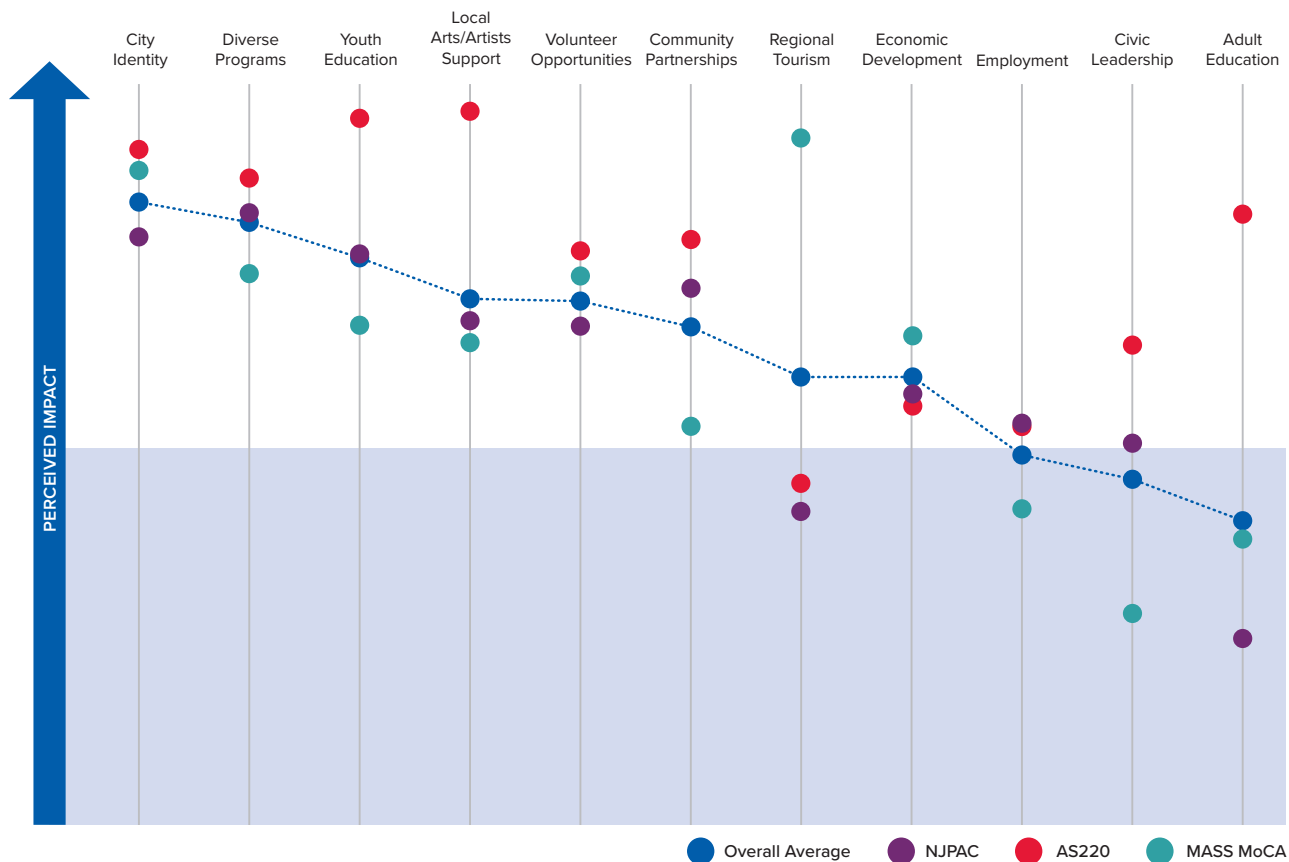
NJPAC engages with diversity through innovative cultural and educational arts programming. It partners extensively with the Newark Museum, Newark Public Libraries, NAACP, and other local organizations to host and produce content. NJPAC's audience diversity has grown exponentially in the past five years, illustrating its commitment to inclusion. From 2013 to 2016, NJPAC's Latinx audience increased from 3 percent to 13 percent, African American audience from 16 percent to 22 percent, and Asian American audience from 3 percent to 9 percent. It's Board and staff believe that diverse programming is an area in which the institution makes the most impact.

Our research found that AS220 has a significant community base, with eight times as many volunteers as employees. It collaborates extensively with local educational institutions and has seven network partnerships. It provides a home for resident companies and offers space, experience and personnel to local arts organizations. Its support for local arts and artists is one of its greatest perceived impacts.

MASS MoCA drives regional tourism through its world-class art programs, leading to positive local economic development outcomes each year. Mass MoCA personnel are connected through a network of primarily educational and arts cultural organizations. Its Board and staff believe that promotion of regional tourism is an area in which the institution makes the most impact.

We observed that while these sites engaged in many partnerships, they struggled to enumerate the impact of these collaborations. A key issue is the lack of consistent data collection to document results. We noted that the way our sites most consistently partnered with others was by offering free or low-cost space. In order to move partnership programs forward, more robust and in-depth ways of working together might be considered beyond providing space, such as marketing, personnel, activity, expertise, and funding (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Types of Partnerships
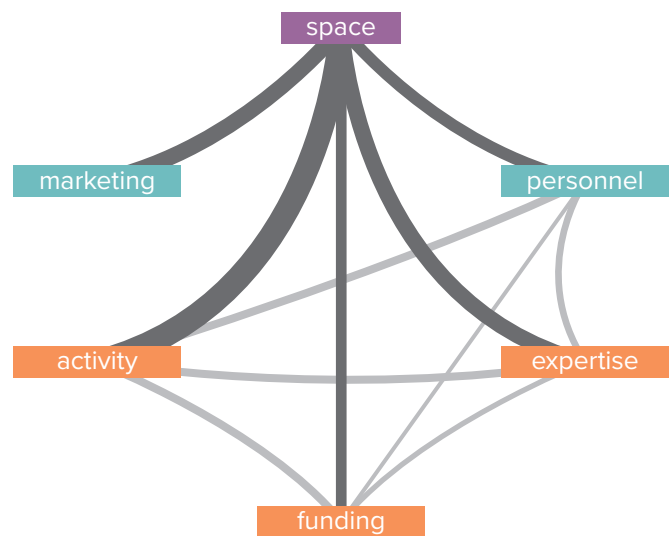
In Closing

Cultural organizations of all types and sizes often struggle with issues of money, audience, and diversity as they try to find the best and most efficient way to make an impact. The lack of resources and, in many cases, over-cautionary leadership have allowed many organizations to rely on longstanding programs with generally predictable outcomes. It is our contention that taking on the anchor role by embracing bold, visionary programs that expand destination status and connect with local residents will bring more money, more audiences, and more impact for each of our sites. We considered ideas such as board exchanges, themed city-wide festivals and long-term, socially-oriented program initiatives as examples of program ideas that reflect the anchor mission.

Large organizations will continue to have powerful boards, financial strength, and visibility as well as extensive fixed expenses and commitments; making it hard to change course. Small organizations will be spontaneous, deeply engaged and often more original and diverse, but have even less financial and staff capacity. Therefore, we need to foster and encourage true, meaningful, and mutually respectful partnerships between small and large organizations

AS220's support for local arts and artists is one of its greatest perceived impacts. Photo courtesy of AS220/Chris Anderson

for the benefit of all. In addition, cross-sector partnerships between cultural organizations and traditional anchors, such as Eds and Meds, could move both culture and community forward.

In the year since my fellowship concluded, the Mellon Foundation made it possible for me take the research to a number of conferences. During this time, I had the opportunity to travel to Strasbourg (Council for Europe); Salzburg (Salzburg Global Seminar) with Steve Wolff; Detroit (Grantmakers in the Arts) with Steve Wolff; New York (APAP) with Steve Wolff and Shey Rivera from AS220; New York (special session for the leaders of all national arts service organizations) with Steve Wolff; London (Exhibition Row, City of London, and Barbican); Dubai (The Global Cultural Districts Network Conference); Seattle (a roundtable of performing arts center leaders) with Steve Wolff and John Schreiber of NJPAC; Los Angeles (constituents of the LA Music Center, City of Los Angeles, and other cultural leaders); and Denver (Americans for the Arts National Conference). Finally, Steven Wolff and I co-presented a NCAR webinar, which you can access **here**. The webinar deck is also available for your review on SMU DataArts' site. **Appendix B** provides an extensive bibliography of books and articles related to our topic.

It has been a remarkable journey.

Along the way and with a range of colleagues, we discussed critical topics such as the long-term effects of chronic underfunding, the substantial lack of respect and marginalization of the field, and the struggle to make partnership and cross-sector engagement work between large and small organizations. Issues of gentrification and equity were raised, along with powerful concerns related to diversity and inclusion.

Arts organizations have many problems and challenges, yet the field continually shows amazing resilience and the ability to carry on despite the obstacles. But, to be truly effective, organizations must be open to change if they are

going to remain relevant, successful, and expansive in their service to audiences, artists, and communities. Our goal is to encourage anchor institutions to expand their horizons programmatically and offer broad services to citizens and visitors.

So let's vision out this future. What happens when we go full on creative? What happens when we partner at the deepest level? What happens when we truly live the anchor role and embrace what is specifically unique and special in each of our communities?

If we embrace these questions and seek answers for them, we will be much more successful in attracting human and financial resources. Our communities will benefit and may just get the respect they deserve.

Karen Brooks Hopkins was a senior fellow in residence at The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation from 2015-2017 and served as president of the Brooklyn Academy of Music from 1999-2015. She currently serves as a Nasher Haemisegger Fellow at SMU DataArts and as Senior Advisor and Board Member of the Onassis Foundation.

Appendix A

Bruno Carvalho (Harvard University)
"Anchor Arts Institutions & Divided Cities"
Delivered at *Anchor Arts Institutions Sounding,* Andrew W. Mellon Foundation
June 29-30, 2017

My role in this project has been to help our group situate our case studies within broader social, historical, and urban contexts. I research intersections between cultural history and urban development, specializing in Latin America, but a lot of my teaching as a scholar of Urban Studies has been on cities of the United States. At Princeton, as part of the Princeton-Mellon Initiative in Architecture, Urbanism, and the Humanities [which I co-directed], we entertained the hypothesis that knowledge formed elsewhere in the Americas can serve as a way of de-provincializing how we think about cities in this country – we considered the insights that a perspective from the south might add to our understanding of the United States. Throughout the Americas, poorer city residents – particularly those of color—suffer the consequences of decades of disinvestment and systemic inequities. But to an immigrant like me, and to any expert on Latin America, where pro-urban biases have historically been the norm, the long anti-urban tradition of the United States stands out. As many others have noted, cities in this country have often been stigmatized, shortchanged, othered, scapegoated. Even as a lot of urban neighborhoods "gentrify," and even if millennials exhibit fewer anti-city prejudices, our current president's talk about "American carnage" is just another episode in a long history of racially-charged urban-bashing.

My research and teaching move from the 18th century to the present, so I'm often attuned to how certain tensions from earlier periods remain foundational to this country's history. Some disputes between Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson, for example, have never been quite resolved. As conventionally understood, on the one hand we have a Jeffersonian ideal of an agrarian republic, on the other a competing vision of a commercial, city-based economy. The musical *Hamilton* is in its way a testament to a Hamiltonian(ish) project for this country's future as urban, immigrant, mixed, diverse. Jefferson, on the other hand, saw cities as a threat to the health of the republic. If the financial-urban model has prevailed in economic terms, in symbolic, cultural and political terms the Jeffersonian rural idealism also had its victories—this is expressed when politicians pay lip service to small-town values, or when people frame cities as home to freeloaders. In this project, although we use the language of "struggling communities," we wanted to push against deep-seated associations between urban and crisis – we focus on challenges, often daunting, but also on possibilities, often inspiring.

Over the past several months I learned quite a bit working with an amazing group – and I think we all share a commitment to the work of thinking strategically about how to reach various constituencies. Translating academic knowledge to a broader public and bridging quantitative and qualitative methods are concerns that inform much of my own scholarship. This project has been for me an opportunity to test out the degree to which, outside of academia, history matters, language matters, architecture and the arts matter. In the struggle to improve cities, how can knowledge count, when the political will isn't there, or when the money doesn't follow, or care? These are far from theoretical exercises, as our efforts remain premised on a recognition that the lives of people who've stuck around during some pretty tough times in each of these three places matter, and can both be enriched by and enrich anchor arts institutions.

So what's the value of looking back, in a project which sets its sights on the future? Historical knowledge can help us to expand the terms of contemporary debates, to stretch the limits of the thinkable, to confront entrenched intuitions. We should not assume that cities are doomed to the levels of segregation so common in the United States today, nor that segregation will solve itself over time. The study of the past can serve as an antidote to the paralysis that our contemporary challenges sometimes produce – I like to remind my students that if the scale of needed changes seems unviable, more unlikely changes have certainly happened before. In times of deep pessimism, our dismal record as fortune tellers provides some consolation: in fact, we might say that one of the tasks of those who study history is to show how the present tends to be proof of the future's unpredictability. Few in the early 1980s would have predicted Providence's recent revitalization; fewer could have foreseen the extent to which the crash of 1929 would set back the economy of a confident Newark for decades to come; and not a single employee of the Sprague Electric Company of North Adams could have dreamed that the art galleries of MassMoca

would one day occupy their facilities. In the history of planning, the unplanned happens all the time, the improbable happens often. Looking back can inspire us to imagine bolder futures.

We might want to recall William Faulkner's famous dictum, from his novel Requiem for a Nun: "The past is never dead. It's not even past." It's never just a matter of learning history so that we avoid repeating mistakes—it's also a matter of recognizing the extent to which we are always living the consequences of history. We inherit and inhabit a world that results from actions that precede us. Throughout the United States, history takes shape in the present through segregation and inequality. Segregation is too often taken for granted in discussions about anchor institutions, and the potential of anchor arts institutions to help mitigate or erode its effects is rarely considered. In this first talk I will highlight overarching characteristics that our three sites share with each other, and with many other places in the United States – later talks will delve into particulars for each.

Newark, Providence and North Adams have histories dating back to the colonial era, as important manufacturing centers – in all cases rivers played crucial roles in early economies [image 1]. Newark had its largest population in the 1930s, Providence in the early 1940s, North Adams in the early 1900s. Like so many of the great cities of the Northeast and Midwest, all were hit hard by deindustrialization and a shift to decentralized, distributed economies. The differences in scale and context are significant – Newark is the largest city in the densest state in the country, though it is relatively peripheral to the metropolitan area centered in New York City; North Adams is a small town in a relatively low density region, but with over one million people within a 50 miles radius; and Providence plays an oversized role in its state, anchoring a metropolitan area that spreads into Massachusetts, and actually exceeds Rhode Island's population by over 50%.

Even as the country's population grew steadily, all three, but especially the two larger cities, lost population and much of their tax-base in the decades following WWII, with the era of automobile-driven sprawl and renewed segregationist efforts, often conceived in reaction to the 'Great Migration' of African Americans from the rural south to the urban north, and in opposition to the expansion of civil rights. All three still have economic indicators that largely lag in comparison to their immediate surroundings and the United States averages, including higher poverty rates and lower median income.

The contours of each of these three places as 'divided' looks very different: Newark's segregation along racial lines is stark in the city proper, and even more pronounced in its relation to wealthier, white-majority surrounding suburbs [maps 2-4]. North Adams's socio-economic indicators stand in contrast to the wealthier college town of Williamstown, and lacks its ethnic diversity. Providence follows a pattern comparable to Newark's, but with a smaller African-American population and more Latino residents. Newark has been a minority-majority city since the 1960s. I'll stick to census categories here, though they of course only hint at the complexities of demographic changes and urban experience. Providence became minority-majority just in the last few years. In recent decades both experimented an influx of Hispanic immigrants that, as scholars like Mike Davis and Andrew Sandoval-Strauss have shown in other contexts, began to reinvigorate downtowns right after the period of "white flight," and long before the more recent arrival of artists and hipsters. This entrepreneurial spirit is reflected, for instance, in robust numbers of minority-owned small businesses. Both Newark and Providence have large percentages of foreign-born populations and Spanish-speaking bilingual neighborhoods. [graphs 4-6]. English is the primary language in only around half of households.

As many of you know, segregation in this country was never an organic or spontaneous process. It was imposed and it picked winners. Nor should it be understood as a failure – rather, it's the result of the successes of what we might call white nationalist political projects that remain powerful and resonant to many, a phenomenon historically tied to anti-urbanism in both the US and Europe, and that we have to take seriously and incorporate into discussions about who can potentially be reached and transformed by anchor arts institutions and by the experience of urban diversity. We tend to think of the post-war "decline" or shrinking of the great cities of the Northeast and Midwest, but in effect what took place was more of a redistribution of people and resources, where the allocation of public and private goods – ranging from transportation infrastructure to government-backed loans – privileged white suburbanites and excluded nonwhite urban residents in ways that were as clear-cut and consequential as they remain morally unjustifiable.

Current home ownership disparities are a direct consequence of this recent history. Throughout the 20th century, government-backed loan programs and the expansion of homeownership helped to create middle class wealth in

the United States, but segregationist and race-based practices largely excluded nonwhites – that's one of the main reasons for the nationwide wealth gap, which is growing — sources vary, but the median white household has around 16x the wealth of African Americans, and 13x the wealth of Hispanics — this impacts racial disparities in student loan debt, retirement savings, and so on. The 2017 annual report from Harvard's Joint Center for Housing Studies shows that the "black-white homeownership gap is the largest since World War II." Conversation about redevelopment or gentrification needs to start with these realities, and acknowledge the difficulties for those who were left out of post-war home ownership programs to break free from cycles of poverty.

Segregation isn't just a spatial feature of urban life in America – it is the product of moral wrongs, it breeds ignorance, fear of exposure to the unknown, emotional and intellectual poverty. If there is tremendous moral urgency to the work of investing in our cities' poorest, anchor arts institutions can have a crucial role in the task of building bridges across identitary lines and helping to break down psychological barriers. If vibrant public spaces become platforms for chance encounters, anchor arts institutions often act as matchmakers across various social and spatial divides.

The potential of the arts to move the needle at a macro scale is of course limited, but anchor arts institutions can be dynamic and nimble as catalyzers of connections – to produce what Felton Earls, Professor of Public Health at Harvard, has labeled "collective efficacy," the often intangible but demonstrable ways in which a sense of belonging and shared interests, within a community, help to improve the health and well-being of individuals.

Anchor arts institutions, if they are accessible and open, can push people to exceed their assigned roles, be it as at-risk urban youth, small-town stragglers, jaded children of suburbia. Over the past year I have learned a great deal about Newark, Providence, and North Adams, and had wide-ranging conversations about each of the institutions in our case studies with elected officials, devoted and brilliant staff, activists, artists, friends of friends, countless strangers. The ways in which the arts and the spaces of art work on us can verifiable, even when they are not easily quantifiable. I remember hearing a 30-some year old Newark public school graduate describe with her first experience at NJPAC's grand Prudential Hall – how it enlarged her sense of what's out there, stretched her perception of what Newark is and could be.

The possibilities of art and culture can be nearly boundless, and arts spaces – be it in institutions or on the streets – can help promote interactions that might counter ingrained resentments and grievances against certain minorities, against diversity, against cities. We might think of the celebration of diversity as a way of reintroducing the 1960s-70s agenda of desegregation, and in that regard, each of our three sites is well-positioned to benefit from the presence of relatively dense cores, and vibrant universities and existing anchors that value diversity – more on that tomorrow. We already have some scholarship on how cultural clusters can lead to poverty rate declines and population increase, stimulating "social network formation" and reinforcing "ethnic and economic diversity," to quote from research by Mark Stern and Susan Seifert. But it's always worth remembering that art's relationship to diversity is never just instrumental, quantifiable, or even immediately graspable: whether in rural, suburban or urban settings, whether in galleries, stages, or sidewalks, the arts can move people to step outside of themselves, to experience different perspectives, to expose us to multiple ways of being and belonging in the world – and, if we still want to end on a pragmatic note – we might even say that the survival of democracy depends on such things.

Appendix B

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