ARTS ACCESS IN CHARLOTTE: INEQUITIES AND SOLUTIONS

by

Jillian Mueller

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Approved by:

_____
Dr. Jaclyn Piatak

_____
Dr. Jacqueline Chattopadhyay

_____
Dr. Sarah Pettijohn

_____
Dr. Thomas Barth

ABSTRACT

JILLIAN MUELLER. Arts Access in Charlotte: Inequities and Solutions
Under the direction of DR. JACLYN PIATAK.

The city of Charlotte, North Carolina has issues with economic mobility that stem from a long-standing history of segregation of income and race. Arts and cultural programming is a possible solution to build social capital amongst low-income and minority populations and alleviate the economic inequity that stems from these historical issues. This thesis examines potential disparities in arts participation among low-income and black residents of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg areas and evaluates the impact of community arts programs currently in place in terms of their ability to increase equity of arts participation and social capital. Analysis of most recent data from the Quality of Life Explorer of Mecklenburg County demonstrated that a household income of over $75,000 is associated with a higher arts participation rate, and that black individuals have a statistically significant lower arts participation rate. Focus groups conducted with Culture Blocks participants, however, indicated that the Culture Blocks program mitigated several barriers to access faced by low-income and black individuals and provided participants with a variety of social and psychological benefits. The results of this study indicate that community arts programs can be useful to provide more equitable arts access in urban areas and can provide many of the same benefits as more traditional arts institutions.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The city of Charlotte, North Carolina has issues with economic mobility that stem from a long-standing history of segregation of income and race. Arts and cultural programming is a possible solution to build social capital amongst low-income and minority populations and alleviate the discord and economic inequity that stem from these historical issues (Task Force, 2015). These populations, however, do not have the same access to the arts as other groups because of unique sets of barriers to participation. This thesis examines potential disparities in arts participation among low-income and black residents of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg area.

Chapter 2 provides a background of the city of Charlotte and recent events that have brought the economic mobility issues the city is facing to the forefront of local policy discussion. Chapter 3 discusses the sociological approach of the social capital values of arts access and participation. Chapters 4 and 5 discuss the unique barriers faced by low-income and black individuals, respectively, and explore possible solutions to these barriers. The quantitative research methods used to examine disparities in arts participation in the Charlotte Mecklenburg area are discussed in Chapter 6.

Furthermore, this thesis examines potential policy solutions and explores the potential of a program currently in place, Culture Blocks, to alleviate practical and perceived barriers to participation. A discussion of the benefits of community arts, description of the Culture Blocks program, outline of the qualitative methods used to evaluate this program, and discussion of results are in Chapter 7. A conclusion with a discussion of research limitations and call for future research is in Chapter 8.

CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND

Charlotte, the Arts, and Social Equity

For the past 30 years, national arts policy has shifted towards using arts access and programming as an instrument to alleviate social and economic issues in society. Arts programming can create a number of social and economic benefits for communities and individuals by cultivating social capital, fostering community development, teaching individuals new creative and social skills, and encouraging collaboration and civic engagement. Access to arts programming contributes improved quality of life both at the individual and collective societal levels. As such, the arts can be a useful tool to alleviate social and economic issues in society (McNeely & Shockley, 2006).

The national policy trend towards using arts programming for social and economic benefits is particularly relevant to the city of Charlotte. In 2013, a study ranked Charlotte last in terms of economic mobility out of the 50 largest commuting zones in the United States (Chetty, Hendren, Kline, & Saez, 2014).   This study (2014) catalyzed the formation of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Opportunity Task Force (Task Force) to conduct extensive research on the topic of economic mobility in Charlotte. The Task Force identified geographic segregation of income and race as one of the two-primary cross-cutting factors hindering economic mobility in Charlotte. The Task Force noted that Charlotte is a city of a "separate and unequal neighborhood geography" with a "a wedge of predominantly white, wealthy neighborhoods to the south and southeast…" and "in contrast, the crescent of lower-opportunity neighborhoods of color" are getting

pushed out further from the city center as cost of living rises in more urban areas (Task Force, 2015, p. 12).

Furthermore, the response to the shooting of Keith Lamont Scott, a black man, by a black police officer on September 20, 2016 further indicated the stark division in the Charlotte community. Shortly after the shooting, the city erupted in riots for two days straight (Yan & Park, 2016). Although most protestors were peaceful, a number of rioters quickly became violent, throwing rocks at police officers and civilians, looting stores, and damaging private property. Police tear gassed rioters and shut down sections of the highway until the riots subsided (Maxwell & Eversley, 2016). The response of the Charlotte community indicated a deep-rooted distrust of government authorities by people of color (Barber, 2016).

Shortly after the riots, the Charlotte City Council released a letter to the community acknowledging that both the shooting and the community response stemmed from inequality issues within the city (Charlotte City Council, 2016). Police-involved shootings are indicative of inequity in cities, since they are more prevalent in regions with greater disparity in social equity and income between black and white residents and occur more often in neighborhoods with lower income (Nix, Campbell, Byers, and Alpert, 2017; Jacobs and O'Brien, 1998; Sorenson, Marquart, & Brock, 1993). To gain trust and reduce inequity issues, the council promised to improve police accountability procedures, create funding for safe and affordable housing, and invest in a workforce development program to create new jobs (Charlotte City Council, 2016).

To fulfill these commitments, Charlotte initiated a wide variety of programming and policy changes. Efforts included implementing youth development programs that

provide opportunities for youth to visit possible employers and build social capital through networking, creating a skills and workforce training program for adults, and implementing regular community forum meetings between city officials and community leaders (Charlotte City Council, 2017). The arts could also contribute to improving these issues and implementing policy change.

Policymakers in Charlotte have been considering art institutions and programming as part of their strategy to bridge disparities in opportunity and quality of life in the area. The Task Force suggested access to arts and cultural activities as a means to alleviate the segregation of income and race in Charlotte by "connecting people and strengthening communities by using arts and culture to create pathways and bridges" (Task Force, 2015, p. 55). To meet this goal, program directors must "develop new strategies and programs that reach more diverse groups and communities" (Task Force, 2015, p. 55). In Charlotte, the Arts and Science Council of Mecklenburg County (ASC) plays a large role in setting arts policy in the area and has taken the lead on developing this programming.

The Arts and Science Council of Mecklenburg County

ASC is a private organization that serves as the Office of Cultural Affairs for Mecklenburg County. It uses public funds from the county, the city of Charlotte, and six other towns within the county limits along with money from private fundraising efforts to provide cultural resources for the region. It pursues its mission to "[ensure] access to an excellent, relevant, and sustainable cultural community for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Region" by providing resources, funding, and programming to support cultural community engagement (ASC, n.d.c).

Founded in 1958 as the Charlotte Arts Fund, ASC is a fundraising body that supports eight cultural organizations, including the Mint Museum of Art, Opera Carolina, the Charlotte Symphony among others (ASC, n.d.c). In 1974, The Charlotte Arts fund became the "Arts and Science Council" and established a cultural action plan to develop new facilities in the center of the city. Its goals were both to revitalize the downtown area and to make arts institutions more accessible to the people of Charlotte by moving them from the suburbs towards the central business district, which is also located at the center of the city (ASC, 1975b). Furthermore, this plan called for an "Afro-American Cultural Center" to "communicate to the entire community the black heritage and experience" that would be a museum of art and history, and provide cultural activities such as plays, dance, writing, and films and education hub (ASC, 1975b, p.26).

Additionally, after the creation of ASC, the organization loosened its sponsorship restrictions. Instead of only partnering with the original eight core elite institutions, support became available to "any nonprofit organization in the metropolitan area simply upon written application" (ASC, 1975a, p.19). This step towards inclusion of new nonprofits indicated a step towards providing greater access to support for nonprofits with culturally relevant programing to minority populations and cultural activities outside of traditional arts institutions.

In 1998, ASC released a cultural action plan to address the need for more diversity in cultural programming to cater to those "who find themselves outsiders in another sense, struggling to partake of the region's prosperity" (ASC, 1998, p.2). This plan (1998) noted the need for arts programming within neighborhoods outside of the central uptown areas by installing programming in "less traditional venues," for example,

holding arts events at neighborhood YMCAs, or in conjunction with local neighborhood associations. ASC believed that by moving programming into the neighborhoods, administrators could "build on the successful connections that are already being made at the neighborhood level" (ASC, 1998, p. 23). This plan (1998) called for ASC to implement a community arts program based on the needs of individual neighborhoods to increase arts participation. ASC requested and received funding from Mecklenburg County to fund these programs and had its first roundtable meeting with community leaders and nonprofits to determine the needs of the various neighborhoods in 1999 (ASC, 1998). This activity provided the foundation for ASC's future community arts programming.

In 2014, this community arts programming came to the forefront of the cultural vision plan, which called for ASC to move neighborhood-based funding from an aspect of programming to a main focus of ASC's cultural offerings. Survey data collected in 2012 indicated that Charlotte residents wanted more art in their communities and specifically wanted this art to reflect and celebrate minority cultures. By 2012, 51% of the population of Mecklenburg county was non-white, and adequate programming was not provided to meet the needs and interests of this population (ASC, 2014).

To address the need for neighborhood-based programming that serves a diverse audience, ASC started a formal program, called Culture Blocks, in 2015. Through Culture Blocks, ASC brings cultural programing to neighborhoods that caters to the needs and interests of the residents of that neighborhood. The programming is provided at no charge to participants and held in parks and recreation facilities and local libraries to

provide ease of access. By 2018, Culture Blocks held over 306 experiences for 8,178 participants at 32 local facilities (ASC, 2018).

CHAPTER 3: ART AS SOCIAL CAPITAL

Social Capital

Harpham, Grant, and Thomas (2002) define social capital as "the degree of connectedness and the quality and quantity of social relations in a given population" (p. 106). In addition to social bonds, social capital also consists of the feelings of reciprocity, mutual trust, and solidarity that result from these relationships. Putnam (2000) describes reciprocity as when one thinks "I'll do this for you now, without expecting anything immediately in return, and perhaps without even knowing you, confident that down the road you or someone else will return the favor" (p.134). Mutual trust causes individuals to believe that others are going to do the right thing, and therefore are more open to collaborate and contribute to the economy. Mutual trust and reciprocity allow citizens to feel safe and supported, and therefore encourage them to act in solidarity with each other (Putnam, 2000).

Since it is an abstract concept with no uniform definition or established standard measurement system, it can be difficult to measure social capital. Because of this difficulty, scholars developed several categories to help conceptualize and quantify social capital of individuals and communities (Putnam, 2000). For example, Krishna & Shrader (2000) categorize aspects of social capital into structural and cognitive pieces. The structural aspects of social capital consist of the actions and links that create social bonds and networks, and the cognitive aspects consist of the values and feelings of mutual trust, solidarity, and reciprocity that result from these bonds and encourage people to make collaborative actions that benefit one another (Krishna & Schrader, 2000).

Additionally, the social bonds people have with one another can be described as strong or weak. Granovetter (1973) describes the "strength" of a tie as being the result of the length of time, emotional intensity, mutual confiding, and reciprocity of the relationship. Bonds between close friends and family members could be described as strong, and weak bonds are those of acquaintances and casual friends. Per Granovetter (1973), weak bonds, which could he describes as more casual relationships and connections, are more useful in terms of bridging individuals across local social groups. This is because strong ties almost always exist between individuals in the same social network, and weak ties generally create a greater number of paths to connections. A greater number of ties is helpful to build social capital because if an individual severs a tie, the individual will still have other weak ties as resources (Granovetter, 1973).

Even the weakest social interactions can have a strong positive impact on reciprocity between individuals. Latané and Darley (1970) found that bystanders were more likely to help an individual who had greeted them briefly while passing in the hallway as compared to one whom which they had no previous interaction at all. This study demonstrates that even the most casual social connections can influence people's motivation to help one another (Putnam, 2000).

Also, Granovetter (1973) asserts that weaker ties between individuals of different races are more effective at building social capital because weak bonds lead to the creation of more acquaintances. Sandstrom and Dunn (2014) found that students who interacted with more weak ties were happier and had stronger feelings of belonging within their community. Individuals with more weak ties also are more likely to attend community meetings, have stronger civic engagement, and "increase the pace and scope at which

communities…act collectively to solve problems" (Kavenaugh, Reese, Carroll, & Rosson, 2005, p.130). Weak ties are especially successful at building social capital between different groups when the individuals meet participating in a specific activity where they can interact with people from different communities around a common purpose. For this reason, the context where ties are made is more important than the strength of the ties (Granovetter, 1973).

The type of social capital that connects individuals from different groups is bridging social capital (Narayan, 2002). Bridging social capital enables individuals to connect with people who have different backgrounds and resources than those in their immediate circle or demographics, therefore expanding possibilities and removing limitations for the individual by introducing them to opportunities outside of their own community. For this reason, bridging social capital is more useful for economic mobility (Harpham, Grant, & Thomas, 2002; Narayan, 2002; Putnam, 2000).

In contrast, bonding social capital strengthens the trust and relationships between individuals in the same community or group (Harpham, Grant, & Thomas, 2002). While bonding social capital can help with psychological advantages, such as reducing isolation and providing support, it is not as valuable as bridging social capital in terms of creating upward mobility. Additionally, bonding social capital can have negative effects on the community by making certain groups of people more insular. Lack of exposure to diverse people and ideas can create more closed-minded communities that are more likely to be intolerant of differences between peoples, and therefore, limit the potential for bridging social capital (Harpham et al., 2002; Putnam, 2000;).

Scholars have called the negative effects of bonding social capital to attention in recent years. Putnam (2002) notes that Americans became more tolerant of homosexuality, racial integration, and gender equality as rates of community engagement declined throughout the 20th century. Putnam (2002), however, has not found a causal link between these two factors. Putnam has found that the American states with higher levels of social capital have higher levels of civic engagement and economic equality. This indicates that bridging social capital is most essential to cultivating equality in a community (Putnam, 2000).

Scholars have found that both bonding and bridging social capital are important factors to the health of communities and individuals overall (Brown, E., Ferris, J., & Brown, E., 2007; Kim, D., Subramanian, S. V., & Kawachi, I., 2006; Kerry, Jan, & Vern, 2006). Both types of social capital have positive impacts on public health, encourage philanthropy, and increase of community action in addition to economic mobility. In contrast, individuals who do not have strong social capital are often at a disadvantage, because they typically lack connections that provide them with advice, career opportunities, and support to advance socio-economically in life and overcome barriers that they may face. For example, church attendance is one of the most important indicators as to if a young black people will find employment. This is due to the social networking aspect of attending church each week and belonging to that community (Freeman, 1985). Furthermore, a study revealed that two-thirds of black and white females found their current position with help from someone they knew at the company, and that most of the time, this connection lived outside their neighborhood (Green,

Tigges, & Browne, 1995; Putnam, 2000). These findings indicate that social capital is an important factor in helping individuals achieve economic mobility.

Unfortunately, people who need upward mobility most typically have the least access to social capital. Those who live in high-poverty neighborhoods often have fewer social ties, and the social ties they have are not as helpful to finding new opportunities. Individuals with lower opportunities can build bridging social capital by participating in sports or arts and culture activities (Putnam, 2000). Arts and culture activities in particular are effective because art is "especially useful in transcending conventional social barriers. Moreover, social capital is often a valuable by-product of cultural activities whose main purpose is purely artistic" (Putnam, 2000, p.411).

Social Capital and the Arts

Sociologists have asserted that the arts can be an instrument for social capital since the late 1970's. Exposure and access to the arts have indicated social status throughout history in western society. Holding specific artistic tastes or having cultural knowledge has connotations of being a member of a high-class community and can be a tool to connect with people of higher social standing. Therefore, the arts can be used as a tool to improve social standing through social capital which can be defined as "connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (Putnam, 2000, p. 19). Using arts as a means to gain social capital, per the recommendation of the Task Force, can alleviate inequity by enabling individuals to find employment opportunities, economic resources, and a stronger social network of people of higher income and social class (Dimaggio & Useem, 1978).

Many studies about arts participation and access are rooted in the theories of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu (1973) asserts that participation in and engagement with the arts is inherently related to the attainment of social capital. Arts participation is a currency of cultural capital that contributes to socioeconomic status and is associated with the elite. This cultural capital consists of "the symbolic wealth that constitutes "legitimate culture" (Bourdieu, 1973, p. 492). According to his theory, Bourdieu (1984) claims that certain types of art are more valuable than others, which indicates that access to a community-arts, or art forms rooted in traditions outside of Western European culture, are less socially valuable than others. Additionally, according to Bourdieu's (1984) definition of legitimate culture, a culture is more valuable when it is associated with a greater degree of "suspension and removal of economic necessity, and by objective and subjective distance from groups subjected to those determinisms" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 54) According to this logic, even if lower-income individuals were to have access to arts, the arts would lose their social and cultural value as cultural due to the decrease in their exclusivity (Bourdieu, 1984).

In the past 20 years, however, Peterson and Kern (2000) and Dimaggio and Mukhtar (2004) have argued that in today's world, more accessible arts with cultural roots outside of the Western European tradition have inherent social value equal to, or possibly even greater than, arts traditionally considered highbrow. Highbrow activities are defined as those from an "Anglo-Saxon" background and typically consist of "performances of plays, ballet, classical music, musicals, visit[ing] art galleries, and attend[ing] opera (Peterson & Kern, 1996, p. 901). Lowbrow art forms, contrarily, are

described as those "created by socially marginalized groups (Blacks, youth, isolated rural folks) or religious experience" (Peterson & Kern, 1996, p. 901).

This shift in cultural importance from Western European arts to greater inclusivity in the cultural world indicates that arts are intrinsically valuable, and that their value in today's world may lie in their democratic and relational values rather than their status as the cultural elite. Peterson and Kern (1996) are proponents of this so called "omnivore theory," which purports that knowledge of a variety of art forms, rather than having specific traditional tastes, is a stronger indicator of elite status (p. 900).

Sociological researchers Peterson and Kern (1996) and Dimaggio and Mukhtar (2004) notice a shift towards omnivorism between 1982 and 2002. While high income and highly educated individuals indicated that they had predominantly highbrow taste in 1982, participants indicate an interest in a greater mix of highbrow and lowbrow genres from 1992 and 2002. Even after controlling for race, age, family household income, and educational attainment, the data demonstrated a significant trend towards omnivorism (Peterson & Kern, 1996).

Several shifts in American culture have led to the decline of the use of high culture arts as a measurement of cultural capital. First, the rise of popular culture and the Internet have democratized access of the public to arts and cultural entertainment and, therefore, lessened the monopoly historically held by arts institutions and universities on cultural programming (Dimaggio & Mukhtar, 2004). Second, many highly educated Americans of high socioeconomic status are promoting multiculturalism and actively rejecting the concept of a cultural hierarchy. Popular opinion holds that folk and popular

culture are not less valuable than high culture (Dimaggio & Mukhtar, 2004; Peterson & Kern, 1996).

Since the United States is becoming increasingly multicultural, highbrow cultural events are becoming less relatable to a broad audience. The popularity of jazz indicates an increased interest in historically black art forms, and that increased interest in art museums and galleries may signify that citizens have an interest in viewing multiculturally based collections. Furthermore, modern culture also may value active arts participation rather than event attendance. These trends could indicate that highbrow art forms "will become irrelevant to the shared culture of families and social groups whose life chances are most dependent on their command of cultural capital," implicating that arts that share the cultures of minority groups and are more accessible may have more cultural value than traditional highbrow arts (Dimaggio & Muktar, 2004, p.191).   If a greater number of people from a variety of economic and cultural backgrounds attend these events, they will have a greater opportunity to create weak ties with fellow attendants or those who share similar cultural interests. Therefore, participation in the arts from a variety of multicultural and community arts activities may have just as much, if not more, social value than arts historically considered more highbrow and elite.

CHAPTER 4: INCOME AND ARTS PARTICIPATION

Access to the arts can provide low-income individuals with opportunities to build social capital that can help them achieve economic mobility. The arts provide a way for low-income individuals to relate to and network with people from a variety of social and economic backgrounds, and they could use these relationships to leverage economic resources (Task Force, 2015). Despite the fact that they could benefit greatly from the social benefits of the arts, lower income individuals are significantly less likely to attend or participate in arts programming. In 2012, only 37% of Americans in the lowest income quartile attended a performing arts event or visited an exhibit in 2012, which is significantly lower than the average of 53.6% attendance for Americans overall, and rates decrease steadily with lower income (NEA, 2012).

This disparity, however, is not caused by lack of interest. The majority of low-income individuals stated they wanted to go to arts events to learn new things (76%), wanted to go to an event to see a new location (74%), and wanted to attend an arts event to support their community (62%) (NEA, 2015). Despite the majority interest in attending an event, barriers often prevent individuals from attending the event at the same rate as higher income people.

These barriers to access are both practical and perceptual. Practical barriers are those which physically prevent an individual from attending an event, such as not having the money to pay an admission fee, adequate transportation, or time to travel to an event. Perceptual barriers, however, are negative perceptions that decrease one's motivation to attend an event and are caused by "the way people think about the arts based on past

experiences and expectations of their social and familial circles" (NEA, 2015, p.13).

This chapter explores the barriers to arts participation that low-income individuals face

and outlines proposed solutions to alleviate both practical and perceptual barriers.

Barriers

     Cost and Arts Participation

     Many studies find cost of attending an event is a significant barrier to arts

participation for people with lower income (Keaney, 2008; O'Hara, 1996; Moore, 1998).

While it is difficult for individuals without disposable income to pay for admission to

events, the barrier of cost is complex and include many other factors that contribute to the

cost of attendance for an arts event beyond the cost of admission. Even when offering

events and activities at no-cost, participation rates amongst low-income individuals do

not increase (Borgonovi, 2004). As of 2012, 38% of arts participants indicated that the

last arts event they attended was free of charge: 68% of adults attended art exhibits free

of charge, and 22% of adults attended a performance free of charge (NEA, 2015).

Borgonovi (2004) ran a logistic regression of the data from the 2002 NEA Participation

data and 2002 US Census and found that there was no statistically significant relationship

between ticket cost points and attendance.

     Therefore, simply lowering the cost of admission may be insufficient to

effectively alleviate the barrier of cost. This is evident through a series of focus groups

Moore (1998) conducted in Ireland among people living below the poverty level. Among

participants, cost was the most prohibitive barrier; however, participants explained that

attending an art event cost more to them than simply the ticket or entry fee. In addition to

cost of admission, these individuals had to factor in the cost of transportation, a babysitter for those with children, food, and also the opportunity cost of taking the time for leisure that could be spent working. This evidence demonstrates that simply lowering ticket prices is not enough to remove the cost barrier from arts participation.

Location of events is a prominent cost barrier to arts participation. One in four low income adults stated physical accessibility was the most important barrier to access. In 2012, 44% of low-income adults reported that they did not attend arts events because they are too difficult to reach (NEA, 2015).   Arts venues are often not in convenient locations to low-income neighborhoods because city planners prioritize economic outcomes in cultural planning and "favor ephemeral tourists over their own residents as patrons" (Markusen & Gadwa, 2010, p. 388).

By examining a variety of cultural plans in many large US cities and smaller regions throughout the country, Markusen & Gadwa (2010) found that cultural planners commonly choose to invest in neighborhoods that are favorable to real estate investors and large-scale facilities that are easily accessible to tourists. The researchers (2010) note that the cultural development plans do not tend to cultivate local arts organizations that offer low cost programming to residents. In this way, "cultural planning at the state and local level becomes captive of particular real estate interests, cultural industries, and cultural elites and thus fruitful ground for consultants who promise great plans that often turn out to be window dressing**" (Markusen & Gadwa, 2010, p.388).

When arts programming is not located in close proximity to low-income neighborhoods, the cost of attendance is exacerbated. Potential participants pay additional geographic cost barriers such as additional transportation costs, which increase

the further away one is from an event, and the opportunity time of travel time. The impact of travel time may persuade an individual to choose another leisure activity over arts participation. For example, an individual may choose to watch television, a solitary action, over attending an arts event to be more effective with one's time (Borgonovi, 2004). For this reason, low-income individuals are more likely to participate in the arts remotely through electronic media such as broadcasts and recordings accessed through television and internet streaming, and lack exposure to building social capital by attending events in person (Novak-Leonard & Brown, 2011).

Perception, Education, and Arts Participation

Low-income individuals may also limit their arts attendance because lack of motivation. This lack of motivation is not purely attributed to personal interest, but rather is shaped by negative perceptions about the arts. Many low-income individuals may see the arts as a "risk" because they felt like they may not fit in or understand the proper etiquette to attend an arts event or would not understand the art. Barriers to access are broader than cost, and lack of relevant and relatable programming can prevent individuals who would greatly benefit from arts events from participating (Kearney, 2008).

These attitudes have been evident in focus groups conducted in the United Kingdom from the early 1990's into the 2000's (Kearney, 2008; O'Hara, 1996; Moore, 1998). In a series of focus groups that took place in Dublin, many low-income individuals stated that arts and cultural activities were "for the highbrow…people with money. Not for us" (Moore, 1998, p. 60). These individuals believed they would not be able to relate to cultural activities because the material would not be relatable to their culture and lives due to their lower socioeconomic status (O'Hagan, 1996). Borgonovi's

(2004) research eight years later demonstrated that this attitude was still prevalent into the 2000's, since low-income individuals reported higher rates of dissatisfaction with their participation attending events featuring traditionally elite arts such as ballet, opera, and classical music. This demonstrates that even when individuals have physical access to arts programming they do not engage with and benefit from the programming if the content is not relevant to their lives and culture.

Additionally, low-income individuals can feel out of place and uncomfortable among others who attend arts and culture activities, who they assume would be of higher socioeconomic status than themselves. Several focus group participants from Hagan's (1996) study said they would be interested in attending but would want to find a friend to go with them so that they would feel more comfortable attending and would have difficulty doing so (O'Hagan, 1996; Moore, 1998). To this day, low income individuals have trouble finding friends to accompany them to arts events. In the most recent NEA Survey of Public Participation of the Arts (2015), about one third of adults in the lowest income quartile said that they did not attend arts events because they did not have anyone in their life to accompany them to events. In this case, an individual may choose another leisure activity over an arts activity to avoid feeling alone. Since low income individuals have more issues finding someone to accompany them to events, that these individuals may face social isolation as well (McCarthy, Ondaatje, & Zakaras, 2001; NEA, 2015).

These issues of perceptions of the arts amongst low-income individuals could relate to to educational attainment. A lower income corresponds with a lower educational attainment and less availability of resources for art education (Borgonovi, 2004; Dimaggio & Useem, 1978; NEA, 2015). Access to education, specifically to art

education, could provide "a socialization environment, where people are exposed to a context where the arts are valued and where one can start engaging in artistic abilities" (Borgonovi, 2004, p. 1875). Arts education not only teaches individuals how to relate to and evaluate art forms, but also associates students with social and cultural values. These skills allow participants to feel more confident when participating in arts events, allow them to bond with other participants, and cultivate feelings of social inclusion (Colbert & Courchesne, 2012; Kolhede & Gomez-Arias, 2016).

I hypothesize that in Charlotte neighborhoods, a lower median household income will correspond to a lower arts participation rate.

H1: Lower neighborhood income will correspond to a lower neighborhood arts participation rate.

Lower income neighborhoods are geographically isolated from arts events and venues, and this is the case in Charlotte as well. Most of the arts institutions are in the more affluent uptown area and require a longer commute time and either public transportation fare or parking expenses, making it financially burdensome (Markusen & Gadwa, 2010). Additionally, lower-income individuals and families may lack motivation to attend arts events in Charlotte if they feel as if they would not benefit from the experience (Kearney, 2008).

Solutions

Although there are significant barriers that hinder the motivation of low-income individuals to participate in the arts, low-income individuals desire to attend arts events for the same reasons as higher-income individuals. Swanson and Zhou (2008) found that

although income has a positive correlation to motivation to attend arts events, lower income individuals have about the same motivations for wanting to participate in arts events. Individuals of lower income brackets (2008) were interested in the recreational aspect of arts events, an opportunity for escapism, and to have social interactions with other participants. If policymakers and program administrators take steps to mitigate the barriers to arts participation, attendance of low-income individuals could increase and people of all socioeconomic backgrounds could benefit from and connect through the arts (Swanson & Zhou, 2008).

By examining these barriers, there are several strategies policymakers should consider implementing to provide access to the arts to lower income individuals. First, lowering the cost of events or offering no-cost events could help alleviate the cost of events and act as a motivator to attend. The 2012 NEA public participation survey indicated that 29% of low-income residents said that low cost or no-cost events was the primary reason they chose to attend an arts event rather than another leisure activity (NEA, 2015).

Although they do not provide the same opportunities for individuals to build social capital, providing more telecommuting options could be another way to provide easier access to the arts by reducing travel time and cost. Accessing arts programming remotely also would allow one to experience arts in the privacy of one's own home, which would mean that one could participate without having to find a companion with which to attend an event. Additionally, remote access to the arts allows individuals to experience arts without the perceived social pressures and the accompanying anxiety. The access to arts, even remotely, still allows individuals to build social capital by

gaining cultural knowledge with which to connect with others in other environments

(Bawa, Williams, & Dong, 2010; Colbert & Courchesne, 2012).

Additionally, experiencing arts online or through television programming may

encourage attendance at live performances (Bawa et al., 2010). Because of the low cost

and time investment of accessing arts programming remotely, individuals are easily able

to explore and become familiar with a variety of art forms and expressions. This access

could pique an interest in making the necessary investment to attending events in person

and provide a baseline of knowledge for an individual to feel comfortable in social

situations at these events (Bawa &Williams, 2010; Colbert & Courchesne, 2012).

Another way to alleviate both social perception and transportation barriers is by

providing arts events in neighborhoods inhabited by low-income individuals. Although

most of these neighborhoods do not have formal performing arts venues, organizations

can hold arts events at local schools, churches, and community centers. In addition to

reducing travel time, the use of informal venues may make participants feel more at ease.

The NEA (2010) revealed that residents of rural areas with less resources have similar

arts participation rates as those who live in urban areas with easy access to formal arts

venues. Rural residents participated in arts activities through art fairs, school and church

events, and by creating art, music, and literature for their personal pleasure (NEA, 2010).

The use of nontraditional venues for arts programming is another way to

encourage arts participation, because it can mitigate the cost of transportation. Evans

(2009) demonstrated that nontraditional multiuse venues can encourage arts participation

as effectively as formal venues in his London-based case study. The results of his study

(2009) emphasize the need for arts programming and centers at the neighborhood level,

since he found that traditional venues such as museums and galleries have had dwindling participation rates, while cultural activities offered in community spaces such as schools, community centers, parks, and churches, have been continuously growing in popularity. Community spaces located closer to suburban or neighborhood areas are therefore more easily accessible. Location of a venue is more important than if it is a formal venue, stating that "users adapt and adopt informal cultural spaces and communal venues according to their social and collective needs, not those of curators or arts policy makers" (Evans 2009, p. 23).

Furthermore, organizations should be held accountable for providing equitable resources to low income residents to overcome these barriers. Using an independent party to perform arts participation surveys could be helpful to develop these plans and ensure that resources are allocated equitably. In addition to organizations developing internal policy to allocate resources equitably, government entities, and grantors who fund arts organizations could perform "social auditing techniques" to ensure that these entities are actively working to reduce barriers to participation (O'Hagan, 1996, p.280). Also, small nonprofits and community arts groups should get involved in regional cultural policy and lobby for more investment in community arts in neighborhoods rather than large flagship institutions (Markusen & Gadwa, 2010). ASC's Culture Blocks program is an example of a community arts program that integrates community engagement and local cultural policy as part of a solution to inequities in arts participation in the Charlotte area.

The Culture Blocks program is implementing several of these strategies to alleviate barriers to arts access for low-income individuals in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg

area. The Culture Blocks program provides local residents with no cost arts

programming in their neighborhoods. These no-cost programs are held at community

centers, libraries and recreation centers in various neighborhoods outside of the city

center to allow easier access and mitigate geographic barriers. In addition to removing

geographic barriers, hosting events in community-based centers rather than formal

venues outside of their neighborhoods may make participants feel more at ease and

reduce social anxiety of participants. By taking steps to reduce the barriers to access, the

Culture Blocks program can increase arts participation among low-income individuals

(ASC, n.d.a).

CHAPTER 5: RACE AND ARTS PARTICIPATION

Historically, black Americans were prohibited from attending high cultural events in the United States, or if they could attend, these events were often segregated until the 1960's (Dimaggio & Ostrower, 1990). Although it has been many years since the exclusion and segregation of black Americans has been illegal in the United States, there is a strong variance in white and black American participation rates to this day. In 2017 27% of white individuals visited an art museum, while black Americans reported a significantly lower participation rate of only 17%. Additionally, black Americans were half as likely to attend a musical play, go to a visual arts festival, or attend a classical music event as Whites (NEA, 2017).

Since black Americans are participating in the arts at lower rates than other ethnic groups, they are not likely receiving the same social benefits. In Charlotte, the black population is still recovering from the longstanding economic effects of segregation. Black Americans disproportionately live in opportunity-poor neighborhoods and attend schools with fewer resources. Considering this, it is crucial that policy makers and arts administrators prioritize decreasing barriers to the arts and increasing black American arts participation rates to lessen this inequity (Task Force, 2015).

Barriers

Black Americans have unique barriers to access as compared to other races. Location is a major barrier to participation in the black community with 60% of black Americans reporting that they do not live in locations where it is convenient to access arts

programs, as compared to 40% of other ethnic groups (NEA, 2012). This illustrates the need for more arts programming in neighborhoods.

Furthermore, the disparity between participation levels in white and black Americans suggests that there are remnants of the country's racist past still embedded in American culture today. Krahe and Acruff (2013) describe this phenomenon through the concept of critical race theory. Critical race theory asserts that because of the narratives of slavery, segregation, and racism rooted in the United States history, white cultural experiences and whiteness are still considered to be the standard, even in the post-civil rights era (Kraehe & Acruff, 2013). Because of this historically ingrained bias, "White Euro American experiences often have been the standard by which all other racial groups' experiences are measured, thus, the experiences and interests of Whites are normalized" (Kraehe & Acuff, 2013, p. 297). The perception of black culture as outside the norm means that it is underrepresented in arts and creates a lack of culturally relevant content for black Americans.

This lack of culturally relevant content is a unique barrier that black Americans face in regard to art participation. When organizations do not offer culturally relevant content, individuals have less motivation to participate. Although not a physical barrier, the relevance and relatability of cultural programming is a significant perceptual barrier to arts participation, especially in low income and minority communities (Dimaggio & Ostrower, 1990).

The lack of diverse representation can also isolate minority populations by reducing participation and being exclusionary. An example of this exclusion took place in an art festival in a gentrifying neighborhood in Portland, Oregon. Although black

residents appreciated the influx of arts in to their neighborhood, they were more likely to see the festival as "for outsiders" and feel uncomfortable participating because there were not many African American artists, businesses, or vendors present at the festival. This case study illustrates how "the arts may stand in as a symbol of racial division" through symbolic exclusion (Shaw & Sullivan, 2011, p. 261). Therefore, I hypothesize that in Charlotte neighborhoods, a larger black population will correspond to a lower arts participation rates:

H2: Larger Black population corresponds to a lower neighborhood arts participation rate.

Solutions

If actions are not taken to increase the representation of black culture and artists in cultural programming, the arts can further contribute to inequality and strained race relations. To achieve cultural equity, arts programming must include more material that reflects the experiences and culture of people of color in order to normalize their experiences. (Behague, 2006). Arts organizations have traditionally not prioritized black cultural programming because of the entrenched bias that arts that have roots in Western European cultures are more prestigious and therefore, more important in arts policy in the United States. This attitude results in "cultural condescension" towards arts rooted in minority cultures and encourages token minority representation in the arts rather than integration and equity (Behague, 2006, p. 24).

Arts institution can correct this discrimination by beginning to regularly include artists and pieces from outside of the Western European tradition in regular programming and present them with the same level of importance (Behague, 2006). By elevating the

importance of minority cultural experiences to that of the traditionally elite Western culture, these institutions create an attitude of cultural equity and can be a tool not only to achieve equity to arts access, but to challenge systematic racism in culture at large (Kraehe & Acuff, 2013).

When black Americans see the art event as an opportunity to celebrate their heritage, they might be more likely to participate. In 2012, 23% of black Americans attended an art event with the primary purpose of celebrating their cultural heritage, as compared to only 4% of whites (NEA, 2012). Dimaggio and Ostrower (1990) also determined that when arts organizations provide culturally relevant programming for black Americans, participation gaps between black and white Americans were minimal when controlling for income and education. This study shows that black art programming can actively engage the black population and culturally relevant programming could effectively close the participation gap.

This strategy to promote black art and history in the arts will not only increase participation, but also can create a more inclusive culture. Being inclusive does "not imply the demise of elite arts," but rather "suggest[s] the importance of recruiting and training all potential artists, regardless of national or ethnic origin" (Behague, 2006, p. 25). Mundel et al. (2004) demonstrated that cultural activities that allowed minority individuals to explore their culture were particularly excited that they were "making visible the often-overlooked role that African Americans have played in American and world history" (Mundell et al., 2004, p. 2). In this way, arts participation empowers participants to elevate their culture in society.

The ability to uplift black culture and its standing within the art world also motivates individuals to participate in the arts. Banks (2010) indicated that black Americans were upset by the lack of African American representation in museums and galleries and responded by purchasing black art with the intent of signifying a demand for greater representation of black culture in these institutions. Therefore, offering arts programming that focuses on black cultural themes or incorporates black art may increase participation among black Americans who feel it is their responsibility to help promote and support black culture.

Local arts nonprofit organizations can remove the barrier of relatability by providing programming that appeals to minority populations. The size and location of these nonprofits allow them to provide content that relates directly to the experiences of their audience and "serves the communities' cultures, rather than serving up pre-packaged culture to the community" (Lewis & McKay, 2008, p. 96). Furthermore, local nonprofits and arts organizations could hold culturally relevant programming in community spaces such as libraries and community centers to remove the barrier of accessibility as well (Mundel et al., 2004; Evans, 2009).

The ASC Culture Blocks program leverages both local arts organizations and community spaces to create culturally relevant programming for Charlotte residents, particularly the black community. Culture Blocks holds culturally relevant programming in easily accessible community spaces. To ensure cultural relevance, the Culture Blocks program administrators specifically select program providers whose workshops, classes, and presentations incorporate aspects of multiculturalism to represent the demographics of each area where Culture Blocks holds programming (ASC, n.d.a). By choosing

accessible locations and specifically selecting programs that celebrate Black culture and history in predominantly black neighborhoods, I propose that the Culture Blocks program may remove barriers to participation and increase the arts participation of black Americans in Charlotte.

CHAPTER 6: EXAMINING RACE, INCOME, AND ARTS PARTICIPATION

To test the hypotheses, I use data from the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Quality of Life Explorer (2018), which is a compilation of data from Mecklenburg County that examines over 80 variables which illustrate the quality of life of a resident of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg area (Table 1). The variables in this study describe the demographics, health, educational attainment, average environmental health, ease of transportation, crime and safety, community engagement, and economy of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg area and its residents from the years 2012 to 2016. The Quality of Life Explorer uses Neighborhood Profile Areas (NPA), to report data geographically. NPA serves as the unit of analysis in this study. Each NPA is a geographic area consisting of one or several census blocks in Mecklenburg County. NPA boundaries were determined both by census blocks and community input (City of Charlotte, 2018).

The City of Charlotte published the Quality of Life Explorer, previously referred to as the Quality of Life Study, over 20 years ago. Prior to 2012, the Quality of Life Study data only reported on areas within the City of Charlotte and was only accessible through large hard copy reports. In 2012, however, the City of Charlotte partnered with the University of North Carolina at Charlotte Urban Institute, Mecklenburg County government, and six smaller towns to expand the scope of data to include all of Mecklenburg County, creating the current Quality of Life Explorer. The Quality of Life Explorer is accessible to the public online and includes an interactive mapping tool, links to nonprofits and local government services, and a link to download all data in excel format (City of Charlotte, 2018).

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable in this analysis is arts participation. This measures the percentage of households that purchased tickets from, donated to, or became members of ASC Partner organizations in the year 2013. This information was gathered at the census block level by an external consulting agency based on address information gathered from credit card purchases or membership purchases and then redistributed to NPA. This is the most recent data (City of Charlotte, 2018). Arts participation ranges from 0% to 72% with a mean of 14.15% across NPAs.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Age of Residents	11.00	81.00	36.54	7.87
Black Population (Percent of NPA)	0.00	97.00	31.29	26.21
Median Household Income ($)	15242.00	226250.00	66629.54	35207.29
Arts Participation Rate (Percent)	0.00	72.00	14.15	12.01
Transit Proximity (Percent)	0.00	100.00	66.48	39.15
Street Connectivity (Scale)	0.94	1.55	1.16	0.10
Hispanic/Latino (Percent)	0.00	87.00	12.13	13.27
Bachelor's Degree (Percent)	0.00	94.00	41.20	22.78
Number of Observations	452			

Independent Variables

The first independent variable in this analysis is median household income. This data provides the dollar amount of median household income per NPA. The Quality of Life Explorer sourced this data from the American Community Survey Five Year Estimates 2012-2016. The Quality of Life Explorer calculates median household income by taking

the average household income for each NPA and dividing this number by the number of households per NPA. The minimum median household income for Mecklenburg County is $15, 242 and the maximum is $226,250. The average is $66,629.

The second independent variable is race. This variable describes the percent of the population that identifies as black. This data is self-reported and comes from the American Community Survey Five Year Estimates 2012-2016. The average percent of the population that is black is 31.29%, with a minimum of 0% and the maximum of 97%.

Several scholars have noted a correlation between a lower income and the percentage of a population that is black. Blau et al. (1986) assert that systematic discrimination against black Americans has led to a greater proportion of African Americans having lower income. Dimaggio and Ostrower (1990) also note that because black Americans are less likely to work in white collar jobs, and therefore will generally have a lower median household income. However, none of the of the variables had a VIF that would indicate collinearity.

Control Variables

In this analysis, I control for age by using the variable median age of residents. Moore's study (1998) indicated that older individuals tend to have higher rates of participation. I also control for level of education level-Bachelor's degree, which measures the percent of adults over age 25 with a bachelor's degree or higher. Studies generally show that people with higher educational attainment have higher arts participation rates (Blau et al., 1986; Moore, 1998; Reeves, 2015). Reeves (2015) asserts that educational attainment is the most important factor in predicting and individual's

likelihood to participate in the arts. Black Americans have lower education attainment overall and therefore are overrepresented in the data in terms of lower educational attainment (Dimaggio & Ostrower, 1990). Additionally, Dimaggio and Ostrower (1990) believe that higher educational attainment in black Americans may cause these individuals to not participate in Euro-centric arts as a political statement. The minimum median age was 11 and the maximum median age of residents was 81. The mean age was 37, which indicates that the average age of a Charlotte-Mecklenburg resident is a millennial. The minimum percent of residents with a bachelor's degree was 0%, maximum was 94%, and mean was 42.20%.

I also controlled for transportation using the variables proximity to public transportation, which measures the percent of households that are within one half mile of a public transit stop, and street connectivity, which measures the availability of routes on an index scale of 1-2. Mundell et al. (2004) cite geographic isolation as a common barrier to access, and several other scholars state that location and lack of transportation hinders individuals from participating in arts and cultural events (Moore, 1998; Wright et al., 2006). The minimum street connectivity is 0.94 and the maximum is 1.55, with a mean of 1.16, which indicate poor street connectivity throughout the county. The minimum transit proximity is 0%, which indicates that not every NPA in Mecklenburg County has access to public transportation. The maximum transit proximity is 100% and the mean is 66.48%, which indicates that more than one-half of the county has access to public transportation.

I control for Hispanic origin by using the variable Hispanic/Latino. This variable measures the percent of the population self-identified as Hispanic or Latino divided by

total population. This data comes from the U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2012-2016 five-year Estimates. The average percent of Hispanic residents was 12%, with a minimum of 0% and maximum of 82%.

Methodology

To evaluate the relationship between the percentage of the median household income and the percent of households that participate in arts programming, I use the following OLS Multiple Regression Model:

$Y=B_0+B_1X_1+B_2X_2+B_3X_3+B_4X_4+B_5X_5+B_6X_6+B_7X_7+E$

Where

Y= Arts participation rate (Dependent variable)

B = Coefficients for each independent variable

X_1=Median Household Income, in dollars (Independent Variable)

X_2= Race- Black or African American, in percent (Independent Variable)

X_3= Median Age of Residents, in years (Control Variable)

X_4=Education Level-Bachelor's Degree, in percent (Control Variable)

X_5=Proximity to Public Transportation, in percent (Control Variable)

X_6=Street Connectedness, on a scale of 1-3 (Control Variable)

X_7=Hispanic Origin (Control Variable)

E=Error

There is a total of 462 NPAs in the Quality of Life Dataset, however, only 452 were included in the analysis. After consulting with Katie Zager, the UNCC Urban Institute Social Research Specialist, I have omitted 2 NPAs from this analysis: NPA 122, which represents the airport, and NPA 285, which is a non-residential industrial area. Additionally, I omitted 8 other NPAs from this study because of missing data points.

I used a multivariate linear regression model to test the hypotheses. Multivariate linear regression allowed me to analyze the direction and strength of the independent variables while controlling for other related variables that may affect the results. Household income brackets are based on those used by the U.S. Census Bureau to visualize median household income (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). The $50,000-59,999 bracket was used as a baseline because household income in the middle-class ranges of $40,000 to $74,999 also did not demonstrate statistical significance in this model. Therefore, this baseline allowed me to observe the statistical significance in the lower and higher income ranges.

Table 2
Effects of Model Variables on Arts Participation (N=452)

Variable	Coefficient	Standardized Coefficient	Standard Error	Bootstrap[a] 95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower	Upper
Percent black	-0.073***	0.018	-0.157	-0.102	-0.037
Median Household Income Under $30,000	-0.797	1.290	-0.020	-2.608	1.152
Median household income $30,000-$39,999	-1.331	1.109	-0.037	-2.917	0.158
Median household income $40,000-$49,999	0.125	1.029	0.004	-1.638	1.922
Median household income $60,000-$74,999	0.649	0.978	0.020	-1.050	2.359
Median household income $75,000-$99,999	5.523***	1.021	0.180	3.646	7.328
Median household income $100,000-$149,000	8.672***	1.285	0.224	5.955	11.433
Median household income over $150,000	18.648***	1.820	0.287	12.187	25.314
Median age	0.081	0.042	0.052	-0.005	0.190
Transit proximity	0.040***	0.008	0.129	0.025	0.055
Street connectivity	4.433	2.723	0.038	-2.062	11.570
Percent bachelors degree	0.235***	0.025	0.442	0.187	0.287
Percent Hispanic/Latino	-0.0572*	0.028	-0.063	-0.096	-0.009
Percent Asian	-0.250***	0.038	-0.152	-0.312	-0.157
Percent all other races	-0.117	0.093	-0.028	-0.293	0.029
Constant (a)	-4.134	4.293	n/a	-14.564	4.583

Model Statistics

Measure	Value
Adjusted R-Squared	0.789
Model Standard Error	5.521
F Value	113.66
Model Significance	0.000***

Note. *$p \leq .05$ **$p \leq .01$ ***$p \leq .001$
a. Unless otherwise noted, bootstrap results are based on 1000 bootstrap samples

Results and Analysis

The linear regression model showed is statistically significant with a model
(ANOVA) significance of 0.00 (Table 2). The R-squared value of the model is 0.789,
which means that about 78.9% of the variation in the dependent variable is related to the
variation in the combination of independent and control variables in the model.
Therefore, this model satisfactorily measures the relationship between the independent
variables and arts participation.

To test my first hypothesis that lower household income corresponds with a lower
arts participation rate, I found that median household income below $75,000 did not have

a significant relationship to arts participation rates. Only neighborhoods with a median household income of $75,000-99,000, $100,000-$149,000, and over $150,000 are more likely to have higher arts participation rates than neighborhoods with a household income of $50,000-59,999. At this level, household income indicates a strong positive relationship between high income and arts participation.

The coefficients presented by income under $40,000 indicate a negative relationship between income at this level and arts participation. Household income at this level, however, did not show to be statistically significant at these levels. Additionally, household income in the middle-class ranges of $40,000 to $74,999 also was not statistically significant in this model. These results indicate that other variables besides household income may be more important to predict arts participation in individuals outside of the income ranges.

In evaluating the second hypothesis, that a larger black population corresponds to a lower arts participation rate, I analyze the relationship between the second independent variable, black, and arts participation rate. This relationship was statistically significant and demonstrated a negative relationship between the black population and arts participation, and therefore supports my hypothesis.

Discussion

The results of this analysis indicate that both income and race correspond to arts participation rates in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg area. The analysis demonstrates that having a household income above $75,000 are more likely to participate in the arts. Additionally, they indicate that if an individual is black, he or she is less likely to participate in the arts. These results are as expected and support both hypotheses.

Although these results do not directly support the hypothesis that a lower income corresponds to a lower arts participation rate (Keaney, 2008; O'Hara, 1996; Moore, 1998), they clearly demonstrate that high income individuals have higher levels of arts participation. These results are contrary to the findings of Reeves (2015), who found no relationship between income and arts participation in his study. While his assertion that education is the strongest indicator of arts participation may correspond to the Reeves (2015) study, this study suggests that there was a significant relationship between income and arts participation in the higher brackets.

These results do support the hypothesis that a higher black population relates to a lower arts participation rate. This negative relationship aligns with the findings discussed in the literature review (Dimaggio & Ostrower, 1990; Lewis & McKay, 2008; NEA, 2017) and may indicate racial inequities to arts access. Similar to the results of the black population, the Hispanic and Asian populations had a statistically significant influence on art participation.   This fact further demonstrates the complex relationship between race and arts participation in the United States and indicates that other minority groups besides black Americans may face a similar set of barriers to arts access and participation.

Furthermore, travel proximity was also a significant indicator of arts participation in this model, demonstrating with a positive correlation between a neighborhood's access to public transportation and arts participation rates. These results correspond with findings in the literature (Moore, 1995; NEA, 2015) that transportation costs can be a significant barrier to arts access. Street connectivity, however, was not a significant variable in the model. These results demonstrate that availability of affordable and

convenient public transportation may be the most important factor in mitigating geographic barriers to arts participation.

Additionally, education was a statistically significant indicator of arts participation with a positive relation to arts participation, displaying results consistent to the literature. These results also support the assertion in the literature that people with lower education attainment participate less in the arts education (Borgonovi, 2004; Dimaggio & Useem, 1978; NEA, 2015). Reeves' study (2015) asserts that education is the most important indicator of arts participation. These results highlight the need for increased access to education, particularly arts education, to create more equitable access to the arts.

The data available for this model presented several inconsistencies that may impact the validity of model results. First, the measurement method of the Hispanic variable may have an impact on the results. All individuals who self-identify as Hispanic or Latinx are excluded from the "black" population in this dataset. This method excludes black Americans of Hispanic descent from this variable and may cause an under representation of black Americans in this dataset. Additionally, data for different variables is from different years. Because of practical limitations, the arts participation data has not been updated since 2013, while race data used in this model is from the year 2016. It is possible that arts participation rates have changed in different NPAs since 2013, especially because the population in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg area has grown rapidly in this time and demographics of various neighborhoods have been affected by gentrification.

The influx of different peoples into the Charlotte-Mecklenburg area, along with the negative correlation between all minority groups examined in this model and arts participation, also demonstrates a need to further examine the issues surrounding arts access to the growing minority population. For example, the Hispanic population in Mecklenburg County has more than doubled since 2000. In 2000, 6.2% of the county population identified as Hispanic in 2000, and this number increased to 12.6% by 2016. New and growing minority populations may face additional unique obstructions to participation, such as language and cultural barriers.

Overall, results indicate that arts participation is more prevalent in high income communities and that minority populations have less access to arts activities. These findings are problematic to a community that is striving for social and economic equity and demonstrate a need to examine solutions to mitigate barriers to arts participation faced by lower-income and minority groups in the Charlotte area. The next chapter of this thesis examines the programming currently in place to promote arts equity in Charlotte through use of a community arts program.

CHAPTER 7: COMMUNITY ARTS: ASC CULTURE BLOCKS

Once policymakers and arts administrators identify barriers, they can implement a

variety of strategies to create a community with more equitable arts participation. This

chapter discusses a potential solution to prevalent practical and perceived barriers to

participation, including community arts programming. Community arts programs exist in

neighborhoods or geographic regions where residents live and provide programming

specifically for the residents in the area where programming is offered. Community arts

is gaining popularity in the United States as a means to not only encourage arts

participation, but so to build communities and alleviate social problems (Lowe, 2000).

This chapter examines Culture Blocks, a community arts program in Charlotte, and

explores the potential impact that this program has on participants in the Charlotte

Mecklenburg area.

Benefits of Community Arts

Even though they are not held in formal arts venues and therefore historically not

considered as elevated as traditionally elite arts, community arts programs can provide

similar, if not superior, benefits to participants by mitigating both practical and perceived

barriers to participation. Community arts provide affordable arts programming in

convenient locations to neighborhood residents, reducing transportation and time cost of

attendance. Also, the ability of community arts to cater content to the taste of residents

and the approachability of informal settings removes barriers of relatability and relevance

to participants. By providing accessible programming, community arts can provide arts

programming to people in underserved areas and provide residents with the benefits of the arts (Mundel et al., 2004; Williams, 1997).

One of the major arguments for increasing arts participation through community arts is the numerous mental health benefits for participants. Community nonprofit art organizations create safe places for members of a community to build social networks amongst their neighbors of different backgrounds by providing "cultural diverse activities and creative space to intergenerational participants" (Lewis & McKay, 2008, p. 295). The ability to connect with community members outside of their typical social groups provides emotional benefits for participants by "promoting the bonds between individuals who are potentially isolated in a community" (Lewis & McKay, 2008, p. 296, Mundel et al., 2004; Williams, 1997).

Community arts programming has a deeply positive impact on the self-esteem and identity of participants (Markusen & Gadwa, 2010). Simply being able to belong to a group through a community arts organization can raise self-esteem and help individuals create a positive self-identity (Swanson & Davis, 2006). The ability to learn new skills fosters a greater sense of self-esteem, and the ability to connect with and promote one's own culture through arts programming makes participants feel a greater self-worth and made them feel motivated (Mundell et al, 2004). In addition to increasing self-esteem, participants in youth-based community arts program can see decreases in emotional problems, such as isolation, lack of self-confidence, and depression, anxiety, and behavioral issues (Karkou & Glassman, 2004; Wright, John, Alaggia, &Steel, 2006).

In addition to the psychological benefits of social support, individuals can create social capital though community arts programming. Social capital can be defined as

"connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (Putnam, 2000, p.19). Community arts allows participants to generate connections and build their social networks though shared experiences not just with each other, but with program facilitators, artists, and administrators at arts facilities through participation in programs.

Additionally, participants in community arts programming develop skills that help them to develop social capital in other areas of their lives such as intercommunication skills, greater ability to cooperate with others, organize projects, and work in teams (Williams, 1997). A study by Wright et al. (2006) indicated that at risk youth involved in a community arts program demonstrated statistically significant improvement in social skills development, particularly the ability to work in teams and to develop friendships upon completion of the program. Community arts can be a tool to teach participants the necessary social skills to build the bonds that constitute social capital (Wright, 2006).

Community arts program participants also can gain social capital by learning about and meeting people of different cultures from their own. Focus groups in neighborhood arts centers in Philadelphia revealed that many participants found value in the opportunity to create social bonds with neighbors outside of their typical social circles (Mundel et al., 2004). The ability to work with and beside others of different backgrounds and ages teaches participants how to communicate with others from diverse backgrounds and creates a "much needed strengthening of understanding, respect, and caring among all participants" (Lewis & McKay, 2008, p. 296; Larson, 2006; Karkou & Glassman 2004). Additionally, by participating in the same cultural activities,

participants reported that they believed community arts helped them to create a shared neighborhood identity (Mundel et al., 2004).

Additionally, participating in arts programming can foster a greater sense of civic engagement from a community. Lewis and McKay (2008) found that the ability of local nonprofits to customize programming to suit their audience encourages civic participation and involvement because many arts nonprofits rely on input from the community members to determine which programming is relevant to their audience. Furthermore, Williams (1997) found that involvement in community arts motivated individuals to engage with local government to advocate for support for neighborhood programs. This experience, according to Williams (1997), created a greater cooperation between the citizens and their local government and taught them how to "build unity through action" (p.10). The ability to gain trust in and learn to cooperate with local government and authority figures is an especially valuable experience for individuals of lower socio-economic status, who tend to have negative perceptions towards government authority (Williams, 1997).

Culture Blocks Program

In 2015, ASC launched a neighborhood-centered cultural program, called Culture Blocks, to provide programming personalized to the needs of individual neighborhoods. ASC staff analyzed arts participation at the neighborhood level using the 2013 Quality of Life data to determine which areas of Mecklenburg County had the lowest rates of participation and organized these areas into five geographical blocks. ASC staff learned about the barriers unique to the residents of each block to participating in ASC sponsored events by attending neighborhood meetings and community events, and meeting with

community leaders and residents in focus groups to formulate programs that meet the needs of residents in each block. The administrators then hired local teaching artists to produce programming customized to the needs of each block in local recreation centers and libraries (ASC, n.d.a; Livable Meck, 2017).

Programming includes a variety of performances and participatory events, such as concerts like "Jazz on the Green," where a local jazz band held a no-cost concert outside a community center, interactive African dance classes for youth and adults, and hands-on clay working classes for seniors where each participant learns to make a mug or pitcher. Events often include community building aspect as well. For example, the "West End Community Cinema Series" allowed neighbors to gather and watch films with themes surrounding the community issues faced by the demographics in the West End block. Through the Culture Blocks program, ASC provides no-cost and relevant cultural programming to Mecklenburg County residents to provide equity of access to the social benefits of arts programming (ASC, n.d.a).

Proposition 1: Culture Blocks reduces barriers to arts participation.

Proposition 2: Participants in Culture Blocks will experience social benefits.

Method

The researcher conducted two focus groups in two separate blocks of Charlotte immediately following Culture Blocks events. I will guide the focus group through a discussion using a series of open-ended questions to encourage participants to share their experience with the culture blocks program and the arts in Charlotte. Focus group participants answered questions individually but also conversed amongst each other to

encourage "respondents to explore and clarify individual and shared perspectives" (Tong, Sainsbury, & Craig, 351, 2007; see Appendix A for focus group prompts). This will give me an overall sense of participants experiences with Culture Blocks.

Culture Blocks administrators made program participants aware that the focus group would take place immediately after the program when participants signed up for the activity online. I collected data at the facility where the Culture Blocks program took place. The researcher had no relationships with any of the participants in either of the focus groups and communicated her affiliation with UNC Charlotte as a student and with ASC as a fellowship recipient to all participants.

After administering the focus groups, the researcher transcribed recordings of focus group discussions and analyzed results by coding results into two categories: Social Capital and Barriers. The researcher developed the codes before the focus groups took place based on themes that emerged out of the literature review (See Appendix D). The Social Capital category codes were further divided into Bridging and Bonding subcategories and described different aspects of social capital. The Bridging category consisted of the codes describing tolerance of diversity, connection with a new person, connection to a resource, or connection to a new group or organization. The Bonding subcategory consisted of codes describing feeling safe in the environment, feeling like part of a community, and feeling supported. The Barrier category consisted of codes describing various barriers to arts participation outlined in the literature such as cost, cultural relevance, location, psychological comfort attending an event, and having a companion with whom to attend events. This coding system enabled the researcher to

interpret results from the focus group in terms of the propositions presented earlier in this chapter.

Focus Group 1: *Using Your Unique Songwriting Workshop*

The first focus group took place after the *Using Your Unique Songwriting Workshop + Showcase* event from 5:15 pm-6pm on February 1, 2019 in the North End/Sugar Creek/Hidden Valley block (Hidden Valley). In this program, a professional singer and songwriter from Dear Soul Music Company provides interactive lessons on songwriting, business practices, and performance to a group of 40 participants. The Hidden Valley block consists of the geographical area north of uptown Charlotte along North Graham and North Tryon streets, Statesville Avenue and Sugar Creek Road. See Appendix B for a map of the blocks. According to ASC, residents of the North End/Sugar Creek/Hidden Valley block had a wide variety of requests for programming, including programming centered around African American Heritage and multicultural education, participatory performing and visual arts, history programming, and community development programs (ASC, n.d.a)

The Hidden Valley Block is 55% black and has an average household income of about $35,000 a year, significantly lower than the county average. About one in five residents has a bachelor's degree and the average resident is 31 years old. This block has a 1.2 out of 2 rating for street connectivity, which puts it at above average for Charlotte and an above average traffic proximity, with 87% of households within one-half a mile of a public transport stop (Quality of Life Explorer, n.d.).

Focus Group 2: *Beauty of Science*

The second case study took place after the ***Beauty of Science*** event on February 7, 2019 at 10:45am in the Northwest block (North Charlotte Block). This program incorporated elements of science, folk-art design, and cultural history to teach participants to make aesthetically pleasing beauty products based on historical black American recipes and methods. Participants made products together as a group and were each allowed to take small samples home after the session. According to ASC, residents in the Northwest block requested programming focused on African American heritage, history, community development, cultural training, history, and public art/beautification (ASC, n.d.a).

The Northwest block is comprised of the geographic area between Rozzelles Ferry and Beatties Ford roads and Freedom Drive and State Street. See Appendix B for a map of the blocks. The Northwest block is 53% Black and has an average household income of about $47,000 a year. About one in five residents has a bachelor's degree and the average resident is 37 years old. This block has a 1.2 out of 2 rating for street connectivity, which puts it at above average for Charlotte and a slightly below average traffic proximity, with 62% of households within one-half a mile of a public transport stop (Quality of Life Explorer, n.d.)

Results

Barriers to Participation

Participants from both focus groups acknowledged that Culture Blocks mitigated barriers that would have otherwise kept them from participating in arts and cultural events. First of all, participants acknowledged that since Culture Blocks programming is

offered free of charge for participants, cost is less of a barrier for participants. Focus

Group attendants indicated that they would not have been able to attend the songwriter's

workshop if there had been a fee. Most participants responded that there was a big cost

barrier to music lessons in Charlotte, and that:

 "Most projects you have to pay, and with this being Arts and Science Council and free, it
gives us the opportunity to do what we want to." (Hidden Valley)

Additionally, three out of the four West Charlotte focus group participants were

recipients of the Senior Nutrition Service program at the recreation center where the

Culture Blocks program took place. Participation in this program implies that the

participants were under financial hardship and would not have extra money on hand to

spend on recreational programs.

The location of the programs was also helpful for participants. When arts events

are difficult to reach for participants, they face hardships to find the transportation and

time to travel to programs (NEA, 2015). Focus group participants indicated that the

program locations were convenient for them. In addition to having access to no-cost

food, the West Charlotte focus group participants mentioned that they also received

medical services and other programming at the recreation center and that the county staff

at the center helped connect them with public transportation to get there. Participants

found it convenient to attend programming because, as one focus group participant

stated:

"I have to come here already!" (North Charlotte)

Because the participants were already familiar with the facility, they felt comfortable

attending arts events there as well. One participant described the recreation center as a

place where:

"People take care of us and take care of our needs and ideas." (North Charlotte)

Additionally, all of the North Charlotte focus group participants lived within one mile of

the transportation center, meaning that they were all residents of the block and that the

program was located in a convenient location to where the resident lived.

The Hidden Valley focus group participants, however, traveled from outside of

the area to attend, and were not residents of the block where the event took place.

Despite the fact that they did not live nearby, they found the location was easy to access,

as it was right off the highway and had no-cost parking. All participants worked and

several were college students, and the time and location of the program made it

convenient for them to attend after classes or on their way home from work. One drove

from north of Charlotte, and another drove about 90 miles from Columbia, South

Carolina each week to attend this program.

The participant from South Carolina stated that he made the long drive each week

to attend Culture Blocks programming because it was difficult for him to find culturally

relevant programming nearby. He stated that:

"Columbia doesn't really have a lot of open mikes out there. It's mainly just opera type stuff, jazz clubs in Greenville, that's about it, but when I come up here I can actually find other people that do what I like to do." (Hidden Valley)

When participants feel they cannot make cultural connections to offered

programming, they face a perceived barrier to arts participation and are not interested in

participating (Kearney, 2008; Moore, 1998; O'Hara, 1996). The songwriters workshop mitigated this barrier by allowing program attendants to work on projects from whichever musical tradition they choose, therefore making the program relatable to a wide variety of participants.

Additionally, many participants in the North Charlotte Block directly related to and connected with the traditions discussed in the soap-making workshop in the West Charlotte Block. During the class, many program attendants smiled and reminisced as they discussed their memories and traditions evoked by the program. In the focus group, an elderly woman expressed joy at being able to remember how her:

"Momma used to make soap in a black pot." (North Charlotte)

Evidence of Social Benefits

Additionally, focus group participants indicated that many elements of social capital were present during their programming.

For instance, Putnam (2000) and Harpham et. al. (2002) assert that exposure to different people and ideas create communities where new connections and ideas can create bridging social capital. Both focus groups indicated that Culture Blocks is a program where there was tolerance of diversity and they were able to share ideas. The North Charlotte group stated that when they attended Culture Blocks events, they felt like they could:

"Talk and say our opinions, share ideas" (North Charlotte)

"Yeah, even at our age, we can learn some stuff!" (North Charlotte)

"Improve my knowledge" (North Charlotte)

"Give input, ask questions, talk" (North Charlotte)

Every participant in this focus group expressed pleasure at being able to learn new ideas and discuss them amongst themselves. All the members of this group were senior citizens and were excited about the continuous exposure to different ideas and thoughts they experienced through Culture Blocks.

The participants in the Hidden Valley group indicated that through their songwriting series, that the group had become a tight knit community despite their diverse backgrounds. Program participants were of varying ages and from various areas of Charlotte but bonded over their shared experiences in the songwriting workshop. Participants remarked that that they were:

"Part of a community"

"All different people"

"People that you would never meet or probably talk to"

A strong community of diverse individuals can help build bonds that constitute social capital (Mundel et. al, 2004; Larson, 2006). This was evident in the Hidden Valley focus group, where participants clearly indicated that the community aspect of the songwriter's workshop helped the participants with their craft. Below are illustrative examples of how the Culture Blocks community helped participants:

"I know I'm not the only one who can't finish a song or has creative blocks and stuff like that and hearing that is really encouraging and makes me feel like if I talk to other people, they can help me, and we help each other out." (Hidden Valley)

"Even though I don't know If I'm going to finish a song, I know I'm going to come here and see what's what. Then we share the music we wrote and I know I'm not the only one [who didn't finish a song that week]." (Hidden Valley)

Through this program, the participant found a group of likeminded people to work through problems with and find greater solutions than if she was on her own. The community shaped by the Culture Blocks songwriting workshop encourages participants to connect and lean on each other rather than become discouraged by difficulties in the songwriting process.

The North Charlotte group was all retired senior citizens; however, they got support they needed to motivate them to keep growing and learning despite retirement and age-related health issues. Focus group participants felt that the community aspect of culture blocks was important because the program:

"got them out of the house! You get to learn something [at Culture Blocks] - you're not sitting at the house all day!" (North Charlotte)

"it makes you feel good to learn something" (North Charlotte)

"give input, ask questions, talk." (North Charlotte)

"keep your mind active" (North Charlotte).

In additional to providing a community to socialize with, the community arts can promote the psychological and emotional health of individuals (Wright, John, Alaggia, & Steel, 2006; Karkou & Glassman, 2004). The Hidden Valley group also felt that Culture Blocks provided emotional support by providing a community where participants could express themselves creatively in a community. Participants stated that:

"I think it's like health for me… it's kind of like medicine for some people. The songs that I do write, I feel it, and when you feel when you're writing, you know it'll be good." (Hidden Valley)

"I've been getting over a breakup and just getting here is one of the highlights of this week honestly because it's like an emotional medicine!" (Hidden Valley)

Participants found comfort in the fact that they could share their feelings and experiences with each other and felt that their shared experiences in this workshop had given them a special bond and understanding with each other, as one stated that:

"people that wouldn't necessarily understand, but now I can come talk to ya'll and you're like yeah, I was feeling the same thing, and I don't feel like an idiot!" (Hidden Valley)

Culture blocks connected residents to resources. A participant in the Hidden Valley group described the songwriting workshop as to introduce her to other people in the industry. She said she met new writers, producers, and song coaches, through culture blocks, and their shared experience in the program:

[is] "a great networking tool" (Hidden Valley)

"makes it easier to find people that are into things that you're into and I can be like oh I met her at the workshop I can just call her up." (Hidden Valley)

Participants in this program also state that the training and confidence they attained through participating in this program gave them:

"the tools we need to go out in our community here and perform. This is like a good tool to, like, encourage us to show your talents off in your own community." (Hidden Valley)

Participants also noted that this program gave them skills that would help them in a professional career outside of the music industry. They described these skills as tools that:

"Everyone needs for everyday life" (Hidden Valley)

In addition to connecting them to more people and resources, participants believed this program taught them how to network:

"Open up more to people, get more comfortable and talk to people that you would never meet or probably talk to." (Hidden Valley)

West Charlotte Center participants were connected to different resources through the Culture Blocks program at the Recreation Center. After attending Culture Blocks, they learned about other resources hosted at the facility, such as free medical testing and other cultural programs such as educational experiences at the local library.

Both the Hidden Valley and North Charlotte Culture Blocks events appeared to cultivate different elements of social capital due to their different structures. The Hidden Valley songwriters' attendants indicated that they received more bridging aspects of social capital. Attendants of this workshop came to learn about a specific set of skills to help them pursue an interest in writing and performing songs. These individuals came from different areas of Charlotte to attend the workshop, and therefore were able to forge bridging connections with people with similar interests outside of their existing social circles. Furthermore, this program consisted of multiple weekly sessions, which could allow attendants to build connections and connect each other to groups or resources as they worked together in this workshop over time. Community arts programs that teach

an applicable skill and occur over several sessions could provide participants with bridging-type social capital.

Rather than helping participants develop a specific set of skills over time, the North Charlotte program occurred in one session and subject matter focused on celebrating a heritage and history. In this program, attendants indicated that they experienced more bonding aspects of social capital. These participants were predominantly senior citizens who, although they lived in the same neighborhood, still might not have connected with each other outside of Culture Blocks or similar programming. Although the seniors in the focus group indicated that they attended the Recreation Center for health and nutrition programming, the Culture Blocks program gave them an opportunity to bond over positive cultural experiences, and therefore, come together as a community. In contrast to those structured like the songwriters' workshop, single session community arts programs that celebrate heritage and history may be more helpful to cultivate bonding social capital and build community within neighborhoods.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

The literature and research clearly indicate that low-income and black communities face unique practical and perceptual barriers to arts participation. Low-income individuals face barriers that do not directly relate to their income level, such as geographic distance and anxiety related to beliefs that they will not be comfortable attending arts events due to the historically elitist perception of the arts (Kearney, 2008; NEA, 2015). Black individuals face similar perceived barriers to the arts caused by lack of cultural and personal representation of black culture and people in mainstream arts and culture in the United States (Banks, 2010; Dimaggio & Ostrower, 1990). This study examined the impact of these barriers on arts participation rates in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg area among low-income and black populations and explored the potential of community arts programs to help alleviate inequity in arts participation and access among low-income and black individuals.

Data from the Quality of Life Explorer indicated that these barriers significantly impact low-income and black populations in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg community. The analysis of this data in Chapter 6 indicated that residents of black neighborhoods were less likely to participate in the arts and that higher-income individuals were more likely to participate in the arts than their lower-income counter parts. Results of the focus group interviews, however, indicate that community arts programs such as Culture Blocks could help to mitigate these barriers to access and provide more equitable access to arts programming across income level and race. Participants were overwhelmingly positive in their responses about the impact that Culture Blocks had on their lives and affirmed that Culture Blocks successfully provided an accessible and comfortable

environment for them to experience arts programming that was relevant to their cultures and interests.

This study is unique in that it uses a mixed method approach to analyze the impact of arts and culture programming on a community. Many studies, most notably the NEA Surveys of Public Participation in the Arts, measure respondent attendance without considering the engagement, enjoyment, or participation in the arts. The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Quality of Life Explorer data uses a similar measurement to indicate arts participation and access in the community. Although attendance is considered the standard measurement to evaluate efficacy of arts programming, "an indication of attendance is no indication of the experience gained during that attendance…they are silent on the nature and quality of the experience of the user" (Gilhepsy, 2001, pp. 55-56). When studies use only qualitative data, however, they can only capture the effect of arts participation on the small select groups of those who attend focus groups. The design of this study, therefore, incorporates both quantitative and qualitative data to address this existing shortfall in the literature.

Research Limitations and Future Directions

There are several limitations to the use of Quality of Life Explorer Arts Participation data. This data does not capture households who participated in arts or cultural activities that were not sponsored by ASC and may omit participants who did not provide a household address or pay with a credit card with a corresponding billing address. However, this is the most comprehensive arts participation data available for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg area at this time. Additionally, the Quality of Life explorer data measures the black population as only the residents who self-identify as black and non-

Hispanic. It is likely that the black population in the Quality of Life Explorer data is understated by the number of individuals who identify as black and Hispanic.

Furthermore, some sets of data had not been updated in several years. The arts participation data had not been updated since 2013. This also meant that different data variables came from different years. Since Charlotte is a rapidly growing and changing city, the data may not reflect the current state of arts participation and other variables. This study highlights the need for updated data collection around arts participation in Mecklenburg County. The arts participation data has only been collected once, and this information is no outdated. Updated Quality of Life Explorer Data from post-implementation of Culture Blocks could help indicate whether Culture Blocks helped to increase arts participation in neighborhoods where programming takes place to further demonstrate the impact of community arts programming on art access.

Additionally, the Quality of Life Explorer data captures arts participation data based on credit card and membership transactions at arts organizations. There is no evidence that a person attended the event, and it does not account for participants attending multiple events. Furthermore, this data excludes all non-ASC related arts events, which may limit research results.

Regarding the qualitative analysis, the researcher was not able to capture demographic information for the participants in this study due to confidentiality concerns. Although she was able to glean limited demographic information from the context of the conversation between focus group participants, it would be useful to gather this information to see which demographic communities the Culture Blocks program is serving and benefiting. Additionally, due to time and budgetary constraints, the

researcher only was able to conduct two focus groups in the northern area of Charlotte. Additional focus groups in other blocks throughout the county would be useful to see if results were similar in other regions. Also, more focus groups would be helpful to capture the impact of the wide variety of programming offered by Culture Blocks.

The qualitative analysis in this thesis relies solely on focus group data gathered at a single point in time to evaluate the effectiveness of the Culture Blocks program. Qualitative data in this manner may reflect the temporary emotional states of participants shortly after finishing a program and may not reflect concrete changes in the participants' lives. To gather this information, a longer study would need to take place to track the impact of the program on participants over time. Also, an analysis of quantitative data to evaluate the impact of community arts programs could provide a more objective view. Due to the time constraints as well as privacy concerns for participants, gathering quantitative and personal data of program participants was not practical, but would be useful in future research (Belfore, 2002).

Furthermore, it is important to consider that other programming can improve social conditions and potentially could be more or less effective than arts and cultural programs. Belfore (2002) takes issue with the fact that, although arts organizations have shown to improve social issues, they have not shown to be more effective than other means. The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Task Force identified arts programming as an essential part of providing more equitable access to social capital. In this thesis, the research supports that that arts programming could provide participants with elements of social capital such as connection to other individuals and community with which individuals can share resources and support one another. Arts and cultural programs,

however, should be benchmarked against different types of programming to determine whether they are the most effective investment to alleviate social inequities (Belfore, 2002; Putnam, 2000).

The data collected in this study, however, demonstrates that community arts programming like the Culture Blocks program of Mecklenburg County can encourage arts participation in low-income and minority-majority neighborhoods. Through this program, participants have the opportunity to make meaningful bonds that produce economic, social, and psychological benefits. These bonds can open new opportunities to and improve mental health of participants, therefore creating a greater equity of these benefits amongst communities that are lacking in resources. Other communities facing issues with inequitable distributions of social capital and other resources may want to consider implementing a program similar to Culture Blocks to provide those most in need to resources access to the benefits of arts programming.

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APPENDIX A: FOCUS GROUP SCRIPT OUTLINE

Welcome and Introduce Moderator

Good Morning. My name is Jillian Mueller and I am a student in the UNC Charlotte Master of Public Administration Program. In this focus group, we are going to discuss your experiences with the Culture Blocks Program you attended today and your participation in the arts and culture in the Charlotte area. I will not be participating in the discussion but will be moderating by asking questions and making sure that we discuss all important issues related to the study in a timely fashion. Before we begin, I will ask you to fill out a piece of paper with your demographic information. Completion of this information is optional but greatly appreciated. I will collect these papers at the end of the focus group.

I will be recording the conversation, but your identities will remain confidential and all contributions to the study will be anonymous.

Questions

1. What brought you to Culture Blocks today?

2. What other arts activities do you participate in and why? Is this your first time attending an ASC event?

3. Do you face issues with participating in arts and cultural events in the Charlotte area?

4. How accessible was today's Culture Blocks program? How far did you travel to get here?

5. How did you relate to the programming?

6. Can you describe the impact that participating in Culture Blocks had on you as an individual?

7. Can you describe the impact that Culture Blocks has on your community? How do you define community?

8. What would you like to see in future programming?

Conclusion

Thank you very much for your participation in today's focus group. I will be around for a few minutes after the interview to answer any additional questions.

APPENDIX B: CULTURE BLOCKS PROGRAM MAP

ASC Culture Blocks
FY18 Program Map
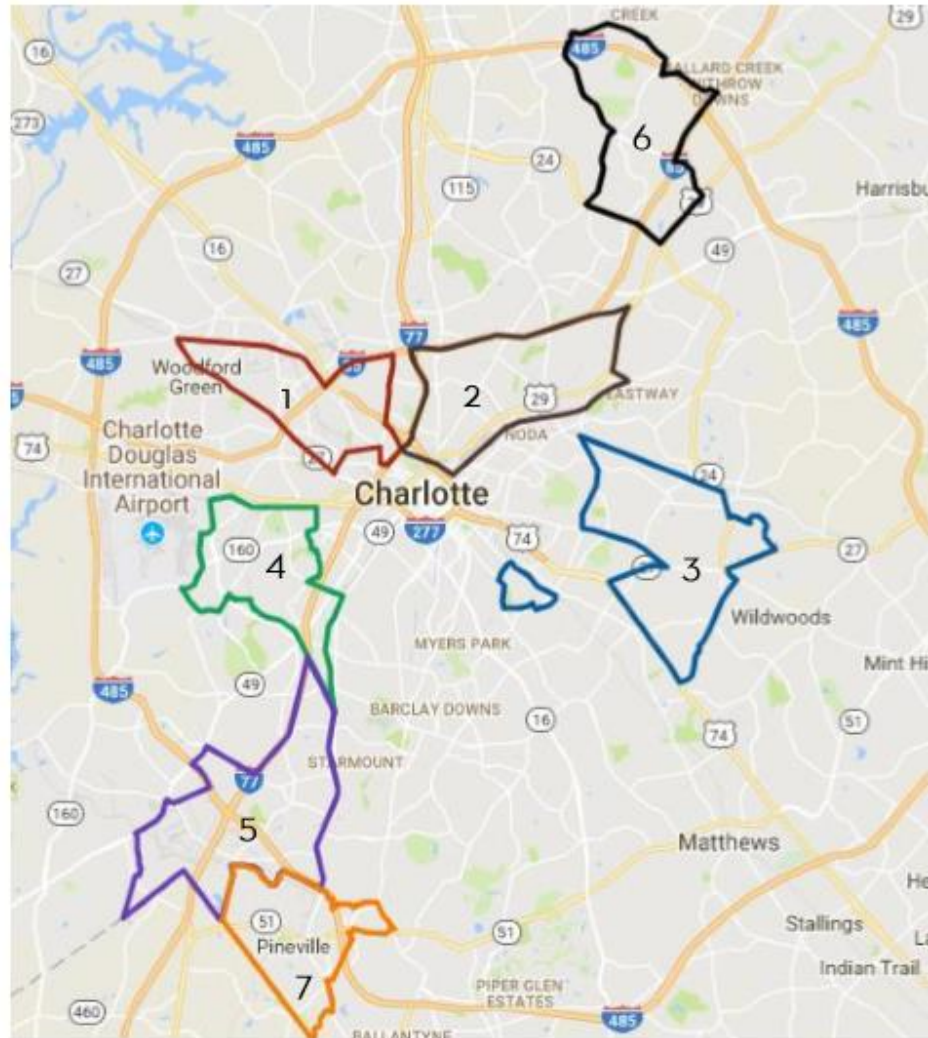
Northwest, Charlotte: **Block 1 (28208, 28214, 28216)**

North End, Sugar Creek, Hidden Valley, Charlotte: **Block 2 (28206, 28213)**

East, Charlotte: **Block 3 (28205, 28212, 28215, 28277)**

West, Charlotte: **Block 4 (28208, 28217)**

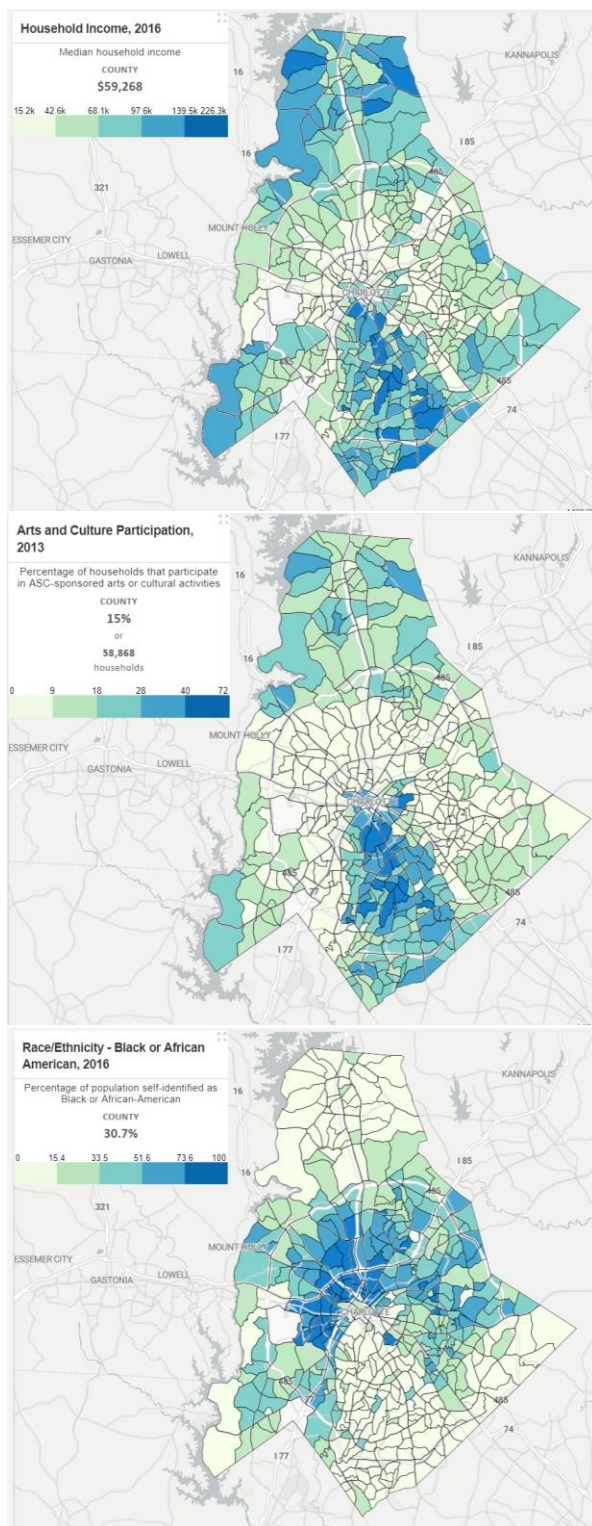Southwest, Charlotte: **Block 5 (28273, 28217)**

Mallard Creek, Prosperity, University City, Charlotte: **Block 6 (28269, 28262)**

Pineville: **Block 7 (28134)**

APPENDIX C: QUALITY OF LIFE EXPLORER

APPENDIX D: FOCUS GROUP CODING SYSTEM

Category: Social Capital

>Subcategory: Bridging

>>Code: TOLERANCE – Tolerance of diversity

>>Code: CONNECTION – Connection with someone outside existing social circles

>>Code: RESOURCE- Connection to a person who could provide a resource
>>Code: GROUPS – Connection to a new group or organization

>Subcategory: Bonding

>>Code: SAFETY – Feeling safe and trusting in the environment

>>Code: COMMUNITY- Feeling like a part of a community

>>Code: SUPPORT – Feeling supported

Category: Barrier

>Code: COST – Activity was not cost prohibitive

>Code: CULTURAL RELEVANCE – Activity is of cultural relevance

>Code: LOCATION – Convenient Geographic Location

>Code: COMFORT – Participants did not feel out of place

>Code: COMPANION – Participants attended with a friend