

Journal of Rural and Community Development

When in Doubt, Go to the Library? Libraries & Rural Creative Placemaking

Author: B. Kathleen Gallagher & M. P. Ehlman

Citation:

Gallagher, B. K., & Ehlman, M. P. (2020). When in doubt, go to the library? Libraries & rural creative placemaking. *The Journal of Rural and Community Development*, 15(2), 95–113.

Publisher:

Rural Development Institute, Brandon University.

Editor:

Dr. Doug Ramsey

Open Access Policy:

This journal provides open access to all of its content on the principle that making research freely available to the public supports a greater global exchange of knowledge. Such access is associated with increased readership and increased citation of an author's work.



When in Doubt, Go to the Library? Libraries & Rural Creative Placemaking

B. Kathleen Gallagher

Southern Methodist University
Dallas, Texas, United States
bkgallagher@smu.edu

Matthew P. Ehlman

The Numad Group
Rapid City, South Dakota, United States
matt@numadgroup.com

Abstract

As rural communities confront increasing challenges and escalating social problems, a variety of interventions have been proposed, including creative placemaking. Creative placemaking is a bottom-up approach to cultural policy development (Redaelli, 2018) that derives from embedding the arts in cross-sector collaboration to produce location-specific social and economic impacts (Markusen & Gadwa, 2010). Libraries in urban and suburban environments have advocated for and demonstrated their abilities to partner in creative placemaking processes. Do rural communities may possess a magic potion to support creative placemaking? “Because it’s what Hermione does...When in doubt, go to the library,” Ron Wesley tells Harry Potter in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (Rowling, 1998, p. 255). This research note investigates the practices and capacities of rural libraries to participate in creative placemaking. Relying on data from the Library Services Survey, conducted by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, and scans of websites, the authors presents the descriptive statistics of capacity indicators and evidence of creative placemaking from 170 rural libraries in Texas. This investigation finds major constraints in the capacities of rural libraries. It concludes with steps to continue advancing the understanding of organizational capacity, rural libraries, and creative placemaking in rural areas.

Keywords: rural communities, creative placemaking, libraries

1.0 Introduction

The struggles of rural communities have garnered the attention of politicians, scholars, and the broader public in recent years (Cohen, 2014, 2015a, 2015b; Vance, 2016). Small, local economies have been eroding in the post-industrial, knowledge-based economy (Mobley, Rine, Kemney, & Messer, 2018). Residents of rural areas

are less likely to pursue higher education and more likely to experience poverty (Zwagerman, 2017). Those with the ability to relocate frequently do; the young and educated migrate for economic opportunity (Smith, Winkler, & Johnson, 2016). This leaves rural areas with an aging population and decreasing talent-pool. Rural communities experience higher rates of poverty than urban areas (Zwagerman, 2017), and they do not receive a proportionate share of philanthropic support (Cohen, 2015b). Dollars granted and job creation in rural communities decreased despite an agreement between the Council on Foundations and the Department of Agriculture (Cohen, 2015a). High rates of unemployment, limited opportunities for higher education, declining populations, and limited philanthropy are critical environmental conditions of organizations in rural communities. Rural communities face significant challenges.

Arts and culture are the heart of community life. They produce tremendous benefits. They generate positive economic impact, revitalize urban and rural places, improve civic engagement, increase social cohesion, augment academic performance, and benefit mental and physical health (Belfiore, 2004; K. McCarthy, E. H. Ondaatje, L. Zakaras, & A. C. Brooks, 2004). The benchmark arts, presented by symphonies, art museums, dance, and opera companies (Ivey, 2008), were historically located in large cities (Florida, 2004; Towse, 2010). Resources converged there—donors, patrons, audiences, and those producing art. An argument for public intervention in the arts was democratization, creating access to quality works for all Americans (Binkiewicz, 2004; Larson, 1983). The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) “extends its work to promote equal access to the arts in every community across America” (National Endowment for the Arts, n/d).

Strategies to leverage the arts, creative industries, creative placemaking, and cultural tourism have been proposed as opportunities to counter community decline (Markusen, 2013; Markusen & Gadwa, 2010). Creative placemaking is a bottom-up approach to cultural policy development (Redaelli, 2018) that derives from embedding the arts in cross-sector collaboration to produce location-specific social and economic impacts (Markusen & Gadwa, 2010). Creative placemaking offers the possibility of strengthening identity, reinvention, and rebirth for places (Ellery & Ellery, 2019; Hughes, 2017; Markusen & Gadwa, 2010; National Endowment for the Arts). It can be undertaken by communities of all sizes, but it requires resources: collaboration, support from individuals and organizations, dedicated funding, and creative assets.

The sustainability of the nonprofit arts model, however, is threatened. Arts and culture nonprofits have increased rates of organizational death (Baumol & Bowen, 1966; Hager, 2000; Hager, Galaskiewicz, Bielefeld, & Pins, 1996). The U.S. approach to funding and current patterns of participation may be endangering the long-term sustainability of the sector in its present manifestation (Ellis, 2007; Kaiser, 2015). Threats to the survival of arts organizations in rural communities are even greater.

Rural communities may possess a magic potion to support creative placemaking. “Because it’s what Hermione does...When in doubt, go to the library,” Ron Wesley tells Harry Potter in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (Rowling, 1998, p. 255). Contemporary, non-fictional advocates have argued that libraries are community assets positioned to address community needs, increase equity, and generate public good. As such, they may be ideal partners in creative placemaking initiatives. This research note asks: What are the practices and capacity of rural libraries for creative

placemaking? Data from the Institute of Museum and Library Services 2017 annual survey and content analysis of websites of rural libraries in Texas are used to explore the phenomenon of library involvement in creative placemaking in small and rural communities. Texas is the tenth-ranked state for the number of small, rural libraries. This investigation is limited to 170 rural Texas libraries.

Arts organizations and libraries serving rural communities face differences in resource availability than urban and suburban organizations. These conditions affect sustainability. As the concerns of rural America have attracted interest from scholars, policymakers, and the general public, it is important to recognize that many of our public administration and management theories are developed and tested in urban areas. There is a gap in our understanding of how practices are adapted and implemented in smaller communities. This paper will contribute to understanding the position of rural libraries, their practice and potential as partners in creative placemaking.

2.0 Challenges for Rural Communities

Rural has been defined in a variety of ways—by population density, features of geography, economic drivers, and industrial development (Arnold, Biscoe, Farmer, Robertson, & Shapley, 2007). The United States federal government defines rural 15 ways (Washington Post, n/d). There are two key constructs for rural among these (Hirsch, 2019). The United States Census Bureau establishes rural as that which is not included in urban areas (Hirsch, 2019; Ratcliffe, Burd, Holder, & Fields, 2016). The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) defines core metropolitan areas are places with 50,000 or more people. Micropolitan areas are places having between 10,000 and 49,999, and all other areas are rural (Hirsch, 2019). The application of both approaches results in areas that are hybrids (Hirsch, 2019). The OMB has generated a list of counties and county equivalents that can be used to categorize settings for organizations based on their postal codes (Cromartie, 2019). Researchers and policymakers are confronted by a variety of definitions and must select the one most appropriate for their purposes.

Rural American communities face many challenges to their survival. The rural population comprised 54.4 percent of the total U.S. population in 1910 (Ratcliffe et al., 2016). The rural population now numbers approximately 56.2 million people (Davis & Marema, 2008). Almost 75 percent of the geography of the United States is considered rural, but it is home to only 14 percent of the population (Zwagerman, 2017). In most rural U.S. counties, more people died than were born in 2013 (Adamy & Overberg, 2017). Residents of rural areas are less likely to attend college and more likely to experience unemployment (U. S. Department of Agriculture, 2017). Rural communities report aging populations and higher rates of poverty (Mobley, 2018). Jobs created and foundation dollars granted have continued to decline despite collaboration between the Department of Agriculture and the Council on Foundations (Cohen, 2002). Out-migration for economic opportunity has resulted in concentrations of the working class in high-poverty, urban neighborhoods (Florida, 2017; Vance, 2016). Unemployment, poverty, and low social mobility are so pervasive that that rural America has been referred to as the new “inner city” by journalists (Adamy & Overberg, 2017; Tamny, 2017). The declining status of rural communities is significant for all Americans because the areas remain a critical source of affordable food and energy, clean water, and physical space for recreation and leisure-time activities (Zwagerman, 2017). The sustainability of rural

communities is important for the broader population, and attempts to address the needs of rural communities have taken many forms.

Rural areas have sought options and opportunities to compensate for economic losses in agriculture and manufacturing. Among prospective interventions are the arts. Arts businesses are exceptional, having proven innovative in both urban and rural areas (Wojan & Nichols, 2017). Businesses recognize the value of arts and entertainment enterprises as important for attracting employees (Florida, 2004; Wojan & Nichols, 2017). Arts and culture are powerful, and they produce intrinsic and instrumental benefits (Belfiore, 2004; K. F. McCarthy, E. H. Ondaatje, L. Zakaras, & A. Brooks, 2004). Therefore, considering arts, culture, and heritage as community assets should be properly valued and should reflect the local population and its preferences. Furthermore, rural arts organizations draw more non-local audiences and report higher civic involvement (Wojan & Nichols, 2017). Rural communities that possess performing arts organizations experience better population growth, higher educational attainment, and higher average incomes than the populations of other rural counties (Wojan & Nichols, 2017). State Arts Agencies (SAAs) have developed programs to encourage and support the development and delivery of arts and cultural programming in rural communities (National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, 2013).

3.0 Creative Placemaking

Creative placemaking is an intervention that has gained momentum. Establishment of Art of the Rural, convening of the Rural Generation Summit, expansion of programs serving rural arts and placemaking, and the initiatives of many communities speak to the larger movement. These endeavors seek to leverage the effort for a variety of community gains.

Creative placemaking is location-specific; it draws from the population, place, and resources of a given location.

In creative placemaking, partners from public, private, nonprofit, and community sectors strategically shape the physical and social character of a neighborhood, town, city, or region around arts and cultural activities. Creative placemaking animates public and private spaces, rejuvenates structures and streetscapes, improves local business viability and public safety, and brings diverse people together to celebrate, inspire, and be inspired. (Markusen & Gadwa, 2010).

It is a bottom-up approach to cultural policy development that relies on the participation of stakeholders in the development and production (Redaelli, 2018). Creative placemaking has been undertaken in communities of all sizes and geographic locations (Markusen & Gadwa, 2010). It is scalable by its nature, and it requires adaptation to the local context. Creative placemaking initiatives have supported the renaissance of places. Creative placemaking projects have re-ignited pride of place for residents and promoted cultural tourism.

Creative placemaking does not require the involvement of nonprofit arts and culture organizations (NPACOs), but they are often active partners. The importance of including artists and NPACOs in creative placemaking has been featured in extant research (Evans, 2009; Levine Daniel & Kim, 2020; Markusen, 2013; Markusen & Schrock, 2006). It can present a challenge to rural communities as the number of rural NPACOs is limited. Furthermore, rural NPACOs include a disproportionate number of small organizations. Smallness is identified as increasing the liability of

organizational death (Carroll & Hannan, 1989). Limited capacity can hinder an organization's ability to compete for resources and to recover from economic shocks (Hager, 2001). Gallagher (forthcoming) examined the positions of U. S. NPACOs with attention to locale (whether the organizations were located in mostly urban, mostly rural, or rural counties) using information reported to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). Rural NPACOs are characterized by lower total revenues, lower contributions, lower program revenues, and lower compensation amounts. Partnerships or collaborations may help small organizations to serve their organizational missions better.

Public libraries are also well-positioned to provide space for the exploration of arts and culture. Public libraries facilitate access to and consumption of cultural material (Summers & Buchanan, 2018). The staff, volunteers, and collections provide guides and points of access to cultural material, discovery, engagement, and interpretation of cultural objects (Summers & Buchanan, 2018). The Society of Chief Librarians announced the development of the Universal Cultural Offer in 2016 (Settle, 2016).

This offer recognizes public libraries as welcoming places where children and adults can immerse themselves in every form of art: learn from local artists; create their own art; watch theater, music, and dance performances; and learn about art and culture through books and reading (Settle, 2016, p. 4).

There are reported cases of libraries operating as cultural hubs in the United Kingdom, Europe, and the United States (Smallwood, 2014; Summers & Buchanan, 2018). Libraries have value as third places (Cabello & Butler, 2017) and operate as cultural and community hubs (Kyle, 2015; Settle, 2016). They often serve the most vulnerable populations (Morgan, Dupuis, D'Alonzo, Johnson, & Graves, 2016). Libraries are important service providers and among a community's cultural amenities.

Libraries not only function as cultural hubs but are actively engaged in creative placemaking (Center for the Future of Libraries, 2017; Dudley, 2013; Summers & Buchanan, 2018). The American Library Association has argued that libraries are positioned to partner in creative placemaking initiatives (Center for the Future of Libraries, 2017). Similar to NPACOs, public libraries face issues that threaten their ability to continue operations. While libraries are more common than NPACOs in rural communities, they are not without threats.

The value of libraries is being questioned in the digital era. Some argue that libraries are no longer necessary (Library Systems Services, 2018). Such views often stem from misunderstandings about the services and benefits produced by public libraries (Hillburn, 2018). Widespread technology fuels the argument that libraries have become irrelevant in the digital age (Hillburn, 2018). Libraries are in the process of reinvention and increasing awareness of their value.

4.0 Capacity

Public and private funders have elevated attention to organizational capacity and effectiveness (Connolly & York, 2002; Svensson, Hancock, & Hums, 2017). Capacity refers to organizational operations—how an organization uses internal and external resources to achieve organizational mission and deliver products or services (Andersson, Faulk, & Stewart, 2016; Christensen & Gazley, 2008; Doherty, Miesener, & Cuskelly, 2013; Sowa, Selden, & Sandfort, 2004). Capacity, or how an organization does its work (Christensen & Gazley, 2008), contributes to

effectiveness. Despite the increased importance of organizational capacity, nonprofit leaders have failed to build it (Lecy & Searing, 2015).

Early researchers reported problems with methods for measuring capacity (Sowa et al., 2004) and lags in developing rigorous systems for measuring the results of capacity building (Connolly & York, 2002). Variations in organizational structures and contexts mean that there is no single approach or system that can be universally applied (Connolly & York, 2002; Doherty et al., 2013; Sowa et al., 2004). Difficulties in measuring capacity can drive organizations to rely on outcome measures.

Too often, outcomes become the indicators of choice for representing organizational effectiveness. Yet, hidden behind those outcome measurements are complex and diverse dynamics that may vary across and within organizations and programs. To improve outcomes, organizations need to understand how their structures and processes enable or hinder those outcomes (Sowa et al., 2004).

Organizations must identify capacity indicators that are appropriate to their industry and environment. McKinsey and Company used an instrument with 58 indicators in 7 domains (Despard, 2017). Smaller organizations may be served by more modest instruments or scales (Svensson et al., 2017). For example, organizational age, staff size, board size, and annual budget were used as indicators of capacity in an exploratory study of youth development nonprofits (Svensson et al., 2017). Several dimensions of capacity have emerged as essential to the evaluation process: infrastructure and operations; leadership, vision, and strategy; human, financial, and other central resource categories; and external relationships and networks (Doherty et al., 2013; Sowa et al., 2004). Indicators reported include: formal mission statements; strategic and creative plans, plan implementation; human resource systems, human capital, sufficient volunteers; stable revenues and expenses, fiscal responsibility, independent financial audits, information technology systems; personal connections, networks, engagement with partners, balanced and dependable relationships, and bureaucratic partners (Doherty et al., 2013; Graddy & Chen, 2006; Sowa et al., 2004).

Efforts to build capacity may drive the expansion of partnerships and/or networks. Graddy and Chen (2006) recognize that the size and scope of an organization's network are influenced by organizational factors, programmatic needs, and environmental factors. The most influential variable to the formation of collaborations in the study was the availability of potential partners. Programmatic needs also appear to increase the likelihood of network formation at statistically significant levels. Rural organizations are confronted with complex conditions and environmental challenges. What are the practices and capacities of rural libraries for creative placemaking?

5.0 Methods

The conditions of rural communities demand our attention. As responses to the unique needs of rural communities are developed, it is imperative that scholars produce research that is informed by geographic context. To date, explorations of libraries' capacities and creative placemaking practices have been dominated by urban and suburban settings. Therefore, an exploratory, quantitative research design was developed to identify whether rural libraries are engaging in creative placemaking initiatives and their potential capacity to do so. This allows researchers

to gain an understanding of current resources and practices. The following section briefly describes the quantitative methodology used.

5.1 Study Population and Data Sources

The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) conducts an annual survey of libraries in the United States. All libraries that complete the survey are included in the publicly available data set. In 2017, 17,452 libraries completed the survey, including 6,366 rural libraries (Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2017). We elected to use a convenient sample of rural libraries in Texas that are included in the 2017 IMLS annual survey of libraries dataset. Survey data was supplemented in two ways. A graduate student first searched the internet for library home pages for the identified rural Texas libraries and then performed a content analysis of the websites for the following information: hours listed, which days of the week the libraries were open, and whether additional resources were listed—with specific attention to college prep programs, children’s programs, event listings, and links to the organization’s social media outlets. Using dichotomous coding, the student identified the information as present (1) or not present (0). If an organization did not have a website, the student proceeded to check Facebook for presence and information sharing. In addition, the number of nonprofit arts organizations in each community was identified from a dataset constructed by the authors built on the National Center for Charitable Statistics (NCCS) Core Data Files (Urban Institute: National Center for Charitable Statistics, 1998 - 2014). The National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities classifies all tax-exempt entities by mission (Jones, 2019). Organizations classified as “A” have a primary mission in arts and culture.

5.2 Variables and Analysis

In an exploratory study of youth development nonprofits, Svensson et al. (2017) measured capacity using four key indicators: (1) organizational age, (2) staff size, (3) board size, and (4) annual budget. The simplicity of this model is well-suited to small organizations. For this exploratory study, we sought indicators and outcomes along each of the four dimensions of capacity. Working with existing data offers a variety of benefits. Doing so can expedite the process and lower costs (Singleton & Straits, 2009). However, researchers do not have the ability to develop their own questions and threads for discovery and must work with the data reported. While the data are not perfect for the task at hand, they offer an excellent entry point to begin this investigation.

The Institute of Museum and Library Services has conducted a survey annually since 1992 (Institute of Museum and Library Services, n/d). Approximately 9,000 public libraries with around 17,000 individual public library outlets complete the survey. The dataset includes 37 variables. From these, ten were identified as indicators of capacity, and six were identified as outcomes. As Doherty et al. (2013) reported, the number of potential partners influences the size and scope of networks. We included the number of nonprofit arts and culture organizations (NPACOs) in the community, gathered from NCCS core data files, as one indicator of the potential for external relationships and networks. These are reported in Table 1, Dimensions of capacity and variables from existing data. Descriptive statistics were calculated for the variables of interest.

Table 1. *Dimensions of Capacity and Variables from Existing Data*

| Dimensions of Capacity | Indicators of Capacity Available in Data | Outcomes |
|---|--|-------------------------------------|
| Infrastructure and operations | Libraries with branches | Total circulation |
| | Libraries with bookmobiles | Total library programs |
| | Hours open (total per year) | Total kids programs |
| | Hours open (average/week) | Total young adult programs |
| Leadership, vision, and strategy | Legal basis | Total attendance |
| | Total number of employees holding the title of librarian (FTE) | Kids attendance |
| Human, financial, and other central resource categories | Total staff (FTE) | Website listing available resources |
| | Total income | |
| | Salary expense | |
| | Benefits expense | |
| External relationships and networks | Number of NPACOs in community | |

6.0 Findings

Rural libraries may be untapped resources for increasing access to and benefits from the arts for rural residents and communities in the United States. This research was undertaken to explore the practices and capacity of rural libraries for creative placemaking.

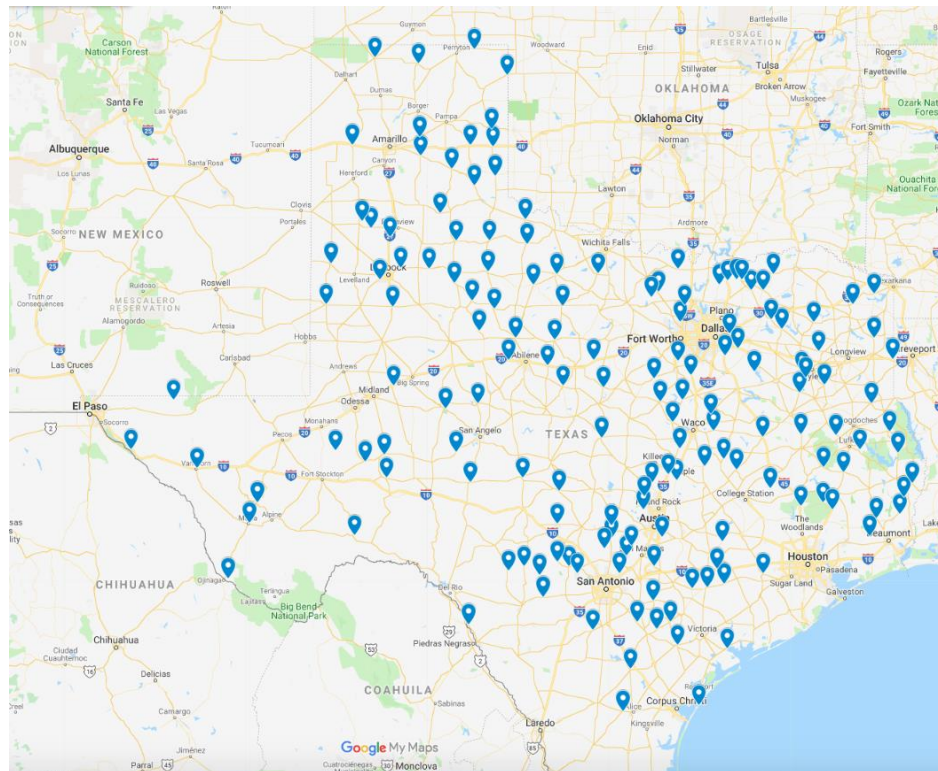
There were 3,911 rural public libraries throughout the United States that completed the survey in 2017 (Institute of Museum and Librery Services, 2017). The number of rural libraries per state ranges from 1 in Hawaii to 408 in Iowa, with a national average of just under 77. Thirty-nine states have fewer than 100 rural libraries. Six states have more than 200 rural libraries. Texas ranked 10th for largest population of rural libraries. In 2017, 170 of the Texas libraries that completed the IMLS survey were categorized as rural (Palczar & Frehill, 2019). Basic descriptive statistics (the range of values and medians) for the United States and Texas are presented in Table 2. A map of Texas showing the locations of rural libraries is presented in Figure 1.

Table 2. *Descriptive Statistics*

| U.S. | Low | High | Average | Texas | Total |
|---|--------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| Number of rural libraries/state | 1 | 408 | 75 | 175 | 3,911 |
| Rural Population/state | 97,524 | 3,847,522 | 1,148,554 | 3,847,522 | 59,724,800 |
| Rural population/ # of rural libraries in the state | 2,314 | 2,415,502 | 160,437 | 24,047 | |
| Percent of the state population that is rural | 0.00% | 61.34% | 25.52% | 15.30% | n/a |

Rural communities vary in size, so it is important to understand the basic profile of rural communities and their libraries. For rural communities in Texas that have libraries, the legal service populations varied from 40 to 37,385, with an average of 4,850 (see Table 3). The legal basis for the organization can be county/city, library district, multijurisdictional (a high school and public library, for example), municipal, or nonprofit. Some form of government is the legal basis for 70 percent of the population (118), while 52 (31 percent) have a legal basis as nonprofit associations or agencies.

Figure 1: Map of rural libraries in Texas.



Source: Gallagher, 2020 (Google Maps, Museum and Library Services).

Table 3. *Texas Libraries—Legal Service Areas and Legal Basis*

| Texas | Low | High or Total | Average/ Percentage |
|--|------------|----------------------|----------------------------|
| Population of legal service area | 40 | 37,385 | 4,850 |
| Legal basis: county/city | | 38 | 22% |
| Legal basis: library district | | 8 | 5% |
| Legal basis: multijurisdictional | | 5 | 3% |
| Legal basis: municipal | | 68 | 39% |
| Legal basis: nonprofit association or agency | | 52 | 31% |
| Total libraries | | 170 | 100% |

Capacity affects the ability of rural libraries to perform their mission, and it may influence the decision to offer arts programming and/or participate in creative placemaking initiatives. Capacity indicators, as described in the methods section, are reported in Table 4. Rural libraries operate with limited staff and modest salaries. The overwhelming majority of the libraries in the sample do not have additional branches or bookmobiles. They operate with the support of an average of 1.13 FTE librarians and an average staff of 1.85 FTE. Salary expenses were withheld from 117 reporting libraries to protect employees. For the 53 reported, total salary expenses for all staff averaged \$111,922, and total benefits averaged \$27,450.

Another measure of capacity is hours the library is open for public access. Reported annual hours ranged from 704 to 6,069. This averaged to less than 14 hours per week for some libraries to almost 117 hours per week at others. The average across all was just under 35 hours per week.

Library use presents another opportunity to understand library capacity. The sample population reported annual circulations ranging from 0 to 297,416, with an average of 19,595. Rural libraries in Texas reported 0 to 1,145 programs in the year, averaging 114.62 or just over 2 per week. Annual programming offerings for children and young adults averaged 59.02 and 13.96, respectively. Annual attendance averaged 2,002 with an average of 1,277 from children and young adults. The difference between the average annual attendance of children (1,277) and young adults (181) is worth noting.

Table 4. *Texas Rural Libraries Measures of Capacity*

| Texas | Low | High or Total | Average/Percentage |
|--|------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| Libraries with branches | 0 | 3 | 0.10 |
| Libraries with bookmobiles | 0 | 0 | 0.00 |
| Total number of employees holding the title of librarian (FTE) | 0 | 7.7 | 1.13 |
| Total staff (FTE) | 0 | 21.46 | 1.85 |
| Total income | \$840 | \$1,695,375 | \$117,129 |
| Salary expense (n=53) | \$50,731 | \$436,209 | \$111,922 |
| Benefits expense (n=53) | \$0 | \$164,905 | \$27,450 |
| Hours open (total per year) | 704 | 6,069 | 1,797 |
| Hours open (avg./week) | 13.54 | 116.71 | 34.56 |
| Total circulation (n=162) | 0 | 297,416 | 19,595 |
| Total library programs | 0 | 1,145 | 114.62 |
| Kids programs | 0 | 827 | 59.02 |
| Young adult programs | 0 | 442 | 13.96 |
| Total attendance | - | 31,718 | 2,002 |
| Kids attendance | - | 31,053 | 1,277 |
| Young adult attendance | 0 | 8,445 | 181 |

n=170, unless otherwise indicated

Finally, we explored the websites and social media pages of the sample population. These are summarized in Table 5. Most rural Texas libraries (81 percent) have an online presence. Most list resources (69 percent), a minority lists events (31 percent) and social media links (27 percent). Just one library out of the 170 listed college-prep resources. Most libraries are open Monday–Friday, according to their websites. Saturday and Sunday offer limited availability; just 37.71 percent and 1.71 percent, respectively.

Table 5. *Rural Libraries – Websites and Social Media*

| Texas | Observed | Percent of total |
|---|-----------------|-------------------------|
| Rural communities in TX with libraries and operating NPACO(s) | 25 | 14% |
| Nonprofit arts in the communities | 37 | |
| Number of rural libraries with a website | 147 | 81% |
| Website lists resources available | 117 | 69% |
| Website lists college-prep programs | 1 | 1% |
| Website lists children’s programs | 20 | 12% |
| Website lists events | 53 | 31% |
| Website provides social media links | 46 | 27% |
| Open Mondays (according to website) | 121 | 71% |
| Open Tuesdays (according to website) | 149 | 88% |
| Open Wednesdays (according to website) | 147 | 86% |
| Open Thursdays (according to website) | 148 | 87% |
| Open Fridays (according to website) | 130 | 76% |
| Open Saturdays (according to website) | 62 | 36% |
| Open Sundays (according to website) | 3 | 2% |

The presence or absence of nonprofit arts and culture organizations provides important environmental and contextual details about community resources. Of the 175 rural communities with libraries in Texas, 25 have one or more nonprofit arts and culture organization(s) in their community. These rural NPACOs are predominantly small, mature organizations with total revenue averaging \$177,589. The extension of this is that 85 percent of the rural communities in this sample are without a tax-exempt arts and culture nonprofit organization.

7.0 Discussion and Conclusion

The threats to rural communities are varied and numerous. Education, economic opportunity, health, and well-being are critical policy areas in need of solutions. As local, state, and national policymakers explore the benefits of an array of interventions, creative placemaking has emerged as an approach generating positive impacts in diverse communities. Creative placemaking is scalable, draws from community resources, and produces local impact. Simultaneously, the cross-sector collaborative nature of the approach requires partners with capacity to contribute.

While the American Library Association has argued that libraries are well-positioned to partner in creative placemaking initiatives, it is essential that such claims be evaluated in non-urban settings. This research was undertaken to explore the practices and capacity of rural libraries for creative placemaking.

7.1 Population

Rural areas are, by their very nature, sparsely populated. This presents challenges to initiatives undertaken to democratize arts and culture and provide equitable access throughout a country. Surveys were completed by 3,911 libraries serving rural communities in the United States, 170 of those in the state of Texas. Each library in our study serves between 40 and 37,385 people with a total service population of 824,480. These libraries are established, embedded in their communities, and at least informally connected to other organizations and people in the community. These characteristics support the potential of rural libraries as agents, partners, or collaborators in creative placemaking initiatives.

7.2 Creative Placemaking

There is no evidence of arts programming or creative placemaking efforts by rural libraries based on the available data. The IMLS survey does not ask about arts programming, creative placemaking, or more general community collaboration. If such efforts were happening, we expected evidence to appear in event listings on library websites. These were not evident in our investigation. This does not mean that it is not occurring. It would be unsurprising to discover kids' programs that include visual arts creation, music, dramatic performance/playacting, or even puppetry. Understanding the types of programming and classification systems will benefit from direct communication with library staff.

7.3 Capacity

Commonly accepted dimensions of capacity include: infrastructure and operations; leadership, vision, and strategy; human, financial, and other central resource categories; and external relationships and networks. Working with existing data limited our selection of variables. The data yielded 11 variables that work as objective indicators of capacity and seven variables that reflect outcomes of capacity. Reviewing the descriptive statistics for each of these variables revealed that rural libraries are operating under significant capacity constraints.

On the dimension of infrastructure and operations, it was observed that libraries are most often operating as a single branch, without a bookmobile, open for fewer than 35 per week, on average. The majority of libraries are not open on Saturdays or Sundays.

The IMLS data did not report variables that were well representative of mission, vision, or leadership. The authors considered that legal basis for ownership reflects source of authority—local government agents or nonprofit boards. The clear majority are public and report to the county, parish, or municipal leadership.

Human, financial, and central resource categories are well reported in the IMLS data. Libraries operate an average of fewer than two full-time equivalent staff who function as information and research guides, plan and deliver programs for different audiences, manage circulation of over 375 items per week, and perform other duties not reported to IMLS. The libraries operate on an average of \$111,922 in total

income. Analysis of salaries and benefits was handicapped by limited data availability.

Indicators of external relationships and networks were not evident in the IMLS data. The authors supplemented this with the number of nonprofit arts and culture organizations in the area as a pool of potential partners. NPACOs are present in only 25 of the 170 communities.

Such constraints may present barriers to partnerships, networks, and collaborations and undertaking community initiatives such as creative placemaking efforts. These capacity indicators suggest limitations to the potential for rural libraries to engage in creative placemaking, but that does not mean it is impossible or not happening. Additional investigation is needed.

7.4 Limitations

This research note presents a preliminary exploration of the capacity and practices of rural libraries to undertake creative placemaking. As the first phase of the investigation, it relied on a sample of only 170 libraries in a single state. We relied on the IMLS Library Services Survey and were limited to variables available within it. While there were reasonable objective indicators of capacity across the four dimensions, these were not evenly distributed. Furthermore, the survey does not include responses about mission, vision, and leadership, nor existing collaborations and partnerships. These limitations create opportunities for subsequent phases of research.

7.5 Opportunities to Advance this Research

Partnering in creative placemaking has been proposed and practiced by urban libraries. Cases are reported, as discussed in the literature review. However, our research did not locate any quantitative studies. Furthermore, the highlighted cases come from urban and suburban settings. There were no accounts of rural libraries undertaking creative placemaking located. Capacity indicators and creative placemaking initiatives must be informed by context. There is no formula or single system for either. As creative placemaking gains ground as an effective intervention that delivers a variety of benefits, it is necessary to develop better exploratory and evaluative tools that include the evaluation of capacity of prospective partners.

There is a gap in understanding creative placemaking initiatives and their implementation in rural communities. This article expands understanding of the capacity of rural libraries, their practices, and their potential as partners in creative placemaking. From this first step, the authors seek to use community-based participatory research methods to develop a better instrument for evaluating the capacity and creative placemaking practices of rural libraries. This would be followed by testing the instrument and then expanding the study population for a more robust investigation.

References

- Adamy, J., & Overberg, P. (2017, May 26). Rural America is the new “inner city”. *Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved October 15, 2018, from <https://www.wsj.com/articles/rural-america-is-the-new-inner-city-1495817008>

- Andersson, F. O., Faulk, L., & Stewart, A. J. (2016). Toward more targeted capacity building: Diagnosing capacity needs across organizational life stages. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 27(6), 2860–2888. DOI 10.1007/s11266-015-9634-7
- Arnold, M. L., Biscoe, B., Farmer, T. W., Robertson, D. L., & Shapley, K. L. (2007). How the government defines rural has implications for education policies and practices (REL 2007–No. 010). Retrieved October 15, 2018, from https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/southwest/pdf/REL_2007010_sum.pdf
- Baumol, W. J., & Bowen, W. G. (1966). *Performing arts: The economic dilemma*. New York: Twentieth Century Fund.
- Belfiore, E. (2004). Auditing culture: The subsidised cultural sector in the New Public Management. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 10(2), 183–202. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10286630042000255808>
- Binkiewicz, D. M. (2004). *Federalizing the muse*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.
- Cabello, M., & Butler, S. M. (2017). How public libraries help build healthy communities. Retrieved November 16, 2019, from <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2017/03/30/how-public-libraries-help-build-healthy-communities/>
- Carroll, G. R., & Hannan, M. T. (1989). On using institutional theory in studying organization populations. *American Sociological Review*, 54(4), 545–548.
- Center for the Future of Libraries. (2017). Creative placemaking. Retrieved February 1, 2019 from <http://www.ala.org/tools/future/trends/creativeplacemaking>
- Christensen, R. K., & Gazley, B. (2008). Capacity for public administration: Analysis of meaning and measurement. *Public Administration and Development*, 28(4), 265–279. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1002/pad.500>
- Cohen, R. (2002). Local government support of arts and culture. *Journal of Arts Management Law and Society*, 32(3), 206–221. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10632920209596975>
- Cohen, R. (2014, December 4). What ails rural philanthropy and what must be done. *Nonprofit Quarterly*. Retrieved from <https://nonprofitquarterly.org/2014/12/04/what-ails-rural-communities-philanthropy-what-must-be-done>
- Cohen, R. (2015a). Letter from America: Philanthropy has neglected rural America - and it hurts. *Third Sector*. Retrieved September 20, 2016, from <http://www.thirdsector.co.uk/letter-america-philanthropy-neglected-rural-america-hurts/policy-and-politics/article/1326684>
- Cohen, R. (2015b). USDA study: Rural philanthropy still an underfunded afterthought. *Nonprofit Quarterly*. Retrieved from <https://nonprofitquarterly.org/rural-philanthropy-continues-to-look-sparse-and-worse-according-to-usda-study/>

- Connolly, P., & York, P. (2002). Evaluating capacity-building efforts for nonprofit organizations. *OD Practitioner*, 34(4), 33–39.
- Cromartie, J. (2019). What is rural? *United States Department of Agriculture*. Retrieved November 1, 2019, from <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/rural-economy-population/rural-classifications/what-is-rural.aspx>
- Davis, D., & Marema, T. (2008). A rural perspective. *Grantmakers in the Arts Reader*, 19(3). Retrieved November 9, 2019, from <https://www.giarts.org/article/rural-perspective>
- Despard, M. R. (2017). Can nonprofit capacity be measured? *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 46(3), 607–626. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0899764016661425>
- Doherty, A., Miesener, K., & Cuskelly, G. (2013). Toward a multidimensional framework of capacity in community sports clubs. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 43(2_suppl), 124S–142S. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0899764013509892>
- Dudley, M. (Ed.) (2013). *Public libraries and resilient cities*. Chicago, IL: American Library Association.
- Ellery, P. J., & Ellery, J. (2019). Strengthening community sense of place through placemaking. *Urban Planning*, 4(2), 237–248. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17645/up.v4i2.2004>
- Ellis, A. (2007). The changing place of the 501(c)(3). *Grantmakers in the Arts Reader*, 18(3), 16–20. Retrieved June 4, 2018, from <https://www.giarts.org/article/changing-place-501c3>
- Evans, G. (2009). Creative cities, creative spaces and urban policy. *Urban Studies*, 45(6&6), 1003–1040. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0042098009103853>
- Florida, R. (2004). *The rise of the creative class*. New York: Basic Books.
- Florida, R. (2017). *The new urban crisis: How our cities are increasing inequality, deepening segregation, and failing the middle class-and what we can do about it*. New York: Basic Books.
- Gallagher, B. K. (forthcoming). Death and life: The promise and problems of the arts in rural communities. *International Journal of Arts Management*.
- Graddy, E., & Chen, B. (2006). Influences on the size and scope of networks for social service delivery. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 16(4), 533–552. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/muj005>
- Hager, M. A. (2000). The survivability factor: Research on the closure of nonprofit Arts Organizations. *Americans for the Arts*. Retrieved from <https://www.americansforthearts.org/by-program/reports-and-data/legislation-policy/naappd/the-survivability-factor-research-on-the-closure-of-nonprofit-arts-organizations>
- Hager, M. A. (2001). Financial vulnerability among Arts Organizations: A test of the Tuckman-Chang Measures. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 30(2), 376–392. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0899764001302010>

- Hager, M. A., Galaskiewicz, J., Bielefeld, W., & Pins, J. (1996). Tales from the grave: Organizations' accounts of their own demise. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 39(8). <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0002764296039008004>
- Hillburn, J. (2018). Keeping up with the urbanites: The importance of popular culture in rural libraries. *Information Today*. Retrieved November 16, 2019, from <http://newsbreaks.infoday.com/NewsBreaks/Keeping-Up-With-the-Urbanites-The-Importance-of-Popular-Culture-in-Rural-Libraries-125696.asp>
- Hirsch, S. (2019). What is rural? *Rural Health Information Hub*. Retrieved October 15, 2019, from <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/topics/what-is-rural>
- Hughes, J. (2017, June 26). Introduction to creative placemaking: How arts and culture drive economic development. Paper presented at the Delta Creative Placemaking Partnership Initiative, Paducah, KY. Retrieved October 15, 2019, from https://dra.gov/images/uploads/content_files/NEA- Jen Hughes PPT.pdf
- Institute of Museum and Library Services. (2017). Public Libraries Survey. Retrieved from <https://www.ims.gov/research-evaluation/data-collection/public-libraries-survey>
- Institute of Museum and Library Services. (n/d). Public Libraries Survey. Retrieved May 5, 2020, from <https://www.ims.gov/research-evaluation/data-collection/public-libraries-survey>
- Ivey, B. (2008). Introduction: The question of participation. In S. J. Tepper & B. Ivey (Eds.), *Engaging art: The next great transformation of America's cultural life* (pp. 1–14). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Jones, D. (2019, April 2, 2019). National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities (NTEE) Codes. Retrieved June 8, 2019, from <https://nccs.urban.org/project/national-taxonomy-exempt-entities-ntee-codes>
- Kaiser, M. (2015). *Curtains?: The future of the arts in America*. Boston: Brandeis University Press.
- Kyle, T. (2015). *Public libraries: The original community hubs*. Ontario, Canada: Ontario Library Association. Retrieved November 16, 2019, from <https://open-shelf.ca/151114-community-hubs/>
- Larson, G. O. (1983). *The reluctant patron: The United States government and the arts, 1943-1965*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Lecy, J. D., & Searing, E. A. M. (2015). Anatomy of the nonprofit starvation cycle: An analysis of falling overhead ratios in the nonprofit sector. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 44(3), 539–563. doi:10.1177/0899764014527175
- Levine Daniel, J., & Kim, M. (2020). Creative placemaking: Building partnerships to create change. *Journal of Public and Nonprofit Affairs*, 6(1), 96–110. <https://doi.org/10.20899/jpna.6.1.96-110>
- Library Systems Services. (2018). Rural libraries turning more to private sector for lifeline. *Library Systems Services*. Retrieved June 5, 2020, from <https://www.lsslibraries.com/news/rural-libraries-turning-more-private-sector-lifeline>
- Markusen, A. (2013). Artists work everywhere. *Work and Occupation*, 40(4), 481–495. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0730888413504418>

- Markusen, A., & Gadwa, A. (2010). *Creative placemaking*. Report prepared for the National Endowment for the Arts. Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts. Retrieved from <https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/CreativePlacemaking-Paper.pdf>
- Markusen, A., & Schrock, G. (2006). The artistic dividend: Urban artistic specialization and economic development implications. *Urban Studies*, 43(10), 1661–1686. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02700420980600888478>
- McCarthy, K., Ondaatje, E. H., Zakaras, L., & Brooks, A. C. (2004). Gifts of the Muse. Reframing the debate about the benefits of the arts. Santa Monica, CA: RAND. Retrieved from https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2005/RAND_MG218.pdf
- Mobley, J. S. (2018). Leading through placemaking and boundary spanning: Rural Christian higher education for the common good. *Christian Higher Education*, 17(1–2), 50–66. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15363759.2018.1404816>
- Morgan, A. U., Dupuis, R., D'Alonzo, B., Johnson, A., & Graves, A. (2016). Beyond books: Public libraries as partners for population health. *Health Affairs*, 35(11), 2030–2036. <https://doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.2016.0724>
- National Assembly of State Arts Agencies. (2017). Support for arts in rural communities. Retrieved from <http://nasaa-arts.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/RuralGrantmakingFactSheet0217.pdf>
- National Endowment for the Arts. (n.d.). *How to do creative placemaking: An action-oriented guide to arts in community development*. Retrieved June 5, 2020, from https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/How-to-do-Creative-Placemaking_Jan2017.pdf
- National Endowment for the Arts. (n.d.). *About the NEA*. Retrieved from <https://www.arts.gov/about-nea>
- Palczar, M., & Frehill, L. M. (2019). *Data file documentation: Public libraries in the United States fiscal year 2017*. Washington, DC: Institute of Museum and Library Services. Retrieved June 5, 2020, from https://www.imls.gov/sites/default/files/fy2017_pls_data_file_documentation.pdf
- Ratcliffe, M., Burd, C., Holder, K., & Fields, A. (2016). Defining rural at the U.S. Census Bureau. Washington, DC: United States Census Bureau. Retrieved from https://www2.census.gov/geo/pdfs/reference/ua/Defining_Rural.pdf
- Redaelli, E. (2018). Creative placemaking and theories of art: Analyzing place-based NEA policy in Portland, OR. *Cities*, 72, 403–410.
- Rowling, J. K. (1998). *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. New York: A. Levine Books, Scholastic.
- Settle, K. (2016). Cultural and creative enrichment: How libraries deliver. *DCMS Libraries*. Retrieved November 16, 2019, from <https://dcmslibraries.blog.gov.uk/2016/08/31/cultural-and-creative-enrichment-how-libraries-deliver/>
- Singleton, R., & Straits, B. (2009). *Approaches to social research* (5th Edition ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.

- Smallwood, C. (Ed.) (2014). *Bringing the arts into the library*. Chicago, IL: American Library Association.
- Smith, M. N., Winkler, R. L., & Johnson, K. M. (2016). How migration impacts rural America. (Brief No. 03-16). Retrieved May 1, 2020, from https://w3001.apl.wisc.edu/pdfs/b03_16.pdf
- Sowa, J. E., Selden, S. C., & Sandfort, J. (2004). No longer unmeasurable? A multidimensional integrated model of nonprofit organizational effectiveness. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 33(4), 711–728. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0899764004269146>
- Summers, S., & Buchanan, S. (2018). Public libraries as cultural hubs in disadvantages communities: Developing and fostering cultural competencies and connections. *Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy*, 88(3), 286–302. <https://doi.org/10.1086/697707>
- Svensson, P. G., Hancock, M. G., & Hums, M. A. (2017). Elements of capacity in youth development nonprofits: An exploratory study of urban sport for development and peace organizations. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 28(5), 2053–2080.
- Tamny, J. (2017). Be compassionate but never, ever pity the ‘forgotten’ rural Americans. *Forbes*. Retrieved November 17, 2019, from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/johntamny/2017/06/04/be-compassionate-but-never-ever-pity-the-forgotten-rural-americans/#336c18cebf86>
- Towse, R. (2010). *A textbook of cultural economics*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- U.S. Department of Agriculture. (2017). Rural education at a glance, 2017 edition. (Economic Information Bulletin 171, April 2017). Retrieved from <https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/83078/eib-171.pdf?v=42830>
- Urban Institute: National Center for Charitable Statistics. (1998 - 2014). Core File Public Charities. Retrieved from <https://nccs-data.urban.org>
- Vance, J. D. (2016). *Hillbilly elegy: A memoir of a family and culture in crisis*. New York: Harper.
- Washington Post. (n.d.). The federal definition of ‘rural’ - times 15. *Washington Post*. Retrieved June 10, 2020, from https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/the-federal-definition-of-rural--times-15/2013/06/08/a39e46a8-cd4a-11e2-ac03-178510c9cc0a_story.html
- Wojan, T., & Nichols, B. (2017). Rural arts, design, and innovation in America. *National Endowment for the Arts*. Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts. Retrieved from <https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/Rural%20Arts%2011-17.pdf>
- Zwagerman, J. (2017, January 24). Beyond the bread basket: Rural America has unique challenges. *Salon*. Retrieved November 15, 2019, from https://www.salon.com/2017/01/24/beyond-the-breadbasket-rural-america-has-unique-challenges_partner/