

# Exploring Connections Between Non-Arts Social Capital and Arts Organization Vitality

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper explores connections between arts and cultural institutions and other civic organizations by examining how the presence of civic organizations in a community is related to revenue and attendance among various genres of arts and culture. Numerous researchers have explored the connections between social capital and arts & culture. Our aim is to supplement the extant literature by exploring the connections between arts and culture institutions and local civic organizations. We also gained context and perspective on our findings by interviewing arts practitioners, exploring their reactions to the data. Data sets employed include data from the Cultural Data Project (now known as DataArts) drawn from organizations in New York State, as well as social capital data and variables developed by Anil Rupasingha and Stephan J. Goetz (Rupasingha and Goetz 2008).

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**Key Words:** Arts Vitality, Social Capital, Bridging, Revenue, Audience Building

## Introduction and Literature Review

Numerous researchers have explored the connections between social capital and arts & culture. Previous explorations include outcomes and social capital indicators arising from participation in the arts (Lee 2013, 7); the relationship between the arts and community development (Mattern 2001, 301); the concept of “musicking” as a way to foster the development of social capital (Jones 2010, 291); and the idea that the arts build and nurture social capital through “bridging” and “bonding” activities (Putnam 2000, 2).

Our research aim is to supplement the extant literature by exploring the connections between arts and culture institutions and local civic organizations. Specifically: are there connections between measures of non-arts social capital and the vitality of arts organizations? This vitality is measured, for our purposes, by analyzing attendance and revenue figures.

## Research Question

This project investigates the consequences of different types of social capital for civic life in the arts community, and the financial return on investment of fostering a strong relationship between the arts community and other local civic organizations. Specifically, we examine how measures of social capital are correlated with the sustainability of a broad spectrum of arts organizations, as evidenced through revenue and attendance data. The arts sector is often a contributing factor to the overall health and vitality of a community (as outlined in multiple economic impact studies, both locally and nationally), but little is known about the various types of social capital that correlate with the multiple genres of the visual and performing arts. In this project, we determine how the factors above correlate with the performance of arts organizations, measured through analysis of attendance and revenue figures.

## Why is this Important?

The arts industry continues to struggle financially – in 2013, forty-two percent of arts nonprofits failed to generate positive net income (National Arts Index 2016). Organizations that are able to identify existing networks of social capital can potentially tap into them and use them as “bridging capital” (Putnam 2000) to acquire new patrons and bolster their individual philanthropy. By reaching out to previously untapped potential audiences such organizations are more likely to build a sustainable model for survival and growth.

## Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Arts and culture organizations in counties with higher social capital scores will report higher revenues.

Hypothesis 2: Arts and culture organizations in counties with higher social capital scores will report higher attendance.

## Method

This is a statewide research project involving all counties within New York State and all Cultural Data Project (CDP) data available in those counties. Many of the ideas and concepts behind this research are derived from our work with arts and culture organizations in Central New York through the [www.CNYvitals.org](http://www.CNYvitals.org) project and the IDEAS collaborative (a multi-funder approach to fostering engagement and collaboration between the community and arts, culture and heritage organizations). We used geographic identifiers in the CDP data to pair it with county level variables pertaining to social capital. These social capital variables (listed below) were developed by Anil Rupasingha and Stephan J. Goetz (Rupasingha and Goetz 2008).

We use ordinary least squares (OLS) regression to examine the relationship between county level social capital measures and arts organization revenue and attendance. OLS, also referred to as linear least squares, is a statistical approach to estimating the relationship between two or more variables. It does so by plotting a line that depicts how a change in an independent variable (such as bowling centers, business associations or civic and social associations) is related to a change in dependent variables (such as

nonprofit revenue or attendance). We use this approach below to examine the relationship between each of the social capital variables and the dependent variables (i.e. revenue and attendance).

## FINDINGS

### Social Capital and Revenue

In order to determine whether there is a correlation between social capital indicators and the revenue of arts organizations, we analyzed CDP revenue data alongside social capital data (Rupasingha and Goetz 2008).

Abbreviations:

- NISP: Categories of arts and culture as identified by the National Standard for Arts Information Exchange Project, established by the National Endowment for the Arts and National Assembly of State Arts Agencies.
- Social Capital indicators:
  - bowl: Bowling centers
  - bus: Business associations
  - civic : Civic and social associations
  - fitns: Physical fitness facilities
  - golf: Public golf courses
  - labor: Labor organizations
  - nccs: Not-for-profit organizations
  - pol: Political organizations
  - prof: Professional organizations
  - relig: Religious organizations
  - sport: Sports clubs, managers and promoters

Figure 1 shows the coefficients for Ordinary Least Squared regression models predicting nonprofit arts and culture organization revenues. A separate regression model was run with each pairing of NISP area and social capital area. In each of these models, we controlled for both year and population size. Below, we present only coefficients that were statistically significant at the  $p < .05$  level.

The direction of each relationship is described using a coefficient (also called a Beta). If this coefficient is positive, then the relationship is a direct or positive relationship such that, as the independent variable increases, so does the dependent variable. For instance, this is the case for the relationship between Business associations and revenue among dance organizations. The reported coefficient of \$9,124.08 is a positive value indicating a positive relationship such that as the number of Business associations increases, so does the dependent variable of revenue. Furthermore, we can tell that, on average, for every unit increase in Business associations in a county, the average amount of annual revenue (for dance organizations) increases by \$9,124.08.

If a coefficient is negative, the relationship is such that as the independent variable increases, the value of the dependent variable decreases. We can see this in the case of folk life/traditional arts organizations, in which the coefficient for the relationship between Public golf courses and revenue is \$8,402.26. In this case, since the coefficient is negative, we know that, as the number of Public golf courses increases, average revenue for folk life/traditional arts organizations decreases. Furthermore, we can see that, for every one unit increase in Public golf courses, the average revenue for folk life/traditional arts organizations declines by an average of \$8,402.26.

**Figure 1**

NISP	bowl05	bus05	civic05	fitns05	golf05	labor05	nccs05	pol05	prof05	relig05	sport05
Dance		\$ 9,124.08	\$ 8,110.42	\$ 7,109.55	\$ (44,261.26)	\$ 9,783.40	\$ 124.90	\$ 36,747.90	\$ 23,552.88	\$ 9,461.09	\$ 271,059.90
Design Arts										\$ 5,363.99	
Folklife/Traditional Arts		\$ 1,766.61	\$ 1,487.53	\$ 1,092.32	\$ (8,402.26)	\$ 1,645.03		\$ 7,274.51	\$ 4,638.16		\$ 44,770.79
Humanities storytelling		\$10,224.81	\$ 9,160.98	\$ 8,054.73		\$ 11,299.28	\$ 134.30	\$ 40,802.84	\$ 26,201.40	\$ 5,691.26	\$ 269,225.80
Interdisciplinary	\$ (104,819.70)										\$ (13,892.14)
Literature	\$ 7,843.90	\$ 2,965.38	\$ 2,645.52	\$ 2,330.90		\$ 3,186.81	\$ 41.44	\$ 11,826.60	\$ 7,596.56	\$ 2,985.31	\$ 86,154.45
Multidisciplinary	\$ 64,415.46	\$24,960.88	\$21,630.32	\$ 20,445.73		\$ 26,562.76	\$ 344.23	\$100,333.50	\$ 65,969.72	\$ 20,082.20	\$ 757,248.10
Music		\$11,314.38	\$ 9,971.60	\$ 8,863.84		\$ 12,192.98	\$ 152.42	\$ 45,677.42	\$ 29,156.42	\$ 9,540.38	\$ 307,049.70
Non-Arts/Non-Humanities				\$ (40,398.35)	\$ (278,427.80)	\$ (50,900.04)		\$ (96,825.21)		\$ (68,999.84)	\$ (1,238,578.00)
Photography										\$ 11,634.20	
Theatre		\$ 9,770.26	\$ 8,635.04	\$ 7,715.55		\$ 10,578.94	\$ 130.84	\$ 78,739.38	\$ 25,184.50	\$ 9,056.89	\$ 281,282.10
Visual Arts		\$56,862.44	\$50,304.23	\$ 43,583.68	\$ (141,128.30)	\$ 61,272.03	\$ 755.05	\$460,625.20	\$146,779.92	\$ 45,486.30	\$ 1,542,255.00

As indicated in Figure 1, Bowling and Golf are the least related to arts organization revenues. For example, the number of golf organizations is negatively correlated to revenue for the few arts NISP areas to which it is related. Business associations, Civic and social associations, Not-for-profit organizations and Professional organizations are the only types of organizations not negatively related to revenue for any of the NISP areas.

Reading this chart as an arts organization, we see that there is correlation (and thus potential for alignment and strategic collaboration) with organizations in the social capital areas in which the coefficient is positive.

For instance, Dance is correlated with business associations, civic and social associations, physical fitness facilities, labor organizations, political organizations, professional organizations, religious organizations and sports clubs, managers and promoters. It appears that the strongest potential is among sports groups, followed by political groups and then professional organizations. For design arts, the strongest correlation appears to be religious organizations.

In Figure 2, we perform the same analysis, but with a dependent variable of attendance, rather than revenue. Again, in each of these models we controlled for both year and population size. Below we present only coefficients that were statistically significant at the  $p < .05$  level.

**Figure 2**

NISP	bus05	civic05	fitns05	golf05	labor05	nccs05	pol05	prof05	relig05	sport05
Humanities storytelling	2,243.66	1,950.30	1,588.82		2,353.28	30.22	8,992.17	2,889.39	1,199.65	54,091.89
Multidisciplinary	1,025.01	895.63	754.61		1,086.18	13.66	4,159.46	1,327.26	775.89	27,481.35
Music	429.65	377.67	330.00		460.95	5.81	1,737.64	557.70		11,709.14
Non-Arts/Non-Humanities	(1,653.12)	(1,418.67)	(1,512.50)	(4,174.63)	(1,957.28)	(21.25)	(6,462.81)	(2,135.05)	(1,391.49)	(47,907.54)
Photography				16,813.90						
Theatre	210.37	186.25	166.01		228.33	2.82	846.07	271.09	199.55	6,083.75
Visual Arts	1,480.02	1,313.05	1,132.42		1,602.85	19.63	5,993.87	1,911.11	1,205.86	40,324.33

In Figure 2, we find that communities with more religious organizations have higher average attendance among visual arts, theater, storytelling, and multidisciplinary not-for-profits. Such communities also boast higher average revenue among dance, design arts, humanities storytelling, literature, multidisciplinary, music, theater, and visual arts not-for-profits.

On the other hand, we find that communities with more public golf courses only exhibit higher average attendance among photography not-for-profits. Such communities also exhibit lower average revenue among dance, folk/traditional arts and visual arts not-for-profits, and the existence of public golf courses is not positively correlated with the revenue of any arts and culture genres.

### Context from Practitioners

In order to contextualize our findings, our research team conducted interviews with two arts and culture leaders with broad and varied experiences producing, presenting, and advocating for the arts. The interviewees were identified through consultation with CNY Arts, the arts council serving a six-county region in New York State ([www.cnyarts.org](http://www.cnyarts.org)).

These two individuals (Elizabeth Dunabar and John Shaffer) were chosen as interviewees due to their extensive and varied backgrounds in multiple genres of the visual and performing arts, and thus constitute a purposive sample of arts management practitioners.

Though much of her career has consisted of curatorial posts, Dunabar has also served as chief executive of multiple museums (including her current post as President and CEO of the Everson Museum of Art in Syracuse, NY), enabling her to speak to both the artistic and administrative aspects of the field.

During his career in arts administration, John Shaffer has managed performing arts venues and worked as a policy & planning specialist at the National Endowment for the Arts. He currently oversees ARTSwego, which presents visual and performing arts on a College campus in Oswego, NY, and his varied experiences in arts presenting and cultural policy offer an important perspective on our project.

Following a period of review of our findings, the interviewees were asked a series of structured questions, generally covering three topics: connections between our findings and their practical experience in the field of arts administration; perceived limitations of the findings; and suggestions for future research. We also inquired with the two interviewees about their organization’s involvement in submitting data to the Cultural Data Project (now known as DataArts), which is one of the data sets utilized for this research.

***Cultural Data Project:***

Both interviewees have experience with the Cultural Data Project (now known as DataArts), however, according to John Shaffer, ARTSwego could not justify the necessary investment of time involved in data collection and submission for the potential return. Also, because they are affiliated with a state university, ARTSwego is not eligible for funding from the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA), which had historically required those applying to participate in the Cultural Data Project (CDP). Elizabeth Dunbar indicated that the Everson Museum of Art has participated in the CDP in order to be eligible for grants from various foundations, including the Central New York Community Foundation (CNYCF). However, it should be noted that, as of the Fall of 2015, CNYCF (along with NYSCA and a number of local foundations) no longer requires organizations to complete the CDP process in order to be eligible for grants.

***Connections to Practical Experience:***

Elizabeth Dunbar, President and CEO of the Everson Museum of Art in Syracuse, NY observed that, in her experience, tourism and travel are major indicators of attendance and revenue for visual art institutions – especially when sports teams are involved. She also commented that this type of data, which highlights connections between non-arts civic organizations and arts organizations, could underscore the need for additional coordination between organizations, especially when it comes to scheduling and programming. In 2016, Syracuse will host the American Hockey League’s (AHL) All-Star Classic. The Syracuse Crunch, a professional team in the AHL, play directly across the street from the Everson, and Dunbar feels that the strong correlation between the arts and sports may prompt her to initiate a conversation around a partnership with the hockey team (Dunbar Interview).

The Everson Museum also recently engaged in a partnership with the 2015 convention of the American Quilter’s Society. Called “Bricks and Blocks,” the museum exhibit invited quilters to submit their works to be exhibited alongside entries to the museum’s 2015 LEGO Design Challenge (Johnson 2015). The museum encouraged quilters to connect their work to the geometry of LEGOs, and according to Dunbar, the program successfully converted convention attendees into museum-goers (Dunbar Interview).

John Shaffer is Director of Arts Programming at ARTSwego, the presenting organization housed within the State University of New York at Oswego. Regarding our findings, Shaffer indicated that he sees reflections of the overall rise and fall of the economy within the data. In terms of practical application, he commented that the approach of this project is generally the opposite of what he is accustomed to doing as head of an arts presenting organization. His general approach is to demonstrate the value of a vital arts and culture scene to other non-arts organizations and groups, rather than analyzing how non-arts social capital indicators impact arts organizations’ sustainability. According to Shaffer this “habit of mind” is due to the fact that his organization is frequently in a position of needing to justify their value to various stakeholders and decision-makers (Shaffer Interview).

During the 2014-2015 season, ARTSwego presented the majority of their programming in venues off campus due to the renovation of the Waterman Theater on the campus of SUNY Oswego. Performances occurred in Fort Ontario (a state historic site), a local church (St. Mary’s Church), and in a circus tent

(featuring Vague de Cirque). Shaffer believes that this forced exodus from the campus led to fruitful new partnerships with many non-arts organizations in the community and also further embedded the series into the community. “This period of time required ARTSwego to meet people where they are,” said Shaffer. He went on to state that in order to generate meaningful connections in the community, “arts organizations need to break out of the isolated contexts within which we have presented the arts.” (Shaffer Interview).

***Perceived Limitations of Findings:***

Part of our objective in speaking with practitioners was also to gain perspective about their perceptions of the limitations of our research. Both interviewees had thoughts about aggregate county-level data being used in the study. In the case of John Shaffer, he feels that Oswego, as a community, is not necessarily representative of the rest of the state in that the region has experienced a sharper decline in support for the arts over the past twenty years than many other communities in New York State. In his view, more localized data would lead to more utility for his organization, while aggregated data is less relevant (Shaffer Interview).

Elizabeth Dunbar’s reaction to this line of questions centered around the “large swath” of data, which also includes data from arts and culture organizations in New York City, which she feels is not indicative or representative of the rest of the state. In her view, excluding New York City from the data “would be more useful to us” (Dunbar Interview).

***Suggestions for Further Research:***

When asked for input regarding suggestions for further exploration and research, Dunbar suggested that it would be useful to know how non-arts businesses and organizations are also impacted by the addition of new sources of social capital to the community. Examples she provided included hotels, restaurants and retail. Also, though the data does include sports organizations, she is curious as to whether a team’s success (i.e. number of wins) plays a role in the sports organization’s correlation to arts sustainability (Dunbar Interview).

John Shaffer approached this line of questions from a pragmatic point of view, indicating that it would be more helpful for arts organizations to be able to demonstrate, with data, the impact of their programming and activities on the larger, non-arts community. This type of study would enable his organization to continue to advocate to community leaders about the value of a vibrant arts ecosystem in the community (Shaffer Interview).

**Discussion**

The concept of social capital has to do with the benefits (both economic and non-economic) derived from cooperation between individuals and groups; in other words, it suggests that "social networks have value." Specifically, we do not know which social networks have how much value and in what domains. Here we are looking for value in terms of patronizing arts and culture organizations (attendance) and helping to maintain their financial sustainability (revenue).

What types of social capital might have these sorts of values, and for which “types” of arts and culture organizations? Here it is important to differentiate between bridging and bonding social capital (Putnam 2000). Bonding refers to ties within groups (homogeneous groups of people) that hold them together and strengthen their relationships. We suspect that these are the donors and patrons that Arts and Culture groups have historically tapped into because they are “like us” and perhaps already “run in the same circles.” Our research is focused on the second form of social capital, bridging, because we conceptualize this as more empirically interesting and perhaps more important. Bridging tends to occur among more heterogeneous groups when they branch out across the silos or social niches that tend to separate them (Putnam 2000). We see this as a key area for audience development and the basic building of a strong and diversified “civic muscle.” Fukuyama (2002), for instance, has asserted that bridging social capital is essential because it involves creating a broader “radius of trust” that is needed to make connections across a diversity of borders/social boundaries, and that serves as a basis for strong organizations (Saxena 2011).

### **Conclusion**

Community engagement, as defined by Doug Borwick in “Building Communities, Not Audiences,” is “a process whereby institutions enter into mutually beneficial relationships with other organizations, informal community groups, or individuals.” (Borwick 2012, 14).

The data that we have presented in this paper is presented in the spirit of encouraging this type of relationship building between arts organizations and non-arts civic and community groups (also known as “bridging” social capital). Borwick later posits that social capital created as a result of arts activities can be extremely valuable in opening up a dialogue between disparate groups (Borwick 2012, 81).

This data could be instructive not only for building inter-organizational relationships, but also in connecting individuals within various organizations to each other. As John Shaffer indicated, arts organizations are often under pressure to justify their value to community stakeholders. Time is a precious resource within arts organizations, and these findings could help arts organizations first identify non-arts organizations with whom they have an affinity, and then investigate those organizations to identify individuals who may already overlap with their patron or customer base as a means to connect the two organizations.

The concept of word of mouth as a means to connect with and engage customers and the concept of increasing value perceptions among individuals have been explored in the literature (Vivek 2012), and these types of grassroots efforts (on an individual level) could be effective ways to connect previously disparate organizations.

Our exploration of this data is not meant to suggest that a dance organization couldn't (or wouldn't) benefit from a collaboration with a golf course; or that if a music organization partners with a sports team they will be guaranteed a return on their investment. What we are suggesting is that certain types of arts organizations are correlated with non-arts civic organizations, and that these correlations could be helpful when arts organizations are determining which community partnerships may be mutually beneficial.



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