

## **The Economic Impact of the Arts in Northfield**

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Kayla Peterson, Matthew Venker, Matthew Wojick

### **ABSTRACT:**

In this paper we investigate the economic impact of the arts in Northfield focusing on artists, business owners, consumers of art, and art organizations. Through interviews, surveys, and participant observation, we have determined that Northfield has a strong connection to the arts and the arts have a significant impact on the economy, though often indirectly. In addition, the town has the infrastructure needed to grow the arts and has many organizations focused on this task. We also discovered information on the strengths and weaknesses of the arts sector in Northfield and how this affects the viability of arts and cultural industries.

### **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:**

The arts have an important place in the Northfield community, are highly valued, and are increasingly becoming a focus for future development.

Our research consisted of 26 interviews, questionnaires given to 366 attendees at nine art events in Northfield, and participant observation at various arts events.

All of our interviewees believed that the arts have an important economic impact on the city as an integral part to the character and a vital addition to the matrix of local businesses.

Northfield's geographic and demographic makeup places it in a unique position to benefit economically from its reputation as an arts town.

Arts create an environment in which people want to live - in this sense they are crucial quality of life factors that encourage an economically competitive populace.

Arts effectively draw people into the downtown area and the individuals attending arts events become potential customers as soon as they set foot downtown.

There are discrepancies between the economic feasibility of various art forms. Many

interviewees spoke of art sales in a manner that reflected a consumer preference towards low-end arts or home décor.

Northfield's arts add to the economic climate of the town through entrepreneurship both in the forms of artists engaging in independent enterprises and in the entrepreneurial skills that can be learned through the arts.

In Northfield, visual arts are continually emphasized and celebrated, perhaps at the expense of other art forms.

There are over 160 self-identified visual artists, in addition to unknown numbers of actors, dancers, and writers in Northfield. Those artists we spoke with believe that a greater investment in the arts by the Northfield City Government would increase the economic impact of the arts in the city.

The financial burden of performing or displaying art is largely placed on those involved in the production instead of being financed through ticket sales or free will donations.

The collaboration - and sometimes lack thereof - between different sectors of the Northfield arts scene reveals a particular ecology of cultural consumption in that there is a disconnect between where art is made and where art is sold.

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**SETTING:**

Northfield, Minnesota is a small community thirty-five miles south of Minneapolis/St. Paul and is home to over 17,000 residents (“About” 2011). Founded in 1855, the city has a rich history and today remains “a vibrant, 19th-century river town with a blend of stunning characteristics and opportunities.”

From the very beginning, the city’s location on the Cannon River Valley has been essential to its character and economic success. John Wesley North, the founder of Northfield chose to settle the land in 1855 because of the availability of natural resources and its convenient location (“Visiting Northfield: History”). North built a dam, sawmill, and gristmill (“About” 2011) but during the financial panic of 1857 was forced to sell these to Charles Wheaton who later sold them to Jesse Ames and Sons. The mill grew successfully, winning the award for best flour in the United States at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia in 1876, but in 1927 the mill was sold to L.G. Campbell, producer of Malt-O-Meal (“Visiting Northfield: History”). Malt-O-Meal is still operating in Northfield today and remains the largest employer (“About” 2011).

Education has also played an important part in the development of the town and is a central

part of the town's identity today. The first public school was founded only one year after North founded Northfield and the first graduating class matriculated in 1866 ("Visiting Northfield: History"). During that same year, Northfield College was chartered by the General Congregation Conference of Minnesota. During the early 1870s, the school was renamed Carleton College and moved to a new building, Willis Hall, which was donated by William Carleton ("Our History" 2008). In 1874, St. Olaf's school was established across the river. Founded by Norwegian immigrants, the school was founded in connection with the Lutheran Church and was initially an academy. In 1889 the school formally became a college ("The History and Heritage of St. Olaf" 2011) and now has over 3,000 students ("Visiting Northfield: History").

Although Northfield's connection to the arts can be traced back to 1800 when Ann North "carted a piano across the frozen Cannon River" ("Community Guide to Northfield and Surrounding Area" 2011) the arts were officially recognized as a major force in the town with the founding of the Northfield Arts Guild (NAG) in 1959. The NAG was not only the first non-profit in Northfield, it was one of the first in the state of Minnesota. The organization has grown significantly and now has "two buildings that host classes, productions, and exhibits" ("About the Guild" 2004). Nonetheless, the center's focus on community remains strong, and the guild maintains a downtown storefront where artists can show and sell their work. In addition, there are numerous art galleries in town and many recent organizations have increased the presence of the arts in Northfield.

In 2004, a new arts organization, ArtOrg, was established in Northfield. After a failed collaboration effort with the NAG, ArtOrg was created as a separate for-profit organization that seeks to "be an energized and inclusive arts-based organization focused on engaging the community in the visual arts through education, business partnerships, and exciting contemporary art venues" ("People and Mission" 2011).

In November 2006, a group of Northfield volunteers created and executed a study on the arts in Northfield titled "Arts Plan06: A Strategic Vision for the Arts and Culture in Northfield"

("ArtsPlan06" 2006). This study suggested the development of an Arts & Cultural collaborative organization, which took the form of the Arts and Cultural Commission (ACC), a committee of the Northfield city council. The arts received symbolic political recognition with the creation of the Arts & Cultural Commission in 2007 with the addition of a staff liaison to the council.

In 2008, the Riverwalk Arts Quarter (RAQ), a non-profit arts organization dedicated to helping artists market their art, was created with a Town Meeting Initiative Grant given by the Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation (SMIF). RAQ applied for and received a grant from SMIF in 2009 to create Northfield's Riverwalk Market Fair (RMF). The goal of RMF, as described in the grant renewal proposal, is to "create a unique, upscale, collaborative open air market in the heart of downtown Northfield" (Kjerland 2011:1). Kjerland reported that in the 2010 inaugural season of RMF "total sales were about \$120,000. Very successful from our point of view."

With the addition of influential organizations in Northfield and increased awareness of the large number of artists in town, Northfield residents and those from surrounding regions have begun to recognize Northfield as an "Arts Town" among its other identities. As the city looks towards expanding, these ties provide some of the inspiration for new directions and initiatives.

## **METHODOLOGY:**

In order to uncover the various economic impacts of the arts in Northfield, we decided to focus on four groups that make up the Northfield arts community: artists, participants, promoters of the arts, and art organizations. Our interactions with each of these groups consisted of 26 interviews, participant observation, and questionnaires given out to 366 attendees of nine arts events in Northfield. Throughout our research, we have worked with Phillip Spensley, the chair of the ACC and our community partner for the project. Given his long history as a playwright and activist for the arts in Northfield and other cities, we derived many of our questions and research

methods from his prior experience.

For the artist group, we began by emailing different artistic communities via lists kept at the NAG. After mailing out the first round of information statements, it became clear that there is a strong visual arts community in Northfield. A lack of responses from non-visual artists spurred us to email the project information statement to Libby Glimsdal in the hopes that we would receive a heartier response from other artistic communities. Interviewed subjects were also asked for recommendations of other potential artists in the community.

Interviews with the artists lasted between thirty minutes and an hour, focusing on the work done by these artists, income received from selling art and/or grants, the perceived general benefit of arts to the community, and suggestions for improving the allocation of funds to the arts sector in Northfield. This method also allowed us to see some participants in their studios, bringing another layer of understanding of Northfield's artists. Our sample consisted mainly of female visual artists; due to a lack of information on the gender ratio and non-visual artists (no compiled list) we are unable to say whether this accurately represents the community of artists in Northfield. It is possible that there are more female visual artists than any other demographic.

To study participants of arts events, we attended events in Northfield ranging from musical performances to slam poetry readings. We gathered information about events through a range of sources including the Northfield Entertainment Guide magazine, online community blogs, posters, and the Carleton/St. Olaf websites. Through these media, we purposefully chose a wide variety of events to encounter different groups of people within Northfield. Our categories of interest were visual arts, dance, choir, orchestra, band, local musical performances, theater, and literary arts; we chose varying locations including Carleton, St. Olaf, NAG, local churches, and restaurants.

We passed out questionnaires inquiring as to where people were coming from for the event, their reasons for attending events in Northfield, and purchases made while in the city. These questionnaires provided many diverse responses, which allowed semi-quantitative (regarding out-

of-town versus local residence) as well as qualitative analysis. On the other hand, the questionnaires were not very useful in obtaining the exact information we were hoping to gather. This brought us to the conclusion that we should change our questionnaire to elicit more specific responses. The change in questionnaires varied the data we obtained per event. Because the questionnaires were limited to individuals over the age of 18, they are not a representative sample of the people who attended each event.

In regards to the promoters of arts in Northfield, the bulk of data was obtained through interviews with those determined to have an economic stake in the arts. A few examples of the determined “promoters” included: art supplies business owners; owners/managers of restaurants hosting open mic nights or the sale of art within their stores; businesses running arts classes; etc. These businesses were also generally conducive to participant-observation, and notes about layout, customers, prices, etc., are taken into consideration as well. These business spaces and events are promising avenues for artists to represent themselves and their art as they provide an easy atmosphere to publicly show art to a large audience. In our interviews we asked promoters a variety of questions that related to their economic impacts on the city and greater community, the observations promoters have made about the demographics of their customer base, and how they utilize arts and creative thinking to promote both their business and the businesses of others in Northfield.

The strengths of our interview format allowed us to gather the opinions and observations of those who have been engaged as arts entrepreneurs for an extended period of time. They have access to a wealth of knowledge about the economic capacity of the arts that we, as researchers, do not personally know outside of our relation to them. As opposed to basing our understanding of the financial impact of the arts solely on economic data, interviews allow us to gain an understanding of how the arts exist in an ecology of cultural consumption. That is, we gained a better impression of the way arts operate as an advertising medium, as a factor influencing local pride and consumption,

and as an intellectual asset to business peoples.

Interviews were open-ended, encouraging participants to speak freely, touching upon topics that might have been overlooked in our questions. For instance, topics such as the impact of the nearby Twin Cities or the role of art classes hosted by certain businesses at bringing people into town had not been considered when initially planning interview topics and questions, but the open-ended format of the interviews allowed such ideas to come to the forefront of our discussions. Though the interviews were informative, it was difficult to gain conclusive and all-encompassing figures on how the arts impact business earnings. We cannot say business A earned \$xx,xxx during an open mic night; without the open mic they only would've made \$x,xxx. We were only able to gather the opinions and observations of promoters about how their business was influenced by the arts.

In consideration of art organizations, we approached several community leaders from influential organizations that support the overall arts structure in Northfield (grant writers, advertising, tourism, etc.). These interviews were an important framework for understanding leadership of the arts in Northfield. We conducted six interviews of people in leadership positions, which limited our understanding of other players in these organizations.

Separating the arts of Northfield into these groups both enabled and limited this study. Many of the people involved in the arts in Northfield fit multiple profiles, and are hard to sort into one of these categories, or do not fit this profile at all. It is possible that some people involved in the arts have been overlooked in this study, but the variety of interviewees and participants in events gives a snapshot of Northfield's arts sector, especially its most visible participants.

## **PROBLEM:**

As previously described in "Methodology," the focus of our research was not arbitrarily chosen by the research team. Rather, our problem grew out of a specific proposition from our

community partner, Philip Spensley. Recent studies on the impact of the arts on Minnesota's economy statewide and smaller-scale studies of how the arts function in regional economies served as models for the sorts of questions we asked in our own study of Northfield's art economy.

The original set of questions we set out to answer included: "What economic benefits does art provide for the town of Northfield?"; "Do people view art as a market commodity or is it seen as something that has value beyond its economic impact?"; and "How can the Northfield City Council create, edit, and implement policies to encourage the growth of the arts in the city?"

Each of the sub-groups involved in the study also had its own set of specific problems, which helped us to answer the larger questions. For art promoters, we began by asking how arts events draw the citizenry of Northfield and surrounding areas to come to the business district and how the arts and creative industries play a role in business advertising and creating appealing store layouts. As the interviews progressed, new questions arose as to how art develops pride and value for "the local" which translates into economic impact on Northfield business owners over "big box" alternatives.

The set of questions best suited for participants inquired after the demographic of people attending Northfield arts events. We originally had a stronger focus on determining the economic impact of out-of-town visitors attending arts events. However, after conferring with Spensley, we revised our problem to include both locals and out-of-town visitors.

Spensley and several studies emphasized the role of nonprofit arts organizations in an arts economy. We were interested in how artists are affected by institutional support, how effective organizations in Northfield are at reaching artists and helping them meet their goals, and how they make arts more available to people in the town and region. After the first few artist interviews were completed, we added a question about how to improve the communication between arts organizations and the other sub-groups of our study.

Before we began the interview process, we conducted a literature review to see what

information already existed on these subjects. Our literature review thus guided what questions would be asked to gain Northfield-specific information on already-researched topics and to explore new areas of the economic impact of the arts. Below are summaries of each source used in the foundation of our study and construction of the theoretical framework that shaped our findings.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW:**

#### *Arts and Economic Prosperity III: The Economic Impact of Nonprofit Arts and Culture Organizations and Their Audiences*

This collection of data from 25 cities, compiled by the Americans for the Arts, found a marked difference between the economic impact of local and non-local audiences in which “nonlocal audiences spend twice as much as their local counterparts (\$40.19 vs. \$19.53)” (2007:1). We approached our research with the assumption that this would hold true in Northfield. Consequently, we structured our participant surveys to designate between local and out-of-town participants.

The report further explains how economic analyses have tracked the path of money through a community as it is spent multiple times, which is a concept important to our research of how the arts in Northfield are a substantial part of the economy. For example, the money from one purchase can cause a ripple effect:

“A theater company purchases a gallon of paint from the local hardware store for \$20, generating the direct economic impact of the expenditure. The hardware store then uses a portion of the aforementioned \$20 to pay the sales clerk’s salary; the sales clerk re-spends some of the money for groceries; the grocery store uses some of the money to pay its cashier; the cashier then spends some for the utility bill; and so on. The subsequent rounds of spending are the indirect economic impacts” (Americans for the Arts 2007:8).

Because our study is qualitative rather than quantitative, we could not collect such

data for Northfield. Still, the general concept of money circulating in Northfield as the result of the arts will be addressed in our findings.

### *The Arts: A Driving Force in Minnesota's Economy*

In 2006, the Minnesota Citizens for the Arts and the Forum of Regional Arts Councils of Minnesota collaboratively published a report on the economic importance of the arts in the state. The authors of the report largely describe the benefits for government, so it is an important framework for the recommendations to the Northfield City Council that will be made in a later stage of this project.

Minnesota's main forms of investment in the arts are grants provided by the Minnesota State Arts Board and Regional Arts Councils, and "there is return on investment to the state of nearly \$11 for every state dollar invested" (2006:i). Beyond this significant return on investment in the arts, arts organizations across the state stimulate the economy by paying employees, purchasing supplies, and contracting other services. This stimulation comes back to the state because the created jobs produce income that can be taxed.

### *The Economic Importance of the Arts*

Studies on the economic importance of the arts and cultural sectors have divulged important information relating to their direct impacts on local, regional, and national economies. Direct spending on the arts leads to spending in other sectors of the economy which in turn enhances wealth and job creation, making cities more attractive to citizens and prospective businesses and companies (Reeves, 2002). Cultural industries have proven to make an effective contribution to the economy as sources of innovation, originality, creativity, and problem solving due to their reputation for having a highly educated workforce. The arts and cultural industries are significant non-standard employers that provide work for a large portion of the self-employed and

temporary job workforce.

### *The Forms of Capital*

Bourdieu's "The Forms of Capital" was one of the most influential anthropological theories in assessing the economic impact of the arts in Northfield. In his classic article, Bourdieu identifies capital as "accumulated labor...which, when appropriated on a private, i.e., exclusive, basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor." Capital, in turn, can be broken down into economic capital, which is "directly convertible into money;" cultural capital, which under certain conditions may be convertible into economic capital; and social capital, or "social obligations" which could convert into economic capital (Bourdieu 1986:242).

Economic capital, then, enjoys the highest position in a hierarchy of capitals. Bourdieu explains how capitalism brought it there:

"By reducing the universe of exchanges to mercantile exchange, which is objectively and subjectively oriented toward the maximization of profit, i.e., (economically) *self-interested*, it has implicitly defined the other forms of exchange as noneconomic, and therefore *disinterested*" (1986:241).

In this explanation, Bourdieu provides a reason why the arts are not traditionally seen as being economically important: many artists do not intend to maximize a profit. However, as we have seen with cases in Northfield, artists do market their work for profit.

### *Measuring the Economic Impact of Arts Projects and Programs*

The arts and cultural industries represent a seemingly small, yet significant, portion of local, regional, and national GDP levels. Studies have revealed some of the most appropriate and or

feasible methods for obtaining the information needed to measure the economic impact of the arts. Several areas in which information can be drawn from include, but are not limited to, total employment (jobs), aggregate personal income, value added (GDP-regional), business output, and property values associated with art production/consumption (Weisbrod 1997). This study also reveals two selection types of appropriate measuring methods such as public information studies and cost/benefit analysis.

### *The Artistic Dividend*

Markusen and King propose the idea of an “artistic dividend,” or the measurement of the incidence of artists in a regional workforce. Amenities, quality of life, and an active and nurturing arts community are all key ingredients in attracting and retaining artists. The resulting artistic dividend provides an income stream in the present and future with returns on investments.

This literature also provided delineation between artist and non-artist. We overcame the issue of where to draw the line by using the same occupational approach as Markusen and King, in which those who “self-identify as artists” can be included in the study. In a regional economy, the artistic talent of these self-identified artists attracts new businesses and “enables businesses in the region to design their products better, enhance working conditions and employee morale, and market their output more successfully” (Markusen and King 2003:6, 17).

### *Cultural Values Do Relate to Consumer Behavior*

Walter Henry has conducted research on the causal relationship between cultural values and consumer choices for marketing purposes (1976). Inspired by an anthropological reflection on the relationship between cultural background and consumption habits, Henry strives to find a statistically significant relationship between socio-economic backgrounds, cultural values, and the resulting consumer choices for American purchasing habits. He concludes by suggesting that cultural values can be used to project consumption patterns.

### *Economics and Culture*

Our discussion of those identified as promoters of the arts in Northfield makes use of Bourdieu's ideas of embodied cultural capital, especially as redefined by the cultural economist David Throsby (2001). Throsby's take on Bourdieu's original ideas is especially helpful for our topic because it aims to bridge the perceived gap between economics and culture by presenting culture in economic terms. Throsby defines culture as "the ways in which [a] group's identity and values might shape individuals' preference patterns, and hence their economic behaviour" (63). He asserts that culture is an economic asset just as any other:

"cultural capital in an economic sense can provide a means of representing culture which enables both tangible and intangible manifestations of culture to be articulated as long-lasting stores of value and providers of benefits for individuals and groups" (44).

Just like any other economic asset, the value and potential of cultural products, whether tangible (i.e., buildings, paintings, or artwork) or intangible (i.e., ideas, values, or beliefs), can decay or increase through neglect or investment (58). Further, his work defines the idea of "cultural ecology," which argues that neither cultural nor economic activity take place independently, but are continuously informing and affecting individual behaviors and choices in relationship to each other (58). Throsby's work additionally suggests that creative ideas ripple out into cultural industries, increasing economic competitiveness by integrating wider ranges of input into the production of a more diverse array products. Traditionally defined creative arts are at the center of this economic ripple effect, reaching out even into industries considered to be "non-arts" (112).

### *From Economy To Ecology*

Gollmitzer and Murray borrow from Throsby's ideas but expand them to a more comprehensive theory about the imaginative potential of the creative ecology and the preliminary needs of its environment (2008). Tracing the transition of Western economies from manufacturing

to service industries, they propose a definition for creativity that accurately instills the word with meaning for economic development: “Creativity is a complex human force that requires a degree of autonomy and indeterminacy in order to function as a value-adding tool in economic and cultural contexts” (10). The ability to think creatively and across institutional boundaries promotes the sorts of innovation and experimentation that encourage economic activity.

Gollmitzer and Murray refer to a 2008 British policy paper promoting art education as the catalyst for new creative talent in business and industry in support of their assertion that the creative values learned through artistic thinking benefit the economy in ways not commonly thought of as pertaining to traditionally defined arts. Work in the cultural sector is characterized by: “a significant proportion of independent or self-employed workers in conjunction with various not-for-profit organizations; a significant volunteer force; low remuneration for a highly educated workforce; the absence of clearly defined career paths; and a highly diversified cultural offering (goods and services)” (20). The specific economic strengths of the cultural sector are:

“The diversity in people and activities of the sector; the passion, motivation, competence and tenacity of workers in the sector; the economic impact of the sector (leverage effect for other sectors); the sector’s close and sustained links with many other industrial sectors; the ability of the sector to sustain and increase its activities under adverse conditions” (19-20).

### *The Politics of State Public Arts Funding*

Georgiou focused on the economic impact of the arts and how it relates to public arts funding specifically. She notes that participation in the arts in the US has increased with 76 percent of adults making the arts part of their lives in 2002, and that there are important links between commercial appeal and the arts as an economic benefit (2008:v). Through many case studies across the country, Georgiou mentions that communication between policy makers and art organizations is tightly knit to economic success in the arts; funding arts will increase participation in arts activities and bring in more funding; and many states have embraced the creative economy movement, thinking about the arts as important in economic development (121-122). She also

notes, however, that “if arts funding is framed as a luxury in competition with basic service, then funding may be cut;” this was a concern that influenced arts funding cuts in 1994 by Republicans (123). This is important given the downturn of the economy and decisions that have to be made within Northfield for future funding, whether the arts will be seen as a luxury or essential part of economic development.

### *The Rise of the Creative Class*

Florida’s study (2004) emphasizes that quality of life infrastructures are necessary elements for drawing economically competitive intellectual populations – what he terms the “creative class” – into a particular area. He defines “creative class” inclusively as those people “whose economic function is to create new ideas, new technology, and/or new creative content;” such a definition allows professions as diverse as scientists, architects, engineers, and musicians to be included within this rubric.

The arts contribute to the creative class’s economic impact in several ways. Arts enable a social structure that is supportive and encouraging of creativity: this supportive “social milieu” “provides the underlying eco-system or habitat in which the multidimensional forms of creativity take root and flourish.” A well-noted arts town is better able to “attract and stimulate those who create in business and technology... [they] provide a mechanism for attracting new and different kinds of people and facilitating the rapid transmission of knowledge and ideas.” Additionally, this social environment of creativity “facilitates cross-fertilization between and among these forms” enhancing the innovative viability of new products or industries by encouraging interdisciplinary perspectives (55).

### *The Symbolic Construction of Community*

Our study utilizes Cohen’s theories about the symbolic value of community (1985). Cohen

writes that “community itself and everything within it, is conceptual as well as material, has a symbolic dimension, and, further, that this dimension does not exist as some kind of consensus of sentiment. Rather, it exists as something for people ‘to think with’ ” (1985:19). Community values are conceptual tools with which to make meaning, “providing [community members] with the means to express the particular meanings which the community has for them” (19). As an abstract category, “the arts” can be said to be a community value which is particularly poignant in Northfield, as witnessed by the frequent references in interviews to the arts as “beautiful” and “fulfilling,” as well as a “unique part of Northfield’s character.”

Additionally, Cohen writes that community values are constructive of identity: community “is highly symbolized, with the result that its members can invest it with their selves... giving to each [member] an additional referent for their identities,” especially construed in contrast with other social communities (109). Thus as individuals, Northfielders, as well as patrons coming from surrounding regions who might feel they fit in well in Northfield, hold a personal stake in the artistic reputation of the town. Our interviews confirm the position that many people are willing to invest economically in this aura with their choice of “artsy” or “quirky” independent businesses over “big box” stores.

Cohen’s reflection on community is made all the more poignant in conjunction with Ulrich Beck’s work on the power of self-motivated work. He writes:

“People are prepared to do a great deal for very little money, precisely because economic advantage is individualistically refracted and even assigned an opposite value. If an activity has greater value in terms of identity and self-fulfillment, this makes up for and even exalts a lower level of income” (quoted in Gollmitzer and Murray 2008:23).

This notion of identity fulfillment – as part of a wider community holding the same values over considerations of total profit motivation – helps us understand the phenomenon of having so many artists working in Northfield, as well as huge populations of volunteers mobilized to donate their time to arts events.

## **FINDINGS:**

## NORTHFIELD'S ADVANTAGES AS AN ARTS TOWN

Throughout our research, it has been emphasized that Northfield's geographic and demographic makeup has put it in a unique position to benefit economically from its reputation as an arts town. As Gollmitzer and Murray write, "An 'inspiring' urban cultural milieu with affordable housing and visible as well as invisible cultural infrastructure is considered a vital component of a reworked creative economy concept" (2008:17). In their definition, necessary elements to an art town's creative ecology include: "creative individuals and entrepreneurs; small to medium enterprises; pre- or anti-commercial activities as well as commercial activities; new mixes of public and private partnership; a complex web of social and cultural infrastructure; local and global production flows" (17). Our research has found elements of all of these factors in Northfield's arts sector.

Northfield's artists, many of whom also take on entrepreneurial pursuits to supplement their incomes, frequently mentioned elements of this "creative ecology" as a reason to live and work in the community. One artist with a downtown storefront echoed this sense, calling Northfield "a little gem" and stating that Northfield is an area with many creative individuals and much interaction with outside communities. She mentioned that although many here have "day-jobs" as non-artists, many in Northfield participate in the arts and thus add to their economic impact. To support this, she added that her full-time job is actually not running her gallery and store but instead working as a manager at another store downtown.

Artist Matt Bunch, originally from Northfield, sees similar positive elements that contribute to his decision to create art in Northfield. "I came back after traveling because Northfield is pretty unique. I've been in Costa Rica and Yosemite and seen people from Northfield. It's the center of the Universe." Bunch, too, supplements the income generated from sales of his artwork with other jobs, increasing his economic impact. Although he sells a good deal of his artwork out-of-town, he stays here because of the positive atmosphere. "Northfield has done good things for artists and it's done

good things for me,” he said.

ArtsOrg, a for-profit arts organization, emphasizes many of the aspects Gullmitzer and Murray describe as working with local artists and providing collaborative efforts to establish new opportunities. The organization opened up a downtown print studio, has brought nationally renowned artists to Northfield, and recently worked with local residents and others to create the St. Cloud Big Print. Dave Machacek, executive director of the organization, has said that there is potential to create “a sub-regional arts area centered in Northfield” due to the fact that there are so many opportunities for expansion. He encourages the development of entrepreneurship in the arts and explains that while it has been difficult to collaborate with other art organizations in Northfield he believes that is important to keep expanding the arts and the collaboration between groups. He says, “It’s not arguing about the piece of the pie, it’s about making the pie two times as big.”

Paul Niemisto, a professor of music at St. Olaf College and active leader in music endeavors in Northfield, notes that “Northfield should have a festival with music of international caliber.” He states that having festivals such as the Vintage Band Festival establishes art in Northfield, and that it has a place and should provide for the city as it can. This was done during the Vintage Band Festival with coordination with the Northfield Hospital for performances and similarly with other musical groups in Northfield during celebrations such as the Defeat of Jesse James Days.

The importance of small-to-medium sized enterprises lies in the increased potential that small organizations provide for collaboration and communication. As they write, creative innovation “requires face to face ‘creative conversations,’ small scale venues and proximity to a community of practice” (20). It has been noted that the close, communal relationships shared by local businesses has contributed to a sense of solidarity in the community: “We support each other... we respect each other for what we offer, and as a group, the store owners get together every once in a while and it’s a really cohesive thing, where we look at what we all have, and if somebody’s carrying a lot of one product, no one else will bring it in – we respect each other’s territory.” The

same scale and communal sentiment among businesses downtown contributes to the diverse offerings available. Further, several people affirmed that running a small store makes it possible to have better customer relations and better knowledge of what the consumer desires. When asked about whether the small-scale of her store offered any advantages, the manager of one store replied:

“It’s the only way that we can differentiate ourselves from [big box stores]. They’re never going to have that personal connection, they won’t remember my name or what I bought last time. They’re going to have a higher employee turnover and they won’t know the products like we do... customer service is huge, which is about dropping whatever you’re doing and listening authentically to the customer, and being a genuine person with them so that they want to come back.”

Thus, in addition to the improved dynamics for “innovative conversations” that make businesses more successful, small-scale enterprises actually offer additional social significance that might make them more competitive.

Between the various arts-related or development-centered organizations, it is clear that Northfield possesses the social and cultural infrastructures that aid movements to improve the town’s economic climate through the arts. One example of this is the newly proposed website that was unveiled at the First Annual Arts Town Meeting, the “Northfield Arts” website. At the “Growing the Arts in Northfield” meeting, discourse centered on the positive impact of the visual artists and a hope for increased collaboration. This website is being created to allow artists to show their work virtually and have a space where interested parties can contact them about making a purchase. In this way, artists can expand their social capital through their cultural capital in an economically advantageous manner that reciprocally has positive economic impact on Northfield.

Finally, in addition to the cultural infrastructure existing in Northfield, the town also occupies an advantageous geographical location. One interviewee emphasized that for an art’s town like Northfield to survive, there need to be larger population centers nearby to support it. She proceeded to draw an abstract map of Northfield in the center of a triangle created out of the larger population centers of Minneapolis/St. Paul (combined metropolitan population >3,000,000), Rochester (population about 100,000) and Mankato (population about 40,000). Her point was that

Northfield had the geographic potential to profit off of the arts from other large and generally wealthy population centers in the region.

Indeed, where we originally thought the twin cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, also thriving arts centers, might be a threat to Northfield's arts, our interviewees noted their observations of the opposite. Many claimed that having these large cities within reasonable driving distance meant that there were huge numbers of potential customers that were both more likely to know about Northfield and willing to make the trip to the town. The Convention and Visitor's Bureau noted that their advertising focus has shifted to the Twin Cities to tap into this potential customer base, but many Twin Cities residents still have the misconception that Northfield is north of the Twin Cities. One idea about why Northfield might be appealing to people from Minneapolis/St. Paul - generally recognized as having edgier or more well-known artists - is that residents of these metropolises often want to "escape the city:" Northfield "provides a getaway feeling." The town's natural environment - specifically the Cannon River - and quaint, small town aura provide these elements of relief that out-of-towners leave the city looking for.

Many artists commented that the colleges made Northfield a unique place to create art and may make it possible to sell art. The colleges were frequently cited for bringing creative people into town and for providing salaries that allowed people to be art patrons. One artist commented specifically on the connection of the art apprentices at St. Olaf College, stating that the apprentices are given gallery space at the NAG for a spring show. By bringing art faculty into the colleges, there also is the opportunity for these experienced leaders in the arts to lead initiatives in the community through participation in advisory boards in the community. These are all examples of the connection between the private and public sectors that Gollmitzer and Murray (2008) describe illustrating how Northfield has the potential to grow as an arts town.

In addition, although college students make up one quarter of the town's population none of the artists we interviewed mentioned college students as members of the demographic that

purchased their art. One artist in particular mentioned the challenges of selling to students because it is difficult to compete with prices or availability of merchandise at larger stores such as Target. In an effort to bypass this she has begun learning a new technique of designing cards, but expressed concern that soon there will be fewer artists as big box stores grow in number and size. Parents and visitors to the colleges play an important role in supporting the arts, however it seems that students who are here on a more permanent basis remain largely disconnected.

## ARTS AND QUALITY OF LIFE

Arts create an environment in which people want to live; they are crucial quality of life factors that encourage an economically competitive populace. Echoing Florida's ideas about the cultural desires of the creative class (2004), our interviewees noted the significance of having a strong arts culture and community for the future development of Northfield. Asked how the arts contribute to Northfield's economic climate, Greg Kneser, president of the Northfield Downtown Development Corporation (NDDC), replied that Northfield's future development will rely on attracting "knowledge workers" – such as IT businesses – into the area. The fact that large populations of students are graduated in Northfield through the two colleges is a strength to be exploited by keeping these knowledge workers in town; indeed, several interviewees were either alums of the local colleges or noted that many of their coworkers were alums.

However, the ability to retain knowledge workers or attract new ones hinges on Northfield's cultural industries and reputation. One interviewee claimed that "if you want an interesting and intelligent and healthy population where you live then you need to offer them what they want. And that's usually arts, higher education, and a great natural environment." A local painter and visual artist echoed these statements saying, "companies move to places where people want to live and the larger businesses increase the tax base." In this way it seems that the arts and businesses have a reciprocal effect where the growth of one can stimulate the growth of the other.

This is provided to some extent by the social significance of Northfield's downtown area. Several interviewees viewed the downtown area as a vital piece of Northfield because it serves as the "community gathering spot," the "focal point" of town. Significantly, as a simultaneously communal and commercial place, the downtown area requires a different formula for development than other areas which might not be endowed with the same social significance. Greg Kneser explained the sense that this communal spot has a different set of goals than ordinary economic development:

"Downtown is a different animal than making land available for an industrial park. [An industrial park] is a good thing for economic development and all, but it's not the same thing as a downtown area that makes people want to live in your town... people come back [to Northfield] because of this sense of community [and] a lot of it is driven by this cool historic downtown that has stuff happening in it."

Later in the interview, speaking about what the arts can contribute to development, he noted that these knowledge workers coming into Northfield "expect to have arts, they expect to have music, [and] they expect to have a place where the community can gather." Significantly, the downtown area provides this conglomeration of the arts and the community. In addition to the high representation of arts-related businesses in the downtown core, there are many places where communal gatherings can take place alongside artistic events, such as Art Swirl, Rock & Roll Revival, and Junebug Festival of Music ("Community Guide to Northfield and the Surrounding Area" 2011). Further, there are many artistic outlets for locals to pursue the arts, such as orchestras in town, local theater productions, and amateur art classes.

#### ARTS AS AN ATTRACTIVE FORCE

Anyone can observe that the arts effectively draw people into the downtown area. Individuals attending arts events become potential customers as soon as they set foot downtown. Businesses such as the Contented Cow realize that arts related events bring more dollars into their

stores and many are more than willing to help promote individuals, groups, and events. Many stores and restaurants in Northfield, such as the Hideaway and Goodbye Blue Monday, have billboards for people to post their events on, which they believe is a good way to do free promotional work. Individuals involved with the promotion of the arts strongly assert that businesses downtown work in sync with each other in this “cyclic movement” of consumption, and that the arts are a crucial means of mobilizing potential customers. An interviewee suggested that she wanted to “see a change in the downtown area” and that there needed to be “more support for local retail/restaurants rather than corporate insurance companies, etc.” This gives the feeling that in order to save the city there needs to be a revitalization of the downtown area that will make everything there local.

Northfield’s arts industry and reputation as an “artsy,” “creative,” or “quirky” town was remarked upon by several interviewees as a powerful force for attracting visitors from the region. One arts gift shop owner noted that her success in business is at least partially because of Northfield’s well-known arts:

“[we’re] not as good as our location... Northfield has a reputation for being a strong arts community – I think it’s because of all the art fairs hosted here... it’s known as a destination. They [non-Northfielders] enjoy it, and are enhanced by purchasing the oddities, the originals, we have here.”

Another, representing a grocery store in town, noted that “the strong arts community draws a diverse population to Northfield, which is beneficial for all local businesses.” It is apparent that Northfield’s overall business environment benefits from the strong reputation the arts have historically imparted on the town. Indeed, even the “Community Guide to Northfield and the Surrounding Area” (2011) encourages visitors to come to Northfield, advertising the town as “an arts destination.” Indeed, one interviewee notes that the images generally used to advertise Northfield utilize the town’s strengths in visual arts and music.

The presence of a strong arts community additionally mobilizes people into the downtown

area through the presence of many arts-related events and arts classes. For instance, the NAG holds about 60 arts events in a year - more than one a week on average - and offers a plethora of arts classes for people in town and the surrounding areas. On the St. Olaf campus, about 25 music events, 1-2 theater productions, dance recitals, and art gallery openings are put on monthly. The Northfield Entertainment Guide includes approximately 100 arts and cultural events per month throughout Northfield and the colleges. Art businesses in the area hold many classes and events as well: Monarch's website offers classes or events on 23 different days in May ([monarchgiftshop.com](http://monarchgiftshop.com)); the Eclectic Goat, specializing in selling local handmade creations, offers over seven different types of classes and contains a studio space available for private parties.

In the observations of many interviewees, once their customers have come into the Northfield area, whether through classes, events, or the desire to shop at a specific store, they spend additional time and money on other local businesses. One interviewee noted her observations of the students in her classes: "They don't just come here, but they'll go out and buy something to eat, they'll buy some coffee to bring in... it's a chain reaction." Another business owner noted her role in promoting the town in the classes that she teaches:

"You almost get to be like a hostess, you know 'welcome to our town - you're going to love this, and yea come into OUR store, but while you're here be sure to eat here and do that and see the river...' I want them to like their experience here so I send them to the places that I think will do the best job."

Thus, the arts play both an economic and a social role in bringing potential customers to town.

## ART FOR THE AVERAGE CONSUMER

Throughout our research, we have noted that there are discrepancies between the economic feasibility of various art forms. Many arts related businesses or organizations feature gift shops or other "cottage industry" crafts in addition to "higher arts" sales (whether that be art

supplies or painting sales at a gallery). Interviews taking place within arts businesses offered some limited insights into consumer art preference. It was interesting to note that a majority of sales we witnessed were of the “gift” or “craft” variety. Additionally, many of our interviewees spoke of art sales in a manner that reflected a consumer preference towards low-end arts or home decor.

Describing her path of artistic entrepreneurship, one interviewee said that she has discovered that “art can be a service. You can be doing certain things for a home or [producing] wearable art... it’s so important that people have beauty before them and usually that’s visual.” Another interviewee, describing observations she has made about her customer base, noted the disproportionate number of female customers she received, hypothesizing that a possible reason for this was that, in a domestic situation, women might be the ones to take charge of decorating and creating a home environment. These observations suggest that the economic feasibility of art – whether a painting, an original set of prints designed as greeting cards, or kitschy home furnishing – depends on its ability to fit within the average consumer’s lifestyle. They further suggest that visual art is most capable of being mobilized for domestic ends.

Price and availability are important elements in art’s ability to fit into the average consumer’s life. Observations made at businesses included customer’s questions about prices and expressions of worry that something might be too expensive. This coincides with the statements of several artists that it is difficult to sell their art profitably or to even be able to sell it at all. This is perhaps one reason that home decor or wearable arts were more easily mobilized than what one typically thinks of as “high arts.” A unique decoration – even if handmade and one-of-a-kind – will likely be less expensive than a painting. An original fashion design, even if relatively expensive, might be an easier purchase to justify than a framed print because it is more functional.

Indeed, one might reasonably assume that art sales at galleries or the many restaurants and cafes in town that showcase arts lag behind domestic or wearable arts because an average consumer does not have the financial capacity to justify impulsive purchases on art, even when they

find something they like. This is supported by one interviewee's perspective on how the arts are affected by the recent economic crises: "The arts are really affected by this economy. When you're in a crisis, you have to go back to the basics: food, housing – and art is sort of an embellishment. So you know – we're struggling there."

## ENTREPRENEURIAL SKILLS OF THE ARTS

Northfield's arts add to the economic climate of the town through entrepreneurship as well, both in the forms of artists pursuing business entrepreneurship and in the entrepreneurial skills that can be learned through the arts. Northfield has several arts shops in and around the downtown area, including art supplies stores, arts related gift shops, home décor and design stores, etc. These stores provide an additional outlet for art sales beyond traditional art galleries or art market fairs. The artistic impact on business entrepreneurship is well stated by Robert Lynch, president of Americans for the Arts who says "the arts are an industry that stimulates the economy in cities and towns across the country. A vibrant arts and culture industry helps local businesses thrive" (Institute for Arts Entrepreneurship 2011).

The manager of an arts-related gift shop downtown spoke of the contribution arts gave to her store's success: "Our tagline is 'Make Your Life Beautiful' – it's a connection to the arts" aimed at giving customers "a more fulfilling and satisfying experience" through their store. Many of their products appeal to customers' desires to bring 'beauty' into the home: "It can be beautiful art on the wall or beautiful jewelry... beautiful fragrances... embracing beauty is a huge part [of their store]." She noted that "people want to surround themselves with things that they love" and so retail success is "about listening to what the customer thinks is beautiful." These findings are supported by Reeves' research showing that cultural industries have proven to make an effective contribution to the economy as sources of innovation, originality, creativity, and problem solving (Reeves 2002).

Further, many interviewees commented on the entrepreneurial skills that can be learned

through the arts. One obvious way the arts contribute to entrepreneurial success is through the visual skills arts teach. Interviewees noted that through the arts “you learn the visual – how to draw people in, to get their attention.” One interviewee noted how helpful the local arts community was in promoting their business: “It’s wonderful to have a variety of talented individuals to contact for entertainment or community-building activities, like writing articles for our newsletter, playing music at our annual meeting, making prints.”

Other interviewees noted the value of arts in the actual running of a business. “Art is a balance of creativity and detail, a sort of left-brain/right-brain thing. And that’s how business is – you can get too detail focused or too focused on creativity and forget about one or the other.” Further, the arts teach us to “always be looking at things to see how you can make them a little different, so that it’s new – so [the arts] encourage product development.” This is consistent with a recent IBM study’s findings that report the need for increased levels of “creativity,” “integrity,” and “global thinking” – with creativity being the most highly noted value – among corporate leadership if future enterprises are to be successful (Institute for Arts Entrepreneurship 2011).

#### BIAS TOWARDS THE VISUAL ARTS?

Through our research it became clear that while Northfield has a wide variety of arts, visual arts are continually emphasized and celebrated, perhaps at the expense of other art forms. ArtOrg caters only to visual artists, and the new website, “Northfield Arts” (scheduled to be launched in June 2011), features only visual artists. We were only able to interview one non-visual artist despite multiple attempts to specifically contact others.

Some have suggested that this divide represents a larger separation in Northfield where visual artists are those who make their living from their art and are thus professional artists, while those engaged in music, theater, and dance are amateurs who may not even consider themselves artists. This could link to how music, theater, and other performance arts are event-based instead of

having physical items to sell. Music within Northfield is used in the community as it is needed for building openings and festivals in town, but is generally considered an unpaid service to the city. These observations indicate a new focus for future research and may provide further insight into the economic impact of the arts in Northfield.

## NEEDS OF ARTISTS

With over 160 self-identified visual artists, in addition to unknown numbers of actors, dancers, and writers, Northfield has a boisterous community of professional artists. Also, huge numbers of people referred to as art “hobbyists” or “enthusiasts” participate in community theatre, or practice their artistic talents through the classes offered by both private businesses and non-profit organizations in town. What, then, is the economic impact of these artists?

With the exclusion of arts teachers, none of our interviewees reported receiving all of their incomes through their art; all but one reported that the figure was less than half their income. Those who taught as professors or high school teachers attributed one-hundred percent of their total income to work related to their art, but the sale of their work in any given year contributed a negligible amount to the total. As one creative writing professor put it, “Occasionally I get paid no more than \$400 for a story or an article, but it’s not as if I really notice that.”

These numbers indicate that a huge portion of the cultural capital available via the artists in Northfield is not converted into economic capital. Despite less than ideal earnings, these artists remain in Northfield and spend money here, re-circulating through the economy. Still, arts organizations and artists alike have noticed this missed opportunity to develop the artistic dividend and a sustainable arts market in Northfield.

Dean Kjerland, a co-founder and board member, explained his view of the RAQ’s role in developing a sustainable arts market in Northfield:

“Its [RAQ’s] focus was not just on events, but on all the services visual artists

need to be entrepreneurs in the community...I'm a firm believer in the view of art that artists are entrepreneurs, and artists have a product, and artists need to make a market."

Some of the services that RAQ currently offers for artists include classes on marketing strategies and business management. One artist stated she had taken the Springboard for the Arts classes and found them to be interesting and helpful but has not been able to take the time to implement all of the ideas presented. She described the difficulty of making time for both creating and marketing art. Even though the information is available on how to go about selling art and creating a marketing plan it still seems challenging to be both an artist and a businessperson.

Artists also had mixed reviews of the success of the first season of RMF. Matthew Bunch, a surrealist visual artist, shared RAQ's opinion on the success of the RMF season: "I made between five and seven times as much as what I paid for my booth."

Nick Sinclair, a self-described "low-brow hot rod artist," did not participate in RMF, but viewed it as a useful start to expanding the arts market:

"I think Northfield really needs to work on tapping resources outside of Northfield...We're an hour from Minneapolis, Rochester, Mankato, Stillwater. We're like central. We need to get those markets going. I've heard crazy numbers come out of Riverwalk and I think that's a huge start."

Mixed media artist Barb Matz was originally involved with the grant proposal for RMF and served as VP of RAQ for one year, but ended her involvement after seeing little results. Asked about her success selling artwork at RMF, she said, "In my opinion, it was sparse, I know that they will say differently. I've seen other art fairs, and I've sold more during an hour there than I've sold in a day here."

Another local artist who sells her work to customers outside of Northfield participated in the RMF, though she mainly sells at larger shows in more urban settings. She mentioned that she normally does attend events like RMF because they do not generate enough profit. She participated once last year, however, and said of the experience, "It was exactly what I expected. I made a couple

of little sales and it was a very wonderful morning. I'm not ready to sign up for the summer of River Walk because it is not conducive for the business side of art."

If current efforts focused on developing the arts in Northfield are not sufficient, what should be done? Each artist was asked to comment on how the city could help to further develop a sustainable arts market that is economically secure for both artists and the city. Most artists shared the view of *The Arts: A Driving Force in Minnesota's Economy*, advocating for a specific number to be budgeted out for the arts each year because it is both an economically and socially worthwhile investment for the city. Wendell Arneson, a St. Olaf Professor of Art, emphasized the wealth of creativity available in the city as an important resource in development:

"Ideas [to support the arts] need to be engaging for the community and financially viable. Good creative thinking will keep the community moving ahead, sustain it, but also make it more aware as a unique artistic community."

Only one artist disagreed with the use of state or federal money to invest in the arts, explaining his opinion in terms of the dependency this creates.

"I think that just pigeonholes artists. If they're just sitting there waiting for the city to give them money, they're just going to be waiting. I think it's more beneficial to say we're going to make a profit and we're going to market, and how do we make this industry work on its own?"

Thus, from the point of view of Northfield artists, a greater investment in the arts by the Northfield City Council would increase the economic impact of the arts in the city. In the process of deciding where to invest, however, it would be prudent to choose those projects that have the capability to become independent.

#### FINANCIAL BURDEN OF EVENTS

The lack of income for artists and arts events within the community is echoed by those who attend various events within Northfield. In general, the financial burden of performing or

displaying art is placed on those involved in the production instead of being financed through ticket sales or free-will donations. Out of the nine events we attended in Northfield, only three had a required ticket price (Northfield Contra Dance, A Very Short Play Festival at the Northfield Arts Guild, and Arabian Nights at St. Olaf College). However, one participant from Northfield noted: “It is fortunate that many (most) events at both St. Olaf and Carleton do not charge admission.” This allows this participant and many others to attend events multiple times a week, encouraging participation in the arts. Yet, the fact that most attendants are not required to spend money on events limits the direct economic benefit to artists.

The fact that many arts events offer free admission adds to the general question of the economic profitability of the arts specifically versus the profitability the arts provide to other area businesses. Within these arts events greater flows of money come into Northfield through retail and lodging businesses. Though many students and some Northfield residents will eat at home before an event and walk there, there are still significant numbers of attendants claiming to spend money on meals, drinks, and shopping around town before or after an event. Out-of-state visitors also frequently spend a weekend in Northfield despite coming for some other specific event or purpose. These visitors might pay upwards of \$300 for a weekend in Northfield on meals, lodging, and transportation. However, these out of town visitors are generally fewer in number than Northfield residents in attendance at arts events. Thus, these art-specific events might owe some of their success to the lack of economic stress it puts on the average attendant.

Our research has also found that the arts have a significant potential to mobilize residents into volunteering in the support of arts. The NAG reports having between four- and five-hundred volunteers in their sixty annual events; the NDDC estimates having close to two-hundred volunteers of different capacities over the past year. Volunteerism in the arts allows events to take place with significantly greater frequency and on a larger scale. Yet, volunteerism comes with the additional challenge of unpredictability. Dean Kjerland described the challenges of relying on volunteer labor to operate the RAQ and RMF:

“There’s probably 6-12 people involved with each organization at any given time, all volunteers. We’re trying to build both boards and increase our volunteers. That’s the big challenge; some people want to help, but don’t want to be on a board. We would like to be sustainable so we can pay people.”

Therefore, the value Northfielder's place on art creates a significant potential for increasing the arts economic impact through volunteers. However, such a reliance on volunteerism again burdens those committing their time and energy into the success of the events, perhaps acting as a limiting force on the growth of the industry.

#### NEED FOR COLLABORATION

The collaboration – and sometimes lack thereof – between different sectors of the Northfield arts scene reveals a particular ecology of cultural consumption in the disconnect between where art is made and where art is sold. Although artists don't necessarily support local art stores all the time (they bought an average of 50% of their supplies from local art stores), they still support Northfield's economy. They receive little in return with respect to the market for their art in Northfield.

Sometimes, as in the case of Nick Sinclair's low-brow hot rod art, their art appeals to a demographic that is not found in Northfield. In his own words, his art appeals to an out-of-town crowd and those citizens who do come to his show "aren't exactly that scene." In other cases, they produce art too similar to what other artists are doing.

Another local artist said that there are not enough "conspicuous consumers" in Northfield and that she is unable to sell her jewelry to many people in town. She even specifically mentioned that some of her art is designed with a certain demographic in mind while other art is more based on personal interest and ideas. She thus has to tailor her creativity to the market and has responded to a lack of customers by selling her art online or at other large art shows.

In addition, there is some concern that there are too many separate arts organizations and collaborations given the number of artists in town. After the creation of ArtOrg in 2004 an article in the Northfield News addressed this concern with the article "Can two arts organizations coexist in

town?" (2004). The article focuses specifically on the organizations competing for limited resources saying:

"If ArtOrg doesn't work cooperatively with the NAG...the NAG will be weakened because of ArtOrg drawing away resources. This would not enrich the arts community here in Northfield, but actually detract from it because the NAG will have less to offer the community."

Although both organizations seem financially sound at the moment there is lingering concern about the problem of having two seemingly competing organizations in town. Several of the artists interviewed expressed frustration with the current state of things, with one artist describing it as such:

"There are too many committees and groups in town. Nothing gets done. They just make more committees, instead of acting on something. They form a committee and they bring in a consultant and waste money and time when they could just do something."

Another artist had similar experiences with institutional support in Northfield. "This town is great at discussing stuff. I've never heard so many heads come together about supporting the artists, and what do they need, and let's help them – and then nothing ever happens," she said. From the artists' point of view, more communication between art organizations and artists would greatly improve their ability to make an economic impact in Northfield.

## **CONCLUSION:**

When most people think of the arts their focus is on the aesthetics of the work rather than the social and economic value added by them. After conducting numerous interviews we, have been able to uncover several findings that suggest how economically important the arts really are, and how overlooked they are in terms of support and funding. For example, through our research we concluded that an increased collaboration and more efficient communication within the arts

community in Northfield would enhance the economic impact of the arts. More collaboration between the art organizations themselves could be the spark that leads to greater collaboration efforts between art organizations, businesses, and artists.

Our research has also led us to believe that the Northfield Arts and Culture Commission has the potential to lead the arts organizations in the process of becoming more economically significant. In addition, some of the leaders in Northfield have aspired for Northfield to be recognized as an arts town, although there are different ideas of how to go about it.

Other revelations were made throughout our research. For example, in researching parts of the events, we came to the conclusion that we could have focused a bit more on the residents of Northfield instead of the people coming to the events from out of town. We also struggled to obtain interviews with many subjects of interest who were not visual artists.

The arts are frequently overlooked, even though they constitute a main source of income for the cultural industries in fields such as media and telecommunications, music, visual art, theater, dance, etc. They add value to the community by providing employment; both full- and part-time jobs are created and sustained by the arts. Although a majority of these jobs are part-time, and some generate little income, they must be taken into consideration as economically significant. The arts also bring consumers into the downtown increasing awareness of opportunities to shop at other businesses in the area.

In reflecting on this research project we have grown in our abilities as researchers and collaborators. We have been given tremendous support from Philip Spensley and Chris Chiappari and those who participated in our study. We have gained confidence in our ability to go into the community as active members while collaborating with a community partner in order to ask relevant questions. Furthermore, we have enjoyed participating in research engaged in bridging the gap between theory and practice and learned about the rewards of doing research that promotes social change.

Our research has led us to make several recommendations for further research. Firstly, since our research focused mainly on qualitative data, we believe that more quantitative data would be an important step to further research on the economic impact of the arts in Northfield. This depends on artists, participants, and the city to keep and share solid financial data. In addition, we support the development of a marketing strategy that pitches Northfield as a “day trip” location to people in surrounding communities including the twin cities. This increases the potential customer base, and provides opportunities for growth.

The next stage of this research – proposed for the summer of 2011 – will more directly address specific concerns about arts funding to the city council. This report will provide a solid framework upon which future research can take more quantitative and political concerns into consideration.

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