



Research Article

FOOD & BEVERAGE BUSINESSES AS A PLATFORM FOR ART DISSEMINATION IN THE AGE OF NEOLocalISM: EXPLORING THE ARTIST PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Neolocalism, or a renewed interest in and deliberate connection to all things local, centers largely on the hospitality industry which strives to create distinct customer experiences and cultivate a sense of place by integrating local art and artistic traditions into their operations. The trend could offer a route to a triple bottom line of sustaining community vibrancy wherein economic, environmental, and social resources are utilized in such a way that their future viability is ensured. Achieving a sustainable sense of place relies upon reflecting a diverse and inclusive place narrative. However, little is known about how local artisans (e.g. musicians, painters, chefs, woodworkers, etc.) and food and beverage business owners connect, nor the process of art selection and dissemination through such outlets. Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of artists who utilize local hospitality businesses as a platform for disseminating their works in order to identify barriers to participation that may limit the diversity of place narratives represented in such settings. A phenomenological research approach was employed, and semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight artists in one small U.S. city in early 2020. Findings suggest challenges including both community taste as well as gaps in local artist education may undermine the quest for inclusion neolocalism might facilitate. Data further revealed these constraints may be overcome by building strong artist networks and encouraging artists to advocate for themselves, persevere, and work on building credibility amongst their peers and local hospitality business owners. This research offers insight into the processes behind the neolocal movement and highlights the need for future studies that focus on neolocalism, place narratives, and the inclusion of art in the hospitality industry as a route to community sustainability.

Keywords: Artist, Art Dissemination, Neolocalism, Place Making, Place Narrative

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1. Introduction

In an effort to cultivate a sense of place, many communities are making a concerted effort to integrate elements of the local area into their programming, servicescapes, and marketing efforts. Demand for such local products, services, and experiences is also at an all-time high fueled in part by the experience economy wherein people value unique experiences (Pine & Gilmore, 1998) and the sharing economy that inspires the sharing of those experiences through social media (Hamari, Sjöklint & Ukkanen, 2015) as well as the widespread opening and more recent closing of big box chain stores and restaurants that homogenized the country's leisure and dining experiences (Schnell & Reese, 2014). The trend, known as neolocalism, centers largely on the hospitality industry with many food and beverage establishments in particular striving to create distinct customer experiences and cultivate a sense of place by integrating local art and artistic traditions into their front and back of house operations (Eberts, 2014). Farm-to-table wine pairing dinners hosted by local bottle shops and featuring regionally recognized chefs; concerts at local coffee shops; craft markets at local breweries; surf videos featuring area breaks and riders on taco shop screens; and locally curated art on the walls of restaurants are increasingly common. Even as Covid-19 has forced hospitality organizations across the board to pivot into uncharted territory, art has remained an important part of many drinking and dining establishments' operational endeavors. Fine dining restaurants are offering chef-curated take-out dinners packaged with hand-crafted desserts from nearby specialty bakeries and soundtracks selected by local music shops; breweries are releasing special blends created in conjunction with other craft food and beverage entrepreneurs (e.g. creating a doughnut stout using a local bakery's goods); and some restaurants are live streaming the music being played in their outdoor dining area for patrons choosing to eat at home.

In turn, food and beverage entities like restaurants, bars, and dessert and coffee shops have become extremely popular platforms through which artists share and sell their creations. In short, local food and beverage-based establishments, local art, and place identity are closely linked and integral features of contemporary American culture (Ingram, Slocum, & Cavaliere, 2020). Despite their importance however, surprisingly little is known about how the relationships between local food and beverage entities and local artists are forged, or the impact these relationships have on artists, locally produced art, or local arts communities. Though poorly understood, the integration of local art and artistic elements into hospitality settings together creates a rich, multifaceted sense of place and contributes to an area's place identity (Hall, 2008; Ingram et al. 2020).

The inherent inclusion of only certain art and artists within these venues however places value upon the specific genres of art represented, the subjects and values communicated through that art, and the artistic communities that facilitated production of the art thereby weaving together a particular narrative about the local area's history, landscape, culture, and community that de facto excludes certain voices, heritages, and/or traditions (see Lowenthal, 1996; Timothy, 2011). Scholars contend the trend of neolocalism offers a route to achieving a triple bottom line of sustainability that includes economic, environmental, and social aspects and in turn long term community vibrancy. However, the approach only works if stakeholders utilize diverse voices of the local area (Slocum & Ingram, 2020). A thorough understanding of how local food and beverage establishments and local artists connect could help to clarify how stakeholders might encourage the inclusion of a diverse range of artistic voices and unique artworks in related venues; improve the retention of local artists in the area; and facilitate a growth in community understanding of and appreciation for local art and local artists. While vital to the notion of using neolocalism as a catalyst for sustainability, no scholarly research appears to have examined the relationship between artists and locally owned food and beverage (i.e. hospitality) organizations. Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of artists who utilize local hospitality businesses as a platform for disseminating their works in order to identify barriers to participation that may limit the diversity of place narratives represented in such settings. Phenomenological-guided interviews (Larsen & Adu, 2022; Moustakas, 1994) with eight artisans in one small U.S. city in early 2020 reveal that while food and beverage organizations do in fact provide a popular platform through which local artists disseminate their art, challenges exist that may work to undermine the quest for inclusion neolocalism might facilitate.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Neolocalism

Neolocalism is defined as the conscientious use of the local in commercial and public venues in response to rising demand for local products, services, and experiences. Schnell and Reese (2014) explain that increased demand for the local and the trend at large can be seen as a response to feelings of placelessness associated with heavy commercial development that spread coast to coast from the mid-1940's through the early 2000's (see USDA, 2007) that essentially homogenized place experiences. When every town has a nearly identical

Sears, Applebee's, or Walmart, Relph (1976) and later Flack (1997) argue there is little left to distinguish one place from another. This led, to some extent, to a countrywide homogenization of shopping, leisure, and dining experiences.

Historically, industry, immigration patterns, and geography organically shaped place identity and local experiences. The local color literary movement that focused on the distinctiveness of places helped, in part, ingrain some characteristics and local idiosyncrasies in certain regions of the U.S. (Baker, 2007; Shortridge, 1991). As local industry declined, and technology and transportation made the world more accessible distinct elements of place faded in favor of the big box chain stores, eateries, and leisure venues that opened in droves often away from downtown areas (Schnell & Reese, 2014). Neolocalism is the purposeful connection or reconnection to the elements of place (see Lefebvre, 1977; Taun, 1974) that make it unique and thereby reinforce, or in some cases recreates, place identity. The concept was derived from scholarship on microbreweries which became widely popular as alcohol regulations relaxed in the 1980's (Eberts, 2014; Flack, 1997; Schnell & Reese, 2003). Engaging in adaptive reuse, many breweries took advantage of often dead downtown and former industrial areas. These businesses harness aspects of their previous servicesscapes to lend a local, worn feel to their establishments, using cultural and geographic references and artistic contributions to emphasize their connection to the neighborhoods they have moved into (Eberts, 2014). Their restoration in turn has often initiated community revitalization and has even aided in the creation of new entertainment districts for tourists and residents alike (Reid, 2018; Schnell & Reese, 2003) as the success of these establishments helps to demonstrate that additional commerce in the area can be supported (Schnell & Reese, 2003).

Other hospitality businesses such as restaurants, dessert and coffee shops, and craft distilleries have similarly begun to capitalize on this trend by using aspects of local and regional idiosyncrasies and vernacular to attract and satisfy customers (Eberts, 2014; Flack, 1997; Schnell & Reese, 2003). In short, the unique culture, heritage, and customs that make a particular location, or space, a rich, multifaceted, and immersive place (see Taun 1974; Lefebvre, 1977) are increasingly popular. Deliberately harnessing a neolocal placemaking approach, scholars argue, has the potential to act as a means of creating and sustaining long-term community vibrancy (Slocum & Ingram, 2020). Slocum and Ingram (2020), explain that “neolocalism, with its noncorporate, community building, small scale production at the local level and artisan promoting culture is intrinsic to the idea of sustainable [place making]” (p. 28). They go on to argue that the trend can be harnessed to achieve a triple bottom line of sustainability wherein economic, environmental, and social resources are used in such a way to ensure their long-term viability. This approach to placemaking not only creates opportunities for, but also relies upon inclusive place narratives. In this sense Slocum and Ingram (2020) call for research on the topic noting that “as a relatively new approach to sustainability, many of the challenges, opportunities, and consequences [of neolocalism] are yet unknown” (p. 30).

While the neolocalism also provides a means of not only including but also celebrating diverse voices, traditions and identities, in practice it is virtually impossible to include *every* artistic voice, genre, tradition, and style on restaurant walls, bar tasting menus, and beer garden stages. Thus, an inherent inclusion and exclusion of art and art forms no doubt exists. Selective memorialization however, even if unintentional, implies cultural importance thus giving some histories precedence over others (Lowenthal, 1996; Timothy, 2011). In other words, the inclusion of only art that meets the aesthetic goals of an organization, inherently limits art shared with the community.

2.2. Artists & Art Dissemination

Though entrepreneurs may have the best intentions of including art in their hospitality endeavors, businesses can only display and support art if there are local artists creating and willing to share their products and talents with them. While artists represent a central factor in supporting businesses as the demand for local elements increases, little empirically supported scholarly literature addresses the practical side of becoming an artist. Regardless, scholars such as Borrup (2016; 2017; 2020) continuously call for city planning that involves culturally inclusive approaches though provide little practical advice for how individual artists might participate in such movements. Instead, a number of general advice books outline ideas for how artists can better start and maintain their careers. Wojak and Miller (2011) advise artists to begin their careers with a written down plan. Rather than just submitting art sporadically to different places, the authors recommend creating a list of steps to be completed before submitting, and a list of where artists plan to submit once they have created their pieces and done the correct background research. Lang (1998) says that it is not just the career goal that is important for artists to pinpoint, it is also crucial to find one's voice and vision in the artistic

process. He encourages artists to identify who they are so they can better sell themselves noting that it is difficult to prove one's worth to buyers if it isn't already defined and measured by oneself. Creating artist networks is also recommended to budding professional artists as a tactic to achieving career success. Grant (2004) says that finding other artists to share contacts and ideas with is essential when first beginning a career in a city, as other artists can create opportunities for each other and support mutual growth. The author further contends that it is vital for artisans to look at the big picture when outlining their careers. Creatives should plan for longevity by stopping potential decision making that could lead to short term success that fizzles out (Frasco & Hetherington, 2004).

3. Purpose & Methods

Connections with local food and beverage businesses have been largely overlooked by scholars yet seems to play a crucial role in both the local arts community and the identity of the local area as a whole in the age of neolocalism. Thus, this grounded theory phenomenological study (Larsen & Adu, 2022; Moustakas, 1994) was undertaken to examine the experience of artists in connecting with locally owned hospitality organizations. Phenomenological research aims to understand participants' perceptions of a particular phenomenon (Larsen & Adu, 2022) using interviews as data that researchers in turn examine in order to ascertain the essence of the experience (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). As such, this paper represents a case study of one community and was exploratory in nature. This study was not meant to offer definitive conclusions and overarching theories that fit every community, rather it was meant to highlight the many facets of the relationship between artists, local communities, and neolocalism, and lay groundwork for future scholars to explore the topic in further depth. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (i.e. the ethics oversight committee) of the University of North Carolina Wilmington (as Study #20-0162).

3.1. The Case: Wilmington, North Carolina

Wilmington is a small port city on the North Carolina coast. The city and the surrounding towns of Leland, Wrightsville Beach, Kure Beach, and Carolina Beach boast a combined population of approximately 250,000 people that is growing quickly (Praats, 2021). The area attracts tourists and residents alike with a vibrant food and beverage industry, hip arts scene, and beautiful sandy beaches. Most of the artistic community is located in the downtown section where there is a flourishing local business scene along a manicured waterfront popular with tourists though a number of breweries, craft distilleries, and niche eateries have opened in old warehouse districts, dated strip malls, and even vacant gas stations. Wilmington is home to two local institutions of higher education that bring thousands of young adults into the community each year, a thriving health and wellness industry, and an increasing number of retirees relocating from chilly New England (Praats, 2021). Wilmington's population is made up of a large blend of college students, younger families, and older adults that venture from all over the United States to live and vacation in this small, coastal city (NCSE, 2020). This variety of age and locality creates a diverse group of people to study.

3.2. Data Collection

Semi-structured qualitative interviews following Creswell (2007) and in line with Moustakas' (1994) guide to phenomenological research lasting roughly thirty minutes to one hour each were conducted with eight artists working in the Wilmington area. Potential subjects were identified as any adult (i.e. over the age of 18) artist, representing any craft, who sought to disseminate their works and/or talents via the local hospitality industry. Participants were selected using a snowball sampling technique (Babbie, 2014). Two well-known artists were initially identified and approached separately for interviews. They then connected researchers with other well-known artists in the community who were asked to participate in one-on-one interviews. Data was collected in January and February of 2020 until saturation was nearly reached wherein new information was no longer emerging from the data (Babbie, 2014; Creswell, 2007). Additionally, the Covid-19 pandemic forced most of the local hospitality industry into lockdown and, as a result, further data collection was not feasible. Creswell (2007) recommends between five and twenty-five interviews be conducted in a phenomenological study.

Interviews focused on biographical, career, business-related, and personal inspiration questions. The biographical questions covered topics like the artists' origins, specific art form, and their experience in Wilmington thus far. Career and business-related questions focused on how artists connected to local food- and beverage-based entities in Wilmington, the challenges they faced when initiating this connection, and the

role such hospitality businesses play in the local art community. Finally, the inspiration questions asked about how Wilmington has influenced the art interviewees are currently creating and/or have made in the past. Questions were developed with a focus on the lived experience as is common in phenomenological studies (see Moustakas (1994). Given that little previous research is available regarding the phenomenon this study sought to explore, interview prompts were aimed at eliciting further description from interviewees wherein those being interviewed were free to interpret the questions asked and thus the responses given in a range of contexts (Creswell, 2007). Exploratory qualitative interviews in this sense are often based on somewhat general discussion prompts in order to prompt discovery which may later act as a foundation from which further, more focused research studies can be crafted (Kvale, 1994).

To gain a wider perspective and ensure triangulation (Babbie, 2014), artists representing a range of experience and genres were interviewed. Participants included two painters, three musicians, one photographer, one comedian, and one actor and producer. In total eight local artists interviewed. No demographic information was collected though the majority were Caucasian and African American. Both men and women were represented. The artists were both locals from Wilmington as well as transplants from other states. Code names were established to ensure anonymity and will be used throughout the research paper.

3.3. Data Analysis

Data analysis began with open coding wherein researchers first looked at all the information as a whole with little expectation of what would be found in order to allow for a variety of concepts to emerge organically (Creswell, 2014; Miles & Huberman, 1994). At this stage researchers examined the data individually and began to identify subjects around which themes might be formed. Similar interpretations of the data were described and centered largely on artist education and professional experience and social factors of the community such as networking, artists' perceived credibility, and local hospitality industry aesthetics. After an initial analysis, axial coding was employed to consider emerging themes from a variety of angles (Creswell, 2014) keeping in mind that the purpose of phenomenological research is to search for the overall essence of an experience (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). During this process themes were evaluated, and then reevaluated and rethemed in consideration of their relationship to the local hospitality industry specifically and neolocalism more generally. Finally, an agreed upon interpretation was formed in turn providing the study with an element of intercoder reliability (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In order to ensure validity and reliability, researchers used memoing with thorough descriptions to detail how findings were produced (Babbie, 2014). Reflexivity was also utilized as researchers discussed and debated themes at various stages of the data analysis process in order to develop the most clear and well-rounded findings possible (Babbie, 2014).

4. Findings

Four themes emerged from the data and were labeled to reflect the general broad subject connecting participants' experiences. Education; artist networks; self-advocacy, perseverance, and building credibility; and community taste and artistic freedom comprised the primary elements shaping artists experiences connecting with local food and beverage entities. Representative data supporting each theme is included as an appendix to this paper (see Appendix A).

4.1. Education

All of the artists interviewed attended one of the two local institutions of higher education in the area in the last fifteen years. Many attributed their experiences at school as a factor in their artistic development. Leo for example attended college to pursue his musical career, choosing to major in creative writing with a focus on poetry to refine and improve the quality of his lyrics and song writing skills. He found that his studies allowed him to see music in a new perspective, transitioning his style from a more literal approach at writing lyrics to more figuratively rich prose with a special focus on the metaphorical. Others echoed the same feelings that their arts education led them to create richer pieces and prose.

However, while post-secondary education may have helped further most artists' crafts, data also revealed a gap in the art educations provided. Interviewees reported that although their education was a critical step in their artist career, they noted a lack of business instruction and opportunities to gain experience relevant to acquiring gigs with local hospitality venues. Many artists found themselves and their peers graduating with

their passions honed and ready to be followed professionally but lacked the business experience to brand and market themselves to those willing to support them. Hillary, a photographer and branding expert, summed up the notion, “You could be the best painter in the world but if you don’t know how to get it out there and put a price on it, no one’s ever going to see it and you’re never going to make a living doing what you want.” Other artists also found this to be an issue as well. Many commented that they had friends in the industry that loved the art side, but as a creative had no idea how to brand or market themselves. This inhibited their ability to connect with local businesses who could be vital to their professional success in the area.

4.2. Artist Networks

Despite some educational gaps, a number of artists credited their time at college in Wilmington to the furthering of their careers pointing primarily to the local network of artists as a factor in their success. Jess, a beginning comedian, noted that like others she did not think she would have started doing stand-up comedy if she had gone to school anywhere else, “which is a testament to how good this comedy scene is” she said. “Something that I do really love is that everybody who’s creative knows everyone else between one to two people,” Hillary, the photographer echoed; a sentiment that was reflected in many of the interviews held. The creative network was portrayed as intricate, supportive, and easy to enter if artists showed any interest. In this sense, networking with other artists in the community was identified as an extremely important element in finding artistic success in the food and beverage art scene. Max, an indie musician articulated what others had also noted saying “the only time I regret anything is when I don’t go...its most important to network. That’s almost more important than the music, honestly.” Like other artists interviewed, he started his career at open mikes (i.e. with small unpaid experiences) in the area and picked up opportunities as he met other performers and audience members.

Supporting other artists was also deemed vital. Max explained that networking was like a web where artists build a set of connections and must stay in contact with all of them in order to create mutual growth in the industry. Cameron, a local actor and producer reflected similar feelings in his interview, “artists have to help and support other people... and they’re going to return the favor. People have to put in the work and show other people they care about their work as well.” This was echoed across genres with artists reporting that networking and mutual support were central to their success in pursuing gigs in local food and beverage venues. Some artists had even banded together as collectives to ensure communal growth. Zion, a painter and part of one group called the Thrive Artist Collective said he and several others were able to “band together and use collective money to buy space to show in” which in turn helped him create a “network that helps fill in the community where they need art”. This less organic and more organized type of networking provided a way for artists to connect as a community, develop contacts, and in turn, book gigs with local food and beverage venues.

4.3. Self-Advocacy, Perseverance, & Building Credibility

All of the local artists interviewed also spoke about the importance of an artist’s career path on both their discovery of knowledge and the development of self-worth in their field. Many of the participants interviewed indicated that when attempting to get their work into food and beverage businesses, younger artists tended to be taken less seriously in their craft and in turn were compensated less for their work than older artists who were perceived as more experienced and thus worthy of higher pay rates. Hillary (the photographer and branding professional) for example, talked about her challenges with compensation at the beginning of her career: “For a very, very, very long time I didn’t get paid. I didn’t make money. People didn’t want to hold up their ends of deals because I was young and learning”. Leo, a young hip-hop musician, discussed similar challenges regarding his age. Leo said his biggest struggle starting out was “trying to find a value for what I brought to the table because I was (sic) providing a service... so I wanted to be compensated fairly.” One unique difference between Hillary’s start and Leo’s start was that Leo broke into the local music industry with a band made up of more established area musicians which helped him gain credibility (and reasonable compensation) more quickly than others interviewed. Hillary grew up in the area but started her career in the arts independently. She gained footing by offering to shoot pictures of companies’ products for free to demonstrate her talent and add experience to her resume. Like Leo, this allowed her to work with food and beverage-based venues in the area but like a majority of the other artists interviewed, did not guarantee her sufficient pay for her services. Similar to what others experienced, she had to work for free or limited pay for around ten years before she was able to make a living on her photography skills alone. Many interviewees further reported that these challenges often forced young artists to question their place in the industry.

Many artists interviews similarly started off their careers by approaching local owners of food and beverage businesses on cold calls and showing them their work while trying to get to know them. Zion, an oil painter, reported that he frequents a lot of local hospitality entities checking for empty walls where there may be space for his art. If he thinks his art might fit the venue, he will bring in a sample of his work and talk to the owner to see if they are interested. He believed this to be a great way to connect directly to businesses without the need of a middleman. Jake, a local musician, also followed this approach, often going around with his press kit and a sample of his music to share. He said one big tool that helped him gain traction was social media. Instagram provided Jake with a way to show business owners what kind of crowds he could bring into local establishments and helped him garner a sense of credibility when speaking to businesses for the first time. Many other artists interviewed also used a portfolio approach in making connections. Hillary, the photographer, similarly utilized a digital portfolio format while Leo, a musician, explained that these examples were key in building credibility as an artist.

With increased credibility many artists indicated that they also felt they had more opportunities to be creative and create art that was “out of the box” for the local community. Since many of them had already established their baseline talent in the city, they felt they could do a little more in their fields and still maintain their following. Jake, a hip-hop musician and music producer for example, said achieving more artistic freedom lies in having established a dependable name for himself. He said sometimes artists have been more conservative in order to “make themselves well enough known that (sic) people will come out and respect them. Then they can do more of what they want”. Nick, an abstract painter who specializes in portraits with graffiti and sculptural influences captured the theme best noting that “being an artist is like being a door-to-door salesman. People have to hustle all the time until they get to a point where someone sees... [and] they have enough following to make money off them.” As artists became known and respected in the area, they were able to branch out with their work and try different techniques, pieces, and themes.

4.4. Community Taste & Artistic Freedom

The connection between hospitality-based businesses and artistic populations is, in Wilmington, complicated. While local bars and eateries play a vital role in the success of artistic talent, the local community also has a huge role in determining what art is promoted and accepted. One issue that was shared by many of the artists was the limited artistic views and values prevalent amongst food and beverage business owners and consumers in the area. Nick for example talked about his struggles commenting, “In general, I know my work isn’t going to be completely accepted here. The audience wants a specific kind of work because the demographic with disposable income has a very specific taste and culture.” Nick had a hard time finding an audience in Wilmington for his avant-garde pieces filled with graffiti words and bright colors. This caused some artists like Nick to change their work to make a living in the area. An artist named Leo seemed to agree claiming that one of his biggest challenges starting out was “trying to get venues to be comfortable with the music I was playing”. He began his solo career as a rapper, creating and performing both lyrics and beats but soon found that the genre was not as accepted in food and beverage venues as he had hoped. As a result, he adapted his music to a beats-only format and formed a musical coalition called Beats and Coffee that is now very popular in the area. This group of musicians focuses on just the beats behind the music and takes out the lyrics, so the songs are less controversial. Another example was found in Zion who changed his entire style of painting in order to achieve success in the local food and beverage-based art scene. “If I had my way, I would just do my oil paintings. I love doing more abstract oil paintings, but they don’t fill as many spaces as well, so I do beachier stuff because it works in this city and it sells.” This sentiment was echoed by other artists as well who also found they had to change some elements of their work and adapt it to the community in order to disseminate their art through local hospitality platforms.

This lack of freedom led some artists, like Jake (a hip-hop musician), to picture the Wilmington area as a conveyor belt for creatives. He said that he sees a lot of artists start here, but in the end, many feel they must move to bigger cities with wider audiences to achieve full artistic freedom”. Others like Nick (the avant-garde painter) echoed this same resigned recognition of reality saying “if I want to do this full time and not just make ends meet and survive, I need to meet a new demographic of people that are younger and more diverse and have a disposable income they want to spend on modern art.”

5. Discussion, Conclusions, & Suggestions

Overall, findings suggest that local food and beverage establishments like breweries, coffee shops, and restaurants play a vital role in the health and growth of individual artists' careers and the local arts community as a whole. This study confirms how closely linked the local arts scene and the local food and beverage industry are in the age of neolocalism as posited by Ingram, Slocum, and Cavaliere (2020). However, while the trend of neolocalism facilitated the dissemination of local art by providing a platform through which many local artists have built a career, several practical aspects kept many artists from fully engaging in food and beverage arts scene. An inability to make connections and a lack of branding and marketing skills presented challenges that kept some artists from pursuing food and beverage venues for dissemination and others reportedly from creating art full time or as much as they would ideally like to.

In addition to practical factors that de facto limited the diversity of the individuals participating and art showcased in local food- and beverage-based businesses, artists felt their creative freedoms were restrained due to the nature of having to create art that satisfied business owners and their patrons. These factors created significant constraints that in practicality end up limiting not only the diversity of artists represented but also the type art disseminated to the public through these popular platforms. In this sense, the challenges artists face when utilizing local hospitality entities as a means of disseminating their art or supporting their craft may in fact, work counter to the ideologies associated with neolocalism that champion diversity as a means to a triple bottom line of sustainability as proposed by Slocum and Ingram (2020).

5.1. Personal Branding & Marketing

Local institutions of higher education seem to inspire and encourage the creation of diverse, unique, and creative art, yet artists reported that while they were taught to think artistically, they were not given the tools to effectively support themselves from their art. In this sense many artists struggle to brand themselves to food and beverage businesses because they lacked proper business and marketing knowledge. On a large scale, institutions of higher education could work to integrate a business curriculum into their arts programs to ensure that creatives would have an introduction to and some background information on how they might earn a living from sharing their talents with others. These constraints could also hinder work from artists representing underserved backgrounds from being similarly picked up and disseminated in food and beverage businesses if they do not have access to similar marketing, branding, or even art-focused educational opportunities.

If colleges focused more on helping artists learn their business value, how to market and price themselves, and how to connect to local businesses around them, a wider variety of art would become available to the community and be incorporated into the local place narrative. This may simply be advising issue wherein artists could be encouraged to take marketing and business classes. Art programs could also work to develop opportunities for collaboration with their school's hospitality or tourism programs. In turn, a more diverse and healthy artistic community could be sustained. Given that arts are vital to creating a diverse, inclusive, and unique sense of place in the age of neolocalism, businesses minded artists would benefit the entire community. If they were educated on principals like branding and networking, businesses may have less of a search when trying to connect to the local culture, thereby creating a more inclusive place narrative that lends itself to long-term community vibrancy.

5.2. Fostering Networks

Additionally, networks proved vital to the retention of artists in the community and thus to diversity of art being made in the area. Artists relied heavily on self-advocacy early on, but found an artistic network helpful in gaining contacts, gigs, and fair payment for performances, wears, and services rendered as suggested by Grant (2004). Those who could not make connections or market themselves to local food and beverage organizations often reportedly moved to larger cities or were deterred from serious professional artistic endeavors all together.

Cultivating a unique and diverse place narrative depends on the retention of talented artists in local area. Unfortunately, there is no real standard for connecting food and beverage or other businesses with artists. When speaking to the artists in this small city, one of the questions asked was how to better facilitate introductions and connections. Many different solutions were proposed, but most centered on either building networking opportunities or better enabling artists to connect through social media outlets. Some said that it could be beneficial to host artist and business mixers to create a safe place for both parties to meet and interact.

Another idea was to create more artists collectives so people would have networks of artists to pose questions to and gain contacts through. When asked how existing relationships could be improved, artists thought creating a local hashtag or rotary list of names could be helpful. The hashtag would allow artists to use their already established media to connect, while a rotary would cater to businesses who were searching for local artists. Finally, one unique suggestion was for branding experts like Hillary (one of the participants interviewed) to become more prevalent within the artist community in order to bridge the gap between the two sectors. Other artists seemingly agreed noting that the artistic community needs “people who like creativity but that have a business mindset to be the fluid in between”. Business majors from local colleges who have a passion for the arts could gain experience in branding and marketing by working with local artists on a pro bono basis thus benefiting both parties. Community groups such as local hospitality industry and business owners’ organizations, community arts councils, and government bodies could also consider creating community outreach opportunities, workshops, and local mentoring opportunities that facilitate artist connections within the community.

5.3. Limitations & Future Research

Though an incredibly small sample representing the experiences of artists in only one community, this study nonetheless highlights the intimate relationship between art, hospitality organizations, and contemporary placemaking. Further, the study illustrates how neolocalism can both positively impact local artists and local arts communities, and conversely, effectively limit the type of art disseminated and artists who participate in the food and beverage arts scene, in turn restricting the inclusiveness of the place narratives reflected.

Given the popularity of neolocalism more research is needed focusing on the links between the arts and local food and beverage entities. The owners of local food and beverage businesses should be interviewed in order to clarify how they discover and connect with local talent in their area. Another major factor in this relationship is the consumer. Consumers not only financially support businesses they also help decide what art is accepted and sought out. Thus, studies that consider how food and beverage-based business customers view art in general, specific genres of art, and the artistic community in general would be beneficial for hospitality entities, local artists, and their communities alike. Research surrounding these topics can only enhance community vibrancy.

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Appendix A. Themed Data Table

Education	Artist Networks	Self Advocacy, Perseverance, & Building Credibility	Community Taste & Artistic Freedom
When she started in high school went to local boutiques and shops (hot wax surg shop, husk, soul shoetique, the wondershop) and ask if she could take things and shoot it for her portfolios and in return they would get images of their products	“something that I really do love about Wilmington is that everybody who’s creative knows everyone else between one or two people probably.”	“Exposure, performing at different places allows me to reach wider audiences and get more opportunities based at the places I’m performing”	Intention is different: less about impressing, “my dedication to the craft has taught me, oh impact a few.”
Career choice about 15 yrs ago and then reenrolled in school for it (associate of arts for bachelors and masters from Academy of Art San Francisco	“being at a downtown shop you just meet people all the time. It’s such a cool place you get to meet a lot of interesting people who are also really creative and into fashion and weird art”	“Every time I had a big solo show I would go around to the galleries and ask them to come to my show to see my work”	“I didn’t want to go so far out there that the people with money and needing services wouldn’t consider me. And then after I grew enough where I could start taking creative liberty with things I went super out there.”
Went to Cape Fear and UNCW for fine art degree, studio art program	It’s most important to network. That’s almost more important than the music, honestly”	“Being an artist for yourself is like being a door to door salesman, you have to hustle all the time until you get to a point where someone sees you have enough following that they can make money off of you”	In relation to importance of restaurants and breweries= “without their support there is very little we could do”
Going to school and doing lots of art and creating lineage of art you assess, critique, and talk about and having a voice has changed overtime.	In relation to networking at local businesses and meeting artists at local shows: No idea how they would have met so many people without that platform, “only time I regret anything is when I don’t go. Makes it addicting to keep going and keep going”	Overtime got more professional, the longer you do it, grow, and look back at work and cringe=means you’re trying hard to progress, grow, master yourself and your skills	Type of music changed when he moved to Wilmington: Play in rock now but didn’t write rock music beforehand, more folky and rootsy before

When in college wanted to be super impressive and huge crowds=influenced by online and movies	Belongs to artist collective in Wilmington “band together and use collective money to buy space where we can show in. . . kept that network to help fill in the community where they need art”	“make yourself well enough known until people will come out and respect you and then you can do more of what you want”	make setlist that best fits group of people at a venue
	People see her at shows and approach her and ask if she wants to perform	“Every creative field is so saturated there’s a million other me’s, like high school kids with their cameras that want to be a photographer or do modeling. So I guess just finding my path and following it and trusting it. For a very very very long time I didn’t get paid, I didn’t make money, people didn’t want to hold up their ends of deals because I was young and learning. Making the transition from trades to getting paid was long and arduous”	Play in front of middle-aged people, play different songs than basement house with college kids
	“always networking”	people thinking at all just fun and you shouldn’t get paid for what you do. Or people being like ‘I can just take that with my iphone	Will adapt depending on the crowd and the energy
	“Comedians jump at the opportunity to give other comedians opportunities”	Got his start by frequenting the business. Friends of owners know his work and point him towards area. Going in and showing his work and asking if they are interested=keeps portfolio of work in his car and if he notices a place doesn’t have much on the walls he will go in and ask if they want to hang his stuff	had to change his art to sell to survive= First started with just making the art he wanted and didn’t care what people wanted to buy Needed to look around and see what people were buying and what he could live with making to fit that market “If I had my way, I would just do my oil paintings. I love doing more abstract oil paintings, but they don’t fill as many spaces as well, so I do the beachier stuff because it works in these places and it sells”
	Unless you have a team around you full of good people it can be hard	Used to push his own stuff and pop up shows, coffee shops	“I just don’t think I can sell my message and make a living right now. At least not here.”
	You have to push your artists friends forward, its hard to do it alone	Someone gave him show in Cargo District=amazing venue. After got picked up by gallery. Internships shown in Wilma Gallery with international artists.	Yet she sometimes has to sensor her jokes a bit because of the area and crowd. Better comedians have jokes for every audience. “I don’t have enough for that but I deliver a lot of the same material and it seems to work across a lot of different populations”

	Local comedy scene is motivated by local club Dead Crow. Dead Crow=fosters new comedians, encouraging to new comedians We are watching you, want you here, when you get better we will give you more opportunities	“My work is avante guard as far as this town is concerned so I ask numerous times to get into galleries and they weren’t really interested. And then a gallery owner came into my show at cargo works and saw my reception and work and then she wanted to work with me after that”	“It’s a weird fence of I like the culture we have where we don’t tolerate bad shit but I don’t think its fair to ruin someone’s career over a bad comment they made a few years ago.”
	Usually informal, word of mouth	Putting out art “gives you the opportunity and monetary advantage to make more work”	She isn’t blatantly offensive so usually people are receptive but sometimes some audiences she is more hesitant with some of her jokes.
		Knock on their door and tell them what you do, check my page, social media, the experiences we have already put on and the crowds we brought	“don’t think I would have started doing stand up if I went to school anywhere else which is a testament to how good this comedy scene is. But Wilmington doesn’t have a huge audience for comedy.”
		Having the right press kit: music video=known video people or have money to pay for it	“I think in other cities there may be something where they see something in you that’s different and new and they understand what’s going on in the pulse of things. As far as Wilmington is concerned in my eyes its much more what is in the vein of what can sell. Unless you do certain types of art or you’re a hustler its harder to sell modern and contemporary art”
		Hard to be a hip-hop artist here, “You can’t just jump onto hip hop shows, you have to actually go out and create the opportunity yourself”	“in general I know my work isn’t going to be completely accepted here. The audience here wants a specific kind of work...(the demographic with disposable income that can afford to buy art) has a very specific taste in this culture around here. A lot of times they look very similar and so I’ve just tried to understand that. I have a group of people and every once in a while, when they can afford to buy something. I haven’t jacked up my prices much... to not outprice the small amount of clientele I’ve built up. I can’t compete with people who make landscapes and abstracts.”
		“try to find a value and what you bring to the table because you are providing a service so you want to be compensated”	“If I want to do this full time and not just to make ends meet and survive I need to meet a new demographic of people that are younger and more diverse and have that disposable income and are into modern stuff”

		<p>“trying to get the venue to be comfortable with the music you’re playing”. Establish your worth</p>	<p>“I can’t really be a rapper 5 times a week in a small town. There are only so many people that are going to come out to come see you.”</p>
			<p>Branched out in different cities and states</p>
			<p>“Other cities that you go to value art a little bit higher.”</p>
			<p>Murals in Wilmington, city will fine them until they get rid of it</p>
			<p>Change to fit myself, less club djs and more non-profit and stuff he’s attached to</p>
			<p>If you play Americana, acoustic guitar, country etc people will just hire you to come play on their patio but “people don’t just want rappers rapping at you while they’re eating dinner”</p>
			<p>“Music is a second part of the experience. You have a bar, drinks make the money. Oh well you have a stage so you can get musicians in here, but that comes later.”</p>
			<p>All make Hip-Hop esc beats, created Beats and Coffee as a way to “still make music that I like and be able to play it. You don’t have any words so it’s just beats that people like and stuff like that”-remedy because there’s a larger range of audience</p>