

# Cultural Heritage and Genuine Wealth in Southwest Virginia

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*Courtney E. Hamm*

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*Advisory Committee:*

*Thomas Walker, PhD (Advisor)*

*Grace Toney Edwards, PhD*

*Rebecca L. Hill, PhD*

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## Introduction

Southwest Virginia is awash in cultural sustainability initiatives. It seems that everywhere you travel in the 19 counties that make up the region, you will see something that is connected to our Appalachian cultural heritage—The Crooked Road, Round the Mountain Artisan Trails, Craft Festivals, and Old Time Music. It would appear that everyone is on board with the concept of heritage as tourism—including small town politicians, the state tourism agency, the massive community action agency People Incorporated, and even former governor and current United States senator Mark Warner. Tourism in Southwest Virginia alone grew by an average of 2.56% from 2011-2012 and added over \$1.3 billion to the economy of the region.<sup>1</sup>

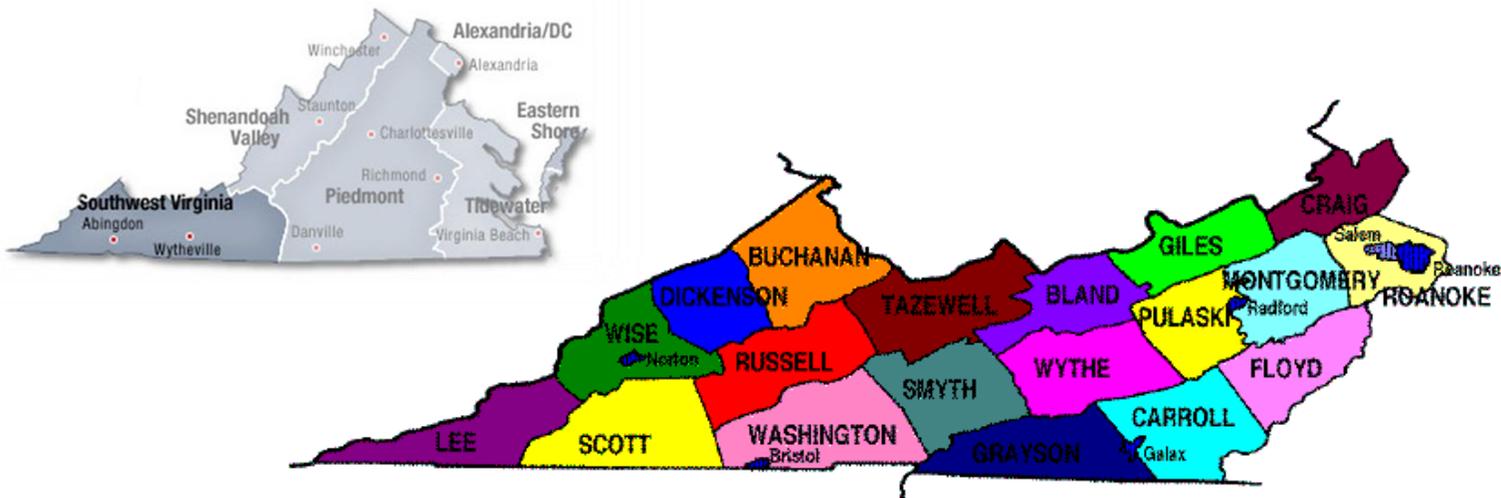


Figure 1 The 19 counties and six independent cities that constitute Southwest Virginia<sup>2,3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Data comes from Virginia Tourism Corporation's Virginia Locality Economic Impact Data available at <http://virginiascan.yesvirginia.org/localspending/localspending.aspx>. A report was created on November 4, 2013 to study the economic impact of tourism on Southwest Virginia's 19 counties and 6 independent cities. Growth percentage is presented as an average of all localities, and the group describes expenditures as "represent[ing] the direct spending by domestic travelers including meals, lodging, public transportation, auto transportation, shopping, admissions, and entertainment." The total figure for expenditures in the Southwest Virginia Region is \$1,320,556,124.

<sup>2</sup> Image Source "Southwest Virginia: All Active Retirement Communities and Homes." Accessed November 14, 2013. <http://www.retirenet.com/location/communities/229-southwest-virginia/53-all-active-retirement-communities-and-homes/>.

<sup>3</sup> Image Source "Economic News/Statistics for Southwestern Virginia Counties." Accessed November 10, 2013. [http://www.radford.edu/~rucee/sw\\_virginia.html](http://www.radford.edu/~rucee/sw_virginia.html).

By all appearances, Southwest Virginia should be thriving—a hub of cultural and economic activity. However, the majority of the impact of this economic growth has yet to reach beyond the region’s middle class. Over 18.02%<sup>4</sup> of the region lives at or below the federal poverty level of \$23,550 for a family of four<sup>5</sup>. Education levels lag far behind the rest of the state with approximately 19.95% of residents never receiving a high school diploma or GED<sup>6</sup>. Those that have completed some form of post-secondary education usually leave the area to find employment. With an unemployment rate that hovers around 7.36%<sup>7</sup> and a lack of professional jobs, it is unsurprising that the region is struggling with a “brain drain.” In *Appalachian Legacy: Economic Opportunity After the War on Poverty*, James P. Ziliak notes that “skilled workers are voting with their feet: those who grew up in the region are leaving and those living elsewhere do not move there.”<sup>8</sup> People still residing in the region face problems beyond receiving an education and finding employment. Teenage pregnancy rates are skyrocketing, abuse of both prescription drugs and methamphetamine are affecting more families and neighborhoods every day, and the social safety net provided by programs such as Temporary Aid for Needy Families (TANF) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is already under serious strain and becomes weaker with every political conflict both in Virginia and Washington, D.C.

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<sup>4</sup> Average created using the US Census Bureau’s “American Fact Finder” available at <http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml>. Accessed November 4, 2013

<sup>5</sup> “Federal Poverty Guidelines,” Families USA, Accessed November 4, 2013, <http://www.familiesusa.org/resources/tools-for-advocates/guides/federal-poverty-guidelines.html>

<sup>6</sup> Data accessed from “American Fact Finder” on November 4, 2013. Average was created from the percent of population with less than a 9<sup>th</sup> grade education level and the percent that had completed 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade but had no diploma.

<sup>7</sup> Average as of August 2013. “Unemployment by County in Virginia.” Bureau of Labor Statistics. Accessed November 4, 2013. <http://www.bls.gov/ro3/valaus.htm>.

<sup>8</sup> James P. Ziliak, “Introduction: Progress and Prospects for Appalachia” in *Appalachian Legacy: Economic Opportunity After the War on Poverty*, ed. James P. Ziliak (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2012), Kindle Location 215.

## A Brief Introduction to the Cultural and Economic History of Southwest

### Virginia

The organization Culture in Development defines cultural heritage as “an expression of the ways of living developed by a community and passed on from generation to generation, including customs, practices, places, objects, artistic expressions and values.”<sup>9</sup> The Appalachian cultural heritage that is specific to Southwest Virginia shares many features with the cultural heritage of the Appalachian Mountain region as a whole, but it is still distinct from the rest of the region—and even changes as one drives over the ridges between the scattered communities. It was developed within these communities, often from an amalgamation of the native cultures of the region’s original settlers. The residents of this region maintained a simple way of life throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, with many (including my great-grandparents) living without amenities such as indoor toilets or bathtubs until the 1990’s. Handicrafts and foodways were created out of necessity, not specifically for their aesthetic value:

In the creation of many necessary items, the art and the work are tied together. Whenever possible, doing something necessary meant it should be done well and be pleasing to behold. Thus the aesthetic underpinnings of such practical activities as basket making, weaving and quilting, blacksmithing, stone and wood work, and home building become clearer as these skills become rarer in the community.<sup>10</sup>

Music enabled many to maintain their connection to religion or to share the worries of everyday life with their neighbors. While their actual “birthplaces” may be disputed, the genres of old-time, bluegrass, and country music would not exist without Appalachian musicians who lived and worked in Southwest Virginia. Even with such a rich cultural history, Maureen

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<sup>9</sup> “What is Cultural Heritage?” Culture in Development, Accessed November 2, 2013. [http://www.cultureindevelopment.nl/Cultural\\_Heritage/What\\_is\\_Cultural\\_Heritage](http://www.cultureindevelopment.nl/Cultural_Heritage/What_is_Cultural_Heritage).

<sup>10</sup> Deborah Thompson and Irene Moser, “Appalachian Folklife” in *A Handbook to Appalachia: An Introduction to the Region*, ed. Grace Toney Edwards et al. (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2006), 147.

Mullinax reminds us that “cultural resources do not automatically become empowering, but must be cultivated,” and these cultural resources did little to increase the economic viability or genuine wealth of the region’s residents.<sup>11</sup>

Wealth did exist in pockets of Appalachia, but most of it belonged to the representatives of absentee landowners and businesses. The majority of residents either worked for the extractive industries (coal and timber) or were sustenance farmers—all sources of income that mostly disappeared in the first half of the last century. However, according to Christopher Dorsey in his book about a neighboring region, “a return to this economic system would not prevent the region from spiraling into economic and social destitution.”<sup>12</sup> While some local politicians and economic development officials seemed to realize that the region’s future could not depend on these extractive industries, others still make sure to brand themselves as a “friend of coal”—and to point out that their political opponents have “betrayed coal.”



Figure 2 Online Political Advertisement from the 2012 Virginia Senate Election<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Maureen Mullinax, “Resistance Through Community-Based Arts,” in *Transforming Places: Lessons from Appalachia*, ed. Stephen L. Fisher et al. (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois, 2012), 98.

<sup>12</sup> Christopher Dorsey, *Southern West Virginia and the Struggle for Modernity*, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co, Inc., 2011), Kindle location 936.

<sup>13</sup> Image Source “Dems Go for the Race Card; Allen (and Everyone Else) Talks Coal Jobs, Energy Independence.” Accessed November 10, 2013. <http://bearingdrift.com/2012/09/27/dems-go-for-the-race-card-allen-and-everyone-else-talks-coal-jobs-energy-independence>.

The next large economic movement in Southwest Virginia was to attract manufacturing plants to the region. These plants varied from sporting goods to building supplies to defense contractors to textiles and clothing. In the past 30 years, the region has seen many of these plants shut their doors and leave thousands unemployed:

After taking advantage of incentive packages and tax rebates, most of the branch textile, shoe, food processing, and other small plants attracted to Appalachia in the 1980s and 1990s left the region by the end of the century, shifting their production to offshore, even-lower-wage facilities in Latin America and Asia...Such plant closings were repeated again and again throughout the region as textiles, leather, and other small manufacturing operations abandoned the United States for cheaper offshore production. Despite the booming national economy in the 1990s, rural Appalachian communities struggled to keep pace with changing global markets. The decline of coal mining and manufacturing employment and the loss of supplemental income from tobacco farming left rural mountain families with few options in an era of rising consumption and technological change. Some families opted to commute long distance to service and trade jobs in regional growth centers. The new interstate and Appalachian corridor highways were clogged each morning and evening with workers from rural communities streaming to and from low-paying jobs elsewhere. Other mountain families chose to subsist on Social Security or disability assistance in hollows and coves that were populated more and more by older residents. Many individuals, especially the young, migrated permanently to the education, employment, and social opportunities of distant cities.<sup>14</sup>

With employment opportunities disappearing almost daily from the region, it is little wonder that the local and regional political and non-profit organizations have settled on cultural heritage tourism as the next great scheme to bring wide-spread economic development to the region. But there are concerns about following this path. According to the World Commission on Culture and Development, there is a world-wide concern that development will mean “the loss of identity, sense of community and personal meaning.”<sup>15</sup> If this fear exists regarding

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<sup>14</sup> Ronald D. Eller, *Uneven Ground: Appalachia since 1945*, (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2008), Kindle location 2911.

<sup>15</sup> World Commission on Culture and Development in Paris, "Our Creative Diversity: Report of the World Commission on Culture and Development," (Executive Summary. Paris: 1995), 28.

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normal economic development, it is not a far stretch of the imagination to think about what development that is dependent on “identity, sense of community and personal meaning” could cause.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine how the millions of dollars in tourism expenditures in Southwest Virginia are being used to improve quality of life for residents of the region and explore some possibilities for expanding that impact. I examine the literature available on the central and southern Appalachian region, as well as on poverty and community development in rural areas across the United States. I present the views of organizations in Southwest Virginia that work with cultural heritage in the region with the aim of developing the economy and creating stronger communities. I analyze the academic research as well as the work of these organizations using the concept of the Genuine Wealth Indicator to address three key themes: 1) Community Development versus Economic Development, 2) Internal Voices versus Outside Influences; and 3) Tourism: Positive Effects versus Damaging Outcomes. I will address the practical applications of my research into these themes for Southwest Virginia and how this research can be applied to rural areas outside the Appalachian region. Finally, I will address how this research is connected to the key purposes of Goucher College’s Master of Arts in Cultural Sustainability program and provide a bibliography for those interested in learning more about related topics.

## Methodology

The overall methodological approach to my research was qualitative, although some quantitative information—such as statistics about revenues, poverty, employment, and educational attainment—was necessary to fully understand the scope of the problem. I chose to use the qualitative method because many of the measurements of genuine wealth including human capital, social capital, and natural capital do not easily lend themselves to statistics in the same manner as more traditional measurements such as Gross Domestic Product.

### How is Economic Development Defined?

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has long been used as a determinant of economic well-being, a tradition that has been blamed for the “relentless pursuit of consumerism, deregulation, globalization, and privatization” that have resulted in “financial collapse, resource depletion, and climate change.”<sup>1</sup> Many of the statistics mentioned in my introduction—growth in tourism, tourism expenditures, poverty, and unemployment—are all features of GDP. As I established in my introduction, expenditures (or the amount of money created by an industry in a particular area—tourism in this case) do not necessarily represent true economic growth. Even with a relatively large growth in the region’s largest industry—2.56% over a one year period<sup>2</sup>—the statistics that should represent quality of life do not show an improvement in response.

Unemployment, educational attainment, and poverty statistics show that the quality of life in Appalachia has not much improved since President John F. Kennedy’s creation of the War on Poverty.

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<sup>1</sup> John Talberth, PhD, “Making Genuine Progress: Towards Global Consensus on a Headline Indicator for the New Economy,” Program Prospectus for the Center for Sustainable Economy, June 2012. Accessed November 17, 2013. <http://genuineprogress.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Measuring-Genuine-Progress-Final.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup>See note 1, page 3.

## Community Development or Economic Development: Alternatives to GDP

According to Dr. John Talberth, Senior Economist at the Center for Sustainable Economy:

There is really no connection between economic activity and economic welfare—there can be an extraordinary level of buying and selling taking place in an economy at the same time that the majority of its citizens are poor, unhealthy, unsatisfied with the quality of their lives, and living in danger of war, environmental contaminants, and political instability. Conversely, we can have a relatively low level of economic activity at a time when citizens are enjoying significant leisure time with family and friends, living in healthy environments, and consuming goods and services that are tasteful, built to last, and made with a minimum of waste.<sup>3</sup>

The fact that the most widely-used measure of economic progress fails to take into account the sustainability of economic progress or the well-being of citizens has led economists such as Anielski, Ferreira, Vincent, and Talberth to search for measurements that can replace or supplement GDP and provide a better picture of the economic and social development within a region. In Dr. Talberth's "Measuring Genuine Progress: Towards Global Consensus on a Headline Indicator for the New Economy," he describes a variety of options that can "reflect society's consensus on what really matters."<sup>4</sup>

Talberth describes a variety of approaches to replacing, supplementing, or adjusting GDP including the Genuine Wealth Index, the Millennium Development Goals indicators of progress, Green GDP, Genuine Savings, and the Genuine Progress Indicator<sup>5</sup>. While each of these

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<sup>3</sup> Talberth, "Making Genuine Progress," 3.

<sup>4</sup> Talberth, "Making Genuine Progress," 2.

<sup>5</sup> For more information on each of these approaches, see Mark Anielski's *The Economics of Happiness: Discovering Genuine Wealth*, The United Nation's Millennium Development Goals at <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>, The United Nations Environment Programme's Green Economy at <http://www.unep.org/greeneconomy/>, Susan Ferreira and Jeffrey R. Vincent's "Genuine Savings: Leading Indicator of Sustainable Development? In *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, 53 2005-04, pp. 737-754, and Talberth's "Making Genuine Progress."

approaches has its own merits, for the purposes of this thesis, I have decided to use a modified version of the Genuine Wealth Index based on Mark Anielski's "Five Capitals of Genuine Wealth: Human Capital, Social Capital, Natural Capital, Built Capital, and Financial Capital."<sup>6</sup> I have used the theoretical perspective provided in Anielski's *The Economics of Happiness: Building Genuine Wealth* as the framework for addressing the key themes of my research (Community Development versus Economic Development, Internal Voices versus Outside Influences, and Tourism: Positive Effects versus Damaging Outcomes) and how each of these themes applies directly to the concept of genuine wealth in Southwest Virginia.

The research included in this thesis consists of two types of sources—previous published research into related issues and interviews with organizations in Southwest Virginia working within the field of cultural heritage.

### Written Sources

Research that is specific to Southwest Virginia related directly to the economic situation is surprisingly sparse—possibly because the situation in nearby Appalachian states seems worse by comparison. I found that in many pieces, the effects of poverty in southern West Virginia, eastern Kentucky and Tennessee, and western North Carolina would be discussed with little to no information on the area of Virginia that connects the region. A search for information on the region is more likely to turn up genealogies, tales of civil war battles, photographic collections of art and the outdoors, or a history of the musical heritage of the region. For this reason, I have included literature that addresses issues in the Appalachian areas surrounding Southwest Virginia, including Dorsey's *Southern West Virginia and the Struggle for Modernity*; Fritsch and Johannsen's *Ecotourism in Appalachia*; Gaventa, Smith, and Willingham's *Communities in*

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<sup>6</sup> Mark Anielski, *The Economics of Happiness: Discovering Genuine Wealth*, (Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers, 2007,) Kindle Location 1060-1085.

*Economic Crisis: Appalachia and the South*; Kingsolver's *Tobacco Town Futures: Global Encounters in Rural Kentucky*; and Starnes's *Creating the Land of the Sky: Tourism and Society in Western North Carolina*. These pieces are also important because many of the problems that affect Southwest Virginia affect the region as a whole. Economic disadvantage crosses the mountains and valleys without concern for political borders.

Equally vital to my research were pieces that addressed issues of poverty in rural life throughout America. Even though these works did not directly address the situation in Southwest Virginia, pieces such as Brown, Swanson, and Barton's *Challenges for Rural America in the Twenty-First Century*; Davidson's *Broken Heartland: The Rise of America's Rural Ghetto*; and Elder and Conger's *Children of the Land: Adversity and Success in Rural America* have been crucial to my understanding of the causes and effects of poverty nationwide.

Attempting to cull the available research to what is truly germane to this project has been a monumental task. A plethora of academic research from the central and southern Appalachian region is available on a variety of topics—music, foodways, handicrafts, inter-personal relationships, poverty, community organizing, labor organizing, health, drug abuse, environmental sustainability, natural amenity development, and tourism, to name a few. Each of these topics is related to the concept of genuine wealth, but for purposes of this study I chose to mention only briefly or entirely exclude certain topics. For instance, although a portion of Southwest Virginia's current and historical economy has focused on coal, the majority of the region's mountains did not prove suitable for coal mining. Coal heritage will be briefly addressed as a small segment of the extractive industries and absentee businesses that have helped shaped the economy. Other topics are of vital importance to the region but are only peripherally addressed in this thesis including religious heritage and health issues that are unique to the region.

## Organization Interviews

In addition to literary research, I also interviewed representatives from nine organizations directly related to cultural heritage in Southwest Virginia. These organizations were Heart of Appalachia Tourism Authority, Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Commission, ‘Round the Mountain: Southwest Virginia’s Artisan Network, Appalachian Arts Center, The Jacksonville Center for the Arts, Barter Theatre, Chestnut Creek School of the Arts, the Birthplace of Country Music Museum, and Roadside Theatre: Art in a Democracy. I chose organizations from a variety of fields: tourism agencies, cultural heritage tourism groups, artisan promotion groups, arts centers, art schools, museums, and public performance groups. Each of these interviews lasted approximately one hour and focused on each organization’s work with cultural traditions—particularly those with the aim of community or economic development.

I originally proposed to conduct approximately twenty brief interviews that were more quantitative in nature. My methodology changed to include fewer interviews that were longer, unstructured, and qualitative for two reasons. The first was that I initially received few responses to my requests for interviews. It became difficult to find representatives of organizations that were willing to participate in my research. Several individuals scheduled time to speak with me and then canceled our appointments with a variety of explanations (or none at all). The second reason I chose to change the structure of my interviews is that I found the people who were willing to speak to me about the work their organization are passionate about their work and wanted to share that passion with me.

While the interviews were largely participant driven, I discovered several key areas of information that gave me a greater sense of how the organization deals with social and economic issues through the agent of cultural heritage. I focused on gaining a sense of how each organization determined which cultural traditions they would work with and how they addressed

questions of authenticity and I questioned each representative about the effect of governmental policy decisions at the local, state, and national level. I also wanted to understand what each organization saw as the main economic and social issues within their communities. I asked each of my interviewees how they engaged in community outreach and if they had any specific methods for including economically disadvantaged community members in their programming or for addressing the social issues faced by their constituents. I learned about each organization's method for tracking their impact on both community and economic development and their successes or failures in these areas. I felt it was important to know whether any of the groups I spoke with were involved with any community issues outside of their main mission statement, and I asked each representative to describe how their community would define a vibrant, viable community.

Because a number of the organizations I spoke with are directly connected to or funded by governmental sources, I found that a number of interviewees were unwilling to discuss the political climate in the region. I feel that because I was recording the interviews, the representatives did not want to say anything that could affect the financial stability of their organization or their own employment. I believe that recording also made my subjects less likely to discuss other delicate subjects such as dysfunctional organizational partnerships or a variety of social issues in the region. Some organizations were particularly hesitant to discuss the negative impact of the coal industry—possibly because Alpha Natural Resources (a major player in the coal and natural gas industry) funds a large number of programs in the region. These include tourism initiatives run by Heart of Appalachia as well as Birthplace of Country Music Alliance's Rhythm and Roots Reunion and Barter Theatre's Project REAL. However, I still consider recording the interviews to be a worth-while practice which gave me several advantages,

including the ability to accurately quote my interviewees and also to compare the language used by different organizations when describing similar efforts.

## Literature and Resource Review

Resources used for analysis in this thesis come from three main types of sources—published materials such as books, journal articles and internet publications; interviews with cultural heritage organizations; and presentations from the Southwest Virginia Creative Economy Conference. Literature sources focused on the history and culture of Appalachia, rural life throughout the United States and the effects of tourism on local communities and regional economies. The cultural heritage organizations can be divided into categories such as tourism agencies, artisan collectives and art centers, arts education facilities, historic preservation groups, and performing arts organizations.

### Topics in the Literature

#### History and Culture

Literature about the history and culture of the central and southern Appalachian region is plentiful. Because the historical element that is integral to understanding the economic situation in Southwest Virginia is directly related to the history of poverty and absentee business owners, I have only included four sections of one book related to the cultural history of the region. This book is *A Handbook to Appalachia: An Introduction to the Region* by Grace Toney Edwards; JoAnn Aust Asbury, and Ricky L. Cox. While chapters such as “Natural Resources and Environment of Appalachia,” “The Politics of Change in Appalachia,” “Health Care in Appalachia,” “Education in Appalachia,” “Appalachian Music: Examining Popular Assumptions,” “Religion in Appalachia,” “Appalachian Literature,” “Visual Arts in Appalachia,” and “Appalachians Outside the Region” are important for anyone looking to gain

more information about a broad range of topics relevant to Southwest Virginia, the topics that are most relevant to this piece are “Appalachian History,” “Appalachian Folklore,” “Peoples of Appalachia: Cultural Diversity Within the Mountain Region” and “The Economy of Appalachia.”

Richard Straw’s “Appalachian History” chapter traces the history of the region from the lives of Native Americans through the beginning of European settlement and weaves in the history of the United States. He addresses the impact of absentee business owners in the coal and timber industries, the effects of the Great Depression, and many of the programs that constituted the War on Poverty. While Straw offers an overview of the economic and social history of Appalachia, for him, the story ends with the War on Poverty. Although *A Handbook to Appalachia* was published in 2006, Straw does not describe the multitude of economic and social problems that either persisted or appeared in the 28 years between the War on Poverty and the book’s publication.

Thomas R. Shannon’s chapter “The Economy of Appalachia” addresses the economic history of the region from its agrarian roots, although he limits the heyday of the extractive industries to a 60 year period between 1870 and 1930. He defines periods of “Stagnation and Decline: 1930-1960,” “The Mirage of Economic Development: 1960-1980,” and “Disappointment and Continued Problems: 1980-2000.” Shannon, like Straw, does not address the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and the publication date of the book means that the effects of 2008’s Great Recession on Appalachia are not mentioned.

Stevan R. Jackson opens the chapter “Peoples of Appalachia: Cultural Diversity Within the Mountain Region” by describing the misleading stereotype that “Appalachians are a

homogeneous people with a single cultural heritage.”<sup>1</sup> He begins by discussing the Native Americans who were the original settlers of the region including tribes such as the Cherokee and Catawbias and how these groups were partially assimilated into the culture of the Ulster Scots, English, African Americans, Germans, Italians, Welsh, Hispanics, Asians, Jews, Amish, and Hungarians who moved to the region in search of work in the coal industry. Cultural assimilation in the Appalachians even led to the creation of a unique racially mixed group, the Melungeons. While Jackson describes what were once the unknown origins of this group, a 2012 study published in the *Journal of Genetic Genealogy* revealed that “Genetic evidence shows that the families historically called Melungeons are the offspring of sub-Saharan African men and white women of northern or central European origin.”<sup>2</sup>

“Appalachian Folklore” by Deborah Thompson and Irene Moser describes many different aspects of Appalachian culture such as “Folk Beliefs, Healing, and Foodways;” Material Culture” including baskets, fiber arts, metalworking, and wooden art; “Music and Dance” including instrumental and vocal music as well as storytelling; and the revival of folk culture currently taking place in the region. Thompson and Moser address many of the cross-cultural creations representing the diverse origins of settlers (described by Stevan R. Jackson in “Peoples of Appalachia) but conspicuously absent is any reference to occupational folklore or social controls. Also, while the authors address traditional folklore, they do not include the folklore created by cultural groups that have recently migrated to the region, particularly Hispanic cultures.

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<sup>1</sup> Stevan R. Jackson, “Peoples of Appalachia: Cultural Diversity Within the Mountain Region” in *A Handbook to Appalachia: An Introduction to the Region* eds. Grace Toney Edwards et al. (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2006), 27.

<sup>2</sup> Travis Loller, “Melungeon DNA Study Reveals Ancestry, Upsets ‘A Whole Lot of People,” *Huffington Post*, May 24, 2012, Accessed December 20, 2013, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/05/24/melungeon-dna-study-origin\\_n\\_1544489.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/05/24/melungeon-dna-study-origin_n_1544489.html).

## Rural Life

Rural life across the United States shares many similarities whether small towns in the Midwest or Southwest Virginia. Many of the works on rural America focus on these areas as a whole. The book that covers the widest number of topics relevant to this work is *Challenges for Rural America in the Twenty-First Century* edited by David L. Brown, Louis E. Swanson, and Alan W. Barton. Chapters that were particularly useful included “Rural Poverty: The Persisting Challenge,” “Rural Children and Youth at Risk,” “Rural Women: New Roles for the New Century,” and “How People Make a Living in Rural America.”

Leif Jensen, Diane K. McLaughlin, and Tim Slack’s “Rural Poverty” offers guidelines for defining poverty based on the federal poverty levels originally defined in the 1960’s. While the numbers are adjusted annually for inflation--\$17,960 in 2001<sup>3</sup> versus \$23,550 in 2013<sup>4</sup>--they do not represent the true amount of financial capital required to support a family of four. The authors describe several of the theories regarding causes for poverty, both at the individual level and structural explanations. Some authors including Ziliak discuss the possibility of the existence of a “poverty trap,” which “can be suspected when poverty is persistent, is not self-correcting, and is perpetuated by the institutions and culture of the region.”<sup>5</sup> Jensen et al. offer a list of research by other social scientists for countering rural poverty, unfortunately, most of this research centers on adapting the existing welfare system, rather than providing individuals with options to achieve genuine wealth. “Rural Children and Youth at Risk” (Daniel T. Lichter, Vincent J. Roscigno, and Dennis J. Condon), and “Rural Women: New Roles for the New Century?” (Ann R. Tickamyer and Debra A. Henderson) discuss the problems faced by rural

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<sup>3</sup> Lief Jensen, Diane K. McLaughlin, and Tim Slack, “Rural Poverty: The Persisting Challenge,” in *Challenges for Rural America in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. David Brown et al. (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003) 119.

<sup>4</sup> “Federal Poverty Guidelines.”

<sup>5</sup> Ziliak, “Introduction: Progress and Prospects for Appalachia,” Kindle Location 241.

youth and women, but while they offer a list of research and policy needs to affect these groups, they do not offer direct solutions to change the situation.

“How People Make a Living in Rural America” by David A. McGranahan offers a history of the economy in rural America from its agrarian and natural resource extraction industries through the industrial revolution. According to McGranahan, the decline in employment has helped to create marginal economies throughout rural America:

Communities characterized by relative isolation, specialization in one or two industries with relatively well-paying, low-skill jobs for men, and outside ownership are extremely vulnerable to economic misfortune and decline. If the main industry becomes unprofitable in that location, capital moves on, leaving the community with few alternatives, as most investment has gone to support the given industry and profits have gone to the outside owners. Sometimes, the industry itself degrades the environment, reducing its usefulness for other purposes. The local workforce also has few alternatives, since the industry in question did not provide or require skills that are useful elsewhere. People may remain, hoping that the industry will return...Appalachia is probably the archetype for this kind of situation.<sup>6</sup>

Like most of the chapters in *Challenges for Rural America in the Twenty-First Century*, McGranahan offers few modern options for employment in Appalachia. The lack of ideas for change is common across a large majority of the resources related to Appalachia and rural life throughout the United States such as Danbom (1995), Davidson (1996), Dorsey (2011), Duncan and Coles (1999), Elder and Conger (2000), Eller (2008), Flora and Flora (2013), Gaventa, Smith, and Willingham (1990), Lyson and Falk (1993), and Wood (2008). In contrast, ideas for change are available in literature referencing community development such as Christenson and Robinson (1989), Fisher and Smith (2012), Galston and Bahler (1995), Goldbard (2006), Green

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<sup>6</sup> David A. McGranahan, “How People Make a Living in Rural America,” in *Challenges for Rural America in the Twenty-First Century* ed. David L. Brown, et al. (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003) 144.

and Haines (2012), Hoff (1998), Keefe (2009), Kingsolver (2011), Lewis, Beaver, and Jennings (2012), Maser (1997), Mullinax (2012), Putnam (2000), Scales and Streeter (2003), Wilkinson (1991), and the World Commission on Culture and Development in Paris (1995).

## Tourism

Tourism is the second largest industry in Virginia<sup>7</sup> and the largest industry worldwide.<sup>8</sup> Many researchers, including Canan and Hennessy (1989), English, Marcouiller, and Cordell (2000), Keith, Fawson, and Chang (1996), Lankford (1994), McGranahan (1999), Miles (2000), Milman and Pizam (1988), Smith and Krannick (1998), Stanonis (2008), and Starnes (2003, 2012) have discussed the positive and negative effects of tourism in a variety of regions across the country; however, Fritsch and Johannsen's *Ecotourism in Appalachia: Marketing the Mountains* provides a critique of the tourism industry in the Central Appalachian region, including Southwest Virginia. They discuss the positive effect tourism dollars can have on the region, but counter this argument with tourism's negative effects on the environment and the evolution of the negative views of community members as described by G. V. Doxey:

His "irridex" covers four main stages. In the first, "euphoria," local people are enthused about tourism and its benefits and welcome the first trickle of visitors. In the next stage, "apathy," the community takes the presence of tourist for granted, and contact with visitors becomes more impersonal. In the third stage, "irritation," tourism nears the limit of carrying capacity, causing strain on the community. At the fourth stage, "antagonism," the tension becomes overt, and the community blames the tourists for all its problems. Beyond this is the "final stage," in which the environment is destroyed and cultural values lost.<sup>9</sup>

Tourism may be the current world-wide economic development craze, but experts have a difficult time not presenting a negative balance when weighing the rewards of an industry that by

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<sup>7</sup> Lori Hester. Interview by Author. Personal Interview. Marion, Virginia. November 30, 2013.

<sup>8</sup> Al Fritsch and Kristi Johannsen, *Ecotourism in Appalachia: Marketing the Mountains*, (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 1.

<sup>9</sup> Fritsch and Johannsen, *Ecotourism in Appalachia*, 27.

its nature is unsustainable. I discuss the multiple issues with tourism in both the analysis and practical applications sections of this thesis, under the theme of Tourism: Positive Effects versus Damaging Outcomes.

## Cultural Heritage Organizations

### Tourism Agencies

Southwest Virginia is served by three main tourism agencies: Heart of Appalachia, Blue Ridge Highlands, and the Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Commission. All three organizations are state-funded initiatives, with Heart of Appalachia and Blue Ridge Highlands existing as regions within the Virginia Tourism Corporation. Heart of Appalachia Tourism Authority in St. Paul, Virginia, represents the seven coal field counties of Southwest Virginia—Buchanan, Dickenson, Lee, Russell, Scott, Tazewell, and Wise—as well as the independent city of Norton. It was founded in 1993 with the goal to “develop, promote, and expand tourism”<sup>10</sup> in the region. The organization has one employee, Pam Vance, who serves as administrator; as well as a Board of Directors consisting of approximately 15 members who are either community members or tourism directors within the region and holds open meetings once a month.

The group works with a multitude of tourism-based initiatives within its region, including each locality’s festivals and attractions, the Virginia Coal Heritage Trail, The Virginia Artisan Trails Program, The Crooked Road, Clinch River Days Festival, Wetlands Estonsa, Clinch River Valley Initiative, ‘Round the Mountain Artisan Collective, Spearhead Trailblazers, Virginia Main Street Program, St. Paul Tomorrow, and Heartwood.<sup>11</sup> Heart of Appalachia also helps to promote and create workshops in partnership with local Chambers of Commerce for aspiring

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<sup>10</sup> Pam Vance, Interview by Author, Personal Interview, St. Paul, Virginia: September 9, 2013.

<sup>11</sup> Heart of Appalachia. “2012 Annual Report.” St. Paul, Virginia: Virginia Coalfield Regional Tourism Development Authority, 2013.

entrepreneurs and small businesses as well as workshops for educators to learn about teaching the heritage of the region.

The Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Commission was created by the Virginia Legislature in 2008 to “encourage the economic ventures and initiatives related to tourism and other asset-based enterprises, including the Southwest Virginia Artisan Center, the Crooked Road, Round the Mountain, and related cultural heritage organizations, and venues that promote entrepreneurial and employment opportunities.”<sup>12</sup> The Commission works with economic development officials, artisans, music and art venues, towns, cities, counties, business owners, outdoor recreation destinations, and non-profits in the region to help them focus on economic development and branding of the slogan “Southwest Virginia: Authentic, Distinctive, Alive.” It was heavily involved with the creation of Heartwood: Southwest Virginia’s Artisan Gateway, and is currently the coordinating agency for the Appalachian Spring—a project designed to connect Southwest Virginia’s outdoor recreation facilities with lodging and restaurant facilities so visitors to the region will know where to stay, where to eat, and what to do during their trips. Neither Heart of Appalachia nor the Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Commission works with community development issues, focusing instead on projects that will lead to economic development for the region.

### **Artisan Collectives and Art Centers**

Southwest Virginia is home to several organizations with the mission of promoting regional artisans, including ‘Round the Mountain Artisan Collective and the Appalachian Arts Center. ‘Round the Mountain was created in 2004 and serves as a sister organization to the Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Commission with the goal of providing support to regional

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<sup>12</sup> HB781: Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Commission, created. 2008. (Virginia) SS 2.2-2532. <http://www.richmondsunlight.com/bill/2008/hb781/fulltext/>.

artisans. It is a non-profit initiative and the majority of its funding comes from the \$20 per artist annual membership fee. Membership in the organization currently consists of over “500 artisan studios and venues, including specialty lodging, recreational points of interest and agricultural sites such as farmers’ markets and wineries.”<sup>13</sup> It has been instrumental in creating Southwest Virginia’s 15 artisan trails which guide visitors from artists’ studios to craft venues throughout the region. ‘Round the Mountain also provides marketing services to their members through its website and hosts free workshops to help artists become entrepreneurs. The organization manages the selection of artists through a jury process from within their organization whose work will be sold and promoted at Heartwood. ‘Round the Mountain is another organization that focuses strictly on economic development. It is closely affiliated with the Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Foundation and uses material culture as a driver for tourism to the region. ‘Round the Mountain also works to improve the individual economic situation of its members by increasing sales, offering information about the practices of profitable arts-based businesses, and providing marketing for individuals and small businesses. ‘Round the Mountain does not work with community development issues.

Appalachian Arts Center a regional art gallery, marketplace, and educational center located in Claypool Hill, Virginia. The center is a division of Southwest Virginia Community College, and the center’s employees are considered employees of the college. It is open for approximately 32 hours a week with a mission “to educate and serve the community through the promotion and preservation of traditional folkways, contemporary craft and fine art. To [sic] support economic development by assisting the area to grow through cultural tourism

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<sup>13</sup>‘Round the Mountain: Southwest Virginia’s Artisan Network. “Help Us Build a Creative Culture...Authentic, Distinctive, Alive.” Abingdon, VA. 2013.

opportunities.”<sup>14</sup> AAC was founded in 2006 under the guidance of Sarah and Jonathan Romeo who were both instrumental in the creation of The Crooked Road: Virginia’s Heritage Music Trail. In addition to displaying and selling craft and art, the center engages members of the local community by sponsoring annual quilt and photography challenges. These challenges invite entries from multiple ages and skill levels and award prizes in multiple categories. AAC provides the opportunity for local artisans to display and sell their work, adding to the economic development of the region. It also works to increase social capital in the community by creating exhibits that draw connections between the region’s cultural past and the work currently being done by artisans.

### Arts Education

Several organizations in Southwest Virginia exist with the purpose of teaching the arts to community members, hoping these new skills will enable them to improve their economic situation as well as drawing tourists to the community. These organizations include The Jacksonville Center for the Arts in Floyd, The Wayne C. Henderson School of Appalachia Music and Arts in Marion, and Chestnut Creek School of the Arts in Galax. The Jacksonville Center is a hybrid organization serving as an arts center, an education facility, and a small business incubator. It was founded in 1995 to serve as an economic engine for Floyd County when the local government decided to inventory the community’s existing assets and build on them. It is mainly a visual arts center, choosing not to focus on the performance arts to avoid duplicating efforts that are already in progress in the area. The organization has engaged in adaptive reuse of a historic building and is located in a former dairy barn. The Jacksonville Center uses this facility as a gallery and education center for both fine art and craft. It uses the additional space

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<sup>14</sup> Appalachian Arts Center. “Appalachian Arts Center About Page.” Accessed November 15, 2013. <http://apparts.sw.edu/about.htm>.

in the building to serve as a “cultural incubator for arts businesses”<sup>15</sup> and also to offer space to what they see as their sister organizations, such as a non-profit health center and New River Community Action Agency. Public Relations officer Lee Chinchester said in a telephone interview that they see “extending an open hand to organizations in need”<sup>16</sup> as a very important function of the center in the community. The organization serves as an important force for community and economic development in Floyd County.

Chestnut Creek School for the Arts provides facilities for learning both fine art and traditional craft and has been instrumental in the creation of a creative economy for the city of Galax. Since its inception three years ago, Galax has seen the creation of 11 new businesses employing 19 individuals, 14 new housing units, and documented over \$2 million in private investments in the downtown region.<sup>17</sup> CCSA provides opportunities for artisans to gain additional income through teaching classes at their facilities and offers training to those artisans so they can continue to teach outside of the organization. They encourage community members to participate in the national Empty Bowls project through open studio nights at OldTown Pottery Co-op—asking community members to create bowls which will be sold for a donation to local food banks. The school is also currently engaged in the creation of a wood working studio with the goal of transforming the skills community members gained through working in the city’s lagging furniture industry into the ability to create unique home furnishings. Chestnut Creek focuses mostly on economic development initiatives, but the organization is involving itself in social issues such as hunger and providing opportunities to underprivileged children.

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<sup>15</sup> Lee Chinchester, Interview by Author, Telephone Interview, September 25, 2013.

<sup>16</sup> Chinchester, September 25, 2013.

<sup>17</sup> Chris Pollins-Shackelford, e-mail message to author. April 2, 2013.

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## Historic Preservation

The Birthplace of Country Music Alliance—in association with the Smithsonian Institute—plans to open a museum in August 2014 honoring the role of the city of Bristol in the history of country music. The Alliance works closely with a variety of organizations, including the Bristol Rhythm and Roots Reunion; the city of Bristol, Tennessee and Bristol, Virginia, the Virginia Commission for the Arts, the Tennessee Arts Commission, The Crooked Road, Sunny Side Early Country Trail, and the National Endowment for the Arts. The Alliance was formed by the consolidation of two groups—The Birthplace of Country Music Museum and Bristol Rhythm and Roots Reunion. Both groups have the goal of sustaining the region’s musical heritage although the Birthplace of Country Music Museum works to preserve the history of music in the region while Rhythm and Roots Reunion works to present current musical acts to community members and tourists alike.

Rhythm and Roots Reunion serves as a major economic driver for the twin cities of Bristol, Tennessee and Bristol, Virginia, while the Birthplace of Country Music Museum serves not only as a center for historic preservation, but also as a community development agency. The museum plans to feature community curated exhibits designed by a staff of volunteers and filled with memorabilia from local collections. Employees of the Alliance frequently volunteer their time for a number of community events and organizations, including the Bristol Motor Speedway’s Ford Speedway in Lights. The Speedway in Lights is sponsored by the Tennessee Valley Authority and all proceeds go to support programs and non-profits benefiting children throughout the region. As an affiliate of the Smithsonian, the Birthplace of Country Music Museum has access to the high-quality programs offered by the Smithsonian. It has recently taken advantage of a program that allows local students to capture, edit, and share images of

space and plans to use this program to help explain the science of sound to visitors to the museum.

## Performing Arts

Southwest Virginia has two major performing arts organizations—the Barter Theatre located in Abingdon and Roadside Theatre (a division of Appalshop) headquartered in Norton. The historic Barter Theatre was founded in 1933 by Robert Porterfield. Mr. Porterfield created the idea of trading “ham for Hamlet” by asking theatregoers to pay an admission charge of “40 cents or equivalent amount of produce.”<sup>18</sup> In its 80<sup>th</sup> year, the official state theatre of Virginia operates under the mission statement:

Barter is a resident company of passionate professional artists and leaders dedicated to serving and enriching our region by creating live theatre in repertory; by providing a nurturing environment for all involved; by embracing and celebrating Appalachia; by being stewards of the legacy of Barter Theatre; by using theatre as a vehicle for education; and by providing audiences, both young and adult, with an extraordinary and enlightening experience each and every time they engage with us.<sup>19</sup>

Barter is one of the biggest economic builders in Southwest Virginia with a \$34 million direct economic impact and also serves as a cultural draw for businesses, medical professionals, and retirees looking to relocate to the area. The Theatre is much more than a driver for tourism and economic development—it also manages a large number of community development initiatives including a partnership with Feeding America, the Barter Youth Academy, a yearly fundraiser for the United Way, a ticket donation program to help other local non-profits, the Appalachian Festival of Plays and Playwrights, and Project REAL (Reinforcing Education through Artistic Learning).

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<sup>18</sup> Barter Theatre. “History of Barter Theatre.” Accessed November 16, 2013. <http://www.bartertheatre.com/#historyalumni>.

<sup>19</sup> Barter Theatre. “FAQs.” Accessed November 16, 2013. <http://www.bartertheatre.com/#faqinfo>.

In contrast to the Barter Theatre:

Improving the economic viability of Southwest Virginia is somewhere down the list of Roadside Theatre/Appalshop's goals. Our main purpose is providing mediums for the diverse voices of the region to hear themselves and each other. In this way, we hope the local life of Southwest Virginia can become more aware of itself. We think such awareness is a foundation for development, including economic development.<sup>20</sup>

Roadside Theatre draws on the performance history of Southwest Virginia that has its roots in storytelling, indigenous churches, and musical heritage. It is an ensemble company made up of local residents who grew up in these traditions, but most of whom never studied theatre at an institution. Many residents of the region have little interest in traditional theatre, and Roadside has worked diligently to remove the “fourth wall” between the audience and the actors, constructing plays that can incorporate constant communication with the audience. Roadside Theatre works diligently to make theatre accessible to the working class and economically poor within the region as well as the upper and middle classes. They strive for accuracy in portraying the lives and stories of community members' friends and neighbors.

Roadside Theatre also works on long-term collaborative projects with ensemble companies from different cultural traditions, including June Bug Productions from New Orleans and Pregones Theatre—a Puerto Rican based theatre located in the Bronx. Their goal is to create collaborations that tell stories from both cultures to help create conversations about our similarities. They have designed a collaborative methodology to help different theatre organizations tell their stories to a broader audience, believing that “our work makes more sense [if everyone is] in the audience.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Dudley Cocks, e-mail message to author. November 7, 2013.

<sup>21</sup> Donna Porterfield, Interview by Author, Telephone Interview, November 21, 2013.

## Southwest Virginia Creative Economy Conference

The Southwest Virginia Creative Economy Conference was held in Abingdon, Virginia on September 19 and 20, 2013 and jointly sponsored by The Crooked Road: Virginia's Heritage Music Trail, 'Round the Mountain, Heartwood: Southwest Virginia's Artisan Gateway, and the Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Foundation. Although the conference was also attended by several representatives of organizations that work closely with community development—including Barter Theatre and Chestnut Creek School for the Arts—it was purely focused on cultural heritage as a path to greater economic development. Many of the presenters focused on positive statistics similar to what I have presented in my introduction without addressing the inequalities in the region. Organizations including the Virginia Department of Housing & Community Development, Virginia Tourism Corporation, Virginia Commission for the Arts, and Virginia Department of Conservation & Recreation presented during the opening session on topics such as “Celebrating the Past: Looking to the Future of Southwest Virginia” and “Main Streets to Mountains: Supporting the Creative Economy.”

The second day featured keynote addresses by Dr. Stuart Rosenfeld on “The Creative Economy as an Economic and Cultural Engine” and from U.S. Senator Mark R. Warner as well as themed breakout sessions. I attended the sessions “Perspectives on the Past” and “Educational Innovation and the Creative Economy” which included presentations such as “Using the Humanities to Understand Southwest Virginia” by Dr. Robert Vaughn, President, Virginia Foundation for the Humanities; “The Craft Legacy of SWVA: A Foundation for the Future” by Betsy K. White, Author and 'Round the Mountain Board of Directors; “Connecting People with the Past: The Wilderness Road State Park” by Bob McConnell, President, Daniel Boone Wilderness Trail Interpretive Center Board; “Community Prosperity in Appalachia: Myth or Reality?” by Dr. Suzanne Moomaw, Associate Professor of Urban & Environmental Planning,

The University of Virginia; “Sustaining Traditional Crafts and Music: A Forty Year Journey” by Sue Ella Boatright-Wells, Dean of Workforce Development, Mountain Empire Community College; and “Preparing the Workforce for the Creative Economy” by Dr. Ron Proffitt, President, Virginia Highlands Community College. Although these breakout sessions covered a variety of topics, only one presentation—that by Dr. Moomaw—addressed the issues of community and economy development.

## Analysis

### Theme 1-Economic Development vs. Community Development

#### Economic Development

I have briefly discussed the importance of economic development in the introduction and methodology of this paper. The facts are simple—it is nearly impossible for a group of people, a geographic region, or a culture to survive without continued economic development. Money is necessary to provide for basic needs including food, shelter, clothing, and health care.

Individuals living below the poverty line are either working without receiving a living wage or struggling to find employment in a stagnant economy. Straddled with debt and living paycheck to paycheck, individuals cannot consider the necessary steps to rise above poverty such as obtaining an education or starting their own businesses. Development, as defined by a majority of economists, consists of two main facets: financial capital and built capital—neither of which addresses the entire picture of community development.

#### *Financial Capital*

Anielski defines financial capital as “money or anything denominated in monetary terms including cash, savings, [and] investments. This includes debt, mortgages, and other loans.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Anielski, *The Economics of Happiness*, Kindle Location 1075

Financial capital is what most economic development professionals focus on—the center of GDP. It is represented by figures such as gross expenditures for tourism or increased sales for individual artisans. While financial capital is important for individuals and the region as a whole, there is a reason for the old saying “money can’t buy happiness.” Although financial capital addresses the monetary strength of an individual or community, it does not account for the emotional well-being of an individual or a neighborhood.

### *Built Capital*

Built capital, as the second half of economic development, is defined as:

“all things that have been made or manufactured with both human and natural capital including equipment, factories, tools, buildings and other physical infrastructure. Manufactured capital contributes to our overall economic well-being by providing the intermediate means to a good life. Manufactured capital includes private and public infrastructure: homes, household appliances, cars, factories, hospitals, schools and roads. It also includes new technology, designs, patents, processes and ideas.<sup>2</sup>

The built capital in Southwest Virginia is falling into disrepair. Factories that once employed hundreds of individuals now sit empty. Crumbling hospitals are being replaced with bright new buildings that do not offer facilities for pregnant women, forcing them to travel a minimum of 20 miles to give birth. Schools are being closed and consolidated into new buildings, damaging the neighborhoods that once considered these buildings to be the center of the communities (Lyson 2002, Edmondson, 2001). Even if a boom time of economic growth comes to Southwest Virginia and our infrastructure can be rebuilt to accommodate the development, what will the effect be on our communities? To analyze the missing facets of

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<sup>2</sup> Aneilski, *The Economics of Happiness*, Kindle Location 1073.

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genuine wealth, I have used Mark Aneilski's *The Economics of Happiness: Discovering Genuine Wealth*.

### Community Development

Aneilski describes three other facets that complement financial capital and built capital to create the concept of genuine wealth: natural capital, human capital, and social capital. These three types of capital are the items most commonly addressed by community development professionals (and rarely by their counterparts in economic development). They are also the components of a happy, worthwhile life.

#### *Natural Capital*

Southwest Virginia has some of the most beautiful and abundant natural capital in the world. This “includes the free gifts from nature: natural resources (forests, agricultural soils, oil, natural gas, coal and mineral resources), land, eco-system services like clean air, water and climate regulate from forests, watersheds and wetlands.”<sup>3</sup> Natural capital not only ensures that we have the resources to live in a particular region, but that the region is aesthetically pleasing and offers multiple recreation opportunities.

#### *Human Capital*

Human capital is the value that we hold in each of our individual lives. It includes all of the aspects that create human happiness and a sense of individual worth. *The Economics of Happiness* describes the value of human capital by saying “A flourishing individual, household or community is one in which the human community is diverse, enjoys meaningful work

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<sup>3</sup> Aneilski, *The Economics of Happiness*, Kindle Location 1069.

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balanced with meaningful leisure time, and time to pursue the aspirations of the heart and soul.”<sup>4</sup>

A high level of human capital is what all individuals strive for in their everyday lives.

### *Social Capital*

Social capital is the value of our relationships with people. Aneilski sums this up as “trust, the ability to work together towards common goals, shared responsibility, reciprocity, neighborliness and a sense of belonging in community.”<sup>5</sup> It is important not just to have relationships with people, but those relationships should have a positive effect on our lives—either by providing us the connections we need to achieve our goals, or simply inspiring us to better our human capital.

### **Why is Community Development Important?**

Community development affects each of our everyday lives. Our ability to feel value in ourselves, to have positive interactions with our neighbors, and to enjoy the environment we live in leads to true happiness and growth as individuals and cultures. A culture cannot survive unless it is able to grow and adapt, and cultural traditions that no longer bring fulfillment will be abandoned by their practitioners. This is why it is particularly important that cultural heritage organizations in Southwest Virginia address community development in addition to economic development. However, each of the nine organizations I surveyed address these some of these issues to varying degrees while completely ignoring others. The following chart summarizes the activities of each of these organizations:

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<sup>4</sup> Aneilski, *The Economics of Happiness*, Kindle Location 1065.

<sup>5</sup> Aneilski, *The Economics of Happiness*, Kindle Location 1069.

	Economic Development		Community Development		
	Financial Capital	Built Capital	Natural Capital	Human Capital	Social Capital
Heart of Appalachia Tourism Authority	✓	✓	✓		
Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Commission	✓	✓	✓		
'Round the Mountain Artisan Collective	✓		✓		
Chestnut Creek School of the Arts	✓	✓		✓	
The Jacksonville Center for the Arts	✓	✓			✓
Appalachian Arts Center				✓	✓
Birthplace of Country Music Alliance	✓			✓	✓
Barter Theatre	✓			✓	✓
Roadside Theatre: Art in a Democracy				✓	✓

Chart 1-Elements of Community and Economic Development addressed by cultural heritage organizations in Southwest Virginia

Each of these organizations addresses every type of capital differently. While some of them offered explanations during my research as to why they address one type of capital over another, others simply choose to avoid the concept of social issues. In fact, I found that many of the organizations that do not address one or more of the community development issues choose to respond as if there are no social issues in Southwest Virginia. In the following pages, I will analyze how each of the organizations I interviewed tackles the issues of genuine wealth.

*Heart of Appalachia Tourism Authority*

Heart of Appalachia, as a division of the Virginia Tourism Commission, only works on issues that directly affect tourism in their assigned territory. This includes working with each individual locality on downtown revitalization projects, not only to improve on their built capital, but also to attract entrepreneurs to vacant spaces. Heart of Appalachia is also majorly involved in a natural capital project, The Clinch River Valley Initiative. The Clinch River is considered one of the most biologically diverse river systems in North America<sup>6</sup> The initiative has five main goals, all centered around the creation of the Clinch River State Park in the coal fields of Virginia. The Clinch River Valley Initiative believes that:

By 2020, the Clinch River Valley will be a global destination based on its unique biodiversity, natural beauty, cultural attractions and outdoor opportunities. This collaboration will bring measurable economic, environmental and social benefits to the region's communities while protecting the Clinch's globally rare species.<sup>7</sup>

This project affects a major portion of Heart of Appalachia's Territory and is also expected to bring a large increase in financial capital from tourism. The organization works with individual entrepreneurs to improve their chances of starting a profitable business, particularly those that are centered on heritage or natural asset based tourism. However, Heart of Appalachia does not involve itself in social issues or in working to improve human or social capital. Pam Vance explained to me that this is partially because they are a state-funded agency and cannot get involved in causes that are overtly political, and partially due to the fact that she is the only employee of this organization.

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<sup>6</sup> "Clinch River Valley Initiative Background," Clinch River Valley Initiative, Updated July 15, 2013, Accessed December 4, 2013, <http://clinchriverva.com/>.

<sup>7</sup> "Clinch River Valley Initiative Background."

*Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Commission*

I have a definition for a creative economy which is using cultural, natural, and human assets to create economy development through tourism or by getting revenues to people you utilize as assets like musicians, artisans, and [recreation] outfitters. It's also to create a quality of life that attracts enterprises and entrepreneurial businesses that are not necessarily tourism related, but [whose owners are] looking for [somewhere with] a good quality of life to locate their business in. In order to do that you have to have the quality of life and you have to have the fiber optic networks.<sup>8</sup>

The above quotation from my September 24, 2013 interview with Todd Christenson defines the work of the Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Commission. Although the Commission is a part of the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development and Mr. Christenson is the former deputy director for community development in the state of Virginia, the Commission shows very little interest in improving the quality of life for the region's current residents. The majority of the Commission's work is on creating an area that will attract tourists who will locate their "go anywhere" businesses in the 19 counties of Southwest Virginia.

The SVCHC works on a number of initiatives that are designed to increase tourism in the region. They were the directing arm in the creation of Heartwood: Southwest Virginia's Artisan Gateway, a project centered in Abingdon that was projected to "draw more than 270,000 visitors annually and generate more than \$28 million in revenue for the region. Additionally, this initiative will help create 1,000 jobs and attract 300 new businesses throughout the region within the first three years of operation."<sup>9</sup> The Commission also works directly with towns in the Southwest Virginia region on projects to revitalize their Main Streets and downtown districts,

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<sup>8</sup> Todd Christenson, Interview by Author, Personal interview, Abingdon, VA, September 24, 2013.

<sup>9</sup> "Heartwood Frequently Asked Questions," Heartwood: Southwest Virginia's Artisan Gateway, Updated October 12, 2011, Accessed December 5, 2013, <http://www.heartwoodvirginia.org/Portals/0/pdfs/HeartwoodFAQUpdated.pdf>.

with a focus on rehabilitating the town’s built capital to establish retail spaces suitable for creative-based enterprises.



Figure 3-A map showing some of the recreation opportunities available in Southwest Virginia<sup>10</sup>

SVCHC is also working with two initiatives that maintain the natural capital of the region—the Clinch Valley River Initiative and Appalachian Spring. While a large number of organizations, government agencies, businesses, and individuals are involved in the Clinch Valley River Initiative, SVCHC is the main entity involved in the creation of Appalachian Spring. This project seeks to work with the existing natural capital in Southwest Virginia, including Wilderness Road State Park, Southwest Virginia Museum Historical State Park, Breaks Interstate Park, Hungry Mother State Park, Grayson Highlands State Park, Natural Tunnel State Park, Shot Tower State Park, New River Trail, Fairy Stone State Park, Claytor Lake State Park, Mt. Rogers National Recreation Area, and Jefferson National Forrest to create an outdoor destination. This plan includes promoting the region as a whole and working with locally-owned restaurants, hotels, bed and breakfasts, conference centers, and outdoor recreation

<sup>10</sup> Image Adapted from Daniel D. Eubank, “Veterans—free admission to all Virginia State Parks,” Accessed December 21, 2013. <http://danieldeubank.wordpress.com/2011/05/25/veterans-free-admission-to-all-virginia-state-parks/>.

outfitters to create a unique brand for Southwest Virginia. SVCHC does not work to improve either human or social capital in Southwest Virginia.

*'Round the Mountain Artisan Collective*

'Round the Mountain is best defined as one of the three arms of the Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Commission—'Round the Mountain deals with craft and agri-tourism, the Crooked Road focuses on musical heritage, and Appalachian Spring works with the natural capital of the region. 'Round the Mountain—like its sister organizations—considers itself an economic development organization, believing that it is “here to create sustainable economic development of the communities [in Southwest Virginia] by assisting artisans with marketing, educational, and entrepreneurial opportunities.”<sup>11</sup>

'Round the Mountain uses natural capital to help residents of the region build financial capital by promoting agri-tourism businesses such as wineries, ranches, alpaca farms, farmers' markets, herb farms, butterfly gardens, greenhouses, pumpkin patches, and flower gardens. However, even though the organization provides new skills to their members, they do very little to improve the social and human capital in the region. It is not as if they are unaware of the social problems—when asked, Diana Blackburn said

Drug abuse is a huge issue that affects many people...there's a lot of drug abuse and a lack of good health care. Affordable health care is another social issue [in this region]. Many of our artisans don't have access to insurance and quality healthcare.<sup>12</sup>

'Round the Mountain does not get involved in these issues, even though they are very aware of their existence. I asked Diana Blackburn about this, and she told me that the

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<sup>11</sup> Diana Blackburn, Interview by Author, Telephone Interview, October 8, 2013.

<sup>12</sup> Blackburn, October 8, 2013.

organization does not “have the capacity to get involved in community organizing issues...we’ve just been so busy we haven’t really had time to think about it.”<sup>13</sup>

### *Chestnut Creek School of the Arts*

Chestnut Creek School of the Arts is actively involved in increasing the financial and built capital of the city of Galax. As I have previously stated, CCSA has helped to create new employment opportunities through new downtown businesses as well as new housing units and over \$2 million in private downtown investments. CCSA has also repurposed the three buildings that constitute the school’s campus, working with the existing built capital in the community to help nurture a creative economy in Galax. Because of this, “the city has seen a direct impact in tourism, visitor spending, jobs and local taxes from tourism.”<sup>14</sup>

Chestnut Creek also works in partnerships with several organizations to improve human capital in their community. The first of these is their partnership with the Empty Bowls project where they encourage members to create a piece of pottery to be sold to raise money for local food banks. By addressing this most basic of human needs, the organization helps to directly improve their human capital. The organization also has partnerships with organizations working with the mentally and physically handicapped, allowing them to offer arts programming to these under-served groups. Finally, a partnership with the Galax public school system enables the school to use art to have a direct impact on students. The school system arranges transportation for youth in grades 3-7 on three days a week, and CCSA provides programming that has helped to improve the students’ attendance, moral, studies, and attitudes.

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<sup>13</sup> Blackburn, October 8, 2013.

<sup>14</sup> Pollins-Shackelford, April 29, 2013.

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*The Jacksonville Center for the Arts*

The Jacksonville Center for the Arts engages in improving the financial, built, and social capital for the residents of Floyd County and the surrounding areas. According to Public Relations Manager Lee Chinchester:

From the beginning, we have thought of ourselves as being an economic engine for the creative economy. We were the first in Floyd. Without our having plowed that ground and showing that it was something that could be successful, I believe that a lot of the following investment would not have been possible to have happened as easily or as successfully.<sup>15</sup>

While the Jacksonville Center (known locally as the Jax) does not directly track its economic impact on the community, they have provided incubator services for a number of successful small, arts-based businesses. The Jax is located in a rehabilitated 1940's era dairy barn located directly outside of the Floyd town limits, and saved the existing structure from being razed and the property becoming home to an outsider-owned chain motel. The organization is not only working to preserve existing built capital, but to also to add to it. They are in negotiations with both the town of Floyd and Floyd County to improve and expand the sidewalks from the downtown area to provide easier accessibility for their facility.

Finally, the Jax works to improve social capital in their community by attempting to cater to a wide variety of interests. The majority of residents in the area come from one of two backgrounds—either the traditional agricultural families or the more liberal back-to-the-landers. In casting a wide net with their programming, they manage to find programming that can appeal to members of both groups as well as creating exhibitions that will draw residents in

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<sup>15</sup> Chinchester, September 25, 2013

individually. This ensures that groups that might normally have nothing to say to each other find common ground through the arts.

### *Appalachian Arts Center*

Appalachian Arts Center is an excellent example of a non-profit organization that is using the cultural heritage of Southwest Virginia to improve the human and social capital of community members. Sarah Darpli-Romeo, the executive director of the organization, offered a description of a community quilting challenge that I feel is an excellent metaphor for life in a community. In this challenge, community quilters are required to use three selected fabrics in any quantity to design a quilt based on a theme (this year, the theme is “Star Light, Star Bright”). The quilts are then displayed and judged in a variety of categories, a process Darpli-Romeo described by saying “the quilts all hang together well because they have at least some of the same fabrics but they’re also all completely individual.”<sup>16</sup> The AAC also offers a photography challenge where the reception allows “people who took the photographs to get to know each other and to share information and knowledge about what they know and what they’ve done and places they’ve been...that’s always very valuable.”<sup>17</sup> Even if the organization does not call their actions building social capital, their programming is consistently created to bring the community together.

Appalachian Arts Center is also working to improve the human capital in Tazewell County and the surrounding area—mostly by introducing children to the arts. The Center currently offers classes in the visual arts for children as well as engaging in a partnership with Barter Theatre that brings a member of the Barter Players to teach drama. They have recently

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<sup>16</sup> Sarah Darpli-Romeo, Interview by Author. Telephone Interview, October 9, 2013.

<sup>17</sup> Darpli-Romeo, October 9, 2013.

begun to expand their children's programming by asking artists that are featured in their gallery to create an after school or weekend program to teach different aspects of the art.

### *Birthplace of Country Music Alliance*

Because the Birthplace of Country Music Alliance is a relatively new non-profit organization, it is difficult to assess their impact on the issues of genuine wealth. Both of the groups that formed the Alliance have either had or plan to have a massive effect on financial capital in the region. Rhythm and Roots Reunion was predicted to have an economic impact of over \$5 million for the cities of Bristol<sup>18</sup> and the Birthplace of Country Music Museum is expected to draw a large number of visitors to the downtown area. I have previously discussed how the Alliance is involved in improving human and social capital through their work with youth and their efforts to support regional non-profit organizations. It is likely that the BCMA will continue to expand their impact throughout the region and could possibly become the first organization in Southwest Virginia to address all five segments of genuine wealth.

### *Barter Theatre*

While Barter's mission does not include adding to the financial capital of Abingdon, they are the main reason that the town has a thriving cultural economy. With a budget of only \$6 million dollars, this theatre presents over 625 shows annually from February to December, a production scale that rivals that of the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis, Minnesota (a theatre with a \$25 million annual budget).<sup>19</sup> Barter's direct economic impact on the region is over \$34 million—a return of over 555%. Until 2013, the theatre was closed during the month of January, a fact that had a major impact on the economy of the town. After receiving many requests from

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<sup>18</sup> "Downtown Prepares for Rhythm and Roots," WCYB, September 19, 2013, Accessed December 6, 2013, <http://www.metronewsday.com/news/19671-downtown-prepares-for-rhythm-roots.html?print>.

<sup>19</sup> Hester, November 30, 2013.

local businesses, Barter partnered with the town of Abingdon to create a concert series called January Jams in an effort to continue to bring patrons downtown to visit local restaurants and shops.

In addition to the awe-inspiring work directly in the theatre, Barter's core office staff of 15 is also involved in a number of projects that build both social and human capital. This includes an annual fundraiser for the United Way that raised over \$3,000 to be distributed to local charities, three programs that work directly with regional youth, and the Appalachian Festival of Plays and Playwrights. This festival invites both playwrights from Appalachia as well as plays about the region and enables these aspiring playwrights to receive feedback on their work. A winner of the festival is determined, and their work is then performed at Barter. These plays are well received, and some, such as *Keep on the Sunny Side*—a play about the Carter Family<sup>20</sup>—have even toured nationally<sup>21</sup>.

Barter's youth programs all seek to improve both social and human capital through the performing arts. Barter Youth Academy works with school age children to teach them all the aspects of theatre such as acting, singing, and dancing as well as team building and problem solving skills. Barter Players is a one-year program for older youth that is similar to an internship where members participate in every part of multiple theatrical productions. Finally, Barter's Project REAL has helped numerous high school students to better understand multiple subjects—not just in English and drama, but math and science courses as well. This program has resulted in improved test scores in the two pilot schools, and due to high demand Barter has

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<sup>20</sup> The Carter Family was a well-known folk-group from Maces Spring, Virginia who participated in the Bristol recording sessions. The family is considered to be the first family of country music, with members playing in groups such as The Virginia Boys, Mother Maybelle & the Carter Sisters, and June Carter and Johnny Cash.

<sup>21</sup> Hester, November 30, 2013

partnered with East Tennessee State University to expand the program into other schools in the region.

### *Roadside Theatre: Art in a Democracy*

Roadside Theatre is headquartered in Norton and is a division of Appalshop, an Appalachian cultural heritage organization from Whitesburg, Kentucky. Unlike the other organizations I have profiled, Roadside exists with the purpose of sustaining and preserving Appalachian culture without relying on state funding or serving as an agent of economic development. While there is not a tradition of attending formal theatre productions in the coalfields of Virginia, there is a rich history of theatrical performance in storytelling, native religious services, and music. Roadside was founded over 30 years ago as a way to tell the Appalachian story, “a story that was being stereotyped in the media and not really being told authentically.”<sup>22</sup> Roadside creates theatrical productions with the aim of improving both the human and social capital of the region’s residents, regardless of their economic status:

People from all class backgrounds come to our plays. Even if they think there is some disagreement with what the play is saying (particularly with people who may be a coal operator or something), what holds the whole audience together is that they are all from the culture and they recognize that [Appalachian Culture] being portrayed very accurately by people that are all from the culture. It isn’t somebody pretending to be from here or pretending to grow up here. We are telling the stories of our families and our neighbors.<sup>23</sup>

### **In Summary**

None of the nine organizations I was able to interview focuses on all five aspects of genuine wealth. While the work of some can be stretched so it appears to include other facets—Appalachian Arts Center and Barter Theatre both inhabit historic buildings and the Birthplace of Country Music Alliance works closely with the downtown revitalization group Believe in Bristol

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<sup>22</sup> Porterfield, November 19, 2013.

<sup>23</sup> Porterfield, November 19, 2013.

(built capital) and Appalachian Arts Center provides a gallery where local artisans can sell their work (financial capital)—no organization is actively working on more than three parts of the genuine wealth puzzle. In fact, organizations that work on economic development only peripherally address community development and vice versa. Many of these organizations do work in partnership with each other; however, these partnerships do not extend to addressing all the properties of genuine wealth. It is unclear if these organizations believe that these issues are in the purview of their counterparts and that it is unnecessary to duplicate their efforts or if they feel that they cannot address issues beyond their main mission. Although they were somewhat reluctant to discuss it, I did discover that organizations that receive a large amount of funding from governmental sources feel that their funding may be at risk if they become involved in community organizing issues that may be deemed overtly political. Several organizations hinted at this in different ways—Heart of Appalachia Tourism Authority mentioned being unable to get involved in community issues because of their status as a state agency, Birthplace of Country Music Alliance mentioned the need to host political candidates from both parties to appear impartial, and Roadside Theatre mentioned the harm that has been done to the arts and arts funding by a particular political group. Arts and cultural heritage organizations should not be subjected to this type of political meddling—they cannot be free to address the issues of their constituents if they must constantly censor their words and actions.

## Theme 2-Internal Voices vs. Outside Influence

It has appeared as a place of cultural backwardness in a nation of progressive values, a region of poverty in an affluent society, and a rural landscape in an increasing urban nation. We *know* Appalachia exists because we need it to exist in order to define what we are not. It is the “other America” because the very idea of Appalachia convinces us of the righteousness of our own lives.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Eller, *Uneven Ground*. Kindle Location 118.

Appalachia has always had an uneasy relationship with the outside world. Social scientists have long used phrases like “cultural deficiencies,” or “backwards” to describe “the accident of birth in rural places like Appalachia.”<sup>2</sup> These negative views helped to influence the policies of the ill-advised War on Poverty, when the federal government and multiple non-profit organizations used outside ideas to change the culture of the mountains: “the problem lay in the culture of the mountain people themselves, a culture, they argued, that preserved anachronistic values and prevented people from lifting themselves out of poverty.”<sup>3</sup> Appalachians had good reason to mistrust these well-intentioned poverty warriors—previous experiences with extractive industries had shown them that promises of help from the outside had often done more harm than good.

### **Impact of Absentee Business Owners**

Extractive industries such as coal and timber worked during the Nineteenth and early Twentieth century to take the natural resources out of the mountains without properly reimbursing the local residents for the damages to their bodies, health, or properties. After these businesses felt they had removed everything of value from the region, they packed up and left Appalachia damaged and its residents impoverished and unemployed. The lack of employment opportunities has led families out of the mountains and into the cities as they looked for work, while generations of men and boys have joined the military and lost their lives in the search for better opportunities. In more recent history, the major source of employment in the region has been factories—yet another industry where the profits did not stay in the region. According to Richard Straw:

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<sup>2</sup> Eller, *Uneven Ground*. Kindle Location 1204.

<sup>3</sup> Eller, *Uneven Ground*, Kindle Location 593.

One of the most important results of industrialization in Appalachia was its negative impact on the long-term economic health of the region. None of the industries in Appalachia encouraged rival or spin-off economic development during their boom years. The effect was sporadic economic growth without real economic development. Benefits throughout the region were not realized from the spectacular profits earned by largely absentee-owned corporations; when the boom periods ended or when technological changes occurred, Appalachia was largely left wanting for jobs and future economic prospects.<sup>4</sup>

This absentee corporate ownership has led to a host of other problems in the region such as subpar public utilities and infrastructure and a lack of suitable healthcare and educational facilities. Many towns in Southwest Virginia must rely on public utilities that were established immediately after World War II, and a large number of them do not have an easily accessible hospital or urgent care clinic. Remote Area Medical (RAM) clinics attempt to serve the needs of the communities with hundreds of medical professionals volunteering their time, but these events usually only occur once per year and involve wait times surpassing five hours for basic services such as dental and vision care. A number of communities still educate their children at combined schools where students from age 5-18 are educated in a single building. Considering the influence of the state capital as well as the number of outsiders currently working in cultural heritage organizations, should residents really expect anything better from the creative economy?

### **Richmond's Influence**

Virginia is a geographically and culturally diverse state, stretching from naval bases on the Atlantic Ocean to the coalfields of the Appalachian Mountains. Fairfax and other counties serve as the home for many who work in Washington, DC and have experienced an almost unbelievable increase in development in the past 50 years, even while the War on Poverty was

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<sup>4</sup> Richard Straw, "Appalachian History" in *A Handbook to Appalachia: An Introduction to the Region* eds. Grace Toney Edwards et al. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006) 15.

being fought in counties such as Lee, Dickenson, Wise, and Buchanan. These counties are closer to other state capitals than they are to Richmond, with local legend saying residents of Lee County can reach seven other capitals in less time than it takes to travel to Richmond. Some people consider Virginia to be three separate states—Virginia (including Richmond, the Eastern Shore, and the “Southside” areas of Danville and Martinsville), Northern Virginia, and Southwest Virginia. While some politicians who have held state and national office seem deeply invested in the success of the region, others would appear to buy into the idea that Southwest Virginia is a completely different state—one that they would rather forget existed.

Regardless of the opinions and sympathies of whichever political party is in power, there are multiple organizations in Southwest Virginia that began as state initiatives and many of these continue under the management of state agencies. ‘Round the Mountain began as a state initiative to promote artisans in Southwest Virginia and to serve as a sister organization to the Crooked Road which promotes the musical heritage of the region. The Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Commission was created by a state resolution to help manage ‘Round the Mountain and Crooked Road after they transitioned from governmental organizations to non-profits. The commission was also charged with supervision of Heartwood: Southwest Virginia’s Artisan Gateway and with working with towns and localities to bring them into the creative economy. Not only did the idea for these organizations come from Richmond, the SVCHC remains a department within the Department of Housing and Community Development. The DHCD selected Todd Christenson, the former deputy director, to serve as the head of this organization. It remains responsible for determining staffing needs and for interviewing and selecting applicants for other positions within the commission.

The most obvious example of Richmond's influence in Southwest Virginia is through Heart of Appalachia and Blue Ridge Highlands Tourism Authorities. Both of these organizations are divisions of the Virginia Tourism Commission—a state entity that defines itself by stating:

The Virginia Tourism Authority, doing business as the Virginia Tourism Corporation (VTC) is an organization of more than 70 professionals working in the Richmond office and at 11 Welcome Centers throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia.<sup>5</sup>

Although the purpose of this organization is to increase tourism (and therefore revenues) throughout Virginia, it is obvious that the majority of the work done by this group comes from Richmond. In fact, the VATC provides a Virginia State Tourism Plan which is supplemented by regional section plans. These plans are available on the VATC's website at <http://www.vatc.org/STP/> but can be difficult to find for anyone unaware of their existence. A link does exist on the front page, but it is entitled DRIVE Tourism and has a logo more fitting for an auto parts company than a business plan. I obtained a copy of the Heart of Appalachia Regional Section during my interview with that organization, and I was instantly struck by how much this plan appeared to come directly from Richmond with little or no input from local residents.

The plan is made up of 5 key elements:

- A situational analysis of tourism in the region, which highlights the key tourism products, regional strengths and challenges, competitive considerations, and other relevant information, is presented to set the framework for the regional strategy.
- Key product themes of focus are identified and applicable objectives and strategies are presented for the five plan outcomes of Products, Pillars (infrastructure), Partnerships, Promotions, and Policies for the Heart of Appalachia tourism strategy.

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<sup>5</sup> "About VATC," Virginia Tourism Corporation, Accessed December 7, 2013, <http://www.vatc.org/about/>.

- Action steps specific to the region, which are above and beyond the actions of the state level plan are outlined.
- Stakeholders proposed to be involved in implementing the plan are also identified.
- Key takeaways for Heart of Appalachia's tourism development in the next five years are outlined.<sup>6</sup>

### *Situational Analysis*

The situational analysis from the VATC offers a list of regional lures and strengths including natural assets such as national and state forests and parks, outdoor recreation opportunities such as rapids and All-Terrain Vehicle (ATV) trails, cities and towns, musical heritage, visual and craft arts, the Daniel Boone Wilderness Trail, and coal heritage. While this is an accurate listing of the assets in the region, the regional product challenges list does not provide much of a sense of hope for the region:

- Limited regional attraction anchors and concentrated experiences
- Differentiation from competition in nearby states-outdoors
- Limited recognition of assets and towns
- Lack of tourism industry maturity
- Limited outdoor and traditional accommodations
- Limited accessibility—interstate and air
- Limited community infrastructure in certain areas
- Challenged economic base
- Underdeveloped towns for visitors
- Beautification needs
- Lack of sense of arrival
- Attraction/destination distance regionally<sup>7</sup>

This list does not account for any of the social issues in the region or the region's negative representation in the national media.

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<sup>6</sup> "Heart of Appalachia Regional Section," Virginia Tourism Corporation, Accessed September 9, 2013, [http://www.vatc.org/uploadedFiles/Partnership\\_Alliance\\_Marketing/HeartofAppalachiaRegionalSectionVTC3292013.pdf](http://www.vatc.org/uploadedFiles/Partnership_Alliance_Marketing/HeartofAppalachiaRegionalSectionVTC3292013.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> "Heart of Appalachia Regional Section."

### *Product Focus Areas*

The primary focus areas for Heart of Appalachia align exactly with the goals of the Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Commission—“Nature & Outdoor Recreation, Arts & Music, History and Heritage, Town/City Centers, [and] Events.”<sup>8</sup> However, the secondary theme focus—culinary—seems a bit incongruous to me, a life-long resident of Appalachia. While central Appalachia has a history with unique foods including ramps (a type of wild leek) and morel mushrooms, the region’s distance from any large population centers and the lack of adequate lodging for tourists would erase the potential for a distinct restaurant industry to form within the region.

### *Stakeholders*

The...list of regional and universal stakeholders illustrates the types of stakeholder groups that may be involved in implementing the State Tourism Plan and the region’s strategies and action steps. The lists are comprehensive, but not necessarily [sic] exhaustive. In addition, regional stakeholders include local and regional government offices, economic development offices and planning district commissions.<sup>9</sup>

The VATC does not consider the residents of the region to be stakeholders in the creative economy. This is yet another example of the needs and desires of the community members being sidelined by the influence of outsiders, particularly those from the distant state capital.

### **You Ain’t from Around Here, Are You?**

If someone asks an Appalachian resident a question that seems to have a common sense answer or makes a statement that has none, they will often be asked “You ain’t from around here, are you?” Perhaps this is due to the mistrust of outsiders, or because we feel that those outsiders somehow just do not understand the region. Research into the psychological and

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<sup>8</sup> “Heart of Appalachia Regional Section.”

<sup>9</sup> “Heart of Appalachia Regional Section.”

sociological origins of the question could be a life's work, but I believe the simplest explanation is that we find it difficult to believe that outsiders can ever understand life in the mountains in the way someone born here would. Do the songs, the origin of handicrafts, the dances or the stories make sense to someone raised outside the culture? In my attempts to serve as a cultural ambassador for my region, I have learned that this is not really possible. Outsiders can appreciate the culture of another and they can see its similarities to their own heritage, but they can never really understand it.

Why then would a cultural heritage organization hire someone who is not a native to promote the culture? While I did not plan on asking any of my interviewees where they were born, the topic came up several times. It seems that half of the representatives of these organizations grew up in towns like Chilhowie, Floyd, Marion, and Tazewell while the other half hail from as far away as Pennsylvania and California. These individuals have been tasked with determining what is important and authentic about Southwest Virginia's culture, creating a unique brand for the region, and marketing it to the world.

Noted social justice champion in Appalachia Helen Matthews Lewis questions the ability of individuals such as this to help the region by saying:

If Appalachians can learn to be bicultural, can researchers, planners, professionals also learn to be bicultural? Can we operate so that the research and planning is no longer antagonistic to Appalachian culture? Can professionals who work with Appalachians or "deal with" or interpret Appalachians give support to the Appalachian or provide the kind of analyses need by Appalachians to promote needed change or resist change? Can researchers avoid being part of the destructive process and giving comfort, aid and data and legitimization to the enemy?<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Lewis, Helen M. with Patricia D. Beaver and Judith Jennings. *Helen Matthews Lewis: Living Social Justice in Appalachia*. (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2012) Kindle Location 1447.

The ability of these outsiders to do the region justice is not the only question raised by their presence. We must also address why more local residents are not being hired to fill these positions. The ideal candidate for a job like this would most likely be a young, educated adult who possesses a deep passion for their region. However,

Young people in central Appalachia face significant challenges in becoming active participants in their communities and in making the decisions that shape their lives. They grapple with confusing messages and experiences that both celebrate and denigrate their culture and communities, disconnecting youth from their homes and from positive individual and collective identities.<sup>11</sup>

Even youth who have become active participants in their communities and possess the skills necessary to create sustainable community and economic development can find it difficult to gain any recognition for their efforts and successes. Finding a position that will enable one to receive a living wage in this field is especially difficult:

The good old boys who still dominated much of Appalachian economic, cultural, and political life at the end of the twentieth century disdained criticism, innovation, and wider participation in civic life just as much as those who had controlled the political system on behalf of outside corporate interest decades earlier.<sup>12</sup>

Although the above quotation refers to Southern West Virginia at the end of the last century, the good old boy system is still very much alive and well in Southwest Virginia in 2013. Equal participation in government and community development is blocked for most community members unless they were born into the right family. Whenever a job is announced—particularly one with government pay and benefits—it is practically guaranteed that the person selected to fill the position will be from one of the old families. While the family names change

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<sup>11</sup> Katie Richards-Schuster and Rebecca O'Doherty, "Appalachian Youth Re-envisioning Home, Re-making Identities" in *Transforming Places: Lessons from Appalachia* ed. Stephen L. Fisher et al. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 78.

<sup>12</sup> Eller, *Uneven Ground*, Kindle Location 3117.

from town to town, the group in power tends to remain in power. Cultural heritage organizations in Appalachia must not only hire members of the community to build their ranks, but ensure that those community members represent the needs of a majority of the population.

### In Summary

Chris Maser gets to the core of the issue of inside voices versus outside influences with the statement “community adaptability, and therefore stability, is based on its ability to meet the majority of its own needs within itself instead of being dependent on outside resources.”<sup>13</sup> For Southwest Virginia, a region that has always been under the influence of the outside, establishing a strong internal voice is especially important.

This does not necessarily mean that individuals who are not natives cannot be passionate about the region while respecting the needs of community members, but they should follow the wisdom of Helen Matthews Lewis:

If I had some advice to professionals coming to the mountains or to mountaineers turned professional, I would say “Listen to *people*, learn from *people*, work with and help and treat *people*. Try to learn from the mountaineer how to be a human being and how to use your skills, knowledge, and energies within the mountain culture.” I would say, “Unlearn your ‘professional’ training, be unprofessional, be human.”<sup>14</sup>

### Theme 3-Tourism: Positive Effects vs. Damaging Outcomes

It is obvious that the direction the state government and many cultural heritage organizations feel Southwest Virginia’s economy should take is a creative one—an economy that will be highly based on tourism. These entities plan to use the assets of the region—musical heritage, craft, coal heritage, and natural amenities—to draw in tourists who will spend their

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<sup>13</sup> Maser, *Sustainable Community Development*, 114.

<sup>14</sup> Lewis, Beaver and Jennings, *Helen Matthews Lewis*, Kindle Location 1882.

money in Southwest Virginia and potentially decide to relocate their business here or retire here. Using the assets that already exist in the community is a hallmark of many types of economic and community development, but at what point does the use of assets become exploitation? While the money that tourism generates can be used to improve the quality of life for the residents of the region, tourism can have a number of negative effects that I will later describe including creating soft economic development, damaging the environment, and raising the cost of living to the point that even more community members have to face the damaging effects of poverty.

### Positive Effects

Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries throughout the world. In many regions across the United States, it has been seen as an alternative for traditional economic development methods, and for good reason:

The growing popularity of ecotourism and heritage tourism...contained the potential for building an alternative economy, one that promised greater monetary returns for local residents, the preservation of rural traditions and the protection of sensitive natural resources.<sup>15</sup>

In an area such as Appalachia—rich with natural resources, tradition, and a unique cultural heritage—marketing these assets seems to be a natural step to improve the economic viability of the region. Although it has not been well-documented, the ecological beauty and slower way of life in Appalachia has drawn visitors and retirees to the region since the early twentieth century. According to Ronald D. Eller's history of the region *Uneven Development: Appalachia Since 1945*, "The flood of suburban tourists seeking to renew their relationship with

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<sup>15</sup>Eller, *Uneven Ground*, Kindle Location 3265.

the natural world passed young people along the highway leaving the mountains in search of better lives in the cities from which the urban refugees had fled.”<sup>16</sup>

This is one of the few examples of a population influx into a region which has often seen its residents unable to find a good quality of life at home. Maintaining or growing population can be crucial to struggling rural areas—without it, these areas will see a reduction in state-level funding for education and infrastructure and even risk losing their representation in both state and national governments. Population growth is only one benefit of a thriving tourism industry. It also undeniably adds jobs in areas that can struggle with high unemployment:

In economically depressed areas, every low-paid service job has its own importance when people cannot easily leave the region and lack higher-paying local opportunities. In many cases, service employment is a second household income, and one that is seasonal, which permits other work in the off-season.<sup>17</sup>

The tourism industry can provide the opportunity for local residents to become entrepreneurs, marketing to outsiders in a number of ways. Local artisans can sell their wares, often for a higher price than they would be able to ask of their friends or neighbors. Because of easily accessible modern technology, musicians can record, market, and sell their own music—particularly that which is seen as being in the “traditional” style. Landowners and builders can create rental properties that offer visitors a “back-to-nature” experience, or even market their land as campgrounds for primitive and recreational vehicles with the proper infrastructure and permits. Others can offer hunting grounds to individuals with a hunting license, or fishing areas to anyone, an activity that does not require a license on private property in Virginia.<sup>18</sup> Even without owning the property required, individuals skilled at these outdoor sports can earn money

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<sup>16</sup> Eller, *Uneven Ground*, Kindle Location 3278.

<sup>17</sup> Fritsch and Johannsen, *Ecotourism in Appalachia*, 40.

<sup>18</sup> “Fishing License Information & Fees,” Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, Accessed December 8, 2013. <http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/fishing/regulations/licenses.asp>.

by serving as a guide on public property. Enterprising families can open a restaurant that features local, “down home” cooking. Drawing on the local food movement, farmers can sell items such as fresh honey and vegetables or specialize in organic, free-range meat.

For other individuals in areas with natural amenities such as the Clinch River or the New River, the opportunity exists to open a company renting recreational equipment such as inner tubes, kayaks, or speed and pleasure boats. Shuttle services are also needed along waterways, biking, and hiking trails. Shops offering outdoor gear for both professionals and “weekend warriors” can be extremely profitable in these areas. In some towns such as Damascus (home of the Virginia Creeper Trail, the Iron Mountain Trail, and a stop along the Appalachian Trail), St. Paul (on the Clinch River), and Radford (on the New River), this type of business has been so successful that several companies are now competing for business and hiring both full and part-time employees.

### Negative Outcomes

Tourism is often accused of creating soft economic development, a term that can have multiple meanings but is usually understood to mean a situation where an industry does grow and create more financial capital, but that capital only reaches the pockets of a few individuals or companies. The effect of this is best explained by Richard S. Krannich and Peggy Petruelka:

Employment opportunities associated with amenity-based growth tend to be in lower-wage service-sector industries, often on a part-time basis, with lack of opportunity for advancement and few benefits, if any. While such jobs can represent important employment options for some residents, they may not generate incomes sufficient enough to fully support a family. Also, these types of jobs are often highly volatile due to the inherent seasonality of tourism-based activity and second-home residency in many settings. Indeed, the magnitude of seasonal fluctuations can rival that of traditional extractive industries, but with a far greater frequency of upswings and downturns...In addition, a substantial

leakage of income out of the local area often occurs, particularly when income and profits are siphoned away by nonlocal corporations that often control much of the development in such settings...Studies of residents' perceptions of tourism-based economic activity seem to confirm the notion that the effects are mixed with several noting a tendency for residents to express skepticism if not outright dissatisfaction with the consequences of tourism in their communities.<sup>19</sup>

Other problems can include high rates of population growth (increasing the strain on sub-par public utilities) and higher housing prices, both issues that can end up costing localities and community members more than they are worth and can even lead to the displacement of people with limited or fixed incomes.<sup>20</sup>

While the tourism industry can provide a large number of low-skill jobs, Matthew S. Carroll believes that some residents do not want to work in these types of jobs because they are incompatible with “traditional rural occupations.”<sup>21</sup> Tourism does not just create unconventional employment opportunities, it can actually affect the culture of the region:

Tourism development can lead to a situation where ‘a small dying town takes a U-turn by capitalizing on its smallness, intimacy, natural beauty, village character, and rural past. Unfortunately, for many communities, this turnaround spells the demise of community traditions, destruction of valued places, and their replacement by a phony folk culture.’<sup>22</sup>

This “phony folk culture” can take several forms. The first, and perhaps least intentional, is the exclusion of some aspects of the culture that may be misinterpreted by outsiders. Another is playing to cultural misconceptions about the region—becoming a caricature of ourselves.

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<sup>19</sup> Krannich, Richard S. and Peggy Petruelka. “Tourism and Natural Amenity Development: Real Opportunities?” in *Challenges for Rural America in the Twenty-First Century* Edited by David Brown et al. (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003) 192.

<sup>20</sup> Krannich and Petruelka, “Tourism and Natural Amenity Development” 192.

<sup>21</sup> Carroll, Matthew S. *Community and the Northwestern Logger: Continuities and Changes in the Era of the Spotted Owl* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1995).

<sup>22</sup> Hester (1990) as quoted in Krannich and Petruelka, “Tourism and Natural Amenity Development” 194.

Starnes describes the “hillbilly’ joke books, miniature moonshine jugs, novelty hats, shirts, and mugs”<sup>23</sup> which have been sold throughout the region at local shops and state-run tourist attractions alike. I feel the most egregious example of this is Gatlinburg, Tennessee at the entrance of the Great Smoky<sup>24</sup> Mountains National Park. Not only is the town overrun by urban sprawl in the form of shopping centers and outlet malls, even the few locally owned stores sell items perpetuating the hillbilly stereotypes, “choosing profit over resistance to prevailing cultural images.” Visitors to Gatlinburg can also visit the Ole Smoky Tennessee Moonshine Store, where quarts of legally produced moonshine line “rustic” walls with “mason” jars. Visitors can not only purchase this weakened, legal version of Appalachia’s alcohol, they can buy different types of fruit pre-soaked in moonshine from employees dressed in bibbed overalls and camouflage t-shirts.

Just as cultural heritage tourism can create the substitution of a “phony folk culture,” ecotourism can actually contribute to the destruction of the environment that originally drew people to the region. Central Appalachia has already seen more than its fair share of ecological destruction from timber clear cutting, deep vein coal mining, and mountain top removal. Now it is facing devastation from ten different sources due to tourism:

1. Air Pollution
2. Noise Pollution
3. Litter and Garbage
4. Chemical Pollution
5. Damages to Wildlife and Wildflower Resources
6. Energy Waste
7. Sprawl
8. Visual Pollution
9. Light Pollution
10. Vibrational Pollution<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky*, 162.

<sup>24</sup> Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky*, 62.

<sup>25</sup> Fritsch and Johannsen, *Ecotourism In Appalachia*, 46-51.

Some of these damages come directly from tourists themselves, others from the building and operation of amenities for tourists. It is clear that ecotourism, even so-called “green tourism,” is not a sustainable industry.

### In Summary

Ronald D. Eller sums up the effect of tourism in Appalachia by stating:

For some Appalachian communities, the growth of tourism during the last decades of the twentieth century provided a hopeful alternative to environmentally destructive industries such as mining and timbering, but recreational development brought its own problems. Traffic congestion, visual pollution, low-wage jobs, and increased demand on local public services tempered the economic benefits of tourism.<sup>26</sup>

Even if the problems of tourism can be tempered through responsible development so that the benefits outweigh the risks, not every community in Southwest Virginia will be able to profit from cultural heritage or eco-tourism. The Virginia Tourism Corporation and “Tourism and Natural Amenity Development” agree that many communities will find it difficult to “capitalize on these features”<sup>27</sup> due to limited accessibility—both from the lack of interstate and air infrastructure and the distance between attractions.<sup>28</sup> According to Krannich and Petruelka:

In short, not every community can expect to successfully recruit an influx of tourists or new residents on the basis of surrounding natural amenities, and amenity-based development cannot reasonably be expected to serve as the salvation of all communities confronted by an erosion of traditional rural economic enterprises.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Eller, *Uneven Ground*, Kindle Location 3260.

<sup>27</sup> Krannich and Petruelka, “Tourism and Natural Amenity Development” 191.

<sup>28</sup> “Heart of Appalachia Regional Section.”

<sup>29</sup> Krannich and Petruelka, “Tourism and Natural Amenity Development” 191.

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## Practical Applications

### Theme 1-Community Development vs. Economic Development

#### The Implications of Community Development

In many rural communities and small towns there are obvious needs for jobs, income, and social services. However, narrowly focusing on such sustenance needs misses the essential contribution that development of community makes to local well-being. Community development is a broad, multi-faceted process requiring the simultaneous advancement and mutual reinforcement of development of community and development in community.<sup>1</sup>

Luloff and Bridger make the point perfectly for the importance of community development. While many of the cultural heritage organizations in Southwest Virginia focus on economic development—and rightly so, the economic situation in the region is dire—they are ignoring many of the aspects of community development. Several of the organizations speak of creating a quality of life that will attract entrepreneurs and “go anywhere” businesses, yet they cannot truly claim to be focused on that quality of life without first improving it for the residents that already live in the region.

#### Vibrant, Viable Communities

In many of my interviews, I asked the organizations how they would picture a vibrant, viable community. Every organization has a different mission statement and a separate answer, yet many of them have a similar vision. Common sense would dictate that this vision should shape the organization’s mission, however, several are not addressing the issues they raised in their answer.

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<sup>1</sup> Luloff, A.E. and Jeffrey C. Bridger. “Community Agency and Local Development” in *Challenges for Rural America in the Twenty-First Century* Ed. David Brown et al. (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003) 212.

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*Heart of Appalachia Tourism Authority*

The potential of each of the towns in my region is to become another Abingdon—they all have that potential, they all have that gift. They are just in different stages of doing that very thing. At one time, I think all of these towns were like an Abingdon. I think what I would like to see them maintain more than anything is a sense of community. It's not the community that brings the visitors in, but it's the community that brings the visitors back. When a stranger comes into this town it's the hospitality and the people who will walk up to you and say "Hey, how you doing? Can I help you?"<sup>2</sup>

Heart of Appalachia Tourism Authority discusses Abingdon as a model for a vibrant town, although Abingdon differs from many of the towns in her region. Abingdon is easily accessible to visitors from three exits on Interstate 81, and is home to many active organizations such as Barter Theatre, People Incorporated, and Appalachian Sustainable Development. Although the Heart of Appalachia Director believes that the sense of community is what will draw visitors back to the region, her organization does not address building social capital. Neither does the organization address how the region's current and new residents will be able to make a living.

*'Round the Mountain Artisan Collective*

I think a vibrant, viable community [is one where] artists who choose to have craft as their full-time occupation have the opportunity to do so but that they have visitors coming into town or their studio. Visitors that come into town can learn about craft, they can learn about the music, they can learn about cultural heritage. At the same time for community members—those of us that live here—to embrace this rich culture that we have. I think a huge piece of what we need to do in Southwest Virginia is to show the people that live here the great quality of life that we do have here...These lonesome roads that we travel on everyday—people are looking for that kind of thing. To be able to look out over the mountains and not see houses perched on all the mountain tops. I think it's the education part of showing the community members that live here what a vibrant community that we do have. What a draw that it is and to embrace that. To figure out how you can stay here and make

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<sup>2</sup> Vance, September 9, 2013.

a living. Getting people to stay at home and embrace what we have. Open up our doors to the business folks, get all the money we can out of them, and then they go home and tell their friends and neighbors about how great Southwest Virginia is.<sup>3</sup>

‘Round the Mountain Artisan Collective works as both a tourism agency and an economic development organization. Their description of enabling artisans to earn a living through craft as well as promoting that craft to visitors to the region fits well within the mission and the work of the organization. However, Ms. Blackburn spoke at length about the need to educate the residents of the region about the value of our culture and how to keep those community members in the region—both issues that ‘Round the Mountain is currently not addressing.

#### *The Jacksonville Center for the Arts*

I think Jacksonville Center is of the opinion that there is room enough for everyone. The pie is not so small that it can’t be practically infinitely divided. What I see as a vibrant community is one that has almost limitless cultural, outdoors, and heritage opportunities for not only the residents but for visitors. [I hope that] we refrain from becoming a Pigeon Forge but still accommodate the wants and the needs of the higher end active visitor and the resident who is engaged, positive, and hopeful. I see it being lots of non-profits working together with both business and government to provide fresh, fun, and new opportunities to residents and visitors alike.<sup>4</sup>

The Jacksonville Center’s response is closely aligned with their day-to-day work in the town of Floyd. They strive to represent an authentic Appalachian culture that does not fall into the phony folk culture present in areas like Pigeon Forge.<sup>5</sup> The organization is currently working with a variety of non-profit organizations such as a community health center as well as with the local government to create a visitors center that will help to coordinate the community

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<sup>3</sup> Blackburn, October 8, 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Porterfield, September 25, 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Pigeon Forge is a neighboring town to Gatlinburg, Tennessee. It is the home of Dollywood, and features activities such as bungee jumping, go karts, and outlet malls.

development efforts taking place in the town. They have also been instrumental in the creation of many small businesses through their arts business incubation program.

### *Appalachian Arts Center*

I think [we need] more independently owned businesses and people who support those independently owned businesses. It's difficult because there is the Super Wal-Mart and it has everything that everybody seems to need and want...There's sort of an awareness of what buying local [can do]. We're still talking about that with people, but [for] a lot of people everything is just about the basics, making sure you have the basics. A lot of time things--especially art and the arts—are considered a luxury. Buying craft or something handmade versus buying something that you can just pick up at Wal-Mart is a choice. We're not asking people to make sure everything they buy is handmade by some local person, but what we're trying to do is make them think about buying just a few things. You buy a few things every year at Christmas that are local or handmade, or for a birthday gift think about commissioning that local artist that does pet portraits. We're trying...to encourage people to think about the possibility of supporting an artist—someone who makes something with their hands—and contributing to their local economy.<sup>6</sup>

Appalachian Arts Center is doing the most of any organization to stimulate the local economy from within. Rather than focusing on bringing economic development to the community with the money of outsiders, the organization believes that by encouraging community members to spend their money in a way that it will remain in their neighborhood.

### *Birthplace of Country Music Alliance*

We would have not just our city officials and people who volunteer and participate in community events, but one of our goals is to bring in people from all walks of life to participate in this almost meta-commentary about who they are which we're trying to build into this museum. We want to be a place where families come on Saturdays or the quilting guild schedules its meetings. We want to be a place for that sort of community interaction and engagement. We also want to be a place where scholars come and maybe there's an interaction and people here in this community see "oh, there's a scholar from Toronto who came down because he's been

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<sup>6</sup> Darpli-Romeo, October 9, 2013.

researching Bristol and early country music for several years and I had no idea that people from outside of this region thought that this is an important and vibrant tradition.” Often that message that this is important and worth saving goes to the state capital and archives in DC and to our academic institutions but it doesn’t really always necessarily stay in the community in a way that people feel like they own the story. We’d really like to see a sense of common property and a sense of ownership of cultural practice in general. It’s not something that we come in as non-profits and give back to the people. There’s something really awkwardly wrong about that idea and that’s what we’re doing right now. We’re working in communities and we’re taking their stories and we’re handing it back to them. A vibrant community in my mind has people within that community that are stepping up to say “I want to be part of this tradition and telling that story myself.”<sup>7</sup>

The Birthplace of Country Music Alliance believes that a vibrant community is one that takes ownership of its own cultural traditions. They are encouraging this through their work with Rhythm and Roots Festival and the Birthplace of Country Music Museum. Not only are community members encouraged to donate items they own that are connected to the region’s musical heritage, but those exhibits will be curated by community members.

### *Barter Theatre*

We’d really like to see more shops where we can have local artists selling their product—not necessarily like Heartwood, but similar. To see a place where if we had some kind of smaller venue where children can come play with puppets or do some kind of acting on their own just to introduce them to the arts. Also a place where after a show is over that we can sit and talk to them and say “what did you think about the show? How did it impact you? Were you thinking X and now you’re thinking Y and why did that change?” Also to understand the importance of Southwest Virginia and the role that it plays—how important it is for people to stay here. This region is full of beautiful natural resources and a lot of heritage. The more people that we lose out of this region, it’s going to be tougher to maintain those things.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Dr. Jessica Turner. Interview by Author. Telephone Interview. November 21, 2013.

<sup>8</sup> Hester. November 30, 2013.

Barter Theatre's response does not cover the full breadth of the social programs they currently manage within the community, but it seems that they are enthusiastic about working to expand their reach. The theatre is already working to introduce youth to the arts through their Barter Youth Academy, Barter Players, youth productions, and Project REAL. They also present controversial issues through their plays—such as *Thicker Than Water*<sup>9</sup>--in the hopes of making their audience think about these issues from a different perspective. They also use the Appalachian Festival of Plays and Playwrights to share the value of life in Appalachia with its residents.

### *Roadside Theatre*

It's a community in which people are using the strengths of their culture and also defining the parts of their culture that are not helpful and trying to make developments and changes there. Defining the strengths and weaknesses of their cultural traditions and to work from that to really develop their listening skills. To be able to really to listen to the big picture, rather than some tiny place that someone told you that you should be. To think for yourself and to look at the big picture and to see what you can do. When the big picture is considered, it really does include everyone. You can see the reason that we need to solve the problems in the community. They do affect you, they will affect you, even if you think they don't.<sup>10</sup>

Roadside Theatre's response, like the Jacksonville Art Center's, closely represents their work within the community. They work with the community's perceptions of itself and also how to share those perceptions with outsiders. They have been so successful in their approach that they have been asked to share their methodology with many outside communities and theatre groups.

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<sup>9</sup> A play about Andrea Yates, a Texas mother who drowned her 5 children in the bathtub in 2001. <http://www.timesnews.net/article/9066742/thicker-than-water-barter-tackles-sensitive-subject-matter-in-powerful-new-play>.

<sup>10</sup> Porterfield, November 19, 2013.

## Ideas for Change

Representatives from seven organizations described their vision of a vibrant, viable community. For some of these organizations, their descriptions match closely with the work they are currently doing while for others they are neglecting major aspects of their vision. When I originally added the question to my interviews, I did not expect it to end up being a loaded question—rather I anticipated that the organizations would imagine what the region would look like in five to ten years if they were successful in their work.

Regardless of whether the organizations are currently working to fulfill their vision of a vibrant and viable community, several key themes appeared across their answers: a desire to maintain a sense of community, to enable local artisans to make a living by practicing their craft, to educate community members about the value of their heritage, and to keep local residents from moving away from the community.

### *Maintaining a Sense of Community*

*“People have to learn to pull together instead of apart to make a community work.”<sup>11</sup>*

Rebuilding social capital is the subject of countless books and articles by social scientists. Authors such as Robert Putnam bemoan its loss in books such as *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Americans are joining fewer social groups such as fraternal lodges or quilting guilds and serving on fewer committees such as the PTA. There are countless reasons for this—the time we have to spend commuting to work, the work we bring home with us, the ease of traveling to find whatever it is we are searching for. If cultural heritage organizations want to maintain the sense of community that they believe to be one of the

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<sup>11</sup> Wood, Richard E. *Survival of Rural America: Small Victories and Bitter Harvests* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2008) 123.

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draws of Southwest Virginia, they need to work with the groups that still exist, encourage membership in those groups, and even work to establish stronger networks of their own.

### *Enabling Local Artisans to Make a Living*

It is impossible to deny that the craft movement is on the rise. Sites such as Etsy.com enable artisans to sell their wares—from works of art to esoteric items—to buyers across the world. Pinterest.com features thousands of instructional pieces on how to make jewelry, yarn from plastic bags, repurposed clothing, and furniture, among other items. For people who want to learn how to craft or who want to buy handmade pieces from others, there are almost limitless opportunities. While ‘Round the Mountain and the Jacksonville Center for the Arts helps artisans with their entrepreneurial skills, Appalachian Arts Center offers a gallery for artisans to sell their work, and Chestnut Creek School for the Arts gives them alternative sources of income through teaching opportunities, none of these organizations is really helping local artisans to tap into the market that is waiting for them across the world.

### *Educating Community Members about Their Heritage*

Due to Appalachia’s uneasy relationship with the mainstream, residents of the region have often felt that their culture is something to be ashamed of. This was reinforced by anti-poverty workers in the second half of the twentieth century, many of whom were of the opinion that “the problem lay in the culture of the mountain people themselves, a culture, they argued, that preserved anachronistic values and prevented people from lifting themselves out of poverty.”<sup>12</sup> Residents of the regions have run from the mainstream image of them as rednecks and hillbillies, even fighting against a major telecommunications company’s recent depiction of them as crazy and toothless while the women are all barefoot and pregnant in the kitchen.

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<sup>12</sup> Eller, *Uneven Ground*, Kindle Location 593.

Roadside Theatre and its parent organization Appalshop are the leaders in this quest, but none of the organizations I interviewed are working within the schools to help change this perception from a very young age.

### *Keep Local Residents from Moving Away*

The negative self-perception residents have about themselves, their heritage, and their region is often cited as one of the major reasons that people want to leave Southwest Virginia. Many people grow up hearing that they are expected to make something of themselves, and this often entails going away to college and moving to a metropolitan area to find gainful employment. Other reasons for leaving the area are less clear. In *Survival of Rural America: Small Victories and Bitter Harvests*, Richard E. Wood first states that “jobs, rather than lifestyle, are the main problem in retaining...youth.”<sup>13</sup> Approximately 100 pages later, he describes the perceptions of people living in rural areas:

People would talk with varying degrees of confidence about jobs and economic development, but express frustration about their community’s need for a clothing store, a health club, a restaurant or two—even a coffee shop: the kinds of things that people in cities take for granted, even joke about.<sup>14</sup>

Although several of the organizations that focus on economic development work on downtown revitalization and helping communities to establish clothing stores, health clubs, restaurants, and coffee shops, these create the type of low-wage service sector jobs that are not what college graduates and well-trained individuals are seeking. What is necessary is a two-pronged approach—creating skilled jobs in a region that has the services many people desire.

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<sup>13</sup> Wood, *Survival of Rural America*, 79.

<sup>14</sup> Wood, *Survival of Rural America*, 188-189.

### **In Summary**

Each of the four areas that are referred to in the organizational responses—maintaining a sense of community, enabling local artisans to make a living, educating residents about their heritage, and putting a halt to population drain—are being addressed in some form by at least one of the organizations I interviewed. All of these issues are complicated and multi-faceted, and they only make up a small portion of the field of community development. While most of these organizations are in partnership with each other; stronger, more active partnerships could enable them to better address each of these issues. Finding a small piece of a problem to work on does further an organization's chances for success in that one area, but with a complicated issue with multiple causes and a variety of effects, organizations cannot afford to be close-minded in their efforts.

### **Theme 2-Internal Voices vs. Outside Influence**

Appalachia's long history of exploitive relationships with the outside world means that organizations within the region must tread lightly between listening to members of the community and taking advice and guidance from outside agencies. It can be difficult for these organizations that are state agencies or mostly funded by state sources to get involved in community organizing issues—particularly those issues related to sensitive political issues. Non-profits must already fear what will happen if they do not appear to be politically impartial during elections and what the outcome of an election can mean to their funding. Non-profit organizations across the world must attempt to overcome this fear by reducing the impact of governmental input on their operations. They must increase the power of local voices, and work to serve their true constituents: the members of the community. In the following pages, I will address the practical implications of each of organizations changing to their focus to a more community-orientated one.

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## Reducing Outside Influence

Outside influence on cultural heritage organizations in Appalachia comes from a variety of sources. They are affected by the policies of local government, the plans of the state government, the funding decisions of regionally entities such as the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), and even the federal government’s decisions about funding to arts agencies and infrastructure management. For much of the history of the region, corrupt local politics has been the status quo. Politicians have often considered themselves to be above the law, and their actions while in office have been designed to serve themselves, their families, and their close friends.<sup>1</sup>

At the state and federal level, it seems that the elected officials each have their own ideas about what Southwest Virginia needs. The region remains deeply conservative, and even middle-of-the-road Democratic candidates who have been successful at securing funding for the region can face a difficult road to re-election. Politically popular policies include support for the coal industry (a finite resource extraction industry that will employ fewer and fewer people every year regardless of political support) and a dislike of social policies such as Supplemental Aid for Needy Persons and the Affordable Care Act, policies that would help a large number of residents in the region.

These representatives have focused on a variety of proposals—from attempting to lure large industries to Southwest Virginia with tax incentives and relaxed regulations to cultural heritage-based initiatives. ‘Round the Mountain Artisan Collective, the Crooked Road, Heartwood: Southwest Virginia’s Artisan Gateway, the Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Commission, and Appalachian Spring were all originally envisioned at the state level. United

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<sup>1</sup> Dorsey, *Southern West Virginia and the Struggle for Modernity*, Kindle Locations 745-884 and 1386-1569.

States Senator Mark Warner recently spoke at the Southwest Virginia Creative Economy Conference about the need to create a festival of festivals in Southwest Virginia—a grouping of local events that will encourage visitors to visit a variety of locations in the region over an extended period of time. Each of these initiatives focuses on the need to bring economic development from outside sources into our communities. Even the ARC must make decisions about which initiatives they feel will bring the most economic development to the region with little or no input from community members. Their efforts are mostly focused on what they determine to be “distressed counties.”<sup>2</sup> A Virginia county has not been listed on the distressed county list since the ARC’s FY 2011, when Dickenson County qualified for preferential treatment.

This outside influence, particularly from government institutions, is not a new trend in Appalachia. In 1970, Helen Matthews Lewis wrote in “Fatalism or the Coal Industry?” that:

The institutions should change; there must be radical shifts in power relationships and the class system. Professionals must learn respect for subcultural systems and recognize the legitimacy and creativity of the subculture rather than regarding them as problems to be changed.<sup>3</sup>

Institutions must change in several ways. At the federal level, funding for arts organizations (particularly the National Endowment for the Arts) must not only be restored to its prior levels, but those levels should be increased. Arts funding from the NEA that is given in partnership to the states yields a return of over 200:1.<sup>4</sup> In addition to increasing funding,

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<sup>2</sup> “ARC uses an index-based classification system to compare each county in the nation with national averages on three economic indicators—three-year average unemployment rates, per capita market income, and poverty rates.” [http://www.arc.gov/program\\_areas/index.asp?PROGRAM\\_AREA\\_ID=15](http://www.arc.gov/program_areas/index.asp?PROGRAM_AREA_ID=15).

<sup>3</sup> Lewis, Beaver, and Jennings, *Helen Matthews Lewis*, Kindle Location 1335.

<sup>4</sup> “Return on Investment: The Federal Government, States and the Arts,” National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, Accessed December 10, 2013, <http://www.nasaa-arts.org/Research/Grant-Making/FedStateFactSheet2011FINAL.pdf>.

regulations should be enacted that attempt to prevent federal and state governmental officials from penalizing organizations that work on community issues. Government-run organizations should not have to fear retribution from the current political powers when they are addressing community development.

Government officials should also seek input from community members when designing cultural heritage programs. Community members better understand what programs are needed on an individual level, and community-level programs may have better benefits than regional initiatives. Finally, hiring for state run organizations such as the Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Foundation and Heart of Appalachia Tourism Authority should not take place exclusively at the state level. Each organization currently requires that all application materials be sent to and reviewed in Richmond, and at least one interview takes place in the state capital. This is a system that does not give presence to residents of Southwest Virginia, nor does it encourage input from community members.

It is perhaps unreasonable to expect politicians and government officials to act ethically and responsibly in the current climate. Perhaps that is why Ronald D. Eller stated:

The poor people of the mountains must free themselves from the feudal system of local politics that protected the absentee interests. The challenge in Appalachia... [is] to facilitate this change by organizing citizens locally around specific community concerns—political participation, health care, welfare rights, access to housing and education, and property rights—and to build a regional identity and regional alliances around shared regional issues.<sup>5</sup>

### **Strengthening Internal Voices**

A prerequisite for sustainable development in a local community is that it must be inclusive, relating all relevant disciplines and special professions from all walks of life...Diversity of thought, culture, and expertise thus allows all persons to contribute to the

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<sup>5</sup> Eller, *Uneven Ground*, Kindle Location 1778.

development process in a special way, making their unique gift a part of the effort necessary to create a sustainable local community.<sup>6</sup>

For a cultural heritage initiative to truly represent the community it claims to represent, it must echo the voices of that community. All community members should have an opportunity for input into the decisions that affect everyday life. While it is impossible for an organization to contact each individual member of their community, they should not only represent the needs of the middle-aged, middle-class constituent. One group that is continually being marginalized are young, working professionals.

Young people in central Appalachia face significant challenges in becoming active participants in their communities and in making the decisions that shape their lives. They grapple with confusing messages and experiences that both celebrate and denigrate their culture and communities, disconnecting youth from their homes and from positive individual and collective identities. <sup>7</sup>

Young people are the greatest hope for Appalachia (and the nation). They are passionate, energetic, and enthusiastic about new ideas. They are also one of the most ignored groups in Southwest Virginia. If one goes to a location where youth congregate in the region, the most likely complaint they will overhear is about how the leadership in their community wants to turn their town into a retirement community. It is hard to counter this argument when you look at the local leadership. Mayors, town councils, and county supervisors are much more likely to be grey-haired retirees than recent college graduates and have a tendency to be opposed to the type of restaurants and shops that will attract and retain youth.

This is a trend that must be reversed. As Richards-Schuster and O’Doherty point out in “Appalachian Youth Re-envisioning Home, Re-making Identities:” “when young people re-envision themselves and their communities, they begin to create a movement of youth activists

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<sup>6</sup> Maser, *Sustainable Community Development*, 113.

<sup>7</sup> Richards-Schuster and O’Doherty, “Appalachian Youth Re-envisioning Home, Re-making Identities” 78.

staying home and reconstructing Appalachia.”<sup>8</sup> Perhaps this is what the old guard is afraid of—but there are currently very few opportunities for young people to get involved in their communities. Richards-Schuster and O’Doherty believe that “ultimately needed are structures—informal networks and formal organizations—that build the ongoing capacity both of young people across organizations to work together for change and adult social justice organizations to engage young people.”<sup>9</sup>

It is not just young people that were born in Southwest Virginia who should become involved in community development issues. Young professionals who have migrated to the region can have an equally important voice and can add to the passion and resolve of those who were born here:

The expansion of the professional class, rising numbers of neo-Appalachians who migrated to the mountains in search of alternative lifestyles, and higher education levels among native residents increased the civic capacity and the diversity of critical voices within the region. Greater access to higher education...produced a new generation of cultural and political leaders that was more educated and more willing to challenge existing power structures. A few began to look beyond the old economies of coal and branch plant manufacturing for more sustainable, alternative strategies for development. Coalitions of the new leadership often came together around issues related to the environment, health care, and cultural heritage, but their ideas frequently met resistance from institutions and politicians comfortable with the status quo.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Richards-Schuster and O’Doherty, “Appalachian Youth Re-envisioning Home, Re-making Identities” 89.

<sup>9</sup> Richards-Schuster and O’Doherty. “Appalachian Youth Re-envisioning Home, Re-making Identities” 89.

<sup>10</sup> Eller, *Uneven Ground*, Kindle Location 3108.

## Relationships

Social Capital is important not only as an aspect of community development, but also in encouraging community members to become more involved in issues affecting their community. Individuals who do understand the value of their cultural heritage have helped to create “an Appalachian nationalism which has grown out of a defense of mountain culture and identity.”<sup>11</sup> This sense of nationalism has forged relationships across generations in Southwest Virginia. These relationships are visible at community festivals such as the Whitetop Mountain Ramp Festival where 8 year olds can be seen dancing with octogenarians to bluegrass and old-time music and also at events such as the Smyth County Jam when teenagers learn from and play music with men in their 90’s. Relationships such as these are extremely important according to White, Castelloe, Hemstreet, Soto, and Butterworth:

Relationships seem to be the force that overcomes that paralysis: when someone I care about is affected by injustice, then I feel that injustice myself, and I am moved to speak and to act. A social movement happens when a critical mass of people, because of those relationships, begin to speak out or take action, and when the people most directly affected by the issue are able to channel that growing social energy to effect a permanent transformation of attitudes, behaviors, laws, and institutions.<sup>12</sup>

## In Summary

A quotation attributed to the 1970 President’s Task Force on Rural Development states “if a community lacks leadership, if it lacks local concern, if it isn’t convinced that it should become a better place to live—then perhaps it shouldn’t.”<sup>13</sup> While many community members

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<sup>11</sup> Dorsey, *Southern West Virginia and the Struggle for Modernity*, Kindle Location 1697.

<sup>12</sup> Craig White, Paul Castelloe, Molly Hemstreet, Yaira Andrea Arias Soto, and Jeanette Butterworth. “Center for Participatory Change: Cultivating Grassroots Support Organizing” in *Transforming Places: Lessons from Appalachia*. Ed. Stephen L. Fisher et al. (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois, 2012) 146.

<sup>13</sup> Attributed to the President’s Task Force on Rural Development, 1970 in Wood, *Survival...* 96.

are convinced that the region should become a better place to live, Southwest Virginia's cultural heritage organizations need to work to reduce outside influence while convincing community members that their leadership is valuable. The representatives of the organizations I interviewed appear to be convinced that life in Southwest Virginia is already something worth preserving. They must now work to convince community members that this is true through educational initiatives and by allowing those community members a role in shaping the future of the region.

### Theme 3-Tourism: Positive Effects vs. Damaging Outcome

*“People in Appalachia who pin their hopes on tourism (in any form) as the region’s economic salvation are as shortsighted as those who favor any other kind of single-industry economy.”<sup>1</sup>*

While not value-neutral industries, cultural heritage and eco-tourism in Southwest Virginia are here to stay. This is not the first region in the United States—or worldwide—to attempt tourism as an economic development strategy. We can study the effects of tourism in North Carolina, Utah, Hawaii, the Pacific Northwest, Alaska, Central Florida, Appalachia, the Southeast United States as a whole, all of Rural America, and even across the world in countries such as Nepal and Belize. Unfortunately, the lessons learned from other regions have shown us that tourism is not without its problems—cultural commodification, cultural erosion, financial leakage, ecological destruction, and negative economic factors.

#### *Cultural Commodification*

*“No one enjoys being looked at like caged zoo creatures.”<sup>2</sup>*

I have already discussed some of the aspects of cultural commodification that are built in to the current tourism industry in Southwest Virginia. With the proliferation of mountain

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<sup>1</sup> Fritsch and Johannsen, *Ecotourism in Appalachia*, 185.

<sup>2</sup> Fritsch and Johannsen, *Ecotourism in Appalachia*, 52.

memorabilia in gift shops and visitors' centers across Appalachia, it is unsurprising that some outsiders feel that driving through Southwest Virginia has become a "hillbilly safari." The aspects of life in the region—agricultural and labor traditions as well as musical and craft heritage—have each been assigned a value relative to their ability to entertain tourists:

As with most forms of cultural tourism, these uses did not reflect the region's cultural traditions but simply those aspects calculated to make a profit. Therefore visitors viewed only selected aspects of mountain culture, ones that reflected more about the tourist-business owners and outsiders than about mountaineers themselves.<sup>3</sup>

Tourism, as with every other industry in Appalachia, is deeply tied to residents' self-perceptions and outside influence. Outside influence has encouraged Appalachians to selectively market their culture as a commodity. Richard D. Starnes discusses how this commodification and cultural selectivity has helped to create "no small degree of animosity"<sup>4</sup> and even "hostile attitudes toward visitors."<sup>5</sup> These attitudes have begun to destroy the mountaineer's natural sense of hospitality, as well as becoming yet another factor of cultural erosion in Appalachia.

### *Cultural Erosion*

Cultural erosion is when the unique attributes that define a culture are lost under the influence of outside culture, and it is a very real problem in Appalachia—a double-edged sword when one considers the fact that cultural heritage is being used as the basis of a creative economy in Southwest Virginia. There are a number of factors that contribute to cultural erosion, including:

- An economically disadvantaged group being able to increase their station in life

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<sup>3</sup> Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky*, 149.

<sup>4</sup> Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky*, 181.

<sup>5</sup> Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky*, 183.

- The prevalence of contemporary culture and language through national media
- Ability of the region's residents to move away
- Community members temporarily leaving for education, career opportunities, or military service
- School consolidation
- Mass-produced, universally distributed commodities
- Multiple sources of entertainment
- Pervasiveness of mass culture from both Hollywood and Nashville<sup>6</sup>

Much of what makes Appalachian culture unique—both from the rest of the world and even from ridge to hollow—is being blurred in with mainstream culture a little more every day. While it is nearly impossible to block out the outside world thanks to the internet, television, and long-distance telecommunications, tourism agencies should attempt to preserve the culture while they are promoting it.

### *Ecological Destruction*

Culture is not the only thing that tourism agencies should focus energy on trying to preserve. Fritsch and Johannsen believe that “the only thing standing between fragile environments and damage from ecotourists is the expertise and, ultimately, the consciences of the developers—not something that can necessarily be relied upon.”<sup>7</sup> While ecotourists, by their very nature, are more likely to engage in green practices, the infrastructure and commodities necessary to sustain a tourism industry are still damaging to the environment.<sup>8</sup> Opening land for hunting or fishing can damage the local food system, and recreational activities such as hiking, horseback riding, bicycling, water sports, and riding all-terrain vehicles can do irreparable damage to both animals and their habits. Driving the scenic highways and byways during the fall to observe the beautiful scenery only contributes to the pollution that can destroy the foliage.

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<sup>6</sup> Fritsch and Johannsen, *Ecotourism in Appalachia*, 56-57.

<sup>7</sup> Fritsch and Johannsen, *Ecotourism in Appalachia*, 171.

<sup>8</sup> Fritsch and Johannsen, *Ecotourism in Appalachia*, 169.

Not all damages result directly from the actions of tourists. Sometimes destruction come from the infrastructure that is put in place to support the industry, and sometimes it is due to poor planning from governmental agencies. Ill-advised zoning restrictions, outdated water treatment facilities, and sub-par trash removal services will add more stress to the environment, a situation that causes Starnes to offer a grim prediction: “If actions are not taken soon, the climate and scenery that have attracted tourists to the region since the early nineteenth century may well be damaged beyond repair, destroying the cornerstone of mountain tourism.”<sup>9</sup>

### *Financial Leakage*

Financial leakage is when the money from tourism related ventures leaves the region in which it was spent. Eco- and cultural heritage tourism usually take place in areas without a well-developed local hospitality infrastructure—a majority of hotels and restaurants are likely to be owned outside the region.<sup>10</sup> According to Fritsch and Johannsen:

Leakage from Appalachian tourism can approach the rates seen in the developing world. Most vacation travel to and within the region is by car, bringing income to gas station chains and car rental companies, few (if any) owned within the region. Using corporate motel chains and patronizing big-name, outside-owned tourist attractions such as Dollywood also raises leakage rates.<sup>11</sup>

There are ways to avoid leakage in promoting tourism. Locally owned businesses are fundamental for keeping tourism revenues in the region. By encouraging residents to open gift shops, restaurants, and bed and breakfast facilities, tourism agencies can ensure that money stays in the local economy. Localities should use the money earmarked for incentives for outside businesses to assist local entrepreneurs.<sup>12</sup> Smyth County recently dedicated \$300,000—in

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<sup>9</sup> Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky*, 188.

<sup>10</sup> Fritsch and Johannsen, *Ecotourism in Appalachia*, 171.

<sup>11</sup> Fritsch and Johannsen, *Ecotourism in Appalachia*, 42.

<sup>12</sup> Fritsch and Johannsen, *Ecotourism in Appalachia*, 173.

addition to state and other funding—to encourage a Chinese-owned furniture company to relocate into a recently closed factory<sup>13</sup>. Rather than pursuing yet another absentee business owner, the community should be working to keep money, profit, and opportunity in the region.

Marion, Virginia is an excellent example of this type of program. The town is more developed than some others in the region since the downtown area has gone through a major renovation period. After receiving grant funds to renovate facades and engaging in other beautification projects, the town created a program called “Small Business Bootcamp.” Aspiring entrepreneurs must attend nine free weekly classes on topics such as credit, creating a business plan, and customer services. At graduation, those with viable business plans are eligible to receive a \$5,000 grant to assist with start-up costs as long as their business will be located within town limits.<sup>14</sup>

### *Negative Economic Factors*

Tourism is often touted as the economic savior of Southwest Virginia. At the Southwest Virginia Creative Economy Conference, representatives of multiple organizations spoke about the massive economic development that has occurred due to tourism. Unfortunately, the industry’s economic outcomes are not all positive. In *Ecotourism in Appalachia*, the authors state that “ecotourism ties ever more remote places into the global tourism economy, thus making them susceptible to the boom-bust cycle of tourism. It also pits them against each other as competitors for the tourist dollar.”<sup>15</sup> Competition between the counties and towns in the region is detrimental to the Appalachian Spring project, which is attempting to brand all of

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<sup>13</sup> Allie Robinson Gibson, “Business trend benefits Smyth County,” *TriCities.com*, December 18, 2013, Accessed December 22, 2013, [http://www.tricity.com/news/local/article\\_290e9524-6862-11e3-81d0-001a4bcf6878.html](http://www.tricity.com/news/local/article_290e9524-6862-11e3-81d0-001a4bcf6878.html).

<sup>14</sup> The Town of Marion, Virginia. “Pop Up Marion’ Small Business Boot Camp.” Accessed December 10, 2013. <http://www.marionva.org/events/pop-up-marion-small-business-boot-camp>

<sup>15</sup> Fritsch and Johannsen, *Ecotourism in Appalachia*, 179.

Southwest Virginia as a tourism destination. When towns that have previously been successful in their tourism efforts lose money to surrounding areas, they are tempted to raise the prices for their remaining clientele. This will actually cause a greater problem because according to Fritsch and Johannsen, “the demand for tourism is what economists call ‘price-elastic.’ This means that a small increase in the price will cause many people to stop buying the product and switch to a substitute.”<sup>16</sup>

Yet another problem faced by communities with a tourism-based industry is the creation of menial, low-skill jobs. While some organizations, such as the Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Commission, believe that any job is better than no job, taking a minimum-wage job can actually hurt a family more than it helps. Minimum-wage jobs do not provide what is considered a living wage in most areas of the United States, and this small amount of income can actually cause a major reduction in a family’s governmental support for necessities like housing, food and health care. This can leave a family in worse shape economically than when one of its members was unemployed. Minimum wage jobs also do not allow families to plan for the future:

Too late, the mountaineer realizes that he has sold his birthright for a mess of pottage. He has become a day laborer, with nothing better in store, and can give his sons no heritage but the prospect of working by the day.<sup>17</sup>

### **Planning for Tourism**

Despite its problems, if properly managed and marketed, tourism can create economic development while safeguarding both cultural heritage and the environment. According to Fritsch and Johannsen:

Communities need to be proactive in planning for tourism. Unless citizens take decision-making about tourism into their own hands,

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<sup>16</sup> Fritsch and Johannsen, *Ecotourism in Appalachia*, 180.

<sup>17</sup> Emma Bell Miles as quoted in Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky*, 181.

the decisions are likely to be made for them by entities far away and not for the benefit of local people.<sup>18</sup>

The list of decisions a community needs to make regarding tourism is almost infinite.

The following, by no means an exhaustive listing, is a partial list of important considerations:

- Branding-how a community chooses to represent its image and sell itself to the outside world
- Marketing-a community must market itself aggressively to the outside world if it wishes to become a tourism destination<sup>19</sup>
- Infrastructure-can the community's infrastructure handle the added weight of tourists? Is the community able to invest in the necessary improvements?<sup>20</sup>
- New attractions-Tourism, like every other industry, must constantly focus on innovations to continue to grow.<sup>21</sup>
- Ecological Sustainability-how can the tourism business sustain the environment while promoting it?
- Regulation-Can the community restrict recreational activities to help preserve the secluded feel of the environment?
- Community Development-How will the community maintain and build its human and social capital?
- Resident Buy-in-Do residents believe that tourism is good for the community?
- Compensation-Are artists and musicians going to be properly compensated?<sup>22</sup>

### In Summary

Cultural heritage and eco-tourism can have a number of benefits for Southwest Virginia.

However, due to the problems of cultural commodification, cultural erosion, ecological destruction, financial leakage, and other economic issues, each locality in the region should carefully examine its choices. Although tourism is promoted for the entire region, each town and county should decide to what extent it wants to participate. Organizations such as Heart of Appalachia and Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Commission should remember these simple guidelines from *Ecotourism in Appalachia*:

Visitors should have experiences that enrich their lives and expand their understanding; local residents need high-quality employment

<sup>18</sup> Fritsch and Johannsen, *Ecotourism in Appalachia*, 161.

<sup>19</sup> Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky*, 185.

<sup>20</sup> Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky*, 185.

<sup>21</sup> Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky*, 189.

<sup>22</sup> Fritsch and Johannsen, *Ecotourism in Appalachia*, 194-209.

and good returns on the investment of their resources; and tourism development must not be exploitative, but should rather respect the current and future environment as well as the culture of the people.<sup>23</sup>

## Conclusion

### Summary of Findings

I used to think that what was needed was to bring mountain people into the economic mainstream. I thought it would be possible to do this and still preserve some of the positive, humanizing qualities of mountain cultures. I no longer think this is either possible or desirable. Our challenge is not to join mainstream America. It is to recreate a renewed and authentic form of what the mountains have always been. From the time that the first white settlers deliberately cut their ties with the coastal culture of colonial America to start a new life in this wilderness, the mountains have offered an alternative to mainstream America.<sup>24</sup>

Appalachia has been the subject of economic interventions since the War on Poverty began in 1964. This outside help has taken multiple forms—the creation of the Appalachian Regional Commission, volunteer organizations such as VISTA, ecumenical outreach from a variety of religious organizations, and state and regional governmental and non-profit organizations. Some of these outside groups—much like the absentee-owned businesses whose damage they were trying to reverse—ended up doing as much harm as good. Organizations such as the ARC—which has done much to improve the quality of life in Appalachia through infrastructure improvements and creation—are few and far between. Many organizations, influenced by the work of social scientists at the time, felt that Appalachian cultural heritage was to blame for the dismal situation more than the substantial institutional and structural issues in the region:

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<sup>23</sup> Fritsch and Johannsen, *Ecotourism in Appalachia*, 7.

<sup>24</sup> Appalachian Studies professional Michael Smathers as quoted in Eller, *Uneven Ground*, Kindle Location 2250.

One seeks to improve the schools, motivate children to achievement, change the values, break down the isolation, bring the area into the ‘mainstream.’ One does not question the institutions and avoids recognizing the need for radical change in the society. The wholesale and intemperate acceptance and promulgation of this model and these strategies have been extremely pernicious and wasteful of money. They have, if anything, helped create an Appalachian subculture by convincing the Appalachian subculture by convincing the Appalachian that he is inferior, backward, lazy and has ‘bad’ values. He should catch up, ‘get with it.’ This image has been projected upon Appalachians by all major institutions from the mass media to anti-poverty programs. It is untenable and unjust to characterize Appalachian culture patterns as deficient or pathological versions of mainstream American culture.<sup>25</sup>

Southwest Virginia is in a unique position within Appalachia. It straddles the border between what is considered Southern Appalachia (the counties without a substantial presence of coal) and Central Appalachia (the coal mining counties). As such, it faces unique challenges as a region. While counties such as Bland, Buchanan, Dickenson, Lee, Wise, and Tazewell have a history of coal mining, the cities of Bristol and Roanoke have been population centers with relatively strong, stable industries. On the southern border of the state, Grayson and Carroll counties as well as the city of Galax have faced different challenges due to their inaccessibility and geographical features. Some organizations I interviewed—Appalachian Arts Center, The Jacksonville Center for the Arts, Chestnut Creek School for the Arts and Birthplace of Country Music Alliance—work mostly within a specific community. Others, such as Heart of Appalachia Tourism Authority, Barter Theatre, and Roadside Theatre have a slightly larger footprint but still do not address the entire region as the Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Commission and ‘Round the Mountain Artisan Collective do.

While some of these organizations are staffed by individuals from outside the region and many of them receive their marching orders from Richmond, they differ from the previous

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<sup>25</sup> Lewis, Beaver, and Jennings, *Helen Matthews Lewis*, Kindle Location 1283.

efforts in one crucial way: instead of believing that cultural heritage is the cause of economic issues in Southwest Virginia, they see it as the solution. Most of these organizations are working towards the creation of a creative economy for the region—the major focus of which is cultural heritage and eco-tourism.

Touted as the savior of Southwest Virginia, the tourism industry is rife with its own complications. Cultural erosion, the commodification of culture, ecological and economic problems all make tourism an industry which requires caution and careful planning. Tourism in Appalachia is also particularly prone to financial leakage so organizations must work diligently to ensure that it does not become yet another absentee-owned business.

The problems with tourism are not the only issue that faces cultural heritage organizations in Southwest Virginia. Quite a few organizations that have tourism as their primary focus do not address the community development aspects of genuine wealth. Natural capital, human capital, and social capital are important elements of living a fulfilled life, and several organizations I spoke with mentioned portions of each element in their descriptions of vibrant, viable communities. Unfortunately, I discovered that many of these organizations are not fully addressing their visions for the region.

Finally, although I was aware that several of the organizations I interviewed were state run, I was surprised to find that almost half of the representatives I spoke with are not originally from Southwest Virginia. The region has long had to deal with outsiders defining their economy and their culture and this is a problem that must be addressed. We must find ways to soften this outside influence, one of which must be to improve the strength of our internal voices. Residents of Southwest Virginia must learn to appreciate their cultural heritage, to want to stay in the region, to be able to support themselves, and to speak loudly about what the region needs.

## Connection to the Master of Arts in Cultural Sustainability

The Master of Arts in Cultural Sustainability program at Goucher College has four key learning objectives, and this project relates closely to two of those objectives:

- How can we work with communities in identifying and nurturing traditions of knowledge and practice that are meaningful and valued by those communities?
- How do cultural knowledge and practices contribute to human and ecological wellbeing, and how can these aspects of culture be strengthened?

### How can we help sustain culture?

Each of the nine organizations interviewed for this thesis is working to sustain cultural heritage in Southwest Virginia. ‘Round the Mountain Artisan Collective, Appalachian Arts Center, Chestnut Creek School of the Arts, and the Jacksonville Center for the Arts focus on craft and the aspects of material culture; Birthplace of Country Music Alliance works with musical heritage; Barter Theatre and Roadside Theatre sustain theatrical and storytelling traditions; and Heart of Appalachia Tourism Authority and the Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Foundation address each of these issues as well as ecological sustainability and labor heritage. This list of organizations is by no means a complete listing of cultural heritage organizations working within the region—many others are having a major impact on cultural sustainability including Appalachian Sustainable Development and the Crooked Road: Virginia’s Heritage Music Trail. The multitude of organizations working together in Southwest Virginia should serve as an example for other regions that do not have a strong plan for sustaining their cultural heritage.

### How can we work towards sustaining culture that sustains people and the planet?

While Southwest Virginia is a model for sustaining the culture of the region, it struggles with sustaining people and the planet—the components of genuine wealth that have been discussed in this thesis. I have suggested several methods for sustaining people by building

human and social capital: improving the education of residents through the arts (in programs such as Project REAL), finding ways to keep individuals who were born in the region in the region by making them passionate about their heritage and by creating jobs, and getting local residents more involved in their communities by encouraging them to join social groups and to speak out for their personal and community needs. I have only briefly addressed the problems that can be created by ecotourism (and tourism in general) as well as some potential solutions, but a wealth of information exists on how communities in general as well as Appalachia as a region can attempt to temper the damage we have already done to our environments.

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