Proceedings of the annual meeting of the Southern Anthropological Society

Volume 44
Number 1 *Reinventing and Reinvesting in the Local for Our Common Good*

Article 2

2020

Connecting, Exchanging, and Having Impact

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Engaged Anthropology

Anthropologists have long been committed to social science done in public and in the public interest. This commitment has been demonstrated by, among other things, support for a globally contextualized understanding of local-level processes of change—a history considered in this volume in the chapter by Melinda Wagner and in Brian Hoey's personal reflection on the ethnographic method. Despite this long-standing commitment, anthropology has only infrequently reached public consciousness and discussion, even while ideas and practices native to the discipline have been put to use fruitfully by other scholars as well as various practitioners working in the public domain. These non-anthropologists have, at times, been more willing and able to expand the impact of core concepts and methods native to anthropology than have anthropologists themselves. Speaking to fellow anthropologists as the field emerged from at least twenty years of roiling (and often divisive) introspection that seemed to leave many within the discipline averse to practical engagement, James Peacock noted that "If the discipline is to gain recognition and a valuable identity, it must accomplish things; it must be active beyond its analytical strategy. Pragmatism and searching critique need not be mutually exclusive" (Peacock 1997, 12).

In order to be relevant, anthropology needs to be seen—perhaps as it once was in the mid-twentieth century—as a publicly-involved

field offering valuable methodological, conceptual, and analytical resources to those who develop and assess policies that affect everyday lives. We see an illustration of such valuation in the chapter by Adams and Damron in this volume in which they address developing an appreciation of neurodiversity through deliberate change in prevailing cultural values. At the same time, the field should be accessible to those who might put these valuable resources—freely available from within the methodological and conceptual "toolkits" of the anthropologist—to work in offering locally-grounded and effective alternatives to mainstream programs, to fill consequential gaps in knowledge and/or service, and to otherwise seek to improve their own circumstances through thoughtful, grassroots action. Anthropology and anthropologists, together with their ideas and approaches, have much to offer people who work for various forms of cultural and social change. Our offerings include an ability to document and describe how broad, macro-level policy may impact local-level conditions as well as how, potentially, the reverse may take place. Some of this work will have an academic audience, of course, but we must also recognize how we may be called to help describe and explain what are often complex, multifaceted, and extra-local factors that affect local communities to residents of these places who genuinely want and need our help. Our role must go beyond providing indirect support by virtue of the value of our theory and methods as supplies to be virtually "handed out." Anthropologists must also be seen as enthusiastic and humble allies who are directly engaged in collaborative actions such as suggested in the chapter by Hoey in this volume. These collaborations may be multi-disciplinary partnerships born of the academy or emergent within community-based alliances created out of the immediate needs of persons for whom the output of academics may appear largely, if not completely, irrelevant to popular efforts to solve local problems.

DOI: 10.56702/MPMC7908/saspro4401.1

Perhaps the most publicly recognized anthropologist of all time, a woman who worked in many cultural contexts around the world during the mid-twentieth century, Margaret Mead lends a succinct statement to capture the discipline's ongoing sense of the possibility of meaningful change through committed, practical engagement by saying, simply, that we should "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."[1] In many ways, the essence of this assertion was the point of departure for our efforts to come together first at the 51st Annual Meetings of the Southern Anthropological Society (SAS) and now in these Proceedings.

Our Theme and Process

The state of West Virginia faces many challenges. These are born of continuing factors such as economic restructuring as well as acute crises that include, for example, a chemical spill into the drinking water of over three hundred thousand residents in 2014 and devastating floods that struck just months before our April 2016 SAS conference in Huntington, West Virginia. In the past several years, public health crises such as substance abuse (particularly opioid addiction) have ravaged communities in West Virginia as they have throughout Appalachia and beyond.

In planning for the conference and in our effort to pull together this volume of work, we chose to face such challenges by engaging with each other to "reinvent our local." This engagement involved recognizing the enduring value of collective heritage together with an eye toward purposefully creating a promising future through reinvestment in shared quality of life. Our commitment to "the local" as manifest in the discrete communities that serve as the consequential places for our working and personal lives is in no way a turning away from recognition of the multitude of ways in which any such

place is embedded within a web of networks that must respond to tensions created by extra-local forces. Indeed, these forces, including far-reaching economic and environmental policies and phenomena, test taken-for-granted ways of doing things in any given corner of the world. Rather, the organizing principle at work behind the conference and Proceedings recognizes that we are each situated as persons and practitioners—whether more or less academic or applied in our professional positions—within distinct places that face their own set of challenges and opportunities. This is to say, the anthropologically-minded research presented at the Southern Anthropological Society conference in 2016 and within this volume is done in the interests of both a personal and public good. We recognize that each of us is part of a common good which we are collectively responsible for creating and maintaining. Thus, our focus on locally-engaged work is much more than simply a means of molding or modifying a research agenda. Rather it becomes a model for informing our own life-long learning, our mentoring within multiple contexts (not simply the classroom), and, of course, the actions we take as citizens.

A cultural anthropologist at Marshall University, Hoey's most recent research has built on earlier work examining acts of everyday place-making as well as deliberate place-marketing as he explores the cultural construction of Appalachia as a distinct region. This research considers how the literature of Appalachian studies intersects the work of scholars interested in postindustrial economic restructuring and its consequences for economic growth and community development by documenting the efforts of activists and others who attempt to redefine the sources and meaning of economic growth in West Virginia. Based in Huntington, home to Marshall University, Hoey has observed and participated in local efforts to establish a purposeful narrative of place with which to animate efforts to reinvent and reinvest in his own local through such groups

DOI: 10.56702/MPMC7908/saspro4401.1

as Create Huntington on whose board he served. Create Huntington is an instrumental, home-grown actor that grew out of coordinated efforts of motivated residents, Marshall University, and the City mayor's office. Beginning in 2006, this forward-looking citizen-based organization, which received charitable 501(c)(3) non-profit status in early 2010, has worked to facilitate development of a what is termed a "vision for progress" among community members and to apply these ideas in Huntington and the surrounding area. As stated in a 2009 interview with Hoey, Thomas McChesney, founding organization board member and native to the area, Create Huntington exists "to provide the structure to enable creatives to do what they think is important, not to tell them what is important. That is something that has become a competitive disadvantage for the area because for too long people here have been told what they should think and what is important" (personal communication, June 2009).

The conference provided numerous examples of how Huntington is committed as a community to progressively reinventing and re-investing in the local after years of decline in the coal-sector and old manufacturing economies. Work by the City of Huntington, as presented by city planner Breanna Shell, outlined core initiatives documented in a comprehensive revitalization plan known as the Huntington Innovation Project (HIP), which depended on the extensive collaboration of multiple stakeholders. The HIP plan was submitted to the America's Best Communities competition, and Huntington won the competition in 2017. The plan includes strategies to redevelop vacant industrial properties along the Ohio River near the Marshall University campus—once the manufacturing center of the town's railroad roots—into new recreational and riverfront amenities; retail and hotel development; green infrastructure for storm water management; and a world-class technology commercialization and advanced manufacturing center. Also included in the

plan is an extension of work begun in the West End of Huntington where the City is assisting the non-profit Coalfield Development Corporation in redeveloping a 96,000-square-foot former garment factory into a social enterprise center known as WestEdge. When complete, the facility will have the largest solar roof in West Virginia, a solar training institute, a woodshop that up-cycles reclaimed materials into furniture, an indoor mushroom and microgreen growing operation, and other facilities and programs that will retrain workers displaced by economic restructuring in the Appalachian region through ReWire Appalachia. Initiatives such as these require strong partnerships such as those realized in successful efforts of Marshall University and the City to transform the 114-year-old

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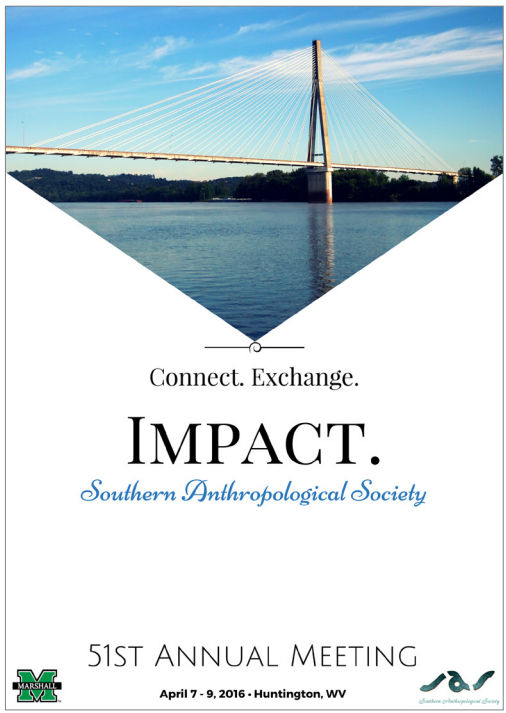
Anderson-Newcomb Building into the School of Art and Design's Visual Arts Center.

Through a 13.4-million-dollar renovation project, this six-story former department store, located squarely downtown and steps from the conference venue, was transformed into the state-of-the-art Marshall University Visual Arts Center where the School of Art and Design relocated from cramped and out-of-date facilities on campus in 2014. In 1902, the Visual Arts program started at Marshall. That same year, the historic Anderson-Newcomb Building was built on Third Avenue. For years, as a well-stocked department store, Anderson-Newcomb was central to the hustle and bustle of mid-twentieth century Huntington until completion of a shopping mall in 1981 just outside of the city shifted much economic and social activity away from downtown. Today, after extensive renovation, this building brings people to downtown Huntington by offering a unique arts experience to both students and citizens.

This historical landmark has become a showcase for how collaborative efforts to connect people to creatively exchange ideas can have lasting impact on the life of a community. The building design and its urban context stimulate synergy through a vibrant bridging between the University and various partners that results in course projects, program initiatives, and transformative student experiences that contribute to the quality of both individual and collective lives. When students leave the Visual Arts Center, they step immediately into an urban environment in which they are participating actively and contributing as citizens. As members of both the University community and the community of Huntington, students contribute to the reinvention of the city as a creative laboratory. Further, students develop skills that will last a lifetime as they complete internships with non-profit organizations and private businesses and participate in creative initiatives throughout the city.

The conference from which contributions to this volume were drawn was conceived as a direct and deliberate expression of Hoey's observation through experiences in Huntington and other fieldwork sites (ranging from the near Midwestern United States to far Southeast Asia) that people from all walks of life can achieve great things when they choose to come together to share their hopes and dreams, exchange ideas, build on the skills that each brings, and take supported action designed to have real impact for a common good. Connect. Exchange. Impact. The conference—just as this volume—was titled "Reinventing and Reinvesting in the Local for Our Common Good" and entailed numerous efforts to brand and reflect this theme through organized sessions, workshops, and field-trips, as well as in such details as signage and social media outreach.



This vision was invoked in our choice of a landmark, a prominent local bridge for our conference posters, a detail you will see reflected in the Wagner chapter where it serves as a kind of trope. We saw our coming together for the two days of this conference, and beyond, as a bridging between what are too often practically separated domains—institutions of higher learning and their larger communities.

As a professional academic, Hoey has endeavored to challenge colleagues within and outside his disciplinary home of anthropology to envision ways that an engaged, public scholarship can contribute directly and significantly to improving the common good within the communities where we live and work.

Among the conference program highlights, attendees had the opportunity to enjoy and engage in research presented on an array of diverse topics such as those presented in this volume. There were also workshops and panels on topics including service learning and other pedagogical subjects that aimed to reinvigorate the work of attendees in and out of the classroom; historical preservation in a local, state, and federal regulatory environment; "smart growth" through application of social science-based evidence; and emerging water crises. Through collaboration with the Marshall University College of Arts and Media, we also benefitted from lively discussion surrounding an art installation prepared by graduating "capstone" students within the fine arts that spoke in a variety of compelling ways to the conference theme.

(Photo courtesy of Lori Wolfe, *The Herald-Dispatch*, Huntington, West Virginia)

Live music and creative performances over three days expressed our conference theme in different ways, including a Welcome "After Party" on Thursday night that featured the local American roots

music band Big Rock and the Candy Ass Mountain Boys. Tours and fieldtrips highlighted local examples of reinvention and reinvestment such as the Visual Arts Center for a glimpse of how "town and gown" were united in the renovation of a dilapidated but once glorious downtown building. Conference goers also had the chance to tour the Keith Albee Theatre, a 1928 Thomas Lamb masterpiece of the vaudeville era and one of the few remaining examples of this extraordinary architectural work nationwide. Located at the edge of the city, the Heritage Farm Museum and Village (HFMV), recently named one of very few Affiliate sites of the Smithsonian Institute, allowed visitors to experience a wide array of collections as well as a living history feature that highlights long-standing achievements of Appalachians who have faced myriad challenges living through hard times. Principle among the lessons offered at HFMV—and one that frankly counters prevailing stereotypes of Appalachia—is that not only are the people of the region distinctive for their strong-willed dedication to tradition but also for their extraordinary degree of ingenuity and innovation. Fortunately for all, this latter trait has kept many residents resiliently open to the kinds of broadminded ideas highlighted in this volume. We can turn to the internationally recognized work of the West Virginia Autism Training Center, located in Huntington, which provides services to persons on the autism spectrum (as described in the Adams and Damron chapter), as an apt illustration of such local innovation and open-mindedness.

In order to bring the conference to fruition and thus lay the foundations for this volume, Hoey worked with six extraordinary student-interns under the auspices of the SAS who envisioned it not as a cloistered gathering of academics—as is so often the case for such events—but rather as a dynamic, open meeting space intended to purposefully connect academics and non-academics in an exchange of experiences, ideas, and plans that could lead us to have positive

DOI: 10.56702/MPMC7908/saspro4401.1

impact in our communities. Throughout the semester, students Heidi Dennison, Jake Farley, Samantha Harvey, Alexis Kastigar, Hannah Smith, and Jocelyn Taylor had a behind-the-scenes experience learning how to host an academic conference. From field trips and activities to advertising, these students were actively involved in all aspects of conference planning. This experience was envisioned by Hoey as a chance for participation in publicly-engaged scholarship in a way not possible in a traditional classroom setting. They gained knowledge and experience beneficial in future endeavors that require an active, collaborative engagement through planning and execution of a multifaceted event. In addition to their involvement in planning the conference, they presented individual work in a group-organized session. They were, in fact, fully involved in the conference—both behind and on the stage.

In the fall semester of 2015, Hoey approached his co-author on this chapter, Hannah Smith (who was then pursuing her undergraduate degrees as an anthropology and biochemistry double-major) with the opportunity to help plan while receiving class credit. As might be expected of a sophomore in college, she knew little about planning an academic conference. Nevertheless, she jumped at the opportunity. As a result, Smith—and ultimately five other students who would join her—learned more about anthropology as a discipline as well as community engagement as an investment in the future and a common good. As participants in this internship course, students were simultaneously learning from their professor while collaborating with student peers as co-workers to develop a successful conference. Engaging in robust conversations and contributing individual ideas to a collective project challenged them to bring distinct viewpoints for considering, among other things, how to define "the local" of Huntington. Huntington served as our starting point and the common ground on which to share ideas based on

our varied as well as shared experiences. Much as in the conference, Huntington as both place and subject became the site where our viewpoints came together.

The dual perspective of this internship course created an interesting dynamic. Because Smith was experiencing analytical and methodological approaches basic to anthropology firsthand, she actively learned the discipline while simultaneously engaging in her local community. Never had she seen "a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens" more driven than the activists she encountered in Huntington while preparing for the conference as well as in her historical research into the economic and cultural history of the city for a paper Smith presented at the SAS conference titled "From Industrialism to Tourism: A Look at Cultural and Economic Changes in Huntington, West Virginia." Huntington's economy boomed with industrialization in the early twentieth century. As factories

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shuttered, thousands of jobs for blue-collar workers came to an abrupt end, generally without immediate alternatives. Huntington's community leaders and its citizens have had to adapt to an economic reality shaped by global forces manifesting at the local level. Becoming involved in her local through the eyes of an anthropologist reignited Smith's passion for this place and its people. And this was the goal of the conference as a whole: for attendees to come away with visions of what they might do at home, in their own local, that would contribute to a common good.

Engaging with her community as an anthropologist also allowed Smith to become deeply mindful of the changes that it was experiencing. Growing up just outside of Huntington, she was imprecisely aware of the extent of problems facing the community. Beyond research for her paper, simply making phone calls to schedule conference field trips made her more aware of the social, cultural, and economic particulars of the community. In her active participation in varied sectors of life in Huntington, Smith was not simply a social scientist searching for answers (and donations to help fund the conference), but a resident hoping for a better future. Once the conference commenced, Smith and her fellow students interacted with people from a variety of backgrounds from several states. As attendees shared their work and spoke passionately of its impact in their own local, the students learned how both old and new ideas can be incorporated into community planning so as to reinvent and reinvest in the local for the welfare of all.

Now studying to receive her Masters of Environmental Management at Duke University, Smith attributes her ability to communicate effectively across disciplines and between community members—which is the crux of environmental management—to her undergraduate experience in anthropology. Through this experience, she learned firsthand that she is at once a citizen and an academic with

responsibility to foster sustainable solutions for problems that affect the environment. Change occurs when individuals with unique backgrounds share a passion for a common local.

Discussion of Themes as Manifest in the Chapters

Though a small volume, the reader will encounter a rich diversity of material compellingly presented across chapters that each contribute in their own distinct way to the collection by illustrating, through their differences, a series of shared themes. At some points, these themes are purposefully referenced as linkages to those explicitly stated as foundational to the conference and volume. At other times, readers will be able to make their own meaningful connections by applying an understanding of the ideas already discussed that motivated organizers of the conference.

Among these chapters, the reader will discover many instances of how our authors seek their own research and experientially-driven ways of contributing to public policy. We see how each is interested in how policies and practices affecting the public, often at the national or even global level, may or may not work within local circumstances. Local conditions may constitute what are described by anthropologists as culturally-particular contexts. "Top-down" policy is characteristically insensitive to viable, though what might be described as "unconventional," approaches. For instance, Upton speaks of messages from media with global origins that may encourage cross-generational sex to young girls in Botswana. She argues that an effective means to combat the effects of such negative influence is to address the problem with locally-informed initiatives and conversations. Wagner echoes this sentiment. When a community is empowered to communicate amongst itself in a search for answers, emergent solutions are locally relevant where a would-be solution imposed—good intentions and all—from outside may fail

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for the lack of relevance and what many community activists would describe as "buy in" or, simply, a sense of ownership by local people.

We see our authors each striving to establish the need for what might be deemed "alternatives" to status quo ways of doing things at multiple levels and domains ranging from a variety of extant public policies to common practices among those who have significant influence on the everyday lives of others, including educators such as those that have contributed to this volume. Part and parcel of this effort is establishing how the efficacy of a particular policy may depend to a great extent on making that policy or education locally pertinent, compelling, meaningful or, perhaps, itself driven by both people and ideas at the local level. Thus, we might make connections here to principles of "cultural competence" when it comes to what some characterize as "intervention," at a minimum, or more extensively as "grassroots" forms of development that shape quality of life for local people in ways that they can and should determine more fully for themselves. We also find reference among the chapters to local cultural reinterpretations of extra-local messages and practices. In all, we are ever reminded of the essential fact that the local, or what might be referred to as "community," serves as the site for meaningful, substantive change in people's lives. It is where lives are, in fact, lived.

Not surprisingly, here we are given entrée to a variety of illustrations for how *ethnography* serves as an essential methodology for allowing social scientists to more completely understand issues that motivate people by giving shape and meaning to their experience. Chapters from Wagner and Hoey, in particular, speak to this point. Importantly, in ways that we see discussed within this volume, ethnographically-informed social science and the public policy that may emerge from it are only part of our concern. Ethnographic engagement constitutes a means of relationship and community-building.

Here we may point to a commitment to mutual understanding born of this methodology that helps create a kind of "shared" or even what some have characterized as a "safe" space out of a co-organized melding of individual experiences and distinct understandings of the world. Shaped by the background of different developmental environments, each person carries his or her own local. By engaging people of different circumstances and creating spaces that foster relationships, distinct communities of experience may merge to form an entirely new shared "local" where unique perspectives combine with the potential to solve problems through helping to visualize and, perhaps then realize, a common good.

Simply stated, communication—beginning with the desire to know a person from whom we might, without that determination for insight, set ourselves apart—becomes the bridge by which we access the ideas and feelings of others in order to reach this shared good. As examined in detail in the chapter by Hoey, ethnographic approaches provide people with the exceptional opportunity to wear hats of both participant and observer, as the role is commonly understood. As practiced by anthropologists, in particular, ethnography allows everyone the potential to be like a student, open to learning. The chapters in this volume exemplify how each member of a relationship becomes a student of others. For example, London and Klaaren's South African peer-educators learned as much from American students visiting the country during a study-aboard experience as the Americans did from their peer-educators. The core reason for the mutual learning experience described by London and Klaaren was the dynamic space for dialogue the course provided, even though this space emerged as an unintended outcome of the encounter between distinct groups of students. In their chapter, Adams and Damron speak to the varied ways of knowing that are realized in the fundamental fact of human neurodiversity and how,

DOI: 10.56702/MPMC7908/saspro4401.1

specifically, those on the autism spectrum may be empowered to share valuable insight and experience with the communities where they live and beyond. As long as individuals work to understand unique forms of communication enacted by neurodiverse individuals, the collective mindset of society can change in ways that open up rewarding possibilities for everyone.

London and Klaaren, together with Adams and Damron, provide compelling instances of "reciprocal learning" and its potential for positive outcomes for all involved. In the end, an engaged anthropological approach centers on relationships and, in particular, seeks to understand connections between individual persons, actors, and larger social collectives from the local to the global and to see how these connections shape meaning for people. What drives people's actions or motivates their desires? As stated in Upton, what are significant "cultural drivers" of different behaviors and in what precise ways would knowing these serve in making policy or programs intended to improve the lives of people in particular times and places?

Honest conversations bring to light both meaningful differences and shared experiences and desires. As Wagner suggests, relationship building in such conversations helps the world become at least a little bit safer for human difference. This transformation occurs by virtue of the effort to construct rapport and arrive at mutual trust in a manner fundamental to the ethnographic method and, in particular, collaborative approaches of a truly engaged anthropology. Adams and Damron speak to benefits conferred by such open conversations about diversity generally and, specifically, neurodiversity. London and Klaaren show how being open about diversity allows individuals to adjust beliefs and practices. As each individual perspective shifts, so might a collective mindset within a community. Upton speaks to the impact of global ideals on a community, both positive and negative. In much the same way as London and Klaaren,

Upton's research describes how open dialogue within a community can serve as a catalyst to spark change in the lives of individuals. Individuals may influence the community as much as the local influences each person. Therefore, an emerging theme in each chapter is the importance of communication and involvement between committed individuals to shape a common local.

NOTES

1. This statement is attributed to Margaret Mead. Though it is clearly consistent with her statements regarding activism, there is no written record of it. Hence, no citation to provide.

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Peacock, James L. 1997. "The Future of Anthropology." *American Anthropologist* 99 (1): 9-17.