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Mississippi Downtowns: Examining the Relationship between Downtown Revitalization and Place-Based Economic Development

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MISSISSIPPI DOWNTOWNS: EXAMINING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION AND PLACE-BASED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

by

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

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ABSTRACT

ROBERT CADE SLAUGHTER: Mississippi Downtowns: Examining the Relationship
between Downtown Revitalization and Place-Based Economic Development
(Under the direction of Dr. Joseph Holland)

This thesis aims to measure the relationship between downtown revitalization and
place-based economic development theory in the downtowns of Hernando, Mississippi
and New Albany, Mississippi. Collectively, people progress and cultural normalcies shift.
This is a facet of life that has historically begotten movement away from the city cores
that initially cradled the sole hub of social and professional life. Progression gave way to
urban and industrial sprawl that has challenged the American downtown to maintain a
spot of relevance and economic as well as social viability.

By analyzing the broad history of the American downtown and also extrapolating
interview data from eight Hernando interview subjects and nine New Albany interview
subjects, this research aims to straddle an understanding of what propels downtown
revitalization in total and in the considered downtowns. The methodology is rooted in a
grounded theory qualitative approach that will assess the views of interview participants
as well as advance the objective of the researcher in aligning a relationship between
revitalization processes and place-based economic development bodies of thought. A
series of open coding to axial coding will be employed following a thorough summary of
the collected interviews. From this coding action, a selective code will be presented that
will lead the research into a phase of conclusions and implications.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Adeline Street, a street that ends at the heart of downtown Hattiesburg, has been my residence since birth. I spent my adolescence roaming the streets of the historical district and memorizing the faces of the people who inhabited those streets. I have candid memories of attending theatre productions and annual concerts at the Saenger Theatre on Front Street and waking up early on Saturday mornings to get breakfast from South Bound Bagel Company as I observed the Amtrak train roll into the station across the street. I've watched downtown Hattiesburg grow in business, stall in development, and land in many spaces in between.

Driving across Mississippi reveals the history of the downtown: the stories of success and the remnants of what were once economically viable and celebrated downtowns. Urban sprawl and widening development outside of these city centers shifted both place and space. Downtown Hattiesburg and its history of ebbing growth does not stand alone.

Since the beginning of urban settlement, the geographic center of communities is where civic, business, and other activities have intersected to serve the needs of the community (Adams et al., 1996). These town centers began to multiply across America with promises of retail splendor and social engagement for community members. The downtown quickly became the economic livelihood and historical backbone of growing areas.

Thriving downtown cores developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, ushered into popular culture and social spheres by the City Beautiful

Movement of the 1890s-1910s (Isenberg, 2004). This movement was facilitated by the work of women's organizations to beautify Main Street America and teach investors the diligence of civic responsibility. The 1920s version of downtown furtherment focused on a more economic front: the viability of business districts. Investors and retailers concentrated attention on the consumer, a change that solidified downtowns across America as spaces of retail splendor in addition to being hubs of civic engagement. Effectively, downtowns became the heartbeat of all regional interactions and activities. As I ponder the problem of deteriorating downtowns, I ask, how can the downtowns in Mississippi reclaim economic and civic relevancy? Even more so, I wonder how any credible success of downtowns in Mississippi can be measured?

Problem Definition

After the conclusion of World War II, many families departed the centers of established cities for suburbia in a flight of what came to be denoted as "suburban sprawl" (Dewan, 2013). The transition out of inner-city living left many downtown centers without the steady population to produce consistent business and civic engagement. This exodus of populations after the ending of World War II was the first of different waves of suburban development that shifted population trends within cities. Fee and Hartley (2011), in tangent with many other economists, theorize that people tend to cluster together because groups offer greater levels of efficiency, and suburbia offered new avenues of productivity in this regard. Trends in population around and away from city centers have fluctuated since the founding of the City Beautiful Movement at the

emergence of the twentieth century, important trends that directly impacted any continuances in the elevation of American downtowns.

Suburban America was ushered into existence by several factors. The first of these factors was the increasingly accessible nature of the automobile. Many suburban families acquired a family vehicle and used it as a tool to warrant their movement to suburbia and away from the downtown heartbeat of many areas. "Out-of-center" commercial development began to flourish in areas of closer proximity to suburbia than to the inner-city. This caused competing economic interests that wage to this day. Adams et al. (1996) summarizes other attractive elements of suburban neighborhoods, including the promise of lower mortgages for many families coupled with the desirable nature of new school districts.

The large-scale move to the suburbs was also closely associated with the "flight from blight" (Adams et al., 1996). This movement facilitated the growth of suburbia, as many established households and families of distinct income perceived a decline in livability when lower-income households moved to inner-city neighborhoods. Poignant issues of race were manifested in this flight, as minority families began to inhabit these downtown and city center areas while many white families sought livelihood nearby or elsewhere.

Cities across the South experienced major shifts in population density and makeup beginning in the early 1960s as a result of racial biases. Atlanta, Georgia witnessed the greatest flux of this flight. Kruse (2005) follows the five years between 1957 and 1962 as 30,000 white individuals departed from Atlanta's city limits, with 60,000 more white individuals moving over the course of the 1960s. Using Atlanta as a

vantage point for American and southern white flight provides implications for the changing social and housing structures of Mississippi's city centers.

This overarching suburban and racial shift is evidenced in the history of Mississippi downtowns. These downtowns have been weakened through the years by the stalled growth of state population. The state population of Mississippi dipped below the three million mark, once again, in recent years (Gordon, 2018). Analyzing this population fluctuation requires creative thinking and a critical brief of those departing populations.

Between 2010 and 2017, the Mississippi outmigration total was 42,811 (McGraw, 2017). Without considering the number of individuals who moved to the state, this figure displays the raw number of individuals who migrated outside of state lines. The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that Mississippi's net total population in July of 2019 was 2,976,149. The state of Mississippi's net total population, via U.S. Census estimates, increased only by 11,019 people between July of 2010 and July of 2019. Compare this population increase to the estimated population loss between 2010 and 2017. The two differing data points show an outmigration trend that is steadily stalling the state's population growth. Figure 1 displays how the majority of that population increase was confined to the years of 2011 through 2014. After 2014, there was little to no uptake in population above the standard net population, as both 2018 and 2019 population estimates dropped below the state's net population (represented by "0" in Figure 1).

2011-2019 Population Changes; Mississippi
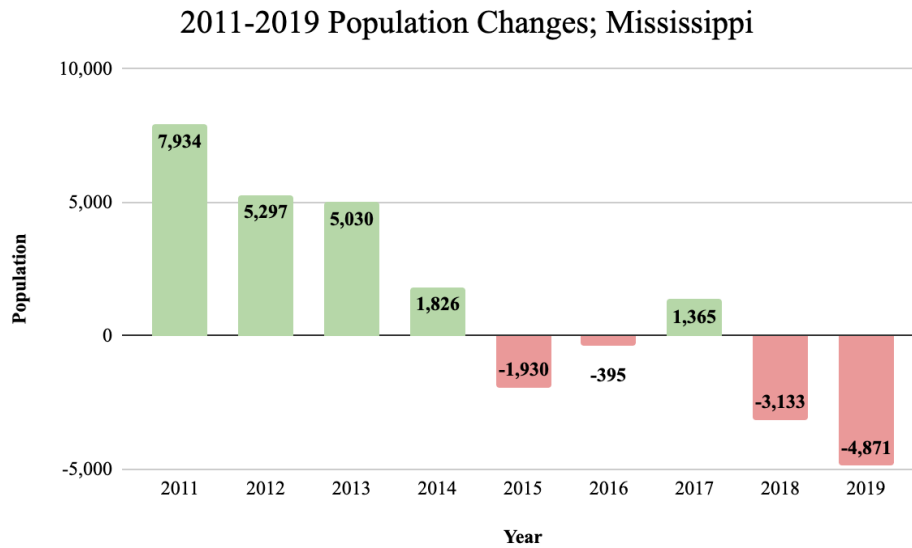
Figure 1: 2011-2019 Population Changes; Mississippi (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019)

Downtowns, specifically through the City Beautiful Movement and the economic ventures that followed, were fashioned to be the civic and cultural totem poles of Mississippi. The notable exodus of Mississippians and the curbed population growth in the past decade impact the state on most every level of organization. In reflection of how these population discrepancies impact downtowns, the following case of Jackson, Mississippi is considered.

Suburban sprawl contributed to the erosion of Jackson as a viable city center, establishing an outstretch of citizen population that the City of Jackson has not been able to tame or refocus. One tool to measure this dispersion of individuals is to consider the millennial population. U.S. Census data shows that between 2010 and 2015, the proportion of millennial populations living in cities across the United States increased 4.7 percent. However, in Jackson, the city experienced the sixth lowest increases nationally

in millennial population (Frey, 2018, p. 16). No number for the actual decrease in the millennial population was provided for Jackson, Mississippi.

In the Regional Studies Journal, Adam & Rubia, (2017) found that millennials are happiest in cities with a population of over 250,000. The millennial generation, encompassing those born between 1981 and 1996, is the first to feel this way about their residency. The general American population, by contrast, are happiest in smaller cities and rural areas. This general American population is represented in majority by boomers, those born between 1946 and 1964, and generation x, those born between 1965 and 1980 (Adam & Rubia, 2017).

Jackson, Mississippi's capital city and most populous city, maintains a population of only 160,628 people according to July, 2019 U.S. Census estimates. The desire for a city-esque lifestyle, although not definitively a priority for every millennial, is a cultural shift that holds weight for patterns of ebbing population growth in the state. The capital city, its downtown, and any other downtown hubs around Mississippi fall short of the modern metropolitan distinction that millennials seek in their residency.

Okulicz-Kozaryn, 2015 asserts that the aforementioned millennial wave directed towards cities of considerable population is partially driven by the disappearance of rural jobs. The growth of metropolitan professional opportunities is an obvious attraction for millennials and young adults alike. Professional mobility and furtherment are the type of extrinsic values that give millennials the nickname of generation "me" (Twenge et al., 2012). These same extrinsic values are traits that might pair well with urban happiness. According to Twenge et al., 2012, extrinsic people will not be as upset by elements of the urban makeup: homelessness, poverty, and other urban problems.

In addition, central place theory extends the appeal of these larger cities by congruently bolstering urban amenities as things of attraction. O'Sullivan, 2007 extends central place theory in regard to millennial draw in the following terms: the number of amenities are proxied by size. The larger the place, the more amenities and the more specialized they are. Access to public transportation for a generation with less of a tendency to drive and speedy access to the internet for this virtually connected generation are examples of amenities that larger cities can produce in larger mass and with greater convenience. Nevertheless, the draw of metropolitan livelihood for millennials is only a singular culprit in the question of Mississippi's population impediment.

The lasting impacts of suburbanization and white flight on the total of America's downtowns coupled with the metropolitan vacuum has facilitated a more than unfavorable environment for countless downtowns. Downtown deterioration is a hard-fought national reality. In Mississippi, paths for downtown revitalization must be measured through a critical lens to understand the patterns of change and aspirations for viable future economic and social success.

Purpose of Study

As the primary researcher, this thesis will examine the relationship of downtown revitalization in Mississippi and place-based economic development. In order to examine this relationship, the researcher will consider trends and patterns of downtown revitalization efforts by examining two downtown entities. Focusing on Hernando, Mississippi and New Albany, Mississippi, the researcher will collect data from interviews

to develop a deeper understanding of how these communities utilize(d) elements of place-based economic development to stimulate revitalization within the downtown districts. The analysis of these interviews will consider the strength of their economies and the level of civil engagement that they experience. The researcher will conduct personal interviews with a myriad of residents, city planners, elected and appointed city officials, local business owners, and others to develop a better understanding of revitalizing downtowns in Mississippi.

The research question that drives this thesis is, what is the relationship between revitalizing downtowns in Mississippi and place-based economic development policy?

First, in Chapter II, a narrative illustrating the development of downtown districts will be provided focusing on city planning strategies. Second, the researcher will narrow the discussion, highlighting place-based economic development in Chapter III. Third, the researcher will present the methodological approach in Chapter IV. Fourth, the researcher will present a thorough summary of the interviews and coded themes from this research in Chapter V. Finally, Chapter VI will provide a discussion of the implications of the findings as well as present the selective code concluded by the researcher.

CHAPTER II

CITY PLANNING

The organization of American downtowns during the first half of the twentieth century glorified the idea of the unified metropolitan community as downtowns began to flourish and mimic each other in patterns of business, retail design, and placement. Homer Hoyt's sectoral model of urban land use displays how cities are organized around unitary centers. The concentric circle theory predicts that urban social structures develop in concentric circles, a city planning theory that recognized the beginning of downtown design as rigid geometric patterns with unitary centers at the core (Hoyt, 1939). The theory has been summarized in the following way:

> "At the center of these zones lies the financial and office district; immediately surrounding this and interpenetrating it is the central retail district where the large department stores and high-grade specialty shops are found. Clinging close to the skirts of the retail district lies the wholesale and light manufacturing zone. Scattered through this zone and surrounding it, old dilapidated dwellings from the homes of lower working classes… In the next zone heavy manufacturing may be found, although naturally this use breaks up the uniformity of the pattern to along routes of transport. The use characteristic of this district is that of homes of the respectable working classes. Apartment houses and tenements of the better grade are common. Beyond the workingmen's homes lies the 'residential' district, a zone in which the better grade of apartment houses and single-family residences predominate, and beyond this the commuter's zone of finer houses and larger lots" (Hoyt, 1939, p. 17).

EW Burgess (1926) and his framework for the expansion of cities predates the work of Hoyt. Burgess labels the downtown as "The Loop" (I), the center of the city that is encircled by, at minimum, four additional rings or zones. The second area is the zone

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in transition (II), followed by the zone of working homes (III), the residential zone (IV), and finally the commuters zone (V) (Burgess, 1926, p. 51).
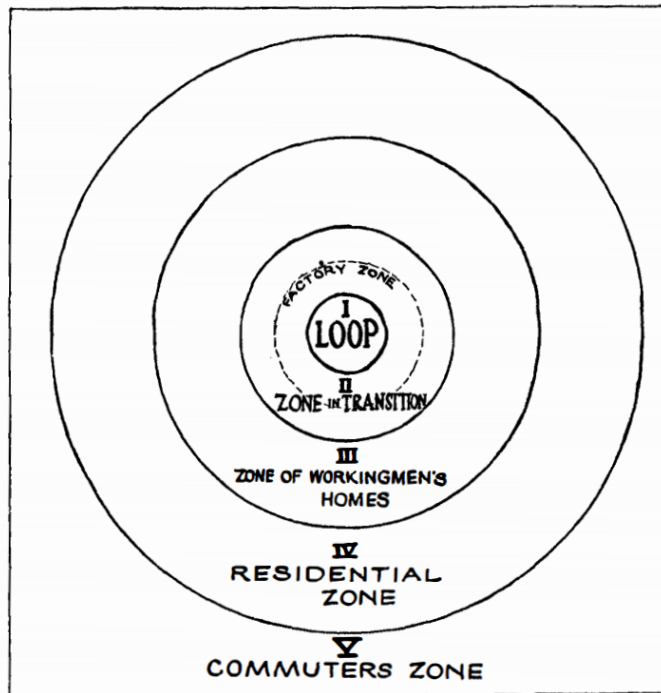
Figure 2: Concentric Circle Theory (Burgess, 1926, p. 50)

Burgess considers the idea of succession, an ecology term that fits into urban planning by way of the tendency of each inner zone of a city to extend its area by the invasion of the next outer zone. If the above chart is applied to the city of Chicago, for example, all four zones would have been encompassed in one central loop in its early history. The process of succession in cities coincides with business and population growth to produce the zones described by Burgess. Both Burgess and Hoyt advanced that cities were organized around unitary centers, simplistic frameworks that provided the foundation for future city planning.

Experts on downtowns have chosen different themes as central to the interpretation of downtown growth, change, and policy needs from decade to decade

(Abbot, 1993). Preferred planning solutions and public interventions of downtowns have changed consistently with each decade, notably since 1945.

Abbot (1993) argues that, "downtown policy has been characterized by sharp discontinuities and the repeated implementation of policies at right angles to those of the previous decade" (Abbot, 1993, p. 7). His research couples the decade shifts from one thematic understanding of downtowns to another with related policies, a framework that synthesizes national trends of central business districts (CBDs). Abbot (1993) considers the following timeline trends:

- 1945-55: The downtown as the unitary center of the American metropolis required improved access through highway improvements and downtown ring roads.
- 1955-65: Downtown understood as a failing real estate market appeared to require the land assembly and clearance associated with urban renewal program.
- 1965-75: Downtown as a federation of sub districts called for community conservation, historic preservation, and "human scale" planning.
- 1975-85: Downtown as a set of individual experiences required regulation of private design and public assistance for cultural facilities, retail markets, open space, and other amenities.
- 1985-: Viewed as a command post in the global economy, downtown has required planning for expanded office districts and supporting facilities. (p. 7-8)

Abbot notes that no single city has exactly matched the prescribed sequence and that trends from one policy era have undoubtedly carried over into the following decades. Nevertheless, the five successive themes and related policies above are still defined and assist in developing a broader understanding of city planning strategies nationwide. This historical context and national city planning evolution will qualify forthcoming data about revitalization efforts in Hernando and New Albany, MS by showcasing trends in downtown planning since 1945.

Downtown: 1945-55

Nash (1985) labels World War II as a "watershed" in the city planning movement of twentieth-century America. He argues that the war broke down opposition to city planning and stunted a pragmatic, rather than solely idealistic, approach to controlling city growth. The National Resource Planning Board, a federal agency that dictated westward expansion and city plans nationally, was disbanded in June of 1943. This shift in national jurisdiction was a victory for pragmatic city planners and a shift that catalyzed a decentralized administration of urban planning. With the federal government no longer mandating changes, the city planning process began to be sorted through a collection of differing local political authorities and interest groups. Between 1940 and 1946, thousands of city, state, and regional redevelopment commissions were created to implement city plans for postwar metropolitan areas. Sociologist Philip Selznick termed this process "cooptation," and it has become a cornerstone of city planning since the 1940s (Nash, 1986, p. 112).

Abbot (1993) precedes discussion of the 1945-55 frame of time with the general assumption that people still wanted to get downtown. This societal assumption defined the many networks of planning activities and called for the improvement of access to and circulation of downtown rather than explicit attention to the downtown itself as a problem needing attention. "The last generation of classic master plans during the 1940s gave little explicit attention to the downtown itself as a special problem" (Abbot, 1993, p. 9). Most planning proposals focused on the opening of new circumferential highways closely surrounding the downtown, plans that would eventually improve access to city centers and set off surrounding residential areas. These infrastructure developments were

prominent across the nation and expanded the process of succession in cities (Burgess, 1926).

Downtown: 1955-65

The mid-1950s witnessed the rapid emergence of downtowns as holders of declining activities and failing real estate markets. The 1958 Census of Business documented the move of retail and other services to suburbia, and the 1960 Census of Population displayed how many central cities (i.e. Baltimore, Cincinnati, and Cleveland) had fallen short of their expected populations (Teaford, 1990). City planners now expressed an unraveling understanding that downtown could easily lose its logical predominance and that existing city plans had relied too heavily on this assumption of relevance, specifically those plans drawn between 1945-55.

The most pointed policy response to the realization of downtown decline was urban renewal. The Housing Act of 1954 increased the flexibility of the Housing Act of 1949 by prioritizing commercial and industrial development in addition to existing parameters of funding for property acquisition, demolition of structures, and site preparation (Robertson-Rehberg, 2011). This act provided funds for clearing so-called "blighted" urban areas and redeveloping those areas with housing projects or commercial buildings.

The Housing and Home Finance Agency (HHFA), which was superseded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in 1965, was responsible for overseeing qualifications for federal loans and grants for new slum clearance and urban renewal projects afforded under The Housing Act of 1954. The HHFA prescribed seven

"essential objectives" for cities to adhere to before qualifying for federal funds: (1)

Adequate Codes and Ordinances; (2) A Comprehensive Plan for Community

Development; (3) Neighborhood Analyses; (4) Effective Administrative Organization;

(5) Financial Capacity; (6) Adequate Housing of Displaced Families; (7) Full-Fledged

Citizen Participation (McGraw, 1955).

Of particular interest to city planners was the sixth objective outlined by the

HHFA; "Adequate Housing of Displaced Families." Although the Housing Act of 1954

boasted funds for clearance projects and construction of new public facilities that

appeased new and revised city plans, it also created a period of contention between

advocates for the poor and local business interests. Cities began to pursue redevelopment

plans that eliminated many poor neighborhoods and left others overcrowded (McGraw,

1955).

The 1954 act established avenues for relocation and federal funding for low

income individuals and families along outer city zones, but pockets of inner-city poverty

and unemployment remained increasingly evident within downtown areas of considerable

prosperity. By the end of the 1950s, many large city governments were aggressively

pursuing urban renewal in the interest of establishing more vital business districts rather

than improving the living conditions of poor residents (Rebertson-Rehberg, 2011). Thus,

The Housing Act of 1954, despite its acknowledgement of downtown decline and efforts

towards urban renewal, created a modern problem for city planners of how to ethically

relocate low income downtown residents without destroying viable lower-income

communities and while simultaneously advocating for commercial and industrial

improvement.

Downtown: 1965-75

By the early 1970s, the subdistricted downtown was as much a staple of planning

documents as the unitary downtown had been in 1950 (Abbot, 1993, p. 15). Jacobs

(1992) suggests that downtowns had to be experienced on the relatively small scale of

individual buildings, blocks, and districts. Her critique of many city plans of the 1960s

and 1970s attacked city planners who continued to reaffirm the idea of downtown as a

single unit, as well as the aforementioned issues of The Housing Act of 1954 and its

displacement of disadvantaged peoples. Advocating for a new and multifunctional

understanding of downtown, to Jacobs, seemed like a logical progression from previous

decades of downtown transition, decline, and attempts at urban renewal.

During this time of restructuring, Seattle received a great deal of attention from

city planners. According to historian John Findlay, the population of the outlying parts of

Seattle increased by 46 percent between 1950 and 1960. Inside the city limits, the

population increased by only 0.7 percent in the same span of time (Ott, 2013). Outlying

towns developed separate districts of business and shopping centers as Seattle became

less central to the regional economy of retail. Donald Monson, a planning consultant

from New York, restructured Seattle as a system of functional zones each with distinct

characteristics in 1963. His fluid comprehensive plan for the central business district

considered a ring highway to make the unitary downtown more accessible and prioritized

Seattle's waterfront, a largely untapped district of business and recreational enterprise

that Monson incorporated into Seattle's developing downtown identity rather than its

solely industrial existence.

Donald Monson reimagined Seattle like a shopping mall itself, with pedestrian

circulation, public transit, and waterfront open space as central elements of his

comprehensive plan (Ott, 2013). Of specific notability is the ring road system around the

newly defined districts and in proximity to other outlying districts of specialization (Park,

2007, p. 110). A sampling of downtown plans from 1976 to 1986 showed extensive

growth in this subarea analysis with Washington, D.C. identifying seven districts, Dallas

and Atlanta each identifying three districts, Richmond eight, Oakland eleven, Seattle

eleven, and Denver labeling six in its downtown core and four more in a surrounding

transition zone (Abbot, 1993, p. 15). Relying on existing identities of cities and

subdistricting those identities in a fluid manner through ring-shaped highway

construction and expansion of the central business district were fundamental elements of

Seattle's post-1963 restructuring that became accepted background rather than an

exciting discovery nationwide after 1975 (Abbot, 1993, p. 15).

Downtown: 1975-85

The late 1970s and early 1980s accepted what had been expanding for years:

suburban "outer cities" were growing as co-equals to downtowns in both population and

retail monopoly. This reality began to be accepted by city planners when they turned to

the concept of the downtown as a theme park; environments to be consciously designed

in the interest of enjoyment and tourism (Abbot, 1993, p. 15-16). The advancements in

planning of the previous decade capitalized on the existing districting of downtowns as

unique and fluid sensory experiences, while the development of urban planning at this

time narrowed the attraction of downtowns by focusing on specialized entertainment and shopping.

Downtowns became to be conceived as cultural centers and museums. William H. Whyte (1988) popularized the view that downtown was a series of personal experiences and choices. By analyzing individual responses to environmental determinants such as parks, sidewalks, plazas, and other downtown public spaces, Whyte theorized that modern downtowns performed at full capacity when the most individuals processed a net positive sensory experience. In formal city planning, emphasis shifted to design and aesthetic control, preservation planning, and similar approaches that treated downtowns as visual experiences. Downtown, in this time frame, came to be viewed as an experience and something of entertainment value.

Downtown: 1985-

Emphasizing the entertainment value of downtown ushered in new waves of commercial growth and welcomed a building boom that ran from the mid-1970s to the end of the 1980s. In the 30 largest metropolitan areas, office construction in the first half of the 1980s ran at twice the rate of the 1970s, which had in turn outpaced the 1960s by 50 percent (Frieden and Sagalyn, 1991). The office boom recreated an understanding of downtowns as unique centers, displaying how city centers could access the global service economy on both high and low ends of business endeavors.

The uniform and unitary assertions of Burgess and Hoyt in the early twentieth century about city centers remain true in the unfolding of modern city planning. Economic focal points and structural design of city districts and subsequent succession

have unfolded since the onset of the twentieth century, sparking a myriad of changes in how downtowns across the country have been structurally organized. The chronological progression of downtown study and planning that is presented above provides context for the current state of downtown development and nationally accepted unitary structure in cities. The implications of urban renewal and districting sectors of downtowns are considerably studied phenomena that I will use to aid in measuring the revitalization and economic development efforts of Hernando and New Albany.

CHAPTER III

PLACE-BASED ECONOMICS

Downtowns since 1985 have largely been recognized as institutions of

entertainment and vessels of smaller niche-centered retail. The landscape of the

downtown has changed considerably since the birth of these city centers, but the core

makeup of social identity has not. With this shift in mind, the social theory that pushes

for specified revitalization and offers a new lens for the decline specific to downtowns

across Mississippi is space and place theory, a social theory that champions the human-

landscape relationship.

Proshansky et al. (1983) theorizes place identity as an indelible characteristic that

drives other factors of life and happiness. Place exists as an external memory for people's

place related aspects of their self-identity. This is place identity. Self-identity is an

unstable concept that is dependent on social interactions and often threatened by external

changes (i.e. relationships, resources) as well as internal changes (i.e. anxieties,

confidence). Places form the bulk of people's routine social interactions, a reality that is

especially true of residential places.

Social identity is tied to place by the process of identification, which unfolds in

three steps: (1) identifying one's environment, (2) being identified by others in the

environment, and (3) identifying oneself with one's environment (Buchecker et al, 2007,

p. 53). These steps of realization are dependent on external factors just as much as

internal ones. This theory couples with the city planning advancements from 1975-85. As

downtowns became to be seen as specialized districts that could be retailed as sensory

experiences, the individual experience of tourists and residents alike became the focal point of city planning.

According to the Project for Public Spaces, placemaking is the modern planning technique that utilizes a city's elements in partnership with the array of personalities possessed by individual characteristics. Placemaking can be understood as the practicable embodiment of place-based theory. Placemaking evolves as an important factor in considering the objective of downtown planning and engagement and involves more than just promoting better urban design. By paying particular attention to the physical, cultural, and social identities that define a place and support its ongoing evolution, placemaking bridges the complexities of space and place theory with the groundbreaking city planning work of aforementioned individuals like Jane Jacobs and William Whyte.

Placemaking as well as space and place theory exist under the umbrella of place-based economic development theory. This facet of economic development forges competitive advantages for many communities by utilizing unique assets to attract new investments and support existing businesses. The economic assets mentioned are place-based assets that typically include residents and their skills; local architecture and infrastructure; academic, technical, and medical institutions; local and regional business and employment concentrations; cultural, natural, and artistic resources; and general quality of life (EPA, 2016, p. 6).

In the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's "Framework for Creating a Smart Growth Economic Development Strategy: A Tool for Small Cities and Towns," six principles are considered as preparatory steps towards implementing a successful place-based economic development strategy: (1) make the distinction between "growth" and

"investment" by building on ongoing investment(s) rather than "growth;" (2) be tactical and strategic with both long term and short term tactics that are regularly updated; (3) be focused on small areas that can be expanded to build on success; (4) start where there is already momentum; (5) find right partners for specific goals; and (6) communicate and coordinate. These considerations support business, workers, and quality of life in equal lengths.

Supporting and expanding existing business and attracting new business contribute to place-based economic development in many notable ways. Helping businesses create jobs, encouraging entrepreneurship, enhancing fiscal sustainability by expanding and diversifying the tax base, and improving quality of life with new services and amenities are several token ways that this support is manifested in development policy. This strategy focuses on the current composition and location of businesses, jobs, and potential emerging entrepreneurs in the community. In turn, this specialized thought can help reveal how well the businesses serve local residents and which businesses have the most potential to lead future economic growth. This part of the economic development strategy considers where these businesses are located and how their location helps the community meet its assortment of economic, environmental, and other goals.

Residents and businesses both value a community with a good quality of life. A variety of factors can improve quality of life, such as a thriving downtown or commercial district with neighborhood-serving shops and restaurants; green and open space; a variety of transportation choices, including options for walking, biking, driving, and public transit; artistic, cultural and community resources such as museums, public art, community centers, religious institutions, and other community gathering spaces; and

medical, technical, and academic institutions (EPA, 2016, pp. 3-4). Robust economic

development strategy shapes the quality of life, business, and workforce. Place-based

economic development utilizes existing tools and structures to establish layers of

cooperative enterprise and social function, and this economic theory will streamline the

analysis of revitalization and economic development in the considered downtowns of

New Albany, Mississippi and Hernando, Mississippi. Additionally, the researcher will set

a theoretical expectation rooted in this theory to assist in constructing an analysis of the

collected interview data.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Selected Downtowns

The researcher chose to consider the downtowns of Hernando, Mississippi and

New Albany, Mississippi for a myriad of reasons. Both cities are county seats, meaning

the downtowns of each city maintain the county courthouse. Hernando holds the Desoto

County Courthouse and New Albany holds the Union County Courthouse. Additionally,

these two cities are in considerable proximity to other key cities including Oxford,

Mississippi and Memphis, Tennessee. Their relative populations (> 20,000), distinctions

as county seats, as well as their regional proximity to other key cities were factors

considered by the researcher in selecting the downtowns of Hernando, Mississippi and

New Albany, Mississippi. Table 1 provides some comparative data from the Cities of

Hernando (Hernando Mississippi: Market Guide, 2018, p. 1) and New Albany (Strategic

Planning Report: New Albany, 2021, p. 16)

	Population	Number of households	Median household income	Average age
Hernando	27, 152	10, 332	$64, 183	37.7
New Albany	22, 915	8,652	$42, 864	39

Table 1: Demographics of Hernando and New Albany

Interviews

Telephone interviews were conducted. Appendix A includes the consent information that was given to each participant. These interviews were approved by the University of Mississippi Institutional Review Board (Protocol 21x-187). A complete application to conduct research with human participants was exempted under 45 CFR. 46.101(b)(#2). The interview sample consisted of 17 individuals in total. Nine of these individuals were residents of New Albany, Mississippi. The remaining eight individuals were residents of Hernando, Mississippi. The interview sample included subjects who were local government officials, business owners, city planners, museum representatives, community developers, main street directors, attorneys, bank representatives, and teachers. Table 2 lists the associated city and a designated field of work for each of the 17 interview subjects. Although some interview subjects participated in different pieces of civil engagement and involvement in their respective cities, pieces of involvement that carry additional titles in some cases, only a singular field of work is denoted for each subject. The ascending order of subject numbers listed in table 2 was chronologically sorted by the date in which each interview was conducted. A purposive sampling was used to collect the data. This nonprobability sampling was employed as a vehicle to achieve the researcher's objective in collecting interview data from a cross-section of the populations considered in the thesis. The characteristics important for the sample in this thesis was a clear connection to either the City of New Albany or the City of Hernando as well as a clear association with the downtowns of each city. Table 2 lists the title of each subject as well as the city they represent. With permission, these telephone interviews were recorded on a separate recording device and manually transcribed. The researcher

transcribed the telephone interviews into separate Google Docs. The researcher utilized a

standardized interview process to conduct the telephone interviews. In this standardized

interview process, each interviewee was asked the same set of interview questions. See

Appendix B for the interview protocol that was utilized by the researcher.

Table 2: List of Interviewees

Hernando	New Albany
● Subject #1: Business Owner ● Subject #2: Alderperson ● Subject #3: Alderperson ● Subject #4: Community Development Director ● Subject #5: Attorney ● Subject #6: Retired City Planner ● Subject #7: Business Owner ● Subject #8: Museum Curator	● Subject #1: Business Owner ● Subject #2: Bank Vice President ● Subject #3: Community Development and Main Street Director ● Subject #4: Alderperson ● Subject #5: Museum Director ● Subject #6: Alderperson ● Subject #7: Bank President ● Subject #8: Attorney ● Subject #9: Teacher

Methodology

The researcher aimed to gather qualitative data to further the research argument directed at "examining the relationship between downtown revitalization and place-based economic development." The Mississippi downtowns of New Albany and Hernando are considered in this research design. Creswell (2013) defines qualitative research as follows:

> *Qualitative research* begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and its contribution to the literature or a call for change. (p. 44).

With this definition in mind, the researcher utilized a grounded theory qualitative approach. The purpose of a grounded research theory is to explain how people are experiencing a phenomenon. The grounded theory developed by the researcher aims to describe such a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013, p. 88). In this research, the process of downtown revitalization is the phenomenon considered. The outline of this approach, set forth by Creswell (2013) is provided in table 3 (p 104, 105).

Table 3: Characteristics of Grounded Theory Qualitative Approach

Characteristics	*Grounded Theory*
Focus	Developing a theory grounded in data from the field
Type of Problem Best Suited for Design	Grounding a theory in the views of participants
Discipline Background	Drawing from sociology
Unit of Analysis	Studying a process, an action, or an interaction involving many individuals
Data Collection Forms	Using primarily interviews with, approximately, 20–60 individuals
Data Analysis Strategies	Analyzing data through open coding, axial coding, and selective coding
Written Report	Generating a theory illustrated in a figure

Within the grounded research theory, the focus lends itself to investigating how individuals experience a specific process and how steps in a process are followed. The interview questions track different opinions and understandings about downtown culture, tourism, and revitalization in Hernando, Mississippi and New Albany, Mississippi. To answer the research question and track such revitalization processes, the thesis consists of a four-step methodological approach. Table 4 illustrates the conceptual structure of the approach.

Table 4: Conceptual Framework of Research Design

Objective	Methodology	Data Source(s)	Analysis
Step 1: Summarize each interview	Utilize interviews and compress information relative to the research.	● Interviews	● Summation
Step 2: Extrapolate separate themes from each interview set	Utilize interviews to establish separate themes in Hernando and New Albany.	● Interviews	● Holistic analysis ● Note patterns and themes ● Open and axial coding
Step 3: Extrapolate overlapping themes from both interview sets	Establish congruent themes by utilizing summarized interviews.	● Interviews	● Holistic analysis ● Note patterns and themes ● Open and axial coding
Step 4: Draw conclusions	Utilize different themes to discuss significance of interview results and present the selective code.	● Interviews	● Holistic Analysis ● Note patterns and themes ● Selective coding

The first step was to summarize the telephone interviews that were conducted. The researcher conducted these interviews to establish a localized narrative about the downtowns of Hernando and New Albany as well as revitalization processes. Each interview summary focuses on three areas: descriptions of each downtown, discussion of revitalization in each downtown, and conversations about tourism in each downtown.

The second step included an open and axial coding technique that was utilized to establish separate themes between the two different interview pools. In this step, a

holistic analysis was employed to analyze repetitive themes and similarities among the two separate pools of interviews.

In step three, an additional open and axial technique was employed as part of the grounded theory approach and to point to overarching themes consistent throughout the interviews. A holistic analysis is also utilized in this third step. The researcher relied on the summaries assembled in the first step to finalize themes.

In step four, after solidifying the chosen themes, the commonalities, and the disparities, the researcher presented, through direct interpretation and observation, the implications of the interview data collected and its relevance. This final step is achieved by presenting a singular selective code that encompasses the totality of interviews and both open and axial coding phases.

Theoretical Expectation

To aid in answering the research question, the researcher also established a particular theoretical expectation(s) before the telephone interviews were conducted. Place-based economic development theory, previously detailed in this thesis, will be used as an additional tool to guide the discussion and any forthcoming conclusions. For example, if this theory holds, then extrapolated themes will point to an obvious utilization of existing assets in the downtowns of Hernando and New Albany. Existing economic assets, as set forth by the Environmental Protection Agency, include residents and their skills; local architecture and infrastructure; academic, technical, and medical institutions; local and regional business and employment concentrations; cultural, natural, and artistic resources; and general quality of life (EPA, 2016, p. 6). By tying revitalization processes

being analyzed in these downtowns along with the provided expectation of utilized economic assets in a prosperous community, this theoretical expectation will allow the researcher to better gauge the correlation between the two in the specified Mississippi downtowns of Hernando and New Albany.

Limitations

A limitation to this research is the ability to capture, in total, an understanding of revitalization and place-based economic development theory that can reasonably apply to all Mississippi downtowns. Since only two Mississippi downtowns were pursued by the researcher, there are obvious limitations when referencing this thesis and cumulative theory as a vantage point is discussing the revitalization processes of and for other Mississippi downtowns not considered.

An additional limitation is the number of telephone interviews that were conducted. Creswell (2013) suggests that holding interviews with approximately 20-60 individuals as a form of data collection is a characteristic of a grounded theory qualitative approach. The researcher conducted 17 interviews, attempting to secure interviews with individuals of comparable work backgrounds and experiences from Hernando and from New Albany. Although the 20-60 individual interviews frame was not met, the number of interviews conducted is approximate to this frame and upholds the researcher's objective of compiling comparable disciplines of work in the makeup of interview subjects.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS/FINDINGS

Summaries

Ultimately, the researcher conducted 17 telephone interviews during February

2021, including nine subjects from New Albany and eight subjects from Hernando. The

following section includes the summaries of those interviews. The objective of this

summation process is to guide the grounded theory approach for the forthcoming steps of

coding the summarized interview data.

Hernando Summaries

Hernando subject #1, a downtown business owner, was the first Hernando

interview. This interview subject likens downtown Hernando to that of the fictional town

of Mayberry in *The Andy Griffith Show*. They referenced the small environment and safe

disposition of the downtown as well as the physical attraction of the historic buildings

and the town square. Hernando Subject #1 detailed the history of the architecture,

labeling the preservation efforts of the downtown and town square as the most attractive

characteristic of downtown Hernando. When asked about revitalization, they said that

they see revitalization as a process of breathing new life into an old building for the

purpose of sustainability. This interview subject used the example of a personal

revitalization project. The referenced project involved the renovation of a 130-year-old

building that this interview subject owns.

Hernando subject #1 categorized Hernando's downtown as a downtown that has already been revitalized. They credit the creation of historical districts and the formation of a historical preservation commission as the main driving force behind this revitalization. Although Hernando subject #1 does not see tourism as the wave of Hernando's future, this interview subject did elaborate on Hernando's appeal as an urban, multi-use community for raising families. In addition, they described downtown Hernando as a growing walking community with a need for more dining diversity and nightlife experience. The historic downtown and, specifically, the Hernando Square were given as downtown's greatest assets by this interview subject. The courthouse lawn, according to Hernando subject #1, hosts occasional concerts that are just one attractive piece in a community with a strong local business presence and a sturdy community involvement.

Hernando subject #2, an alderperson, immediately detailed the attraction and history of the courthouse square when asked to describe downtown Hernando to someone who had never visited the city before. This interview subject describes the courthouse as the centerpiece of the town and justifies its importance by pointing out a recent renovation process that the courthouse underwent as well as a collection of murals along the courthouse's internal walls. These murals are paintings that tell the story of Hernando Desoto, a Spanish explorer, passing through the area.

Looping back to the square and the downtown courthouse, Hernando subject #2 praised architectural renovations throughout the downtown that had maintained the integrity of the historic buildings and mentioned recent efforts by downtown businesses and city officials to install more benches, sidewalks, and better lighting downtown.

Hernando subject #2 expanded on their definition of revitalization by talking about the work that has been done to update buildings along the courthouse square as well as the recent completion of a major sidewalk and sidewalk crossing project in downtown Hernando.

Hernando subject #2 noted that the downtown was in the middle of a revitalization process. They touched on downtown efforts to bring local businesses "up to speed" as well as a citywide effort, through an EPA Brownfields Program, to safely clean up and reuse contaminated properties (Environmental Protection Agency, 2021). This interview subject noted this EPA initiative as an extension of the ongoing revitalization efforts. As a concluding thought, Hernando subject #2 cited a general interest among Hernando residents in seeing the downtown succeed as a driving factor for the ongoing revitalization.

Tourism was noted by Hernando subject #2 as a driving force in all small towns, including Hernando. Hernando subject #2 said twice that Hernando, although not apparently different from most other small towns or communities, is and should continue to pursue tourism. Hernando subject #2 concedes that there is money in tourism and that Hernando's parks and recreation is a piece of that tourism. They also mentioned Hernando's Farmers Market, describing it as the best farmers market in Mississippi. In summation, Hernando subject #2 answered that the courthouse and the Hernando Chamber of Commerce were the main assets in downtown Hernando.

Hernando subject #3, the second alderperson who was interviewed, used the slogan "Mississippi's Front Porch" to describe the city's position at the top of the state as well as its hospitable environment. This interview subject described the square as

downtown Hernando's most attractive element, citing it as the hub of Hernando. They credit the City of Hernando for doing a good job with tourism efforts, specifically referencing the Hernando Chamber of Commerce and the City of Hernando Community Development Director for their event planning work. Hernando subject #3 referenced the farmers market, the summer music series on the courthouse lawn, as well as the draw of festivals and local fairs as assets to downtown Hernando.

Hernando subject #3 equated revitalization to the act of breathing new life into something. This interview subject said that revitalization indicates how something was somewhat successful at some point and how it is then worth bringing back to its former glory. Hernando subject #3 asserted that Hernando is in the middle of revitalization. The interview subject said that the ongoing renovations of historical buildings in the downtown area as well as the continual opening of new, locally owned downtown businesses in recent times is helping to drive the revitalization. Secure property values for residential and commercial properties was listed by this subject as an additional driving factor in this revitalization process.

Hernando subject #4, a community development director, describes downtown Hernando as a small, historic bedroom community of Memphis with a high quality of life. They credited the courthouse and the square as being the most attractive pieces of downtown Hernando. This interview subject says that revitalizing a downtown involves doing something that is going to enhance the quality of life as well as the economic impact that a downtown makes in a community.

Hernando subject #4 postulated that the downtown was in the middle of revitalization. The interview subject specifically referenced the expansion of businesses

and the growth of traffic in downtown Hernando in recent times, stating that only approximately 30% of downtown Hernando's buildings were occupied 12 years prior. The quality of life and the events hosted downtown were identified by this interview subject as catalysts for the ongoing revitalization. Half of the Hernando Square holds retail space while the other half is office space (mostly attorney offices). Hernando subject #4 expressed a desire for there to be more retail fronts and less office spaces in downtown Hernando. Rather, this subject discussed the possibility of office spaces moving to the second floor of buildings to allow for such retail space on the ground level.

Hernando subject #4 also spoke to the ongoing efforts to beautify downtown Hernando. Specifically, they discussed the planting of flowers, the refinement and expansion of city signage, and the recruitment of more restaurants to enhance foot traffic throughout the entirety of the square. This interview subject stated that 44 was the median age in Hernando, a young median age that points to a dense family population. The city's Excel by 5 Program, a state led initiative that accredits different communities for being child and family friendly, is something that this subject also discussed as something of attraction to Hernando and the downtown. Hernando subject #4 described the population as having an expendable income. Coupled with the high density of families, this expendable income led the subject to conclude that people are continually committed to making life and financial investments in Hernando.

On a note of tourism, Hernando subject #4 discussed the draw of the farmers market. Described by the subject as the number one farmer's market in the state, approximately 100,000 individuals annually visit the market's 70 vendors. This interview subject named the courthouse as the greatest asset to downtown Hernando. In addition,

Hernando subject #4 said that Hernando was one of the only cities in the state that had not lost sales tax revenue since the beginning of the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Hernando subject #5 is an attorney whose office is located on the Hernando Square. This interview subject describes downtown Hernando as the core of a quintessential town and attributes the courthouse square as being the downtown's most attractive characteristic. They described revitalization in terms of business occupancy in a downtown. Revitalization, in this sense, would mean an increased occupancy of businesses in buildings downtown as well as upgrades for such buildings. This interview subject believes that Hernando needs quality growth. They mention that the growth of Hernando is inevitable and that the city should consider stronger conversations about tourism as an avenue of investment towards quality growth. Hernando subject #5 did not define quality growth but only labeled it as a positive thing in comparison to negative, non-quality growth.

Additionally, Hernando subject #5 says that Hernando has already been revitalized. They referenced this process of revitalization as having begun in the 1980s and described the catalyst for the revitalization as a group of Hernando residents who followed one another towards the goal of revitalization. This interview subject purchased and refurbished a building in downtown Hernando in 1996, a project that they say sparked a significant amount of interest in other revitalization projects around downtown Hernando. They describe a positive trend of revitalization that included the creation of a city preservation committee and the placement of downtown Hernando on the national historic registry.

Furthermore, Hernando subject #5 touched on their experience as a law student at the University of Mississippi. Specifically, they discussed the similarities between the Oxford Square and the Hernando Square. Vocalizing a negative point about downtown Hernando and its square, this interview subject discussed the unequal distribution of office space to retail space. Consequently, this interview subject says that there should be more retail spaces than attorney offices and other office spaces on the Hernando Square.

Hernando subject #6, a retired city planner for the City of Hernando, detailed the environment that the downtown fosters. This interview subject says that downtown Hernando is an old, historic town square that is known for its home-like, comfortable, walkable, and enjoyable small-town environment. This interview subject said that the square is approximately 450 feet in length and that it serves as the hub of all of Desoto County. They detailed the history of the downtown, including the burning of many downtown buildings during the Civil War and the devastation that a large tornado unleashed on downtown around the year 1900. Hence, many of the buildings on the square only date back to the early 1900s even though the town of Hernando is roughly 170 years old.

As a city planner, Hernando subject #6 approaches revitalization from a processed and well-defined perspective. This interview subject details revitalization by expressing how every space has and will experience a lifecycle. A space is born, it grows, it matures, it plateaus, and it begins to decline. When a space has reached the decline or plateau stage, Hernando subject #6 says that there are certain techniques that can be applied to induce new life. This is revitalization. Downtown Hernando, according to the interview subject, could not necessarily be categorized as a downtown in need of revitalization, as a

downtown in the middle of revitalization, or as a downtown that has already been revitalized. They conceded that ten years prior downtown Hernando could have been considered as an area in the middle of revitalization. However, Hernando subject #6 said that revitalization has been largely accomplished but that there are many dynamics and variables of any space that create a continuous need for revitalization processes.

Hernando subject #6 said that 10 to 15 years prior, the boom of the casino industry in Tunica as well as an increased interest in the historical nature of downtown Hernando were to credit for improved economic activity as well as revitalization processes. What is driving growth now, according to this interview subject, is the design of new transportation routes. Namely, this interview subject references I-69. I-69 and I-55 are cosigned north from I-269 in Hernando to the Tennessee state line. In addition to the interstates, Hernando subject #6 mentions the curation of Hernando's quality of life and good school systems as pieces that allow the growth of Hernando to be a self-fulfilling cycle that was built over the years.

According to Hernando subject #6, Hernando boasts no tourist attraction(s) in the sense that would be regionally or nationally significant. This interview subject elaborates on a localized sense of tourism, one that focuses on a Hernando-specific history and that strives to develop assets or potential assets. From an economics standpoint, Hernando subject #6 says that a community should do all that it can to develop itself. By the same token, the interview subject says that a community should not chase flashy attractions that might not be congruent with the authentic nature of a community.

In summation, Hernando subject #6 mentions the popularity of the farmers market as well as other seasonal events like the Water Tower Festival and different foot races

that occur downtown. In their view, all of the social interactions on the square that form the heart of the community is downtown Hernando's greatest asset. This interview subject concluded by mentioning the historic preservation efforts in downtown Hernando as an asset that has been pursued in a way that is historically appropriate and fitting for the downtown community.

Coincidentally, Hernando subject #6 discussed the city planning work and comprehensive city plan they previously completed for downtown New Albany. Hernando subject #6 says that the economic impact of the Tanglefoot Trail and the trailhead in downtown New Albany are a massive catalyst for revitalization in the community. This interview subject discussed how the trail complements another unique natural aspect downtown, the Tallahatchie River. In comparing the downtowns of Hernando and New Albany, Hernando subject #6 said that they both have similar characteristics and parallel historical aspects, specifically in the design of their buildings. They concede that, because of the Tanglefoot Trail, downtown New Albany has greater tourism potential than downtown Hernando.

Hernando subject #7, a business owner, refers to downtown Hernando as an enchanting, easily walkable space with a great town square and courthouse. Hernando subject #7 talked about the eclectic group of buildings around the square and the investments that individuals have made in these properties over the last 30 to 40 years. Hernando subject #7 sees revitalization as a reinvestment in existing infrastructure and considers Hernando as having a dated revitalization. In elaborating on this point, Hernando subject #7 acknowledged a belief that downtown Hernando is in the middle of a revitalization process that they hope Hernando will never stop pursuing. This interview

subject credits good schools, steadily increasing real estate values, city leadership, parks for children, and Hernando's proximity to Memphis as factors contributing to the controlled growth of Hernando and downtown Hernando.

The Hernando farmers market was described by Hernando subject #7 as being like a Saturday morning party. This interview subject says that any vibrant downtown with a square like that in Hernando should pursue tourism efforts, but that downtown Hernando would need substantial investments for tourism to become successful. Hernando subject #7 talked about limited parking around the Square being one of the negative aspects of the downtown. In conclusion, this interview subject praised Desoto County for their commitment to constantly reinvesting in the Hernando Square. At the end of the interview, Hernando subject #7 provided the researcher with the contact information of several other civil leaders with a connection to downtown Hernando.

The final Hernando interview was with a museum curator. Hernando subject #8 says that Hernando is a thriving town, and that the downtown has maintained a distinct historic character both architecturally and in the makeup of its citizenry. This interview subject spoke at length about the efforts the City of Hernando has made to correct infrastructure and preservation inconsistencies in the downtown. Specifically, Hernando subject #8 talked about how a number of older homes in the downtown area of Hernando were lost to a period of urban sprawl that continued from the latter parts of the 1970s and into the early 2000s. Hernando subject #8 said that whatever was destroyed or torn down before the start of the twenty first century has been restored and repurposed by way of city planners making use of what structures and architectural styles remained in downtown Hernando.

Hernando subject #8 describes the downtown as a walkable area and references the Desoto County Museum as being the crown jewel of recent downtown developments, as the museum is situated in the middle of the square. This interview subject details revitalization as a process that is pursued after a period of stagnant growth. When milling about Hernando, this interview subject did not label Hernando or its downtown as an area that had experienced any stagnant growth. Rather, they said that Hernando only began to see real growth in the 1990s as an exodus from Memphis, Tennessee facilitated movements to suburbs and, consequently, to the City of Hernando. Additionally, this interview subject says that the farmers market is an attractive, local element of revitalization.

Hernando subject #8 asserts that Hernando is in the middle of a revitalization process being generated by younger people who grew up in Hernando and have chosen to root themselves and their families back in Hernando. Through their work with the museum, Hernando subject #8 sees tourism as something of great importance for Hernando. To this interview subject, investing in tourism in turn means investing in future residents of Hernando. In conclusion, Hernando subject #8 mentioned recent sidewalk projects in downtown Hernando as well as multiple parks throughout the town as assets for both the city and the downtown.

New Albany subject #1, a business owner in downtown New Albany, describes downtown New Albany as being a New England style strip of businesses in buildings that have been standing since the late 1890s. In discussing the downtown, this interview subject animated a story of how people have been parking in the middle of West Bankhead Street since horse and carriages. West Bankhead Street is the heart of downtown New Albany and the street in which the majority of the downtown retail space is situated. New Albany subject #1 also distinguishes downtown New Albany by touching on how its design is unique in comparison to the square style of many other small, southern downtowns (i.e. downtown Hernando).

Moreover, New Albany subject #1 characterizes downtown New Albany as a clean, well lit, and well visited area. This interview subject says that Van Atkins Jewelers, a well-established downtown business, brings wealthy visitors to the downtown and that the Tanglefoot Trail attracts many other people to come downtown. The Tanglefoot Trail is Mississippi's largest Rails to Trails conversion, stretching 43.6 miles. The trail, which extends from New Albany, Mississippi to Houston, Mississippi, has a prominent trail head that is situated in the middle of West Bankhead Street in downtown New Albany.

New Albany subject #1 defines revitalization as a process of rehabilitating buildings themselves. The business owned by this interview subject occupies a building that was bought by a group of residents in New Albany around 1995. New Albany subject #1 explains how, as part of this group of residents, they were able to purchase the buildings for essentially land value and establish a repurposing of space and a new age of

retail in downtown New Albany. In discussing revitalization, this interview subject

referenced the creation of the New Albany Main Street Association 25 years prior as the

real catalyst for the economic prosperity and retail capacity of downtown New Albany at

present. Additionally, New Albany subject #1 says that the downtown has already been

revitalized but that the process of revitalization is, nonetheless, a process that is never

finished and that requires constant betterment.

In conclusion, New Albany subject #1 says that location is what the downtown

most capitalizes on. New Albany is close in proximity to Memphis, Tupelo, and Oxford.

This, to the interview subject, makes downtown New Albany an attractive and accessible

area for tourists and potential residents alike. Other assets discussed by this interview

subject included great schools, a strong tax base, and reputable industry.

New Albany subject #2, a bank vice president, details downtown as having a

quaint and easily walkable/bikeable environment. In terms of attractive characteristics,

this interview subject references the draw and recreational features of the Tallahatchie

River, which runs through downtown New Albany, as well as the uniqueness of how

people park in the middle of West Bankhead Street. The interview subject also references

the New Albany Main Street Association as an attractive characteristic of the downtown.

To New Albany subject #2, revitalization is about bringing excitement to an area,

business district, or downtown that has become dull or possibly stagnant. They said that

New Albany is, to a degree, in the middle of revitalization. However, this interview

subject qualified this by saying that different parts of a town are always in need of some

revitalization. Specifically, New Albany subject #2 referenced the work of different

community leaders in championing revitalization. This interview subject believes that

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signage, stemming from Mississippi Highway 15 (MS-15) and leading towards downtown, should be improved and that the Tallahatchie River should be developed by the city to be better utilized as a recreational activity.

New Albany subject #2 approaches tourism as a net positive that is accomplished in the way that the city and downtown utilizes existing assets. This interview subject likens the draw to New Albany with the attraction that stems from New Albany being the birthplace of William Faulkner, the allure of the Union County Heritage Museum, and the recreational appeal of the Tanglefoot Trail. A local Toyota facility and a WalMart distribution center in New Albany are industries that New Albany subject #2 credits for bringing stability to New Albany and greater business and traffic to downtown New Albany.

In conclusion, New Albany subject #2 attributes several downtown businesses, including Van Atkins Jewelers, Sugaree's Bakery, and Tallahatchie Gourmet Restaurant, as being credible assets to downtown New Albany. Furthermore, this interview subject discusses the attraction of the courthouse and the adjacent downtown grounds as being well kept backdrops for different events, such as the annual Tallahatchie RiverFest. This courthouse is the Union County Courthouse and it is located across the street from the New Albany Main Street Association on West Bankhead Street.

New Albany subject #3, a community development and main street director, references downtown New Albany as being part of a storybook community. This interview subject says that the unique downtown encompasses natural and artistic beauty that leaves any visitor with a sense of place. New Albany subject #3 believes that the downtown is like a destination, namely because of its vibrant energy and heavily

occupied storefronts. They supposed that downtown New Albany has already been revitalized. In expanding on these thoughts, this interview subject described downtown as existing in a bubble of constant revitalization. New Albany subject #3 credits a group of proactive citizens who, in October of 1996, pursued the main street program as being the catalyzing factor for this revitalization.

In discussing tourism, New Albany subject #3 says that any tourism dollars should be fully governed by the city instead of a separate entity, such as a tourism board. This interview subject said that the city's historical tie to William Faulkner, as well as the Tanglefoot Trail and the numerous parks, are notable assets that the downtown capitalizes on. In summary, New Albany subject #3 discussed the tangible benefits produced by the Tanglefoot Trail as well as the need for an organized bike ride spanning the entirety of the trail.

New Albany subject #4, an alderperson, describes downtown as an active area with more going for it than most other North Mississippi downtowns. This interview subject references the historic look of downtown as a relevant characteristic. Additionally, New Albany subject #4 acknowledged the longevity of numerous anchor businesses, namely Van Atkins Jewelers and Sappington's Department Store, as features of downtown New Albany that set it apart from other Mississippi downtowns.

When speaking about revitalization, New Albany subject #4 touched on how downtowns were once the lifeblood of small-town America. To this interview subject, revitalization for New Albany and most downtowns involves bringing back the dynamics of the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s to make downtowns the focal point of a city once again. New Albany subject #4 credits the New Albany Main Street Association for changing the

vitality of the downtown and detailed a project that their family led to repurpose a building on West Bankhead Street. This interview subject says that downtown New Albany must always exist in a cycle of revitalization. This revitalization, to New Albany subject #4, is evidenced in the affinity that people in New Albany have for the downtown. Specifically, this interview subject says that revitalization is constantly pursued because the downtown wants to avoid another exodus of businesses out to Highway 15.

Furthermore, New Albany subject #4 says that tourism dollars and sales tax dollars are both vital pieces of the city's budget and that, although the downtown does not necessarily accommodate tourists for overnight stays, that tourism is still something that downtown New Albany is able to pursue. New Albany subject #4 says that the people and the Tanglefoot Trail are downtown New Albany's greatest assets. This interview subject lists the work of the New Albany Community Development and Main Street Director as a specific asset under the broad asset of people. New Albany subject #4 offered several of their personal contacts at the conclusion of the interview for the researcher to coordinate additional interviews with.

New Albany subject #5, a museum director, references New Albany and the downtown in positive terminology, describing it as a river city with a small, unique, and historic atmosphere. In comparing downtown New Albany to other downtowns, New Albany subject #5 recognizes the value of the historical buildings as well as the consistent occupancy of these buildings by anchor businesses. Additionally, New Albany subject #5 says that revitalization is about breathing new life into buildings and the entirety of a town. This interview subject said that downtown New Albany is on its way

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to being revitalized but that revitalization is not something that is ever really done. New Albany subject #5 credits proactive citizens and different sustainability and planning committees that these citizens serve on as being the driving force behind downtown New Albany's continued revitalization. Specifically, New Albany subject #5 mentions the work of people at the New Albany Main Street Association.

New Albany subject #5 mentioned the 2% tourism tax as something that has specifically helped the Union County Heritage Museum. This interview subject expressed a personal desire for a city marketing plan as well as a directional signage program to enhance tourism efforts in a more tactical and organized way. The Tanglefoot Trail was listed as downtown's greatest asset by New Albany subject #5 on the basis of the amount of business it stimulates for the downtown and the traffic it generates for the entire city of New Albany. In conclusion, this interview subject expressed a desire for greater parks in and around downtown New Albany.

New Albany subject #6, an alderperson, credits business owners and active community members for allowing downtown New Albany to maintain a place of relevancy amidst the decline of many other Mississippi downtowns. This interview subject includes the work of the main street association as well as the way people park on West Bankhead Street as unique qualities of the downtown. New Albany subject #6 likens revitalization to the process of repurposing something. Specifically, they mention the repurposing of buildings throughout downtown New Albany. In this discussion of revitalization, New Albany subject #6 references the transformation of an old movie theatre into what is now the Magnolia Civic Center and the repurposing of a dilapidated building in the middle of downtown New Albany into a small park called Cooper Park.

New Albany subject #6 maintains that the downtown is between the middle and end stages of an ongoing revitalization process that is being driven by a myriad of factors including responsive elected officials, engaged community members, and an active main street program. This interview subject says that tourism should be spearheaded by downtown and development partners in tandem. New Albany subject #6 lists the Tanglefoot Trail is the main tourism attraction as well as an undeniable asset to downtown New Albany.

New Albany subject #7, a bank president, commends friendly and proactive people as well as a diverse business scene as being downtown New Albany's greatest characteristics. This interview subject credits I-22 as an asset in generating traffic in downtown New Albany. Industry spurred by the local Toyota plant as well as the various anchor storefronts downtown and the Tanglefoot Trail are cornerstones of New Albany's makeup, according to New Albany subject #7. This interview subject references Sappington's Department Store, Van Atkins Jewelers, Sugaree's Bakery, and Magnolia Soap Company by name. Moreover, New Albany subject #7 praises these business owners for being consistent brand ambassadors for their respective industries and the downtown in total.

New Albany subject #7 says that downtown New Albany has had its ups and downs but that the implementation of the main street association 20 to 25 years prior sparked a period of continued rejuvenation. They define revitalization as the act of taking something that is outdated and fine tuning it to the growing world around it. New Albany subject #7 labels revitalization as an ongoing process and one that has been championed by key leaders from the New Albany Main Street Association. To this interview subject,

the downtown is the heart of a city and any localized businesses outside of the downtown core have to depend on this heartbeat for uniform success and economic growth.

When discussing tourism, New Albany subject #7 detailed their time on a former tourism council that worked to install an existing tourism tax. This interview subject frequently mentioned the work of the New Albany Main Street Association and, specifically, the influence and dedication of the director of the program in installing elements of tourism. In summary, New Albany subject #7 expressed a desire for more sidewalk space and a greater volume of outdoor dining and outdoor seating throughout downtown New Albany.

New Albany subject #8, an attorney, differentiates the quaint nature of downtown New Albany from other Mississippi downtowns by explaining the consistent and successful presence of businesses along West Bankhead Street. They see New Albany as always having been a proactive and progressive downtown that has never fully needed a revitalization process. New Albany subject #8 references revitalization as a system that targets aesthetic and economic improvement in an equal way. This interview subject considers the geography and layout of New Albany as being reasons for the downtown's relevance. Specifically, they mention the flow of traffic from I-22 (formerly Highway 78) and the organization of businesses along West Bankhead Street as reasons for the flow of success in downtown New Albany.

Tourism is something that New Albany subject #8 believes the downtown is easily poised for. They mention the literary draw of William Faulkner's birthplace, the historical draw of the Union County Heritage Museum, and the recreational attraction of the New Albany Sportsplex in reference to tourism. According to this interview subject,

the Tanglefoot Trail is the downtown's greatest asset, followed by the museum and anchor businesses along West Bankhead Street. New Albany subject #8 details efforts to develop the Tallahatchie River as a recreational activity and lists a number of other popular recreational activities in and around downtown New Albany.

New Albany subject #9, a teacher, describes downtown New Albany as a small and vibrant downtown. This interview subject defines revitalization as the act of giving something life once again and concedes that downtown New Albany, as a consistently trafficked and vibrant downtown, never noticeable lost its livelihood. New Albany subject #9 grouped viable local businesses, the noticeable absence of chain businesses along West Bankhead Street, local restaurants, and the historical significance and preservation of buildings as real stakeholders in the continued relevance of downtown New Albany.

After defining revitalization in the aforementioned terms, New Albany subject #9 then stated that downtown New Albany was in the middle of a revitalization process that was ignited by the legalization of alcohol sales downtown. They credit town leadership for making the legalization of alcohol sales a reality, as well as other initiatives such as the development of the Tanglefoot Trail. Conversing about tourism, New Albany subject #9 said that the Tanglefoot Trail is well known and adds to the allure of downtown but that more people should know about William Faulkner's birthplace, which is located right next to downtown. Furthermore, this interview subject says that there should be lodging development that would allow for overnight stays in downtown New Albany, seeing that there are no current opportunities for people to stay downtown overnight.

In summation, New Albany subject #9 lists proactive citizens who have made lifelong investments in downtown New Albany and the rest of New Albany as one of the downtown's greatest assets. Attractive local businesses, such as Sugaree's Bakery, are the real cornerstone of downtown New Albany according to this final interview subject.

Themes

Per grounded theory, a system of coding was pursued to extrapolate themes. First, individual responses to the settled interview questions were extrapolated through an open coding process in which the researcher dissected major themes and correlations among interview responses. From this step, axial coding was pursued to solidify categories relevant to downtown Hernando and downtown New Albany as separate considerations as well as to solidify themes relevant to both downtowns. Finally, a selective coding step was pursued to consume all preceding themes and actions of coding. In this final step, one overarching theme was extrapolated.

Hernando Themes

In analyzing the data from the eight Hernando interview subjects, the main themes that presented themselves were **structural features** and **square activities.** These themes were extrapolated in the axial coding phase after an open coding analysis pointed to several repetitive qualities of downtown Hernando, including the attraction of the physical courthouse and the historical preservation efforts of the downtown. The second repetitive set of downtown Hernando qualities included positive discussions of the farmers market and the courthouse lawn.

The Desoto County Courthouse, located in the middle of the Hernando Square, was referenced by seven of the eight Hernando interview subjects as either an attractive characteristic of the downtown or as an asset to the downtown. In describing the downtown area, Hernando subject #2 says, "Our courthouse is the centerpiece in our downtown area. You will find that many cities have a courthouse in their downtowns across Mississippi, but what is so unique about ours is that ours has been renovated… That's our main attraction in our downtown area, and everything else downtown kind of feeds off of the courthouse in architecture design and everything."

"During June, there was a band on the law of the courthouse on Thursday evenings," said Hernando subject #1. "It's great to have the whole community come sit on the courthouse lawn." Hernando subject #4 says that the courthouse is the downtown's greatest asset because of the way parking spaces are set up around the building as well as the nice grass area in front of the courthouse. "It sets up a good opportunity for it to host events, and you want to get people downtown to be able to recognize that there are businesses that are down there."

As part of the open coding phase of analysis, the researcher also found repetition in the interview responses about physical preservation and historical efforts in downtown Hernando. Hernando subject #6 describes the downtown as having an old, historic environment. "About 90% of the buildings on the Square have had a historic building rehabilitation of one sort or another," said this interview subject. Hernando subject #6 also spoke about their own experiences and preservation, saying "Around the same time, I guess it was, the city created a preservation commission, and the first district was in the downtown area. We got it put on the national register and that helped." This reference was to this interview subject's revitalization of their own building on the Hernando Square in 1996, an effort that they say sparked a greater interest in building preservation and physical revitalization processes in downtown Hernando.

Hernando subject #3 talks about these building preservation efforts as a current happening, saying, "I believe that Hernando is right in the middle of revitalization because we've got a lot of local citizens that are taking older buildings and renovating them." Hernando subject #2 says that, besides the draw of the courthouse, the preservation efforts are one of the most attractive characteristics of downtown Hernando. "When they [downtown buildings] were renovated, their old architectural designs were renovated to bring them up to new standards."

In addition to being a business owner on the square, Hernando subject #1 had the following to say about the historical makeup of downtown Hernando: "My office is on the square right across from the courthouse, and it is actually the oldest building on the square, circa 1870. In the Civil War, you know, they burned the whole Square to the ground. So everything there has been rebuilt from somewhere around 1870 on. I'm on the

Historic Preservation commission, so our goal is to keep the square the way it was originally built as far as exterior buildings. That's one of the reasons why I said as soon as you pull up on the square you get that real sense of nostalgia and original construction."

The Hernando Square is the backdrop for many key events, including the Hernando Farmers Market and a music series on the lawn of the square's courthouse. "We have a lot of tourism that comes through there on the weekend just for our farmers market," said Hernando subject #2. "When people come for the farmer's market, they shop other places also." Hernando subject #3, who happens to be the current Hernando Farmers Market Director, talked about the relevance of the market by saying, "All these other farmers markets across the nation were suffering and we were not." In addition to this, Hernando subject #3 conversed about the old-fashioned design of the market. "That's what a farmer's market should be about, connecting with the local farmer. Yet, it should have all of these little things that should help improve the social and mental and physical aspects of their life."

"During June, there was a band on the lawn of the courthouse on Thursday evenings, said Hernando subject #1. "It's great to have the whole community come sit down on the lawn, that type of stuff." Hernando subject #3 also talked about the Thursday evening concerts on the courthouse lawn, speaking to the versatility of the space. "We have really capitalized on our square and also we have a large lawn in front of our courthouse where we hold events."

New Albany Themes

In analyzing the data from the nine New Albany interview subjects, the two main themes that presented themselves were **recreational features** and **specificity.** The first theme was extrapolated in the axial coding phase after an open coding analysis pointed to several repetitive recreational features of downtown New Albany, including the attraction of the <u>Tanglefoot Trail</u>, the recreational possibilities of the <u>Tallahatchie River</u>, the draw of the New Albany <u>Sportsplex</u>, the multiplicity of <u>parks</u>, and the unique quality of <u>parking</u> in downtown New Albany. The second theme of specificity presented itself in the form of naming <u>civil leaders</u> and <u>anchor businesses</u> by name.

The researcher extrapolated the first theme, recreational features, from the totality of New Albany interviews. New Albany interview subjects consistently listed an assortment of recreational activities as well as outdoor features of the downtown and surrounding areas.

The Tanglefoot Trail was overwhelmingly listed as either downtown New Albany's greatest asset or the greatest characteristic of downtown New Albany. Eight of the nine New Albany interview subjects referenced the trail. The Tanglefoot Trail is Mississippi's largest Rails to Trails conversion project, stretching 43.6 miles from Houston, Mississippi to New Albany, Mississippi. As aforementioned in this thesis, the uniqueness of the Tanglefoot Trail for downtown New Albany is its trailhead's position in the heart of downtown New Albany, intersecting West Bankhead Street and North Railroad Avenue.

New Albany subject #3 discussed the benefits that downtown New Albany has reaped from the trail as well as the way in which it has impacted many other

communities. "What's unique about that trail is you are crossing six communities between Houston and New Albany and really, other than New Albany and maybe Pontotoc, those communities were dying," said New Albany subject #3. "But when the Tanglefoot came, every one of those communities now has life." Additionally, New Albany subject #6 advances that the Tanglefoot Trail is one of the downtown's biggest assets. "That to me is an asset that you can hang a lot on because people are going to come here to ride the trail, and they are going to need to eat and sleep and shop.

New Albany subject #6 also spoke to the process of building the trailhead as a focal point of the downtown, saying, "That is an awesome attraction to New Albany, especially for tourism. We have had people from all over the United States and overseas to ride that bike trail... it was the old railroad, and we took over that, we got the ball rolling on, got it all approved, and laid asphalt for a biking trail and walking trail. So, we jumped on that, redid the trailhead, did some signage, a lot of brick pavers, tables, lighting, to make it as attractive and useful as we can to make it easy to access. Plus, it draws people and is a good place to start riding the trail or end the trail. It goes right there in downtown for people to shop or eat at our restaurants." New Albany subject #4 expanded on this idea of far-reaching trail use, saying, "I was stunned when I saw what the Tanglefoot Trail did for our town. I would never have dreamed, and I have always loved riding bikes and I started doing that before the trail opened, but I didn't realize how many people from all over the place would come to our town because of the trail. It has been amazing. I was skeptical about it, but it draws a lot of people to downtown."

The Tallahatchie River runs along the West Bankhead Street entrance to downtown New Albany and is the namesake for the downtown's annual Tallahatchie

Riverfest in September. New Albany subject #2 speaks of the Tallahatchie River through a nostalgic lens, saying, "You can do a lot of different things in towns, but it's difficult to get a river to run through it. I've got many fond memories of wading and fishing in the channel, as we call it." New Albany subject #3 describes the Tallahatchie River as a piece of downtown's "natural and artistic" beauty.

New Albany subject #8 spoke to the recreational potential of the river, saying, "There are some areas by the river right there where the local tourism staff and main street staff want to somehow develop that and have the public use the river. I don't know what all their plan entails, but I suspect it would be something along the lines of allowing people to picnic and put your boat or kayak in and go down the river… I am a big believer in exercise in general, and I think that would be a big draw to the town if we could make that happen."

The New Albany Sportsplex was an additional recreational activity that was extrapolated as a theme among New Albany interview subjects. Although not located within the downtown, New Albany interview subject #1 says that the "world-class Sportsplex is within a mile of our downtown." New Albany subject #8 says, "People travel from all over Mississippi to come to baseball games. We have a baseball league and a lot of college players that come up here and play during the summertime. We have one of the best tennis parks in the state, according to a lot of tennis players."

Parks in New Albany were mentioned in causal, non-expansive language by several New Albany interview subjects. New Albany subject #2 spoke about a former empty lot on West Bankhead Street, saying, "It was a large department store downtown years ago, where Cooper Park is right now. It sold jewelry within the store, and the store

burned. So they donated the land where it burned to create Cooper Park." When listing

different assets held by the downtown, New Albany subject #3 spoke about the number

of parks within the city. "And then we have five city parks that are within our city limits,

which is also unheard of."

New Albany subject #5 was somewhat of an outlier in the repetition of responses

about the totality of parks in New Albany as an asset. This interview subject said, "I feel

like we need to make more of those opportunities to get our parks in better shape and

create more recreational opportunities for families." In the same breath, this interview

subject also credited the Tanglefoot Trail and Cooper Park on West Bankhead Street as

being great resources for recreational activity. "I would say that the best thing down there

is the Tanglefoot," said New Albany subject #5. "I think that Covid has taught us a thing

or two and that we have to look towards our assets that allow us to be outside. We were

fortunate enough that there were these opportunities with the Tanglefoot and we have the

park downtown, which is full all of the time."

Arguably one of the most peculiar features of downtown New Albany, numerous

interview subjects referenced the habitual parking of cars in the middle of West

Bankhead Street as a unique and attractive quality of downtown New Albany. New

Albany subject #1 said, "What makes us unique is the parking in the middle of the street.

You can drop someone off anywhere in the world - a shopping center, WalMart, Target,

what have you - and they don't know where they are. But when you're in New Albany

you know exactly where you are because it's so unique to have people parking in the

middle of the street, and it's been that way since horse and carriage."

New Albany subject #2 spoke to the unconventional nature of this parking system downtown, saying, "It blows people's minds. Many times you can see a visitor who will be trying to let someone out, but they're parked and they're not leaving." New Albany subjects #5 and #7 spoke about localized conversations about the potential danger and relevance of allowing people to continue to park in the middle of West Bankhead Street. New Albany subject # 7 said, "We have some people that say why don't we do away with that and some people who think, well, that's kind of a neat thing to have and don't do away with it. I guess as long as we don't have very many wrecks then I guess it's okay to do that."

The researcher extrapolated a second theme within New Albany's interviews; specificity. New Albany interview subjects consistently cited the names of several anchor businesses downtown as well as the work of two specific individuals within the New Albany Main Street Association.

First, eight of the nine interview subjects mentioned downtown businesses by name. The businesses that were consistently mentioned by at least more than one interview subject were Van Atkins Jewelers, Tallahatchie Gourmet Restaurant, Sugaree's Bakery, and Sappington's Department Store. New Albany subject #2 touched on these anchor businesses, saying, "Tallahatchie Gourmet has a Cajun or Louisiana taste, and the owner is from that area. Then we have Van Atkins Jewelers which always promotes historic downtown New Albany... Sugarees, it's pretty amazing to watch them cook and mix. It's a bakery that sells cakes and stuff all over the United States. That's just a couple of assets that we have that we try to capitalize on in New Albany." New Albany subject

#4 mentions Van Atkins Jewelers and Sappington's Department store as "solid anchor stores" that make downtown New Albany a continuous attraction.

Second, four of the nine interview subjects mentioned two New Albany Main Street Association employees by name. New Albany subject #2 said that these two civil leaders "have done a great job with our Main Street Program and are just constantly trying to improve our town." New Albany subject #4 said that these two civil leaders "create activity in our town by creating events to get exposure to our businesses downtown." New Albany subject #7 credited these two civil leaders as well as the main street leaders who preceded them for their actions in "Trying to keep empty storefronts in front of people to let them know that they are available." Additionally, New Albany subject #7 credited these two civil leaders for doing a good job of measuring the wants of 'city folks' when it comes to what businesses are wanted in the downtown. "I think we do a good job of recruiting businesses if we need that type of business," said New Albany subject #7 in reference to the work that these two civil leaders do.

Overlapping Theme

In analyzing the data from the interviews, there were multiple patterns of overlay. However, the most present theme that was represented in this overlap was the theme of **people**. This theme was present in both downtown Hernando and downtown New Albany, specifically through the consideration that <u>local people</u> make up the catalyst for a great deal of change and community efforts in both downtowns and that the downtowns have assets that attract <u>outside people</u>.

Hernando subject #5 stated that revitalization came from a process that "one person started, and people followed." Hernando subject #7 said that "people are making sound investments in the square property, and we've got just a few issues that we could hopefully address that would make the square just that much more appealing." In talking about successful revitalization practices, New Albany subject #3 applauded the makeup of people downtown. "I'm telling you, tourism is an economic development catalyst, but also people are. We're lucky in this community to have people to care. When you combine all of that, that's when it takes off."

Downtown businesses are led by people whose leadership was repetitively admired by interview subjects. Hernando subject #3 said, "A lot of small businesses have opened lately around the downtown area, and a lot of them are mainly locally owned, which is a great way for people to be invested in Hernando with their businesses and their personal lives." New Albany subject #7 said, "To me, it's just the people who are involved with the businesses… just a lot of neat shops and businesses that are run by local people who just do a really tremendous job of promoting their businesses as well as downtown New Albany."

New Albany subject #9 discussed the role of civil leaders in catalyzing downtown revitalization, saying, "What got that to happen was leadership. There have been several people who cared about it [revitalization] who have provided leadership who have gotten things like the Tanglefoot Trail brought to New Albany." New Albany subject #4 said, "An asset for our downtown and city is the people… I think all of our businesses and their willingness to do things outside the box contribute to the success of our downtown."

"You've got to be able to drive growth in any area, or otherwise you are just going to have this brain drain where young people will just have to leave because there is no future in these small towns," said Hernando subject #7. "Hernando is the opposite of that. People are bringing their children here to grow up, and that in turn drives our growth, and they stay here." Subsequently, Hernando subject #8 touched on the role of youth in revitalizing downtown Hernando. "I really think that it is a lot of the younger people who grew up here or are coming back here to start careers or to reside here. I think a lot of the movers and shakers of the younger set have chosen to make Hernando their home, and that certainly helps."

Hernando subject #8 expanded on the investment of persons, saying, "It's human capital, along with resource investment from people who live in other places. Like Oxford, Mississippi, they have discovered just what a beautiful, livable, walkable community Hernando is, and they choose to make it their home." New Albany subject #5 said, " I think the fact that there's always somebody looking towards the future and planning, that's what drives it and that's what drove it to get to where it is right now."

Furthermore, there is the idea that the processes of revitalization can be and are continuous efforts that have a multiplying impact. "From my perspective, the components

that were put in place over the past 20 years have created a top tier community that is in a cycle of its own, says Hernando subject #6. "It's a self-fulfilling thing, and people are attracted to the quality of life that has been built." New Albany subject #1 speaks to this multiplying phenomenon in a tourism sense, saying, "The more people who come here and are happy, the more they will tell other people. It's sort of the multiplier effect. So you get people coming and going and telling others. Tourism is very important to me."

In summation, the catalysts for revitalization involve people. "It comes down to the social, physical, mental, and economic impacts of people," said Hernando subject #4. New Albany subject #2 says, "We've just got a lot of people in town who just care about the downtown." New Albany subject #7 mentions the hospitable quality of invested people in the downtown. "People are nice and friendly and will bend over backwards to try to help you with whatever the situation may be," says New Albany subject #7. "I think it's the people when you get down to it."

Also, this theme of people can be extended to interview responses about the impact of outside people. This refers to the people who are already drawn to the downtowns of Hernando and New Albany or who bring some sort of outside influence that can and does benefit the downtowns. New Albany subject #2 says, "We have people coming from all over the United States to ride on this trail and make a day, well really a weekend out of it, which helps all of our restaurants and things as well." Hernando subject #4 says, "We are now the number one farmer's market in the state, and we have over seventy vendors. That attracts about 100,000 people a year." Outside people add to the economic viability of these downtowns and their existing assets, a cornerstone of place-based economics development theory.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION/IMPLICATIONS

Selective Code

The researcher set forth the findings of this research in the previous chapter and will utilize this final chapter to conclude the thesis and to discuss the implications of the findings. The grounded research theory guided the open coding, axial coding, and selective code that will be presented in this concluding chapter.

After finalizing the researcher's general open coding and more specific axial coding processes, a singular selective code was decided upon by the researcher: **continuous revitalization**. This big idea captures the summation of this research and advances that the downtowns of New Albany and Hernando exist under an umbrella of continuous revitalization processes that are spurred by a myriad of inputs that are congruent with the theoretical expectation set forth by place-based economic development theory. Figures 3, 4, and 5 display the relevant themes of the entire code.
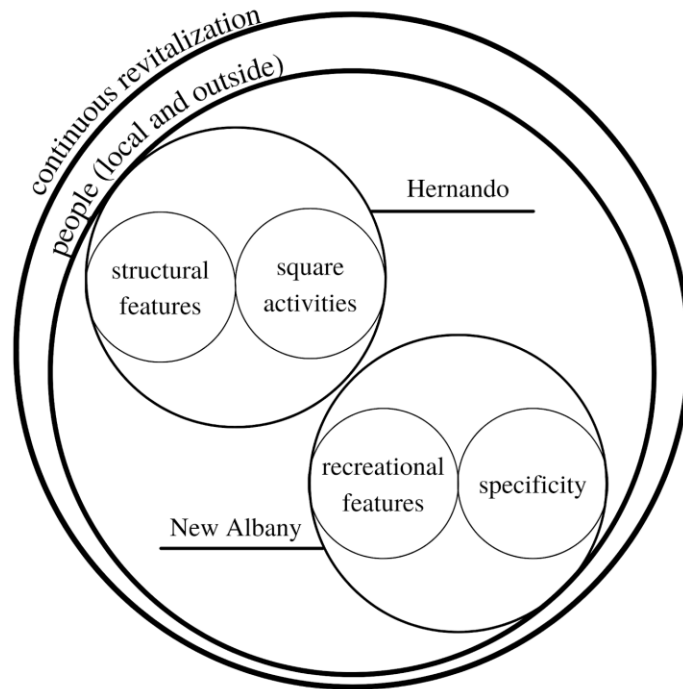
Figure 3: Coding Diagram
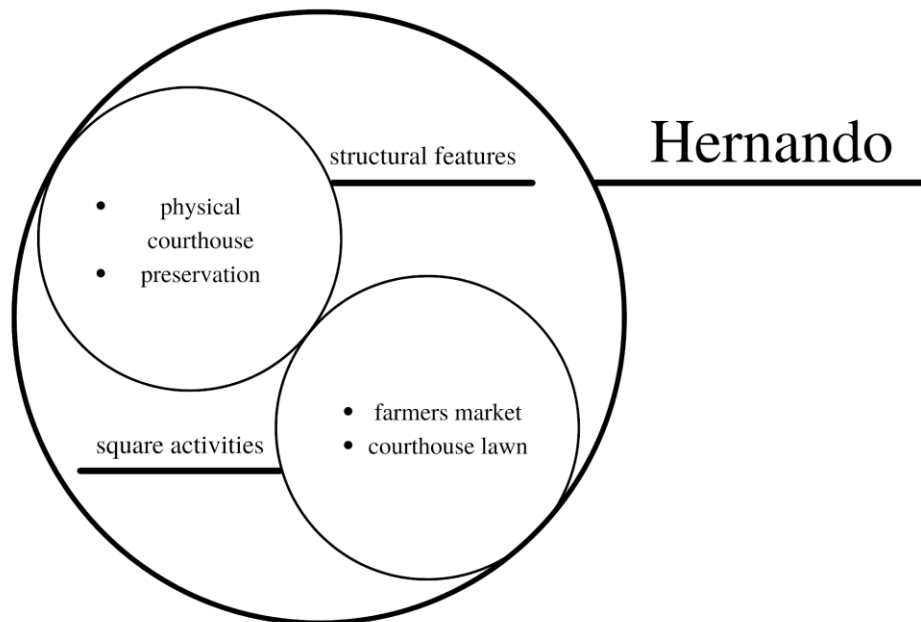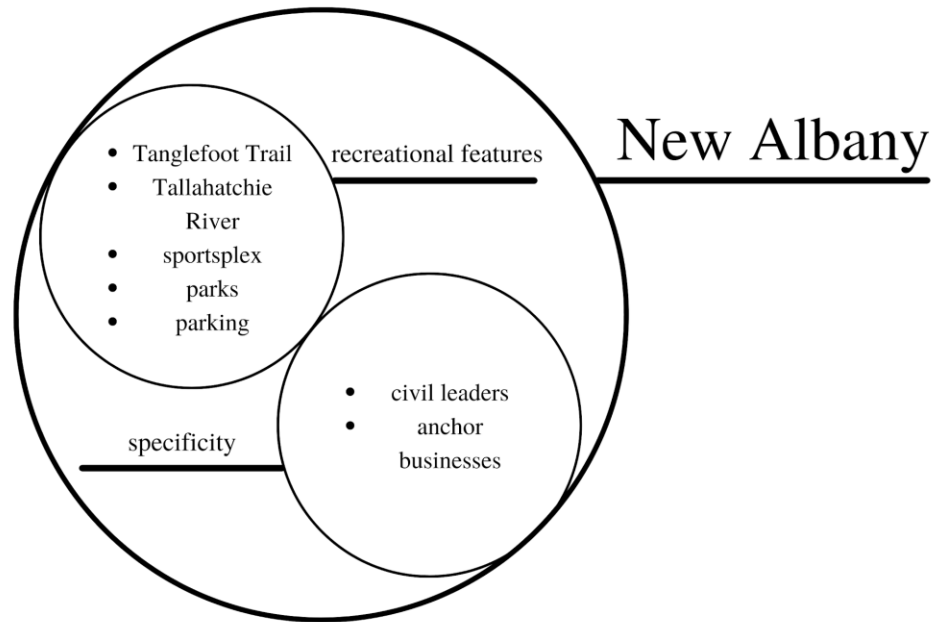

Figure 4: Hernando Coding Diagram

Figure 5: New Albany Coding Diagram

Hernando and New Albany interview subjects were each asked to speak on their

individual understandings of revitalization and to answer a question about what stage of

revitalization they considered their respective downtown to be in, if any. Interview

subjects were asked, "Which best describes downtown Hernando/New Albany to you: a

city's downtown a) in need of revitalization; b) in the middle of revitalization; or c) that

has already been revitalized?" An additional option of "none of the above" was allowed

under the context that the interview subject would elaborate on their reasoning. The

responses that unfolded from this question and additional layers of interview responses

were overwhelmingly assertive that revitalization for the downtowns of Hernando and

New Albany is a continuous process.

Hernando subject #8 had the following to say about the nature of revitalization in downtown Hernando: "I think it [revitalization] is in the middle. You never want to rest your laurels and say that everything has been done. I would say that we are in the middle of it, and I think that is said with a positive attribute. I don't think any effort like that is complete, but it is headed in that direction." The response of this interview subject was not an isolated sentiment. New Albany subject #7 details their coinciding opinion on furthering a continuous revitalization. "I think revitalization, in my mind, is an ongoing process. It never ends. If you stop, then you start going backwards. I think you have always got to do what you have to do to enhance and make things better. I think we have reached a certain degree of revitalization, but I think it's something you have to continuously look at. Some businesses do well, some don't. The whole business structure might change."

New Albany subject #6 conceded that the downtown was between the middle and final stages of revitalization, adding, "We've done a lot of revitalization, but there's always room to improve. If something comes up, an opportunity, I will be glad to jump on it. We've got to always be ready for opportunities as they come. Like I said, we've done a lot and we're blessed with what we have, but there's always room for improvement." New Albany subject #5 shared the same opinion by recognizing that downtown was between the middle and final stages of revitalization, qualifying this opinion by saying, "I don't think that you are ever done revitalizing. You better stay on top of it, or you will find that you have missed a step in there. You always have to work towards staying on the cutting edge of things."

Hernando subject #6, a retired city planner, professionally summarized the essence of this selective code: "You can't say that something has been revitalized and that it doesn't need any more attention. It has been largely revitalized, but the process in a space that old and with that many variables, the dynamics of that place, there is an ongoing and a continuous need for revitalization processes. They might not be as acute or as substantial as they were a decade ago, but that need never diminishes. It requires continual attention."

Furthermore, interview subjects who originally conceded that their respective downtown had been revitalized consistently discussed the necessity of continuous revitalization processes too. New Albany subject #3 affirmatively stated that downtown New Albany had already been revitalized, yet this interview subject also balanced this answer by saying that revitalization is something that is never fully won. "I think the best part about our downtown is that it continually is in that bubble of revitalization. There's constant movement." Additionally, no interview subjects supposed that either downtown Hernando or downtown New Albany were in stages of life that predated any form of revitalization.

Selective Code and Place-Based Economics

Continuous revitalization in the aforementioned context encompasses the exact elements that place-based economic advances. Referenced in Chapters III and IV, place-based economic assets consistently include residents and their skills; local architecture and infrastructure; academic, technical, and medical institutions; local and regional

business and employment concentrations; cultural, natural, and artistic resources; and general quality of life (EPA, 2016, p. 6).

The selective code includes the relevance of anchor businesses in New Albany, the importance of architecture and historical preservation in Hernando, the natural resources utilized by New Albany, and a general quality of life that both downtowns pursue through the talents and work of residents and civil leaders alike. Continuous revitalization shoulders the axial code and open code that the researcher organized from the interview summaries and subsequent interview data.

With these specific consistencies in mind, the researcher considers the theoretical expectation of place based economic theory as a satisfied expectation. In total, the 17 interviews pattern the place-based economic assets given by the EPA. The only limitation to this satisfied theoretical expectation is the apparent lack of interview data considered from the element of academic, technical, and medical institutions. No technical or medical institutions were conversed by interview subjects, but good school systems were mentioned by Hernando subject #4, #6, and #7 as well as New Albany subjects #1 and #2.

In closing, the existing assets of both downtown New Albany and downtown Hernando are uniformly utilized by the residents and civil leaders of both downtown.

Conclusion

In analyzing the total of interview data collected, there are key similarities and differences between the downtowns that emerged. First, there was a more uniform and understood language around the historic relevance of buildings in downtown Hernando.

New Albany Interview subjects displayed a comparable understanding of the importance of revitalized buildings, but the conversations among Hernando interview subjects pointed to a deeper cultural impact of historical preservation efforts on many downtown buildings. These efforts are in line with William H. Whyte's (1988) popularized view that downtowns are a series of personal experiences and choices. In other words, the aesthetic and preservation-driven efforts to revitalize buildings in downtown Hernando signified a cultural shift to design and aesthetic control that led downtown Hernando to be treated as a visual experience. This visual experience was clearly reflected in the patterned responses from Hernando interview subjects about the aesthetic makeup of such repurposed buildings, a consistently talked about asset and quality of the downtown.

Downtown New Albany was repeatedly noted for its unique parking as well as its abundance of parking. Downtown Hernando was repeatedly noted for its absence of parking, especially on Saturdays during the farmers market. The compact design of the Hernando Square hinders parking but produces a centralized event space (lawn concerts and farmers market) while downtown New Albany's downtown strip has allowed for easy access to anchor businesses along West Bankhead Street.

A more obvious difference woven into the interview data was the different grids of each downtown. Hernando was clearly noted for its courthouse square while New Albany's West Bankhead Street was consistently referenced. The two town cores are laid out differently, a distinguishing feature that reasonably fosters and favors differing themes or assets.

The coinciding assets of the two downtowns have been discussed, including an overlapping code detailing the influence of people on both downtowns. Continuous

revitalization is a subliminal practice that downtown Hernando and downtown New Albany have been able to pursue through their possession and utilization of very basic place-based assets. In conclusion, these downtowns share characteristics and yet they differ in many of their qualities. Every comparing and considering Mississippi downtowns, each downtown will have an unsystematic makeup of civil leaders and residents, dissimilar histories, inconsistent businesses, and contrasting aesthetic and recreational features when compared with each other. Nevertheless, the downtowns of Hernando and New Albany are advanced as cases for understanding how a Mississippi downtown can prosper despite stagnant state growth and despite urban and industrial sprawl.

The cases of downtown Hernando and downtown New Albany display the investments that already exist within a downtown. The extrapolated interview data implies that Mississippi downtowns already acknowledge the qualities of place and space that make an individual downtown noteworthy. Investments were presented in differing words and considered from different stages of revitalization and from different abilities of both downtowns. These two downtowns showcase the synchronous relationship between revitalization and place-based economic development practices. This positive relationship can be driven to imply that there are similar positive relationships in other Mississippi downtowns. Even more so, this line of reasoning can be specially applied areas of similar populations and with comparable assets to that of downtown Hernando and downtown New Albany.

New Albany subject #4 said the following about the current state of the downtown: "Revitalization to me means bringing back what we had in the 40s 50s and

60s back to downtown to make it the focal point of the town." Throughout the extrapolated interviews, revitalization was defined as a process to restore something to some inkling of former glory. Downtown Hernando and downtown New Albany have separate histories and differing assets, but their organizational themes speak to distinct and subliminal processes of revitalization.

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APPENDIX A

CONSENT INFORMATION

Title of Study: MISSISSIPPI DOWNTOWNS: EXAMINING THE RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION AND PLACE-BASED ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT

Name of Researcher and University Affiliation:

Cade Slaughter
Undergraduate Student
Department of Public Policy Leadership
105 Odom Hall
University, MS 38677
Phone 601.270.4074
rcslaugh@go.olemiss.edu

Recruitment Email:

Hello,

My name is Cade Slaughter, and I am a senior honors student at the University of
Mississippi. My honors thesis, entitled "Mississippi Downtowns: Examining the
Relationship between Downtown Revitalization and Paced-Based Economic
Development," would benefit greatly from your input and respective expertise. This
study has been approved by the University of Mississippi's Institutional Review Board
(IRB), and the information that we discuss will be included within my thesis as I seek to
learn more about the past, present, and future existence of downtowns.

This way of data collection will be through an audio-recorded interview in which I will
ask and discuss questions about downtown revitalization, city planning, and the economic
impact of downtowns as you see it.

I hope you will participate in this research, and I would be more than happy for us to
establish a time to discuss this project. This interview will last approximately 30
minutes. I thank you in advance for your time and the work that you do.

Sincerely,
Cade Slaughter

Consent to Participate in Research; Oral Script:

My name is Cade Slaughter, and I am the primary investigator for this thesis - my phone
number is (601) 270-4074 and my email address is rcslaugh@go.olemiss.edu. The title of
this study is: "Mississippi Downtowns: Examining the Relationship between Downtown
Revitalization and Place-Based Economic Development." This research aims to discover

the relationship between place-based economic development and revitalization efforts in the downtowns of New Albany, MS and Hernando, MS. This research derived from a desire to understand efforts of growth, business, and lifestyle revitalization in downtown areas specific to Mississippi. The importance of this research is that it will afford a deeper understanding of place-based economic development, an economic strategy that builds upon existing assets, while connecting such strategy to different stages of revitalization efforts in the aforementioned cities. This study will be completed over the course of this academic semester, and your participation will require approximately 30 minutes of your time. There are no foreseeable risks associated with your participation, and the measured benefits of your participation include the knowledge I hope to gain from your words. Participation is voluntary, and the only alternative is to not participate. The information you share will only be accessible to myself and my research advisor, Dr. Jody Holland, and any identifiable information we discuss will be password protected in the form of the audio recording and the transcribed interview. You have the right to withdraw your participation.

This study has been reviewed by The University of Mississippi's Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a participant of research, please contact the IRB at (662) 915-7482 or irb@olemiss.edu.

Do you certify that you understand the above information? Do you certify that you are at least 18 years of age? And do you certify that by completing the interview you consent to participate in the study

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol Project: MISSISSIPPI DOWNTOWNS: EXAMINING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION AND PLACE-BASED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Time of Interview:

Date:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee:

My name is Cade Slaughter, and I am the primary investigator for this thesis - my phone number is (601) 270-4074 and my email address is rcslaugh@go.olemiss.edu. The title of this study is: "Mississippi Downtowns: Examining the Relationship between Downtown Revitalization and Place-Based Economic Development." This research aims to discover the relationship between place-based economic development and revitalization efforts in the downtowns of New Albany, MS and Hernando, MS. This research derived from a desire to understand efforts of growth, business, and lifestyle revitalization in downtown areas specific to Mississippi. The importance of this research is that it will afford a deeper understanding of place-based economic development, an economic strategy that builds upon existing assets, while connecting such strategy to different stages of revitalization efforts in the aforementioned cities. This study will be completed over the course of this academic semester, and your participation will require approximately 30 minutes of your time. There are no foreseeable risks associated with your participation, and the measured benefits of your participation include the knowledge I hope to gain from your words. Participation is voluntary, and the only alternative is to not participate. The information you share will only be accessible to myself and my research advisor, Dr. Jody Holland, and any identifiable information we discuss will be password protected in the form of the audio recording and the transcribed interview. You have the right to withdraw your participation.

This study has been reviewed by The University of Mississippi's Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a participant of research, please contact the IRB at (662) 915-7482 or irb@olemiss.edu.

Do you certify that you understand the above information? Do you certify that you are at least 18 years of age? And do you certify that by completing the interview you consent to participate in the study

Questions:
In the following interviews, the cities of New Albany, MS and Hernando, MS are being discussed. The character "X" Will denote either city based on the individual being interviewed. The audio recorded and transcribed responses to these questions will be denoted anonymously by way of subject numbers that will be divided into the two categories of association: "New Albany Subject #" or "Hernando Subject #."

1. How would you describe downtown X to someone who has never been to the city before?
2. What is the most attractive characteristic about downtown X to you?
3. Are you familiar with the term "revitalization," and if so what does that word mean to you?
4. Which best describes downtown X to you: a city's downtown a) in need of revitalization; b) in the middle of revitalization; or c) that has already been revitalized?
   a. If you answered a) to the above question, what is the one factor that needs to occur or be pursued by the city in order to reach revitalization?
   b. If you answered b) to the above question, what is the one factor that is occurring or being pursued that is driving said revitalization?
   c. If you answered c) to the above question, what was the one factor that occurred or was pursued that drove the revitalization?
5. If none of the above apply to X in your opinion, explain why.
6. Is tourism something that you believe should be better pursued by the City of X or other development/downtown partners? Elaborate.
7. What are the existing assets that downtown X capitalizes on?