Constructing "Community" in a Changing Economy:
A Case Study Analysis of Local Organizing in the Rural United States

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This dissertation titled
Constructing "Community" in a Changing Economy:
A Case Study Analysis of Local Organizing in the Rural United States

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ABSTRACT

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Constructing "Community" in a Changing Economy: A Case Study Analysis of Local Organizing in the Rural United States

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Disaster can sometimes be a time of opportunity: for reflection, reevaluation, and readjustment—for questioning the status quo. Through a case study of Wilmington, Ohio, a small Ohio town in the midst of a self-described economic disaster, I consider how organizational networks and communities constitute each other in efforts to redefine a sense of place and local identity amid large-scale unplanned change. As I explore the ways in which “community” is named and placed in micro, meso, and macro-level discourses, I am guided by the following broad questions: How do component organizations in a transorganizational network demonstrate and defend their legitimacy? How do they communicatively construct and maintain a shared vision for the future towards which to mobilize a collectivity of individuals? What opportunities for and obstacles to collaboration do community organizers encounter in their efforts to redefine the communal spaces of a town? By analyzing transorganizational narratives of crisis, disaster, and opportunity, this study strives to engage communication studies more deeply in understanding the inextricable relationship between individual, organizational, and community identity.
DEDICATION

“Bernard of Chartres used to compare us to dwarfs perched on the shoulders of giants. He pointed out that we see more and farther than our predecessors, not because we have keener vision or greater height, but because we are lifted up and borne aloft on their gigantic stature.”

-John of Salisbury

To the people and places that have lifted me to such great heights. Without your stable foundation, great strength, and enduring support, I could not stand here today.
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PROLOGUE

I am a Leaver.¹ And in the rural U.S. there are millions of us. No one ever expected me to stay in southwest Ohio. The people who stay are the ones who can’t leave. Long before my high school graduation, teachers, community members, and family friends all asked, “Where are you going to go next?” They assumed I would leave. I was marked at a young age as a Leaver. And so I left. I didn’t even consider colleges in the state of Ohio. Why would I? I graduated at the top of my class and was a three-time First Team All-Conference soccer player. I knew I was going to college, and I knew that college would be far from home. I knew because everyone told me so. I looked at schools in Georgia, New York, North Carolina, and Kentucky before choosing Lake Forest College on the north side of Chicago. I loved the idea of being so close to a big city. I desperately wanted to get out of small town U.S.A.

During the summer following my high school graduation, every get-together with friends was emotional. At least a couple times a week, we would meet at someone’s house for a bonfire in the backyard. We would roast marshmallows and hotdogs, play guitar, tell our favorite stories from our oh-so-distant high school days, and avoid talking about the inevitable future. Toward the end of the summer, our numbers began to dwindle. I felt fortunate to be one of the first to go.

I remember my last bonfire: The fire blazed, illuminating the faces of my friends sitting in a makeshift circle of straw bales. The light flickered off the wall of cornstalks in the field behind us. Despite the laughter and storytelling, I felt a heavy solemnity. I would be leaving for Chicago in a couple days and this could be the last time we would all be together. Most of my friends were Leavers too, so when we packed our bags for college

¹ Carr & Kefalas (2009) coined this term in their sociological study of rural brain drain.
we waved good-bye to this town with no intentions of moving back. Moving back meant you failed. When I hugged my friends good-bye that night, tears streamed down all of our faces. As the bonfire faded away into the distance, I knew I had two options: move away into the great unknown or move back as a failure.

In the time that has passed since I left, those options have started to change. Some of the Leavers are returning but not with their heads hung in shameful defeat. Some of the would-be Leavers are choosing to stay. Difficult economic times and the closing of the area’s largest employer have not left this community untouched. Rather than fleeing, though, some people are choosing to stay home and start a revolution. That community and those people are the subject of this dissertation.

As I typed the last word of that last sentence, I picked up the phone to call my younger brother Chas. Chas was four years behind me in school, so our lives have always run strangely parallel to each other. Now, as I complete my Ph.D. at Ohio University, he is completing a degree in Architecture at the University of Cincinnati. I called Chas because, as I wrote my narrative, I worried that the passage of time had romanticized my memories, that nostalgia had tinged them a sweet shade of sepia. I called him for a reality check. I told my story in the way that I remembered it, but of course, memory can be a funny thing. Because his summer of bonfires and tearful goodbyes was much more recent than mine, I trusted that he would give me truthful feedback if my words were trite or my portrayal overblown.

When I read the last sentence aloud, a heavy silence hung on the line between us. Finally, he said, “I don’t know whether to cry or...” His words trailed off. When he started speaking again, his voice was soft: “That’s my experience too.”
I remembered that Chas had applied early and committed immediately to the architecture program at the University of Cincinnati. Throughout middle school and high school, he had a Bearcats poster hanging in his bedroom, sketched blueprints for our “dream houses” in his spare time, and thoroughly exasperated our parents with constant suggestions for major renovations. I had no doubt that he would be accepted to and attend the prestigious program in Design, Architecture, Art, and Planning (DAAP) at UC. However, until this phone conversation, I didn’t know about his reservations.

“I knew I wanted to go to the University of Cincinnati,” Chas said, “I just wished it wasn’t called that. When people asked me where I was going to college, I’d tell them DAAP, but I never said Cincinnati.”

Chas felt ashamed to be an achiever, a potential Leaver, and to stay in southwest Ohio. Somehow, emphasizing the prestige of the program made the decision to stay more justifiable, but still, he wished Cincinnati weren’t in Ohio. His story confronts me with my own decision to return to Ohio only when I could similarly justify the decision. “Well sure,” I could say, “I’m back in Ohio, but that’s only because I’m getting my Ph.D. And yes, I’m going to Ohio University, but it’s the Scripps College of Communication!” As I had this revelation about my own shame, I felt simultaneously embarrassed and relieved. Embarrassed because I devalued my home so much that I felt a need to distance myself even as I returned to it; relieved because I wasn’t the only one.
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

The National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) cites December 2007 as the beginning of the Great Recession in the United States. The housing market suffered, employers looked for ways to trim their budgets, foreclosures hit a record high (a record that continued to be broken in subsequent months), and unemployment and underemployment skyrocketed. According to NBER (2010), “recession” refers to the period of time between a peak and a trough in economic activity. Therefore, when NBER announced that the recession ended in June 2009, the organization was not suggesting that United States citizens had returned to a pre-financial-crisis standard of living but, rather, that our economic activity had hit its lowest point. Although the recession is officially over, many people are still struggling to recover from the difficulties of the past several years.

The heavy pressure of unemployment, underemployment, and reductions in force (RIFs) pushes down upon the shoulders of many U.S. citizens who are continuing to cope with the shockwaves of the Great Recession. Especially hard-hit have been those regions most dependent on manufacturing and shipping companies for large-scale employment (Carnevale & Smith, 2011). The U.S. region stretching from the Atlantic Ocean on the east to the Mississippi River on the west, and from the Great Lakes on the north to the Ohio River on the south has long been identified by geographers as the Manufacturing Belt or the Factory Belt due to its high concentration of successful industrial towns (see De Geer, 1927; Hartshorne, 1936). Recently, as more of these jobs are shipped overseas or managed more efficiently by machines, this region has seen its proud title replaced by a more derogatory nickname: the Rust Belt.
The exact moment that the identifier “Rust Belt” attached itself to this formerly thriving region is not well documented. However, Safford (2009) purported that the term became popularized during the presidential campaign of 1984 when Walter Mondale accused Ronald Reagan of turning this industrial region into a “rust bowl” (Coleman, 1984; Weinraub, 1984). Over the course of the campaign, reporters slightly modified Mondale’s words and began describing the region as the “rust belt” (Mouat, 1984; Raines, 1984). This region, once known for innovation and industry, entered the 1990s with a reputation for “a proliferation of rusting factories, declining home prices, population losses, high unemployment, and general economic malaise” (Safford, 2009, p. 3). An expanding global market and increasing trends toward deskilling and outsourcing manufacturing jobs have expedited deindustrialization in this part of the United States. Of all of the region’s cities, perhaps the most well-known icon of this tragic slide into economic despair is Rust Belt capital city Detroit.

Until recently, the prevalent media image of Detroit has been one of sad desolation, violence, and crime. With the decline of the U.S. automobile industry, Detroit has seen dramatic population decreases. According to the Center for Youth and Communities (2010), a third of Detroit is vacant; its boundaries encompass an area the size of Manhattan, San Francisco, and Boston combined but with a population that has slipped from nearly two million at its height in the 1950s to a mere 713,777 according to most recent census numbers. In the last decade, Detroit’s population has decreased 25% to the lowest level the city has recorded since the 1910 census (Linebaugh, 2011).

Many Rust Belt cities fell victim to the same hubris as Detroit. They built a community heavily dependent upon one industry for large-scale employment. As
Chambers (1997) stated, “With ecological systems, resilience increases with complexity. Simple systems with few links are vulnerable” (p. 193). Bearing this in mind, perhaps no one should have been surprised about what has happened across the Manufacturing Belt in recent years. The region has experienced, rather abruptly and dramatically, substantial job loss, population flight, and economic hardship as its exulted industries closed down, one by one. A consideration of the exact confluence of local, state, national, and international events that contributed to these economic disasters is beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, suffice it to say, “disaster” is an apt description of the effects on the local communities.

Disaster, however, can sometimes be an unexpected opportunity. As Solnit (2009) noted, “Horrible in itself, disaster is sometimes a door back into paradise, the paradise at least in which we are who we hope to be, do the work we desire, and are each our sister’s and brother’s keeper” (p. 3). In suffering together, community members sometimes find fellowship rather than isolation. According to Fritz (1996), “Disaster provides a form of societal shock which disrupts habitual, institutionalized patterns of behavior and renders people amenable to social and personal change” (p. 55). Of course, change does not always mean progress, but the disruption of the taken-for-granted that occurs in the aftermath of disaster creates opportunities for reflection, reevaluation, and readjustment—for questioning the status quo.

Writing about community response to the Halifax disaster in 1917, Samuel Henry Prince (1920) remarked, “Life becomes like molten metal. It enters a state of flux from which it must reset upon a principle, a creed, or purpose. It is shaken perhaps violently out of rut and routine. Old customs crumble, and instability rules” (p. 19). Large-scale
disaster and hardship, then, awful as they may be, can provide an impetus for collective organizing and a basis for a sense of common purpose. Economic hardship is certainly a different phenomenon than the sort of disaster experienced when a tornado or hurricane devastates a town. However, the dramatic changes in life circumstances imposed as a result of the evacuation of a town’s primary employment base can have effects that cut as deep and last as long as any natural disaster.

To avoid such economic disaster in a world that is increasingly globalized, Friedman (2007) argued, people must strive to be “untouchable” by seeking and creating jobs that are not vulnerable to outsourcing, digitization, or automation. He stated, “In a flat world there is no such thing as an American job. There is just a job, and in more cases than ever before it will go to the best, smartest, most productive, or cheapest worker—wherever he or she resides” (p. 279). Having already learned this painful lesson, and determined to not just survive but to thrive in an increasingly connected global economy, innovative leaders in one small town in southwestern Ohio are changing their approaches to organizing in order to build a local community that is “untouchable.” That town is the subject of this dissertation.

In the rest of this chapter, I provide an introduction to the subject case central to this study. After briefly describing the “rupture” (LeGreco & Tracy, 2009) and local response that serve as the defining moment in this critical case, I justify my choice of this particular town as the research site. Finally, I reflect on my position as a researcher in relation to this case and provide a chapter outline for the rest of this dissertation.
Staying Home and Starting a Revolution

On July 19, 2010, actress Megan Fox invited Wilmington, Ohio resident Mark Rembert to the stage to accept an award at the VH1 Do Something Awards. A lanky young man in his mid-twenties, Rembert strode onstage with a bounce in his step. Beneath his tan jacket he wore a dark brown t-shirt bearing a white outline of the state of Ohio, and in the southwestern corner of the state, a red star hovered with the words, “This is home.” As Rembert hoisted the trophy over his head, he said, “This is for all the people that stayed in Ohio to start a revolution!” The VH1 Do Something Awards celebrated actors, athletes, philanthropists, and innovative young minds that dedicated their energies to helping the world in some way—developing nutritional training programs in Sub-Saharan Africa, creating a dance theatre in New York for physically and developmentally disabled children, or coming home to start a sustainable living movement in rural Ohio in order to combat severe unemployment and to reinvigorate a depressed economy—as Mark Rembert did.

The Rupture: Wilmington’s Largest Employer Closes

Wilmington, Ohio is a Manufacturing Belt town of approximately 12,000 residents, situated on the flat farmlands between Cincinnati, Dayton, and Columbus. As county seat of Clinton County, Wilmington is a quintessential Midwestern town, fully equipped with an idyllic Main Street lined with quaint local businesses. Most people in this part of rural Ohio are employed on local farms, in county schools, or, until May 28, 2008, at the Wilmington Air Park through the German-based mail and freight shipping company DHL (ODOD, 2006; Lynch, 2008; ODOD, 2010). In May 2008, as a result of a struggling economy and decreasing profitability, DHL decided to close its doors on
domestic shipping in the United States, focusing its attention on the international market instead. As a result of the hub closing, about 8,000 people in Clinton and the surrounding counties found themselves suddenly unemployed. In a story entitled, “Towns on the Edge,” former Mayor David Raizk lamented that one out of three Wilmington households had a family member employed at the air park and that he feared as many as one in five small businesses in the area could fail as a result of DHL’s restructuring plan (Barnett, 2008).

DHL’s announcement came in the midst of heated political campaigning for the 2008 presidential election, and suddenly, the town of Wilmington found itself as a priority destination for politicians, journalists, and celebrities from across the nation. Within the first six months following DHL’s restructuring announcement for the Wilmington hub, John McCain, Sarah Palin, and Barack Obama each paid special attention to the town, holding rallies or meeting with community leaders (Hannah, 2008). Ohio Senator Sherrod Brown held community roundtables and created a page on his website specifically for families affected by the closing of the air park (“Sen. Brown unveils web page,” 2008). In the 2010 gubernatorial campaign, monotone images of the Wilmington Air Park populated television ads as each candidate promised to do more to bolster the state economy. Most recently, during the 2012 Republican presidential primary, FOX News Correspondent Mike Huckabee hosted a roundtable forum with candidates Newt Gingrich, Mitt Romney, and Rick Santorum on the subject of jobs and the economy in an empty DHL building at the Wilmington Air Park (Chaffin, March 2012).
Aside from politicians looking for an adequately depressed community to serve as their campaign backdrops, Wilmington was also graced with the presence of several other national icons in the time following DHL’s departure. In 2009, 60 Minutes aired two special reports—titled “The Winter of Our Hardship: A Town in Crisis” and “Wilmington’s Long Recession”—investigating the emotional and economic toll of job loss in the area (Klug & Flaum, 2009a, 2009b). Also in 2009, comedian Jay Leno invited area residents to a free Mother’s Day comedy show (Hannah, 2009), and celebrity chef Rachael Ray brought in her crew to renovate Sugartree Ministries, the local food pantry, and hosted a special Thanksgiving dinner with musical guests Nick Lachey and the popular band The Fray (Freed & Farley, 2009). Rounding out the guest list, in late 2010, conservative media personality Glenn Beck hosted his holiday show, which he called “America’s First Christmas,” in the historic Murphy Theater in downtown Wilmington.

And so, Wilmington, Ohio was catapulted into the national media as a poster child for the Great Recession. On 60 Minutes and The Rachael Ray Show, interviews with Wilmington residents captured the tearful stories of devastation, despair, and fear. Artistic camera operators panned the historic downtown windows displaying ‘For Sale’ and ‘For Rent’ signs, lingering on the image of an American flag waving in the reflection of a window above a small business. Headline after headline dripped with woeful adjectives and story after story opened with descriptions of picturesque Wilmington, followed abruptly by bleak unemployment statistics and depressing anecdotes.

A Local Response: Energize Clinton County Forms

Meanwhile, Taylor Stuckert and Mark Rembert, 2003 graduates of Wilmington High School, returned to their hometown after completing undergraduate degrees in
Philosophy and Economics respectively. When DHL announced the closure of the Wilmington hub, Taylor was volunteering for the Peace Corps in Bolivia, where he worked in the Agriculture Extension program, and Mark was living and working in West Philadelphia for a start-up public relations firm. In the fall of 2008, Taylor returned home to Wilmington prematurely when the Peace Corps was evacuated from Bolivia due to political turmoil. Long-time friends, Taylor and Mark planned to enroll in Peace Corps service to Ecuador together the following spring, but upon Taylor’s return, decided instead to set up camp in Wilmington to direct their energies toward local, rather than international development.

In November 2008, Mark and Taylor founded Energize Clinton County (ECC), an organization dedicated to working with the Wilmington community to realize its potential, capitalize on its resources, and respond to what Martin Luther King, Jr. referred to as “the fierce urgency of now.” According to the ECC website, the organization’s name came from “the energy we [Mark and Taylor] felt when we chose not to accept this fate and began to contemplate the now-available opportunities and the amazing potential for our hometown” (Rembert & Stuckert, 2008). In this way, through its portrayal in news media sources, blogs, and interviews, Wilmington, Ohio became a contested space as various rhetors sought to ascribe meaning to the vacancies left by DHL’s departure.

Former Ohio Governor Ted Strickland drew attention to this definitional battle in his speech to the City Club of Cleveland on July 11, 2008. He began by reciting the portrayal of Ohio cities as widely described by national and international media. According to these sources, Ohio is battered, despairing, suffering a self-inflicted economic death, and facing a bleak economic winter. According to a London newspaper,
The Observer, “Only the prospect of full employment, a home, good schools and everything else the American dream promises made life tolerable in this harsh country” (Doran, 2008). Following his melodramatic performance of these depressing descriptions, Strickland stated simply, “You’re wrong. Ohio has too many strengths, too many successes, too much talent, too noble a history to reach such erroneous conclusions based on superficial observations.”

In Wilmington, Mark Rembert and Taylor Stuckert echoed Strickland’s sentiments. In founding ECC, Mark and Taylor refused to interpret DHL’s departure as an occasion for despair: “This great crisis has presented Clinton County with the opportunity to become a model and testing ground for technologies and development strategies that will lead Ohio’s and America’s economy through the 21st century” (Rembert & Stuckert, 2008). Therefore, where the national media found a people to be pitied, ECC saw the potential for progress.

In 2009, ECC succeeded in establishing Wilmington as a Green Enterprise Zone. According to Mark’s comments at a June 4, 2009 Wilmington city council meeting, this project was motivated by multiple factors. First, a national effort, funded by the American Recovery Reinvestment Act, committed $60 billion to promoting green economic development in the U.S. Additionally, in 2008, the state of Ohio passed the Renewable Energy Portfolio Standards, which required by 2025 that 12.5% of all of Ohio’s energy be produced from renewable sources. Recognizing potential for economic growth in these areas, Mark and Taylor saw an opportunity in positioning Wilmington at the forefront of the green energy and sustainable living movements. According to meeting transcripts, ECC’s goal in establishing Wilmington as a Green Enterprise Zone was to spur
investment in green industry, technology, and infrastructure, thereby attracting federal grant money and new job opportunities to the Clinton County area.

Mark and Taylor began working closely with local organizations, networking with downtown business leaders and local government officials, and allowing each day’s agenda to be set by emergent problems. Beyond the buzz words of green energy, ECC’s broad mission was unclear, but they were passionately motivated to participate in economic redevelopment efforts, rather than sit by and watch. This lack of focused direction meant that many people in town struggled to understand what ECC sought to accomplish and therefore how to evaluate if they were being successful, but also, it opened up unending collaborative opportunities for the pair. Through these collaborative relationships with existing organizations in the Clinton County area, Mark and Taylor’s initial focus on green jobs and energy efficiency initiatives slowly morphed into a broader mission of developing a more resilient local economy. They helped to develop and nurture a Buy Local campaign, rejuvenate a county-wide farmers’ market, and kickstart efforts to attract and retain young professionals to the Wilmington area.

Initially, the only media attention ECC attracted was local or regional at best, but by March 2009, Mark and Taylor gained access to a national stage through interviews with NPR and CNN. In March 2010, Wilmington and Clinton County were selected to receive nearly $1 million to fund local renewable energy projects through the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant program. On May 10 through May 14, 2010, NPR ran a five-part series, titled “Wilmington’s Homegrown Hope,” featuring stories of several local organizations working together to rebuild this town’s economy. The series began with Mark and Taylor telling the story of ECC’s growth and evolution.
As illustrated in this series, many of the programs that flourished in Wilmington in response to DHL’s departure had permeable boundaries. A local network emerged and began working to change the way people—local citizens as well as national media sources—talked about Wilmington. In the aftermath of DHL’s May 28, 2008 announcement, campaigns directed toward increasing local economic activity multiplied and the boundaries between organizations blurred as networks of community members sought to save their town from the worst case scenario of economic death.

The story I just told is one partial, incomplete version of a public narrative regarding economic redevelopment efforts in Wilmington following DHL’s departure. The founders of Energize Clinton County and the organizations with which they worked represented only a small portion of the rhetors active in shaping public discourse at the local level. In fact, the most visible public source of a local message answering DHL’s announcement could be traced back to the office of then-mayor David Raizk, who immediately formed an Economic Task Force to coordinate the response efforts of leaders in politics, business, and the civil sector. Additionally, city council meetings and online forums hosted by the local newspaper became hotspots for public participation as they provided discursive spaces for Wilmington citizens to contest the “reality” of the town’s current economic situation.

So, although ECC represents but one organizational character in this complex narrative of interwoven discourses, I began by introducing their story because theirs is the story I knew first. Before I spoke to mayors past and present, before I dug through public records and national discourses, before I embarked on this project as an intellectual pursuit, I followed the evolution of ECC from the perspective of an interested Leaver far
from home. I was intrigued because Mark and Taylor were supposed to be Leavers too. We were all high-achievers in high school, and we went away. However, they returned to Wilmington to throw their voices in the mix and to participate in shaping that public narrative about the future of the rural US in a global economy. And when they did, I paid attention. So, whatever the role ECC played in the initial response to DHL’s departure, their story framed my intrigue with this topic, and so, their story also frames this dissertation.

The various competing, complimenting, conflicting, and coinciding narratives constructed as several rhetors simultaneously worked to shape public discourse concerning economic development in Wilmington demonstrates the divergent policy implications of the stories we tell. I have already introduced one set of those rhetors, but this dissertation plucks many more voices from the cacophony—community leaders, politicians, businesspeople, educators, citizens, and philanthropists—whose efforts in Wilmington and Clinton County helped to reconfigure a sense of collective identity in the absence of their leading employer. In weaving together their stories, in exploring their constructions of Wilmington’s past, present, and future, I explore the rhetoric of community-level organizing in the midst of major change.

Justification for this Case

Wilmington’s story is a familiar one for many people in the U.S. Small towns across the country have struggled with constructing and negotiating new place-based identities in the face of recession, job loss, and community reorganization. In this dissertation, I chose to focus on the competing discourses working to construct the identity of one such town. The difficulties experienced by Wilmington citizens are not
entirely unique to the town; many places have struggled just as much, if not more. The organizing efforts of Mark Rembert, Taylor Stuckert, and others are also not remarkably different from the sustainability and revitalization movements cropping up in rural and urban settings alike across the U.S. Wilmington is not easily recognized by name outside of the region and, although the town has received substantial media attention in recent years, large urban centers like Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Detroit are far more likely to be identified as key cases for understanding the impact of economic disaster.

However, I chose to study Wilmington because its story is ordinary and familiar. At a general level, this case study analyzes the events surrounding the departure of a large corporation leaving a community that had grown dependent. The drama of such a massive organization leaving such a small town at the height of the Great Recession made Wilmington’s situation a key case (Thomas, 2011) due to the inherent interest of this case to the particular phenomenon of organizing in times of unplanned change. So, I also chose Wilmington precisely because the town population is small and the surroundings are rural. Too often, only distant populations in countries half a globe away are highlighted as victims of unintended consequences of globalization. A cursory glance at recent research on rural development leads to Latin America, Africa, and Eastern Europe. Meanwhile, a silent crisis is occurring in the rural U.S.

The term “rural” is largely subjective and defined differently by geographers, sociologists, and funding agencies. According to Cromartie and Bucholtz (2008), the portion of the U.S. population considered rural ranges from 17 to 49 percent depending on which definition is used. Wilmington currently self-identifies as a rural small town on the city website, and the Ohio Department of Development (2010) described the county
land use as being 2.13% urban (residential, commercial, industrial, and transportation) and 97.36% cropland, pasture, and forest.

The silent crisis experienced in rural settings like Wilmington has been referred to as a “hollowing out,” which Carr and Kefalas (2009) defined as, “the devastating loss of educated and talented young people, the aging of the population, and the erosion of the local economy” (p. ix). As shifts in the global market create fewer post-industrial options for rural people than metropolitan U.S. Americans (Cole, 2009), the rural small town threatens to disappear altogether. Community organizers gather their resources to save the condemned places they call home in resistance to arguments that places such as Wilmington are icons of a by-gone era, like mining and frontier towns of the Old West, and that they will fade away in similar fashion.

Reflections on Positionality

I chose Wilmington as my research site for many reasons, but not least of all because of my own personal connection to the place and the people that constitute this town. When I write about the silent crisis of brain drain in rural America, I feel a sense of guilt knowing that I am implicated in that statement. I am a Leaver, and Wilmington is my home. Sort of. I have a complicated relationship with the town and people of Wilmington that uniquely positioned me for this dissertation research. I am, and always have been, at once an insider and an outsider in Wilmington. My father has taught math and coached wrestling at Wilmington High School my entire life. My sister worked at the Air Park for two summers as an intern in the communications department. My three siblings and I all attended Wilmington High School where we were active participants in varsity athletics, student governance, theatrical productions, and other extracurricular and
service organizations. However, we are not Wilmington citizens. My family lives thirty minutes down the road in a one stoplight town called Fayetteville.

Therefore, although I have at times been deeply entrenched in Clinton County politics, I cannot vote there. When ordinances pass and local officials are elected, they do not directly affect or represent me. However, McKerrow (2010) conceived of citizenship as active community engagement, stating that, in simplest terms, “one’s identity as citizen is expressed through his or her actions within a public space” (p. 78). Therefore, although my family lives in Fayetteville, it might be said that we constructed ourselves as Wilmington citizens through our active participation in the Wilmington community. So, when television cameras rolled in from all directions to broadcast news of DHL’s departure, and when this small Midwestern town became a talking point for presidential candidates in 2008 and again in 2012, the political became deeply personalized and the personal became unavoidably politicized.

Summary and Dissertation Overview

In response to the state of affairs in Wilmington following DHL’s exit, various rhetors sought to reconstruct the story of who the people of this town have been, currently are, and possibly can be. As just one example of the competing discourses surrounding this situation, I introduced Mark Rembert and Taylor Stuckert who together founded ECC to combat the bleak representation of economic conditions as constructed by national news services. Their rhetorical construction of Wilmington as a place of possibility challenged popular media portrayals of the town as a microcosm of a devastated America. Each of these constructions resonated in different ways with the lived experiences of Clinton County residents. Each of these constructions demanded a
different policy response. As the organizing principles of the retrospective narratives shift, so too do the prescriptions for the future of the community. This dissertation explores implications of the contentious and multivocal process of constructing “community” when the central anchor has been destabilized.

This topic has deep roots across disciplinary boundaries, and I draw upon these various histories in Chapter Two in order to enrich my own study of collective identity, leadership, and social change. Researchers in organizational communication, management, and planning have explored issues of employee identification, workplace leadership, and interorganizational collaboration during times of dramatic change. Scholars and practitioners in development, responding to broader community changes, have considered the role of narrative in diffusing innovative ideas and creating large-scale social change. Geographers, urban planners, and architects have studied community development by attending to the relationships between social organization, landscapes, and the built environment. I hope to build bridges across these silos, so that we might better understand the interactive relationship between the symbolic and the material conditions that enable and constrain social organizing in times of uncertainty and destabilization.

Through interviews, ethnographic observations, and document analysis, I trace the discourses of power and knowledge active in shaping community identity across micro, meso, and macro-levels of interaction. Research on dialogue and conflict has too often attended to micro or macro-level discourses to the neglect of the interconnections between discourses (Barge, 2006). The method employed in this dissertation speaks directly to that critique in an effort to better understand the ways in which broad social
discourses shape and are shaped by locally situated practices, and vice versa. I describe these methods in great detail in Chapter Three.

The final three chapters present the products of this research endeavor. First, Chapter Four is a case narrative, which details the organizing efforts in the Wilmington area from May 2008 until 2012. Chapter Five is an analytical essay, which describes a conceptual framework for understanding policy implications of narratives of crisis, disaster, and opportunity. And finally, Chapter Six pulls apart the interwoven stories presented in the case narrative and analytical essay in order to discuss theoretical and practical implications and general conclusions.

As I begin my investigation of community organizing in the midst of economic disaster, I am guided by the following broad questions: How do component organizations in a transorganizational network, such as ECC, demonstrate and defend their legitimacy? How do they communicatively construct and maintain a shared vision for the future towards which to mobilize a collectivity of individuals? What obstacles do community organizers encounter in their efforts to redefine the communal spaces of a town? By exploring the relationship between a transorganizational network’s discursive constructions of “community” and collectivity in times of change, this study strives to engage communication studies more deeply in understanding the inextricable relationship between individual, organizational, and community identity.
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the broadest terms, this dissertation examines how “community” is constructed in the midst of dramatic change. In a small town, large industries can have a significant impact on local culture as employees identify themselves with their work and as community leaders and area businesses forge connections in an effort to strengthen the community network. As such, when the leading employer leaves a rural community, the destabilizing effect on the community at large requires a collective response. This dissertation studies how new narratives are co-constructed—at micro, meso, and macro levels—in an effort to reestablish or re-envision a sense of coherence.

To lay a theoretical foundation for that analysis, this chapter begins by reviewing the literature on identity construction within organizational settings during times of stability and change. To this end, I provide an overview of previous research on identification, visioning, and transformational leadership within traditional workplaces. I then describe how this theoretical and practical workplace research can inform inquiries into communicative practices across organizational boundaries by exploring literature on collective identity, interorganizational collaboration, and transorganizational narratives. Finally, I contextualize this research within the lived spaces of Wilmington, Ohio by situating “community building” within this particular built environment.

Constituting Organizational Identities

Historically, organizational communication has adopted management research as its scholarly foundation, as evidenced by textbook authors’ tendency to move through classical management, human relations, and human resources approaches to studying organizations as their introduction to the field (see, for example, Eisenberg & Goodall,
2001; Miller, 2006; Taylor & Van Every, 2011). As a result, scholarly investigations into the question of how communication constitutes organizational realities have all too often been confined within the rigid boundaries of traditional economically-oriented organizations, with a focus on improving productivity and efficiency through communication practices.

This focus on workplace communication meant that most early studies implicitly adopted a container metaphor in which communication existed as something that happened within organizations. Although the container metaphor is limiting in ways that I will discuss in greater detail later in this section, narrowing the scope of research to the corporate workplace has produced well-defined, fruitful scholarship that has been instrumental in developing a better sense of the ways in which individuals form collectives oriented toward common interests, goals, or understandings of “the good.” This section provides an overview of literature in organizational communication, management, and planning on some of the greatest contributors to current understandings of organizing collective behavior: organizational identification, visioning, and transformational leadership.

**Organizational Identification**

Operating within this workplace-as-container metaphor, Cheney (1983b) introduced Burke’s rhetoric of identification to organizational communication research. Burke (1950/1969) explained identification as being a state of believing oneself to be joined to another insofar as their interests are joined. In discovering common ground, individuals might be “at once a distinct substance and consubstantial with another” (Burke, 1950/1969, p. 21). Consubstantiality refers, therefore, to real or perceived
overlap between parties, which can serve as the basis for collective identity and a sense of group belonging. Since Cheney’s (1983b) study, research on organizational identification has proliferated to consider the phenomenon as it relates to various outcomes, such as individual satisfaction and organizational effectiveness (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Pratt, 1998); and within organizations during various changes, including shifts in management and temporary labor (Barker, 1998; Gossett, 2002, 2006), mergers and downsizings (van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, Mondene, & Lima, 2002), and new technological and economic conditions (Scott, 2001; Thatcher & Zhu, 2006; Wisenfeld, Raghuram, & Garud, 1999).

Across these organizational changes—shifts in management, mergers and downsizing, new technological and economic conditions—scholars in organizational communication have emphatically argued for the important role of communication in the change process. In an effort to substantiate some of these claims regarding the central role of communication, Farmer, Slater, and Wright (1998) studied the communicative processes through which members achieved shared vision under new leadership. They argued that the ability to provide a future vision around which employees can organize is critical for successful leadership. Returning to our disciplinary roots in management, a practical need to better understand effective communication during organizational change has resulted in a corpus of literature developing on visioning and leadership.

Visioning and Transformational Leadership

In a central work on both of these topics, Burns (1978) distinguished between transactional and transformational leadership. *Transactional leadership* essentially amounts to traditional top-down management. Leaders demand particular results and
workers are rewarded for delivering those results. In contrast, *transformational leadership* requires the ability to use inspiration and vision to motivate followers to work toward a collective goal (Avolia, Waldman, & Yammarino, 1991; Warrick, 2011). In different situations, each leadership style can be useful.

However, in the uncertainty, flux, and change of the current global economy, Warrick (2011) argued, “There is an urgent need in organizations of all types and sizes for transformational leaders who have the courage and skills to reinvent and build organizations capable of succeeding in today’s times of dynamic change and scarce resources” (p. 11). Transformational leaders, therefore, are charismatic individuals capable of organizing horizontally, motivating others to transcend individual goals, and networking to build a strong resource base. In order to accomplish the goals of transformational leadership, visioning becomes an important communicative task.

Visioning is a term that has been used widely by practitioners in planning and management and carries with it sometimes Utopian connotations of the imaginary (Shipley, 2000). In order to move from visioning to creating, communication is key. Having a clear vision requires “knowing who you are, where you’re going, and what will guide your journey” (Blanchard & Stoner, 2003, p. 14). This ability to develop and communicate a comprehensible “roadmap” (Barge, 1994, p. 183), “agenda” (Kotter, 1982, p. 60), or “set of blueprints for what the organization will be in the future” (Tichy & DeVanna, 1986, p. 128), has been found by management scholars to be central to effective organizing (Peters & Waterman, 1982; Blanchard & Stoner, 2003). However, developing a comprehensible vision is necessary, but not sufficient, to successful leadership in times of change. In fact, developing a vision is not even the first step.
According to Tichy and Devanna (1986) leaders attempting to transform an organization must first recognize the need for change; second, create a new vision; and third, institutionalize change.

The ability to implement change is a critical skill for transformational leaders. Kotter (1996) outlined an eight-step model for transforming organizations: (1) establish a sense of urgency; (2) create the guiding coalition; (3) develop a vision and strategy; (4) communicate the change vision; (5) empower employees for broad-based action; (6) generate short-term wins; (7) consolidate gains and produce more change; and (8) anchor new approaches in the culture. Most of this writing about visioning and transformational leadership has come from practitioners and consultants in planning and management; and so, although these models have served as useful heuristics for training purposes, very little work has sought to systematically analyze the communicative processes involved in this sort of organizing outside of an organization-as-container model.

This section has outlined major contributions from communication studies on identification and from management and planning literature on visioning and transformational leadership. Taken together, these two bodies of research help to inform our current understandings of the ways in which individuals transcend personal goals in pursuit of some collective “good.” As demonstrated through this brief survey, most of this research has been confined to the boundaries of traditional workplaces. Even where scholars have studied settings outside of corporate, economic culture—as in studies of identification in nursing teams (Apker, Propp, & Zabava Ford, 2009) and intercollegiate forensics teams (Croucher, Long, Meredith, Oommen, & Steele, 2009)—the subject organizations have had clearly delineated and fairly unmoving boundaries. With the
dominance of the container approach to studying organizational communication, the ways in which individuals constitute both organizational and community identities in the larger sense of locality—region, city, town, or neighborhood—has been neglected. In the following section, I provide an overview of the work of scholars seeking to fill this void.

Constituting Collective Identities across Organizational Boundaries

With the interpretive turn of the 1980s, many organizational communication scholars made a commitment to shift the focus of their research from the communication that occurs in organizations to the “organizing features of communication” (Cheney, 2000, p. 25). Out of this shift, two strands of distinct but related theorizing have emerged around the communicative construction of organization (CCO). McPhee and colleagues (McPhee & Iverson, 2009; McPhee & Zaug, 2000) have developed a widely cited theory that conceptualizes organizations as composed of four message flows: self-structuring, membership negotiation, activity coordination, and institutional positioning (for a detailed summary of four flows CCO theorizing, see Putnam & Nicotera, 2009). Although operating from similar assumptions about the importance of communication in organizing processes, the second strand of CCO research conceives of communication as the “site” and “surface” of organization (Taylor & Van Every, 2000). Each theory contributes useful heuristics (flows versus site/surface) for thinking about the relationship between communication and organizing.

The perspective I adopt in this dissertation, however, aligns with the “Montreal School” of James Taylor, Francois Cooren, and their colleagues at the Université de Montréal. Drawing upon a rich philosophical foundation of works by Karl Weick, Harold Garfinkel, Deirdre Boden, Alfred Schutz, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Stanley
Deetz, this organizational theory proposes that communication exists at the intersection of text and conversation. Text refers to words and phrases pieced together in more or less systematic ways to create understandable segments of language. Texts impose patterns that organize conversation and also transcend it. Complementary to text is conversation, which refers to the “total universe of shared interaction-through-languaging of the people who together identify with a given organization” (Taylor & Van Every, 2000, p. 35). So, as speakers draw upon a repertoire of texts to structure their conversations, organization emerges in communication with conversation as the site and text, its surface.

Informed by the Montreal School, I argue that the subjective experience of community life is only possible through its representation in language. “Community” must be constructed as a discursive text in order to be comprehensible and have meaning in the intersubjectivity of a conversation. That is, rather than hoping to discover some internal psychological sense of belonging that unites a collection of individuals into some larger group (be it a public, an organization, a community, or a nation), I ask, how do patterns of communication (conversation and text) organize our world into perceptible collectivities? I do not assume that something called a “community” exists a priori in the world. Instead, I consider how the discourse of “community” is claimed by or attributed to a collection of individuals and how an organizational structure we come to recognize as “community” emerges through communication.

This constitutive approach to studying organizational communication expands earlier notions of communication as something that occurs within organizations to consider how communication organizes. This broadened understanding of organizational communication better positions scholars to study the complex boundary-spanning
organizing practices that characterize large portions of the contemporary global economy. Lewis (2005) suggested:

[A more contextual and “open systems” perspective] repositions the locus of our research and theory from a firm-centered approach that examines the relationships of the individual firm within its own boundaries or with its own immediate environment, to a community-centered exploration of how organizations within a community participate and engage one another and the citizens that make up the community. (p. 249)

In contemporary society, organizational boundaries often blur at the edges as more interorganizational collaboration contributes to increasing permeability. The processes involved in creating a sense of coherence and collectivity across increasingly fluid boundaries are largely communication processes as members negotiate a “common substance” to form a shared identity and purpose (Chaput, Brummans, & Cooren, 2011).

Most of the research on organizational identification during times of stability or change seeks to define the degree to which members of closed-system organizations consider themselves to be part of or associated with said organization. Several organizational identification scales exist to measure sense of belonging, membership, and shared values (for examples, see Cheney, 1983a; Edwards & Peccei, 2007; Mael & Ashworth, 1992). These measures act as valuable social-psychological indicators of individuals’ sense of self in relation to organizations. However, such an approach to studying collective identity assumes that the organization has existential precedence and identification follows. Conceiving of communication as an organizing practice, as the Montreal School does, flips that precedence on its head and therefore requires a shift in
scholarly attention from internal experiences of organizational identification to external expressions of group belonging. This move brings us to the concept of collective identity.

Collective identity has been defined as “the image that a collective constructs of itself and with which its members identify” (Assmann, 1992, p. 132, translated in Glover, 2004). The act of construction is highlighted in this definition because, without individual identification with a collectivity, no “we-identity” exists. As Glover (2004) explained, “By sharing a tale of a collective ‘we,’ in other words, members bring the associations to which they belong into existence” (p. 47). Collective identity serves as a motivator of collective action in interorganizational collaborations (IOCs) as relationships create legitimacy (Human & Provan, 2000; Wry, Lounsbury, & Glynn, 2011), social capital (Kramer, 2006), and moral obligation (Whetten, 2006) between involved individuals and organizations. Citing the temporary and variable nature of boundary-spanning organizational relationships, Koschmann (In Press) claims that additional research is needed to account for meaningful differences between the communicative constitution of collective identity in IOCs versus traditional notions of organizational identity.

In the past decade, this literature on interorganizational collaborations has expanded exponentially as organizational communication, sociology, and management scholars have attempted to better understand the interwoven fabrics of contemporary global society (for a review, see Barringer & Harrison, 2000; Lewis, Isbell, & Koschmann, 2010). Expanding and traversing organizational boundaries in this way complicates the very idea of social organizing. After all, as Harter and Krone (2001) note, “For any social organization to function, there must exist a common set of norms, values, and expectations” (p. 259; see also, Jablin, 1987). Each of the community organizations
that participated in the economic redevelopment network in Wilmington, for example, existed in a complex web of relationships with one another in a way that could stimulate, constrain, or challenge their actions. Research in this area, therefore, attempts to account for the complicated processes of value negotiation, identity construction, and relational maintenance central to interorganizational collaboration.

Although the communication discipline has been an active site for some of these scholarly conversations, organizational communication scholars still have much more to offer to research on the related topic of transorganizational networks. Management scholars make a nuanced distinction between inter- and trans-organizational phenomena (Hayden, 1992). Interorganizational communication refers to interactions between distinct organizations that may or may not be highly interconnected and embedded in a shared context. In contrast, transorganizational communication refers to messages, rules, stories, and the like that transcend organizational boundaries, interpenetrating and blurring functional boundaries.

Interorganizational collaboration is certainly an integral part of Wilmington’s economic redevelopment story; however, the literature on transorganizational narratives is somewhat more relevant to the specific focus of this dissertation. Additionally, a prolific body of literature exists around narrative identity more generally, not all of which is relevant to this study. For that reason, this section provides a selective and partial overview of literature related to collective identity and narrative before focusing more specifically on studies of narrative identity in development and social change research. I then introduce the narrative frame (transorganizational narrative) that will most directly inform this study.
Narrating Collective Identity

Questions of identity formation and negotiation permeate social inquiry. Communication scholars have long participated in the interdisciplinary search for explanations of how individuals define themselves in relation to others, how meaning is constructed in interaction, and how collections of individuals co-create a sense of social reality. Differently described as a “paradigm of human communication” (Fisher, 1987) and “equipment for living” (Burke, 1941/1973), narrative has been understood by innumerable scholars as an important tool for creating a sense of self in relation to others. A quick EBSCO search of “stories” and “self” returns a results list of more than 10,000 articles in communication, philosophy, and sociology alone.

Let us assume then, as this massive body of literature would suggest, that narrative, social interaction, and identity exist in an important and mutually-constituting relationship with one another. To quote just one narrative scholar on this point, MacIntyre (1984) purported,

The story of my life is always embedded in the story of those communities from which I derive my identity. I am born with a past, and to try to cut myself off from that past, in the individualist mode, is to deform my present relationships. (p. 221)

Taking MacIntyre seriously on this point results in a highly complicated conception of identity as a multiply-authored narrative construction. If the story of my life depends upon the storytelling of others, I am never the sole author of my own narrative. Furthermore, I simultaneously live my life and act as a character in the stories of other people’s lives. As we co-construct our lives in relation to one another, we negotiate issues of identity and what we accept as narrative truth.
Warning against conceptions of stories as mere modes of transmitting truth or reality, organizational communication scholars study how communication discursively constructs organizational reality (Cooren, 1999) and argue that stories act as mediators, making experience meaningful and communicable by providing a “framework for reality construction in the organization” (Brown, 1986, p. 80). This perspective rejects presumptions that stories are “just recipes for stringing together a set of ‘hard facts,’” arguing instead that, “in some profound, often puzzling way, stories construct the facts that comprise them” (Amsterdam & Bruner, 2000, p. 111). Specifically, stories organize a sense of shared reality by aiding comprehension, suggesting a causal order, guiding action, and conveying common values (Weick, 1995). In this way, as they participate in storytelling practices, organizational members actively create an organizational reality (Frost, et al., 1985; Mumby, 1987; Pondy, et al., 1983; Putnam & Pacanowsky, 1983; Smircich, 1983).

Stories, therefore, are organizationally significant because they construct webs of relationships, which provide bases for social action either with or against another entity:

Stories create protagonists and oppose them to antagonists… They establish a framework of enablers (allies, patrons, instruments, and opportunities) and barriers (opponents, complications, evil forces). They create a schedule of phases of action to be realized… They structure the conversational world by interpreting it and, in the process, shape the meaning we give to events. (Taylor, 2005, p. 213). So, narration constitutes collectivities—in-groups and out-groups, “us” and “them”—in this process of relational web-building. Linde (1993) contributed to this argument by suggesting that “we use these stories to claim or negotiate group membership and to
demonstrate that we are in fact worthy members of those groups, understanding and properly following their moral standards” (p. 3). Therefore, community associations exist as a type of collective identity insofar as they are socially constructed entities that are imagined and known through the stories that members tell about them (Polletta, 1998). In the community setting, negotiating identity through stories becomes especially complex because so many rhetors are active in the joint storytelling process. Moving from dyadic, small group, or organizational storytelling into the realm of community or society makes apparent power dynamics and inequalities that have been well-studied by scholars in the area of development and social change.

*Development Communication and Social Change*

Understandings of community membership and group boundaries become especially important when we move into development research. Quebral (1971/2006) defined development communication as those messages designed to stimulate the rapid transformation of a community “from poverty to a dynamic state of economic growth that makes possible greater social equality and the larger fulfillment of the human potential” (p. 54). Interestingly, she followed this definition with an off-handed comment that, given this definition, development communication can only be a Third World phenomenon. As the field has developed over the past few decades, most scholars in this area have begun with the same assumption: If we are talking about transforming a people from poverty to economic growth, we must be talking about some unfortunate population in Africa, Asia, or Latin America. However, as I argued in Chapter One, many of these same power dynamics, problems, and unintended consequences of globalization are being felt in the rural United States as well.
Development communication scholars’ focus on quickly disseminated messages intended to stimulate change and growth has meant that the sort of narratives they tend to study have largely been stories propagated by the mass media, as demonstrated by the substantial area of research devoted to popular culture and entertainment-education (e.g., Fernandez, 1999/2006; Singhal, 2003/2006; Storey, 1999/2006; Tufte, 2005/2006). However, development research also has a long history of advocating participatory approaches to creating social change, arguing that the people who constitute the community must be included in public decision making and public definitions of collective visions for the future (e.g., Bessette & Rajasunderam, 1996/2006; Downing, 2001/2006; Yoon, 1996/2006). In fact, a central goal of development communication is to stimulate public awareness of planned change (Quebral, 1971/2006), which sounds a lot like the sort of action transformational leaders are supposed to demonstrate in clearly communicating a shared vision.

Communities experiencing change and organizations experiencing change cope with many of the same problems (though of course on a different scale)—uncertainty, a need for vision and leadership, and a need to negotiate sometimes incommensurate narrative definitions of group identity. So, applied to the area of social change, storytelling takes a decidedly critical turn. In times of change, as old definitions outlive their use and organizational boundaries soften, power dynamics do not disappear. As organizations and societies in flux seek to create coherence and a collective “we,” the unheard stories become just as important as the public ones. For this dissertation, I chose to focus on the public stories, the “elite” narratives of leaders, movers and shakers. From an economic redevelopment perspective, these elite narratives warrant scholarly attention.
because they function as a rhetorical resource to attract (or repel) businesses, to receive grants, and to retain/attract (or expel/repel) community members.

Who, though, has the power to speak, to define, to lead? These questions are consequential in development research, but also in communication research on deliberation and the public sphere. Fraser (1990) criticized Habermas and other theorists of the public sphere for their assumptions that issues of power can be set aside in public forums merely by advocating respect and asking participants to talk to one another as if they were social equals. Rather, defining public spaces—materially and discursively—is a highly ideological, power-imbued, and contestable endeavor. Research about the public sphere has begun to shift from normative theory about ideal speech situations (Habermas, 1971/2001) to practical theory about “actually existing democracy” (Fraser, 1990; Tracy, 2010). As deliberative theory reaches for grounding in practical application, organizing around development and change makes the community an ideal site for research.

*Storytelling and Transorganizational Networks*

Given the similar communication needs in both organizations and communities following dramatic change, I adopt a narrative frame from management research in order to explore the narrative aspects of leadership in community development. Specifically, the literature on transorganizational narratives (Boje, 2011) provides rich avenues for investigating the imaginative process through which member organizations of community networks communicatively construct and maintain a shared vision for the future.

In 1972, Samuel A. Culbert, J. Max Elden, Will McWhinney, Warren Schmidt, and Bob Tannenbaum—then associates at UCLA—called for more investigations into the processes of transorganizational networking, which Boje and Hillon (2008) defined as
“planned change in the collective relationships of a variety of stakeholders to accomplish something beyond the capability of any single organization or individual” (p. 652). From their perspective, new opportunities arise when boundary-spanning organizing practices are considered as part of the larger ecological system of a community. The focus of this dissertation is the unplanned change of municipality-level organization due to corporate restructuring, rather than planned changes of mergers, acquisitions, or the like. In this way, my study expands management theory regarding transorganizational narrative during planned change to consider boundary-spanning storytelling in the midst of disruption, disaster, and crisis.

Boje’s (2011) triadic model of transorganizational narratives outlines three genres of storytelling prevalent in organizational development. According to this model, the first genre of storytelling is a retrospective account with a beginning, middle, and end. In this way, retrospective sense-making is a past-oriented narrative genre that ossifies experience into a coherent story. The second genre of the triadic model is the living story of the present. Sensitive to the dynamism of unfolding action, living stories might be likened to a tour insofar as each plot twist is dependent upon sense-making in the present tense. The third genre exists along the frontier of the future. Antenarratives is defined by Boje (2011) as “a bet on the future pattern . . . It is also a before narrative that serves as a hypothesis of the trajectory of unfolding events that avoids the pitfalls of premature narrative closure” (p. 1; see also, Boje, 2001, 2007, 2008). The process of creating an antenarrative, therefore, is an act of actively imagining possible futures and organizing around that storied potentiality.
Collective organizing in changing economic conditions requires this sort of imagining together in order to bridge organizational boundaries to work toward some common goal. According to Boje and Hillon (2008), transorganizational networks form as “[e]ach stakeholder negotiates the meaning of the collective story. Each story is a fragment, a perspective on the whole” (p. 652). These stories do not form entirely separate from the material conditions of each component organization. As Young (2005) suggested, people associate particular memories, stories, and dreams with certain spaces. Therefore, disparate people identifying with various organizations collaborate and conflict with one another as their stories collide in public spaces. As such, constructing and maintaining spaces as “public” serve as important means of constituting collective identity and co-authoring transorganizational antenarratives.

Community Building and the Built Community

The organizational practices of community building are both enabled and constrained by particular physical conditions of the built environment. Through the communicative act of organizing, material and symbolic aspects of community interpenetrate each other with structure and meaning. A discourse of “community,” therefore, does not simply describe some pre-existing, external and immutable object already out there in the world. Instead, a discourse of “community” creates community—makes it exist as a consequential and meaningful set of beliefs, attitudes, and practices within a built environment. In this study I explore the ways in which collective identification is formed through processes of “naming” and “placing.” I discuss each concept separately in this literature review as a matter of sheer heuristic necessity, but a
larger goal of this dissertation is to consider the ways in which naming and placing interact with each other in community building practices.

Naming a Community

Human beings are fundamentally individuals… Whenever we form groups of any sort… we are assuming an artificial or acquired identity.

(Michael Calvin McGee, in Corbin, 1998, p. 129)

In the quotation above, McGee conceived of the individual as the primary unit of human existence. His argument presupposed that, though we often engage with each other in various relationships, these relations are not fixed or necessarily enduring. From our very conception, we exist in a dialectical tension between individuality and collectivity. After all, we emerge from the biological unity of egg and sperm; thus, human existence begins through a relational process.

Describing people according to collectivity, however, according to their associations and group memberships, is by definition an act of generalization. According to Burke (1945/1991), generalizations are necessarily reductive insofar as they identify a group of things by a certain property so as to consider a collection of separate parts as a unified body. In similar fashion, McGee (in Corbin, 1998) argued that any construction of individuals as a group is reductive because “It is intended to take a collection of individuals who really don’t have that much in common and to get them to behave as if they were a single entity” (p. 116). Burke (1945/1991) called this rhetorical action “naming,” suggesting that “to name a thing is to recognize some principle of identity or continuity running through the discontinuities that, of themselves, would make the world sheer chaos” (p. 96). Together, these two theorists provide language for making sense of
the ways in which large populations of individuals might be communicatively constructed as a coherent whole.

According to McGee (1975), this collective construction of “The People” as a unified body is mythical in that the constituent parts rely on a Leader to establish the group identity. Furthermore, he argued, even when belief and behavior make “real” the group identity, it is still a mass illusion because any group is still a collection of individuals: “That is, they are conjured into objective reality, remain so long as the rhetoric which defined them has force, and in the end wilt away, becoming once again merely a collection of individuals” (McGee, 1975, p. 242).

Following DHL’s departure, certain Wilmington citizens felt motivated to create organizations whose primary purpose would be one of (re)defining “The People” of the Wilmington community. With names like Energize Clinton County and Grow Food Grow Hope, some of the organizations active in forms of economic redevelopment seemed to adopt Poulakos’s (1983) definition of rhetoric as “the art which seeks to capture in opportune moments that which is appropriate and attempts to suggest that which is possible” (p. 36). These organizations engaged the Sophistic definition of rhetoric as to dynaton, which assumes that desires to be other or to be elsewhere are the driving force of life. According to Poulakos (1983), “New thoughts, new insights, and new ideas always attract our attention not only because we have not encountered them before but also because they offer us new ways to perceive ourselves and the world” (p. 31). This definition of rhetoric sets as its purpose the transportation from a world of actuality to that of potentiality.
However, the members of this transorganizational network are not the only rhetors seeking to “name” the Wilmington community (and thereby organize disparate individuals into a particular collectivity). The possibility-oriented rhetoric of revitalization promulgated by these community organizers cannot be understood well without considering the other naming discourses with which they are speaking. The empty spaces of the Wilmington Air Park, for example, are named at various times and by various rhetors as abandoned and available, devastated and developing.

Communicative constructions of “community” are thus created in the spaces between these countless and at times contradictory rhetorical texts. According to Bakhtin (1986), “Each utterance is filled with echoes and reverberations of other utterances to which it is related by the communality of the sphere of speech communication. Every utterance must be regarded primarily as a response to preceding utterances of the given sphere” (p. 91). Therefore, in order to appreciate the rich timbres of meaning coloring the discursive efforts of community revitalizers and developers in Wilmington, I analyze the various dominant discourses seeking to name the people and places of Wilmington.

*Placing a Community*

In writing about the people and places constitutive of community, I would like to clarify my terminology to distinguish first between spaces and places. Spaces refer to the material realities of streets and buildings and fields and concrete lots, but they are also the location for the socially defined places that we occupy. So for example, the space of Lasher Hall is a musty, old building on West Union Street in Athens, Ohio. But Lasher Hall’s “place-ness” develops out of my relationship to it. As the place that I learn and teach and work and play. Although the distinctions between space and place are not
simple and stable, “all of those working on place seem to agree that place consists of particular rhythms of being that confirm and naturalize the existence of certain spaces” (Thrift, 2009, p. 92). Space, that is, exists as unrealized possibility until the daily rhythms of life and interaction give it shape and define it, if even for a moment, as a particular place.

This word, “place” is not as simple as it might seem either. In an effort to tease out the nuanced geographical differences in place-related language, John Agnew (1987) proposed a three-part framework for defining meaningful aspects of place. **Locale**, he argued, refers to the physical setting in which social interaction occurs. The locale of Lasher Hall, then, is the physical building with all its materials, furniture, and decoration. **Location**, the second aspect of place in this model, refers to the definition of the geographical area encompassing locales due to social and economic processes operating at a wider scale. Lasher Hall’s location is on the northwestern edge of Ohio University’s campus, where the Georgian architecture of the central campus buildings becomes sparser and apartment complexes, local bars, and small restaurants line the old brick road. **Sense of place**, the third aspect of place in Agnew’s model, refers to the subjective orientation one has toward a place. As such, every occupant of Lasher Hall would likely have somewhat different senses of place due to our different subjective positions. This framework of locale, location, and sense of place provides more specific language for describing processes of community building in this dissertation, and, although they are definitionally distinct constructs, all three aspects are instrumental in constructing “places.”
As I consider the discourse surrounding “community” in Wilmington, I inevitably find myself caught in this relational web between place and space. When DHL announced their restructuring plan, the spaces, the material realities of streets and buildings and fields and concrete lots, became sites of contention for competing narratives defining the places of Wilmington—as a ghost town, dejected space, and product of the devastation of recession/as a site of possibility, space of innovation, and symbol of hope and progress.

There can be no separating the material reality from the socially constructed meaning, however. They are inextricably connected to one another in that places simultaneously exist in and produce space. Furthermore, no production of space or place occurs outside of systems of power. In fact, Foucault (1980) called for research that would investigate this very intersection of topics: “A whole history remains to be written of spaces—which would at the same time be the history of power—from the great strategies of geopolitics to the little tactics of the habitat” (p. 149). The material space, in its use or disuse, becomes a social construct, a place, insofar as it is imbued with meaning.

Communities, therefore, cannot be reduced to either buildings or people situated in a particular geographical location. Rather, community spaces are actively produced through spatial practices. Lefebvre (1974/1991) proposed a triadic model of spaces as perceived, conceived, and lived. Spaces are perceived through spatial practices, which are the everyday routines that define a sense of physical reality. Spaces are conceived through representations of space—maps, plans, models, and designs that seek to fix spaces in time. According to Lefebvre, “Such representations are thus objective, though
subject to revision” (p. 41). Finally, perhaps the most ambiguous element of Lefebvre’s triadic model, lived *representational spaces* are dynamic, fluid, situational, and unfixed. They “obey no rules of consistency or cohesiveness” (p. 41). All three realms are interconnected, and the relations between them create a spatial code, “a means of living in that space, of understanding it, and of producing it” (pp. 47-48). Community spaces become “public,” therefore, not only through zoning laws and other formal representations of space, but also through their appropriation in human practice.

Franck and Stevens (2007) described the way that conceived spaces become appropriated in spatial practices as a “loosening” of space: “Here the previously established uses have become detached from the space leaving it open for new uses and new meanings… offering an invitation to imagine what this place could be” (p. 8). In similar fashion, contested definitions of and plans for a community’s physical spaces open up symbolic spaces for deliberation and negotiation. Spaces constructed as “public” become habitable by a multiplicity of social groups and, consequently, a multiplicity of meanings. Simonsen (2005) suggested that these spaces become theatricalized or dramatized as a variety of groups reconstruct homogenized spaces for their own purposes. Space is defined by its use or disuse, by the people present and absent, and by the textual fragments (McGee, 1990) activated by the interaction of the histories, values, and identities of all of those groups and individuals.

Occupying places elicits stories, memories, histories that can, though they don’t have to, influence one’s imaginative horizon of possibility. Analyses of “places of memory” often focus on past-oriented narrative residues. As Dickinson, Blair, and Ott (2010) suggested, “Both place and memory, from this point of view, are always already
rhetorical. They assume an identity precisely in being recognizable—as named, bordered, and invented in particular ways” (p. 24). In this way, space, place, and temporality are not disconnected. They interpenetrate each other, serving as a particular orientation toward material and symbolic relationships.

Although these studies of memory and place are valuable in and of themselves, we should also question how those residues can be appropriated as materials for the future. In our interactions in the present, we can dwell in the placeness—the stories inflected with past—and we can marvel at the spaceness—the open-ended raw potentiality. The spatial, therefore, exists within the context of social interrelation in space-time. Massey (1994) described this dynamic, fluid, multi-dimensional interweaving of relations as a sort of nodal web, in which place is “a particular articulation of those relations, a particular moment in those networks of social relations and understandings” (p. 5). The rhetoric of space and place accounts for the interconnectedness between these concepts, wherein the acknowledgement of space as a discursive accomplishment necessitates a social-relational understanding of place.

**Lived Bodies in Lived Spaces: A Symbolic and Material Community**

Social spaces are spaces of embodiment, where material and symbolic co-mingle to create meaning. The lived body—a theoretical concept derived from the existentialist philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir and Maurice Merleau-Ponty—unifies the acting physical body with its specific sociocultural context. Iris Marion Young (2005) theorized about the lived body from a gendered perspective, examining the interaction between anatomy and context. According to this perspective, we are all born into a gendered world not of our own making. The material facts of our bodies—skeleton and organs,
ligaments and tendons, muscles and fat—move and exist in a particular time in history, a particular geographic space, surrounded by particular other people who are co-constructing ways of being in the world together. These material facts of my physical and social environment create the facticity of my existence.

My body-in-situation is both enabled and constrained by the physical and social aspects of my existence. Sonia Kruks (2001) argued that while our physical bodies do not pre-determine everything about who we are, they do play an important part in shaping the ways that we exist in the world. We are neither constructed fully from within, nor fully from without. Equipped with reflexive awareness of our bodies-in-situations, we might focus on the productive character of power.

Research focused on the body-in-situation must be sensitive to both spatial and platial elements of “situation.” After all, as Edward Casey (2009) explained,

[T]he body is the specific medium for experiencing a [place]. The lived body is the material condition of possibility for the [place] while being itself a member of that same world. It is basic to place and part of place. Just as there are no places without the bodies that sustain and vivify them, so there are no lived bodies without the places they inhabit and traverse… Bodies and places are connatural terms. They interanimate each other. (p. 327)

Communities, therefore, are composed of particular material conditions of possibility—distinct bodies, buildings, streets, and fields—which form a collectivity through the rhetorical act of naming. This dissertation brings together these rhetorical organizing practices and the resultant organizational structures in an effort to understand in all its complexity community building in times of unplanned change. To better substantiate
theory with empirical, lived evidence, we must develop questions and methods to attend to the multifaceted nature of this relationship between material and social aspects of community life.

Summary and Research Questions

The human frailties revealed in storytelling can allow participants to cope with vulnerability, and if necessary mobilize resources when individuals or groups find themselves on the wrong side of a statistic.

(Harter, 2013, p. 37)

Although Harter situated this statement in a discussion of storytelling in health contexts, sudden sickness on individual and community levels bear striking similarities at times. Economic disaster, I suggest, is a late stage manifestation of a latent social disease. And, just as medical students learn syndrome recognition through case-based studies, so too might students of social organizing learn the symptoms indicative of societal illness. The question becomes, how can we learn to identify the symptoms sooner so our actions might be characterized as “preventative care” rather than reactive treatment? This study begins with an investigation of the conditions of vulnerability experienced by a community seeking to “narrate new normals” (Harter, Patterson, & Gerbensky-Kerber, 2010) following a dramatic rupture in their collective sense of coherence.

While some of the members of Wilmington’s local leadership strove to co-narrate a revolutionary new normal of local sustainability, they were also deeply immersed as characters in several other storylines as well. As such, during this moment of destabilization, as community leaders sought to restore coherence and stability to their sense of place and vision for the future, they were also prominent characters in others’
narratives-in-progress. These co-present narratives deeply influenced one another because, as MacIntyre also wrote, “We are never more (and sometimes less) than the coauthors of our own narratives” (p. 213). Therefore, in order to better understand the ongoing constructions of “community” as narrated by various rhetors, I consider both local and national discourses through the following research questions:

RQ1: How do local speakers “name” the community of Wilmington in public discourse regarding economic conditions?

RQ2: How do speakers in the national media “name” the community of Wilmington in their coverage of local economic conditions?

In the community setting, re-storying is a complex endeavor because so many rhetors are active in the joint storytelling process. Part of the community building process, then, becomes one of managing contradictions in the collective story. One way in which some local leaders in Wilmington sought to narrate with, rather than against, a larger segment of the community was through cross-sector collaborations to craft coherent transorganizational narratives. As representatives from various organizations worked on problem-based projects in the community, organizational boundaries blurred and became more permeable. These cross-sector partnerships allowed collections of organizations to accomplish together what might have been impossible separately, and so an additional research question emerges:

RQ3: How do transorganizational narratives function to mobilize collective action?

Finally, the stories we tell about who we were, who we are, and who we can be are both inspired and limited by the physical conditions of our lived environments. As such, this study seeks to understand the interrelationships between symbolic and material
constructions of “community” to tease out the ways in which perceptions of incommensurability arise between stories. I am interested, therefore, in understanding individual community leaders’ visions for the future in relation to physical spaces so that I might discern points of connection and disconnection between community leaders. To that end, I pose my final research questions:

RQ4: How do community leaders coordinate transorganizational narratives in relation to physical spaces?

RQ5: How do community leaders negotiate meanings when shared public spaces become sites of definitional contention?

Conflicts cannot exist until they are named and so they cannot be addressed until they are articulated. Hopefully this dissertation will prove useful to the Wilmington community as a systematic process of identifying current contradictions and possible connections for future collaborations. Beyond the town of Wilmington, this case study can offer insights for developing a practical knowledge (phronesis) for similarly situated communities undergoing dramatic change. Just as medical students develop their clinical judgment by studying many patient cases, so too might students of organizational and community life develop their practical judgment through studying cases like this one. In this way, we might learn to recognize patterns associated with particular problems and responses that might serve as general rules (subject to continual refinement) to guide discerning responses to similar cases in the future. In the next chapter, I outline my methods for conducting and creating this case study.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

As I intimated in Chapter One, my approach to studying community organizing in Wilmington responds to a critique Barge (2006) launched toward dialogue and conflict research. Specifically, Barge argued that plenty of research considers either macro or micro-level discourses and structures, but that not enough attention has been paid to the relationships across these levels. In order to attend to the community organizing efforts of Wilmingtonians at both micro and macro levels of analysis, I adopted a method developed by LeGreco and Tracy (2009) called discourse tracing. Inspired by Fairclough’s (1989, 1995) take on critical discourse analysis and George and Bennett’s (2005) discussion of process tracing, LeGreco and Tracy’s method is a systematic qualitative research approach to studying the interrelationships between broad social narratives and particular local practices.

Informed by applied, critical, and qualitative sensibilities, discourse tracing begins with the idea that perception is always rooted in a particular subject position, which is shaped by social and historical conditions that precede any one individual’s existence. Operating under a paradigm Deetz (2009) characterized as politically attentive relational constructionism (PARC), discourse tracing assumes that identity, reality, and knowledge are constituted through communication within the structures of particular organizations and in relation to particular power relations. According to LeGreco and Tracy (2009), “Discourse tracing enables scholars to critically analyze the power relations associated with change and proceed with a systematic data analysis process that is accessible and transparent” (p. 1517). A primary goal of this critical-interpretive research approach is to provide grounded insight that can inform applied communication practices.
Research emanating out of a critical, poststructuralist epistemology has been critiqued as difficult to understand and impossible to evaluate (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). LeGreco and Tracy (2009) sought to develop a systematic analytic procedure that could answer critical, poststructuralist questions surrounding meaning making, discourse, power, and practice, while also meeting standards of rigor in qualitative-interpretive research and beyond. Thus, this approach was developed with the goal of creating a language for clearly communicating the analysis processes of qualitative inquiry to policy makers, grant funders, and IRB boards. The qualitative kin informing discourse tracing are grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), constant comparison (Charmaz, 2000), case study methodologies, and process tracing (George & Bennett, 2005). Each of these methods contributes to the language of context-specific, structured, and focused study utilized in this approach.

I begin this chapter by clearly defining the case central to this dissertation. Then, I discuss my methods of data collection by outlining my sources and processes for acquiring micro, meso, and macro-level discourses. Finally, I explain my steps of analysis and interpretation before concluding with some words on researcher positionality and reflexivity.

**Defining the Case: Wilmington, Ohio**

The first step of discourse tracing consists of defining a case using a rupture or turning point. In this study, the critical moment defining the case is May 28, 2008, the date that DHL announced the restructuring plan that effectively closed the Wilmington hub. Although I introduced this rupture in the first chapter, delving more deeply into the
history of the Wilmington Air Park will help to contextualize the significance of DHL’s departure.

What was, until recently, the largest privately owned air park in the United States began as an old cornfield that a group of local personal aircraft enthusiasts used in 1929 as an informal landing strip and impromptu site for small air shows (ABX Air, 2011). A small hangar was built one year later. The burgeoning air park began to take form during the World Wars as the field functioned as an emergency landing site. The Army Air Corps laid the first coat of concrete paving for a runway in 1942, naming the site Clinton County Army Air Field. In the interwar period, the air park fell into disuse until Continental Air Command reopened the base in 1951 as a result of the Korean War. The air park served as a training site through 1970, until the U.S. Department of Defense closed the base in September 1971.

Local citizens and members of the business community formed the Community Improvement Corporation (CIC) and petitioned the Secretary of Defense with plans for an Industrial Air Park. The CIC purchased the air park from the federal government for $1.2 million (CBS, 2009). In 1980, Airborne Express purchased the air park, hired 550 employees, and began moving 14,000 packages a night (ABX Air, 2011). Over the next decade, business boomed for Airborne Express, leading to a continuous stream of expansions, renovations, and upgrades. In 1988, Airborne Express officially became ABX Air, and by 1990 the company had grown to 3,400 employees and was averaging 400,000 packages each night (ABX Air, 2011).

DHL purchased the ground and sales network of the air park in 2003. ABX Air continued to operate out of the air park as an independent public company but worked in
conjunction with DHL. The administration of former Governor Bob Taft proposed a $70 million highway bypass project as an incentive for DHL when they were initially considering the purchase (Nolan, 2008). The purpose of the bypass was to create a route around the city for commercial traffic servicing DHL’s Wilmington hub.

On May 28, 2008, DHL announced a “restructuring” plan that consisted of discontinuing domestic air and ground services to focus on the international market (Driehaus, 2008). The abandoned raw materials and half-finished structures of the bypass project lay untouched for three years, until the city received federal grant money to complete the four lane highway during 2011. As thousands of people in Clinton and the surrounding counties became suddenly unemployed, the town of Wilmington—whose rapid growth and development over the past three decades was closely tied to the air park—found itself experiencing an identity crisis. The spaces, the material realities of streets and buildings and fields and concrete lots, became sites of contention for competing antenarratives defining the place of Wilmington. Discourses seeking to define the Wilmington “community” following the rupture of DHL’s departure, therefore, serve as the primary material for this dissertation.

Data Collection

Having defined the case of interest, the second step of discourse tracing is to gather micro, meso, and macro-level discourses, order them chronologically, and conduct a close reading to elicit emergent themes. In order to fulfill this requirement, I relied on an extensive set of data from a variety of sources. In the following sections, I outline my methods of data collection, beginning with the micro-level discourses of localized
practice and working my way toward the macro-level discourses of broad social narratives.

Micro-Discourses

In order to answer my research questions regarding community organizers’ efforts to use transorganizational narratives to mobilize collective action (RQ3), construct transorganizational narratives in relation to physical spaces (RQ4), and then negotiate meanings of contested spaces (RQ5), I attended to situated practices at the most particular level. For the purposes of this study, I acquired micro-discourses from two primary sources: semi-structured interviews with community figures active in shaping public discourse on economic development and ethnographic observations.

In analyzing these micro-discourses of localized practices, I drew upon existentialist philosophy on the lived body, primarily as articulated by Iris Marion Young (2005), in order to develop an interviewing practice that would be more sensitive to embodied local spaces. In this section, I provide a brief overview of the theoretical frameworks informing my approach to this research before describing my methods of interviewing and ethnographic observation.

Theoretical frameworks: Existentialism and participatory action research

I discussed Young’s conception of the lived body more deeply in Chapter 2, but to briefly summarize: the lived body is the body-in-situation. The material facts of our bodies—skeleton and organs, ligaments and tendons, muscles and fat—move and exist in a particular time in history, a particular geographic space, surrounded by particular other people who are co-constructing ways of being in the world together. These material facts of my physical and social environment create the facticity of my existence.
Scholars drawing upon the lived body literature strive to understand the “body-in-situation;” however, traditional interviewing methods severely limit the complexity with which either body or situation (let alone their interactions with each other) are presented in scholarly publications. Therefore, drawing on participatory and ethnographic approaches to research and development, I adopted an interviewing approach that strove to take into account subjects’ situatedness in space and place.

In recent years, feminist ethnographers have sought creative approaches to provide opportunities for their research “subjects” to tell their own stories in their own voices. Creative analytic methodologies, emerging out of the framework of participatory action research (PAR), have suggested alternatives or supplements to the structured interview. PAR is a particular orientation to qualitative inquiry that emphasizes developing collaborative partnerships between researcher and participants in an effort to investigate phenomena with rather than on the local populations. Due to the collaborative nature of this approach, researchers adopting these practices are advised to begin projects with a broad research agenda so they can work with the local participants to define the issues worth investigating. Together, researchers and participants generate and analyze information, which ideally lead to local action and positive change for everyone involved (Bowes, 1996; Cameron & Gibson, 2005; Kindon, 2010). PAR methods that have gained substantial exposure in recent years include drawing as method, visual mapping, photovoice, and participatory video (see Guillemin, 2004; Barnhurst, Vari, & Rodriguez, 2004, Wang, 1999; and White, 2002).

Practitioners in the field of development have been primarily responsible for the creation of a participatory approach called Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA).
Chambers (1997) described PRA as being a qualitative approach to inquiry that privileges local knowledge, using secondary data as context. Researchers using PRA should be critically self-aware of biases regarding place (where you go), person (whom you meet), and season and time of day (when you go). The process consists of seeking out experts to observe directly, obtaining information through systematic walks called transect walks, semi-structured interviews, and case studies and stories.

I am especially drawn to PRA’s interest in creating a mobile field through transect walks. As they have most frequently been used in development projects, transect walks follow predetermined courses determined by practitioners based on the particular problem they are trying to address. Practitioners walk with community members in an effort to glean local knowledge about places passed along the way. As Chambers (1997) stated, “With the ground, more can take part and take part more easily. Passers-by stop and become involved. Paper is private; the ground is public. Paper empowers those who hold the pen…There is a democracy of the ground” (p. 152). In this way, the research site moves from an artificial or sanitized office setting to the physical sites of interest within the community. Mobility invites interruptions and external noise by embracing the dynamic setting of an active community (Atkinson, Delamont, & Housley, 2008).

**Peripatetic interviews: Walking the town with local leaders**

Because transect walks have primarily been used as a practitioner tool for development work, I made one slight modification in order to adapt transect walks for academic research. I accepted the general framework of PRA but rather than traversing a consistent predetermined route, I asked each of my participants to choose the routes that we traveled together. When I contacted potential interviewees, I said that as part of the
interview, I would like to see some of the places or events that they think “best illustrate what is happening in the area economically.” My language was intentionally vague in this request. First, in asking “what is happening… economically,” participants had to make evaluative judgments regarding whether they believed the economy was improving, deteriorating, or staying the same, and thus, whether they wanted to tell me a story of progress, decline, or maintenance. Second, in saying “the area” rather than defining a particular geographical region, I allowed participants the freedom to define the local impact zone for themselves. My request continued by prompting participants to think about sites with meaningful personal stories attached to them. In my recruitment emails I wrote, “These could be projects that you have been involved with directly or sites of future projects that you hope to see happen.” I offered to meet participants at sites of their choosing, from which we would walk or drive together through the place(s) they wanted to show me.

In these opening sites, I answered questions regarding my research and participants signed informed consent forms. Because some interviewees were policy makers or elected officials, the Institutional Review Board at Ohio University asked that I take additional precautions to protect participants in case my notes should be subpoenaed. I did not anticipate that these public officials would be exposed to any greater risk than other participants because they were already on public record expressing opinions on the same topics we discussed in our interviews. However, I provided ample opportunities for interviewees to select a level of confidentiality with which they would feel comfortable. First, I mentioned on the informed consent form and in conversation with them at the beginning of our interviews that, though I anticipated no risks or discomforts, depending
on what they chose to share with me, participants’ comments could have social, political, or economic ramifications within their community. I reminded them in this initial meeting and in follow up correspondences when I shared parts of my dissertation with them that at any time they may ask to have their names removed or ask that any specific comments not be used for research purposes. On the informed consent form, participants had an option to choose to either use their actual name or select a pseudonym and confidentiality parameters (see appendix B for complete IRB Form and appendix C for consent form). All participants chose to be identified in this dissertation by their actual names, so no pseudonyms have been used.

The interviews then generally proceeded with walking or driving together to places of their choosing. I say generally because five of my interviewees chose to conduct the whole interview in their office spaces where most of their work actually occurred. Despite the fact that some participants chose to stay in their places of business for the duration of the interview, I refer to my interviewing approach as “peripatetic interviewing” in order to invoke a particular understanding of participants’ roles in the research process. The word *peripatetic* refers to the act of walking about while teaching or disputing and is most commonly associated with Aristotle and his followers who were known for wandering Greece and the Lyceum as they philosophized together. I chose this word to describe my interviewing method to draw attention to the importance of spatiality and movement in interviewing and to situate the participants as teachers/storytellers and myself, the researcher, as student/listener.

This connection between stories and spaces, highlighted by Aristotle in his peripatetic school, is an important one. People tend to connect stories to material places
in ways that make embodying those spaces a rich site for research. As Young (2005) noted, “Material things and spaces themselves become layered with meaning and personal value as the material markers of events and relationship that make the narrative of a person or group” (p. 140). In this way, material things and spaces have a sort of narrative residue. People have stories and memories and dreams of certain futures connected to particular places.

Through peripatetic interviewing, therefore, participants had an opportunity to show me meaningful places, telling about their histories and imagining their potential. Even when they chose to stay in their offices, participants defined our interview sites as meaningful spaces for their work in economic development. As we traveled through the fields and buildings and topographies of Wilmington, we explored the “landscape” of the community in every sense of that word. According to Wylie (2007), “Landscape is both the phenomenon itself and our perception of it… Landscapes are not just about what we see but about how we look. To landscape is to gaze in a particular fashion” (p. 7). Therefore, as we traveled through the spaces of Wilmington and Clinton County, we also traversed Lefebvre’s (1974/1991) triadic model of spaces as perceived, conceived, and lived.

As I walked with participants around local businesses, unoccupied buildings, and open streets or drove with them through downtown Wilmington and the air park, I asked interviewees to tell me about their background (How long have you lived in Wilmington/Clinton County? How did you find yourself in your current position in the community?), talk about their personal experiences and organizational interventions in the neighborhood (How do you, personally, and your organization, more generally, work
with other members of the Wilmington and Clinton County communities? Can you recall any particular moments of pride or frustration that you experienced in your work on this project?), and describe specific sites we saw along the way, including memorable events that happened in these areas, and visions for what this part of the city might become.

Finally, I developed a series of narrative-based probing questions to use as follow-ups when appropriate. These probes heightened my attention during interviews to issues of character development, setting/context, and plot (see appendix E for full interview protocol).

Over the course of these interviews with various community leaders, we traversed the triadic models of both space and storytelling. As we walked, we moved between spatial practices, representations of space, and representational space (Lefebvre, 1991). Simultaneously, I listened to retrospective accounts, co-constructed living stories, and participated in imagining antenarratives (Boje, 2011). I constructed these interviews in such a way that I hoped to better understand wherein lies the incommensurability between competing definitions of and visions for the spaces that constitute this community.

Due to my interest in situating shared stories within the more nondiscursive elements of lived experience, I adopted an ethnographic sensibility toward methods of data collection to attend to features such as spatiality, comportment, and artifacts. As Atkinson, Delamont, & Housley (2008) explained, “Ethnographic fieldwork … is predicated on the recognition that local social organization and the conduct of everyday life are complex, in that they are enacted through multiple modes of social action and representation” (p. 31). Too often, however, ethnographies have conceived of location as
merely providing “context” or “background” to a study more centrally focused on identity or culture. However, describing places as the container of culture, community, or identity is insufficient.

In order to supplement my expertise in attending to discursive interpretations with a more specialized attention to the enabling and constraining features of the built environment, I re-walked the routes of each peripatetic interview with my brother, Chas, who is a student of architecture in the University of Cincinnati’s College of Design, Architecture, Art, and Planning (DAAP). Chas has worked for architecture firms in Cincinnati and Chicago and in the summer of 2011 participated in a project designing and building a sustainable community center in Tanzania. During the summer of 2010, Chas participated in a community development program, Clinton Community Fellows, aimed at reducing the brain drain in Wilmington. He was selected for this experience based on his unique design background. Chas was paired with small businesses and nonprofits in the Wilmington community that required or would benefit from additional design capacity or the design thinking process. Chas’s understandings of the built environment of Wilmington created another layer of interpretation to this study through his specialized attention to the architectural aspects of sites, such as volumes within space, enclosure and exposure, views in and views out, entry and egress, proximity, and materiality.

Guided by this approach, I conducted individual interviews ranging in length from 45 minutes to over four hours with a total of fifteen people. I began by interviewing the four individuals most heavily cited in local and national media regarding Wilmington and the economy: (1) David Raizk, Mayor of Wilmington during the DHL announcement and crisis; (2) Randy Riley, current Mayor of Wilmington and County Commissioner during
the DHL crisis; (3) Chris Schock, Executive Director of the Clinton County Regional Planning Commission; and (4) Mark Rembert, Director of the Chamber of Commerce and co-founder of Energize Clinton County. In these interviews, I asked each person who else they believed I should be interviewing due to their role in shaping public discourse surrounding local economic conditions.

Based on their recommendations, my next wave of interviewees consisted of the rest of the members of the Economic Development Workgroup, which was convened by Randy Riley in 2012: Rob Jaehnig, director of the Center for Innovative Food Technology and city council member; Debbie Stamper, director of the Clinton County Convention and Visitor’s Bureau; Bret Dixon, Economic Business Development Director for Clinton County; and Kevin Carver, director of the Clinton County Port Authority. Additionally, David Raizk recommended that I speak with his executive assistant, Laura Curliss, to gain access to relevant documents surrounding response efforts, and Mark Rembert and Chris Schock both recommended that I speak with Dessie Buchanan about her work with the Buy Local First campaign and Clinton County Farmers’ Market. In many of these first and second wave interviews, Keith Hyde’s name came up over and over again. Several interviewees praised Keith’s work as executive director of Workforce Services Unlimited, and so I met with Keith as well. During our meeting, Keith invited a former ABX employee and current case manager, Nate Cline, to join us (see appendix A for a clear outline of the full list of interviewees).

Using this sort of snowball sampling, I continued interviewing until my claims could be “saturated in data” (Fitch, 1994, p. 36). By saturation, I mean that I collected data until I achieved redundancy. I continued interviewing until no new information
emerged in our conversations, except for the idiosyncratic differences in emphases and emplotments. I also read through my interview transcripts together with local and national news coverage and city council meeting transcripts to look for key contributors to public discourse that were still unrepresented in my interviews. Through this process I added two additional interviewees to represent important publicly-funded entities that were especially hard hit by city budget cuts and the shrinking wallets of local residents. Ron Sexton, superintendent of Wilmington City Schools, spoke with me about economic impacts of DHL’s departure and consequent response efforts on area schools, and Lori Williams, philanthropist, director of Wilmington Parks & Recreation, and former ABX employee, spoke with me about the role of service and nonprofit organizations in the area’s recovery.

All interviews were recorded using digital audio recorders, which I either held or attached by an armband to the upper arms of both myself and participants for best audio quality while walking. These interviews resulted in over 26 hours of audio recording, which were then transcribed so the actual discourse would be available for close analysis. LeGreco and Tracy (2009) do not specify a particular approach to transcription as being necessary to their discourse tracing method; however, as a discourse analytic approach, the exact words do matter, though not at the level of specificity required for conversation analysis. Since there were two audio recordings of most interviews (one on the researcher’s arm and one on the participant’s arm), I compared the 526 single-spaced pages of typed transcripts against both audio recordings. Disparities, where irresolvable, were marked in the text of the transcript.
In addition to audio recording these peripatetic interviews, I also kept a small notepad with me to jot notes about more ethnographic aspects of our interactions. These details could not be captured by audio recording or reliably reconstructed in memos after the fact, such as nonverbal responses. Since many details regarding clothing, setting, and posture could be reconstructed in jottings after I completed the interview, I kept in-field jottings to a minimum so I could be more fully immersed in the moment. I returned to each interview site immediately following the discussion in order to write a narrative description of the space and to take pictures, whenever possible.

*Ethnographic observations: Working alongside the Clinton Community Fellows*

During my peripatetic interview with Mark Rembert, I was offered working space in the Clinton Community Fellows’ office, located adjacent to the Chamber of Commerce and across the street from the Wilmington Municipal Building. The Clinton Community Fellows program is the synergistic brainchild of Energize Clinton County and the Regional Planning Commission. The fellows program was created with the goals of retaining and attracting young professionals to the Clinton County area. As soon as I joined the office, I introduced myself to the fellows, and explained my dissertation project. The fellows consented to share an office space with me and even offered frequent interpretations and suggestions for developing my dissertation research. Each verbally consented to be included in the written dissertation, and they became important collaborators to me at this particular stage of my study. This office site became my home base for more extensive ethnographic observations during the summer of 2012.

Since *retaining* Clinton County’s best and brightest was the primary goal of the program, potential Returners have typically been privileged in the application process.
The summer of my observations, three of the five fellows—Ashleigh, Mitchell, and Molly—represented that desired group of homegrown Achievers. They spent much of their childhoods in the Clinton County area, went away for post-secondary education, and returned to spend their summer break applying their newly-acquired college knowledge to their hometown.

However, during the summer of 2012, two of the fellows—Edmund and Daniel—fulfilled the latter half of the Fellows’ program goals: attracting outsiders to the area. Edmund is a native of Cameroon and second-generation Wilmington College student. Following his father’s path to Wilmington, Edmund quickly became active in campus life, serving as president of the student body. In an effort to connect more deeply with the community in which the campus is situated, Edmund applied to work as a Clinton Community Fellow. The second fellow-outsider, Daniel, came to Wilmington by way of Haverford College, Mark’s alma mater, looking to have an impact in a small rural community and to experience a way of life much different from his home of Los Angeles, California. More information about each fellow is available on their blog at http://www.clintoncommunityfellows.org/.

By sharing an open office space with these five individuals, I gained access to the brainstorming sessions, weekly meetings, and daily conversations that filled that multi-purposed building with activity. I began working out of that office the same week that Ashleigh, Mitchell, Molly, Edmund, and Daniel reported to begin their fellowships. On my first day in the Fellows’ office, Chris Schock, the Executive Director of the Clinton County Regional Planning Commission, treated us all to lunch at the General Denver, a historic hotel and restaurant in downtown Wilmington (and an important site discussed
later in this dissertation). I shared a desk with Edmund because he spent most of his days out and about in his partner-organizations’ physical sites. In many ways, I was treated as though I belonged in that office as much as any other fellow. They included me in meetings and discussions and two mile treks for ice cream at Peppermint Patties. They greeted me with smiles when I walked in the door. I asked them about their fellowship work and offered suggestions, and they asked me about my dissertation work and offered suggestions right back.

The moment when I realized how deeply embedded and embraced I was in this community and with these people came near the end of my data collection. I was sitting in on a weekly meeting with the fellows, Chris, and a few others. Chris was pitching an idea for a feedback session with young professionals intended to guide future city planning. He suggested a tentative date of late July for the meeting and asked the fellows for advice on wording the recruitment message. Ashleigh looked at me and said, “This sounds like it would be so valuable for your dissertation, but you’re going to be traveling then, aren’t you?” In our informal office conversations earlier that week, I had mentioned an upcoming trip out west for a wedding and conference in Colorado. As Chris described his vision for the young professionals’ meeting, I was just so happy that the city leadership would host such a meeting that I had not even thought about my own attendance.

“Do you want us to record it for you?” Ashleigh asked.

“Wait, is that when you’re going to Colorado? When do you get back?” Chris flipped open his notebook as he spoke, “It doesn’t have to be on that day. We want you to be able to be there.”
Amazed and astonished that community leadership would organize a public meeting around my availability, we negotiated a better date and settled on early August. This moment, and many others, illuminated for me the great value of being rooted in the communities we choose to study. Throughout my time in the fellows’ office, I kept active fieldnotes whenever possible. Because we were often working at computers or sitting behind desks facing each other in an open room, I could take these notes unobtrusively. Occasionally someone would notice me typing or writing feverishly and they would joke, “Oh yeah, that’ll be great for the dissertation. Better write that down!”

Understanding that fieldnotes are necessarily selective (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995), during field observations and return visits to interview sites I focused my attention most explicitly on attending to those details that best helped me to answer my research questions regarding the situation of stories in space. Keeping in mind Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw’s (1995) warning that, “Prior experience, training, and commitments influence the fieldworker’s stance in writing notes” (p. 42, italics in original), I re-read my fieldnotes with an analytical eye toward what I know because of my insider status and what I know because of my academic training. In this way, I incorporated reflexive memos throughout my full fieldnotes as one way of attending to my own positionality throughout the process.

**Meso-Discourses**

These rich micro-level discourses, acquired through on-the-ground experiences of ethnographic observation and peripatetic interviewing represent only a portion of the discourse considered in this dissertation. These situated, particular discourses of localized action were coordinated and connected at the meso-level. Meso-level discourses, then,
synchronized practices across several local contexts, often in the form of policy and public discussion. In this study I considered three primary sources for meso-level discourses: Wilmington city council meeting transcripts, economic task force meeting records, and local news stories. Analysis of these meso-level discourses helped to address my first research question regarding the ways in which the citizens and the community organizers in Wilmington are “named” in local public discourses.

City Council Meeting Transcripts

Tracy and Dimock (2004) called for more researchers to devote their energies toward the study of meetings because, “Meetings are where people define and do who they are as groups, organizations, and publics. Meetings are the interactional means through which people create, sustain, reform, and destroy unity (or division) among their immediate groups and their larger communities” (p. 157). City council meetings in particular have been singled out by some scholars as rich sites for community dialogue and deliberation (see Gastil & Keith, 2005; McComas, 2001). In these meetings, as citizens participate in local governance, organizational and community groups constitute who they are and co-construct a public identity (Schwartzman, 1989; Tracy and Dimock, 2004; Tracy, 2010). This previous research would suggest that during city council meetings, citizens participate in the construction and maintenance of community identity through their engagement in public deliberation.

Meso-level discourses, therefore, included transcripts from Wilmington city council meetings beginning on June 5, 2008, when a harried Mayor Raizk addressed the council for the first time following DHL’s announcement of intended departure. Following every meeting, Laura Curliss, Executive Assistant to the Mayor, transcribed
the meetings from audio tapes and posted them online. Although Curliss made an effort to record statements verbatim, lapses occasionally occurred due to indiscernible speech, multiple speakers talking at once, or missing segments of recordings while tapes were being switched. Because I did not conduct a frequency count of particular words, but rather, engaged in a more general thematic analysis, these transcripts provided sufficiently complete discursive information.

To reduce the population of transcripts from the 112 meetings held between June 1, 2008 and June 1, 2012, I used relevance sampling to narrow the data set based on the presence of explicit talk about the economy. These meetings were identified by using the Microsoft Word search tool to find every instance of “econom” in the transcripts. The text was further narrowed by selecting the relevant excerpts (excerpts containing explicit talk about the economy) within the selected meetings. Given the highly structured nature of city council meetings, excerpts were determined based on procedural indicators, such as beginning when the council president formally acknowledged a speaker and ending when the council president thanked the speaker. This process resulted in 51 excerpts from 48 city council meetings, totaling 170 pages of single-spaced text.

*Economic Task Force Meeting Records*

The second source of meso-level discourses considered in this dissertation came from the work of an important transorganizational response team. Following DHL’s restructuring announcement on May 28, 2008, local and state government officials leapt to immediate action by forming a regional leadership organization composed of politicians, educators, businesspeople, directors of nonprofit organizations, unions, small businesses, and other relevant regional experts in economic development writ large. On
June 11, 2008, Wilmington Mayor David Raizk and Ohio Lieutenant Governor Lee Fisher co-convened the first meeting of the Economic Task Force (ETF) at Wilmington College. This large, representative organization was an instrumental player in responding to the DHL crisis. As such, I provide much greater detail regarding the organization’s structure, processes, and outcomes in the case narrative in Chapter Four.

The essential details at this point in the story are that ETF meetings were designed as closed-door events and their primary purpose consisted of coordinating actions across organizations and controlling the public message regarding economic conditions in the region. I acquired an amazing database of publicly-accessible documents through Mayor Raizk’s executive assistant, Laura Curliss. I met Laura for our interview at the City Municipal Building. Prior to my arrival, Laura had requested two large accordion files full of public documents from the Mayor’s office. We set ourselves up around a table in a meeting room on the ground level and Laura talked me through each document, providing background information and tagging important information so I could make copies. Additionally, Laura granted me access to all of her electronic files from her work with the economic task force through a shared Dropbox folder that the current city administration set up for me. In this folder, I found meeting agendas, PowerPoint presentations, grant applications, memos, talking points, fact sheets, reports to the community, and even example Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notifications (WARN Notices) to air park employees. Documents from these meetings and produced by this task force were invaluable meso-level discourses that coordinated messages and activities across all local, regional, state, and national first-responders dealing with DHL’s massive restructuring plan.
Local News Coverage

Finally, local news coverage served as my third source of meso-level discourses. The *Wilmington News Journal* is the only local newspaper for all of Clinton County. The general lack of other sources of local news media in the region makes the *News Journal* a concentrated forum for publicly framing community-relevant issues in Wilmington and Clinton County. In this study, I used the *News Journal*’s online archive to find all articles about the economy and DHL between May 28, 2008 and May 28, 2012. This search resulted in 182 local news stories totaling 317 pages of single-spaced text.

Macro-Discourses

So, while micro-level discourses acquired from interviews and ethnographic observations represent localized practices and meso-level discourses acquired from city council meeting transcripts, ETF records, and local news represent efforts to coordinate localized action across contexts, macro-level discourses consider widespread social narratives and enduring rules that function at a cultural level. For this study, the macro level consisted of testimonials from congressional hearings, public letters and statements from politicians, and supplemental texts gleaned from national media sources covering the economic conditions in Wilmington and similarly affected US towns. Testimonials from four congressional hearings serve as the first source of macro-level discourses considered in this dissertation. On August 19, 2008, during a Joint Field Hearing of the House State Government and Elections Committee and Senate Finance and Financial Institutions Committee, political leaders and union presidents gathered with local business owners and college administrators to present their concerns regarding the legality of DHL’s business decision. On September 9, 2008, Mayor Raizk told his story
before the House Judiciary Committee during a hearing on competition in the package delivery industry. On September 16, 2008, state and local representatives spoke on behalf of Wilmington as the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure considered the effects of a proposed arrangement between DHL and UPS on competition, customer service, and employment within the express package industry. And finally, on February 15, 2012, Mark Rembert testified before the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee regarding energy and economic growth for rural America. Prepared statements and official transcripts of these hearings served as macro-level discourses as speakers sought to situate Wilmington’s story within broader social narratives regarding the US economy.

In addition to these public statements, many of the same politicians who attended these congressional hearings wrote letters on behalf of the Wilmington community. Ohio politicians banded together as a bipartisan delegation to send strongly worded letters to US and German ambassadors, to the US Attorney General, to the Chairman of the Federal Trade Commission, and to German Chancellor Angela Merkel. Mayor Raizk was an avid letter-writer during this time, appealing for help from all corners of the political world. Then-presidential-candidates Barack Obama and John McCain also issued letters on behalf of Wilmington, decrying DHL’s decision to leave. I gained access to a collection of 38 letters of this sort through my interview with Laura Curliss. Like the Congressional hearing testimonies, these letters are written for a national and international audience and, so, they situate Wilmington in broader social narratives.

Finally, national news sources provided additional discourse at the macro-level. As mentioned in the first chapter, national coverage was especially prevalent during
election cycles. Aside from the broad political attention this town received, Wilmington was also the subject of various national human interest stories, as I described in some detail in Chapter 1. For this study, I located national news stories about Wilmington, the economy, and DHL through a LexisNexis search that resulted in 58 stories totaling 243 single-spaced pages of text. Additionally, I recorded video clips from Rachael Ray’s Thanksgiving special, Glenn Beck’s Christmas show, and Mike Huckabee’s Presidential Forum on Jobs as exemplars of the national media attention that Wilmington received.

These formal testimonials, public letters, and national broadcasts situated Wilmington’s story within broader social narratives in US governance and policy-making about job loss, economic changes, resilience, and vulnerability. Analyzing these discourses allowed me to better understand the way “the people” of Wilmington were “named” in the context of national economic discourses (RQ 2).

Data Analysis

As the first step of analysis, I first ordered all of these texts chronologically, consistent with the discourse tracing methodology. The analysis process was then guided by two specific tasks: developing a series of questions toward the data in order to trace discursive practices and developing a case study based on the answers to those questions. These questions developed over the course of my research and initial reading, informed by my participants’ insights and my own experiences, training, and goals. Therefore, while these focused questions were inspired in part by the research questions I outlined in Chapter 2, they were also more specific and chosen for their usefulness in constructing a full case narrative.
These questions were philosophical (e.g., “What is the nature of disaster?” or “What does it mean to engage in economic development?”), procedural (e.g., “Which individuals and organizations are involved in economic development?” or “How was the economic task force organized?”), and/or context specific (e.g., “How is ‘the community’ of Wilmington named in public discourse?” or “How do speakers construct themselves in relation to <the People> and <the Place> of Wilmington?). I developed some of these questions with my participants during interviews, which created an early opportunity for participants to offer their own interpretations and answers. As a result, my analysis was guided primarily by the problems, queries, and meaningful moments identified as important by the community leaders participating in the study.

Beginning, then, with reading transcripts, public documents, and fieldnotes to gain a holistic sense of the discourses, I manually coded the data in an effort to answer my list of structured questions. According to LeGreco and Tracy (2009), the process of formulating and applying structured questions “emphasizes how the human instrument… is implicated in drawing out qualitative observations” (p. 1532). In this way, discourse tracing demands that researchers be vigilant in accounting for their procedural decisions at every step of data collection and analysis. In an effort to move more seamlessly through this massive data set, I used the qualitative analysis software NVivo 9 to organize texts and structure the coding process.

The final analytical step in discourse tracing required I translate the raw data into a more accessible case study narrative. I relied heavily upon NVivo to make moving between texts less cumbersome than that process might have been otherwise. For this reason, the qualitative software package was extremely useful in tracing my focused
questions across these many texts and organizing them neatly in one simple location. However, when I began working on Chapter 4, the case narrative, the neatness of NVivo seemed counterproductive. I wanted to sift through the messiness. I wanted to hold all the contradictions in my hands. I wanted to cut up the jumbled pieces and move them around. I wanted to touch the stories. And so I did.

I read through each interview transcript and copied the stories—the bits with beginnings, middles, ends, characters, and plot—into one Word document. I printed these stories and reorganized them chronologically. I grouped together stories participants told about the same events. I highlighted in one color their points of convergence; I highlighted in another their points of divergence. Like a braid, the points of coming together and moving apart became clearer to me. As I wove the stories together with the other texts I had collected, the case narrative acquired a form. The story I tell in the next chapter is certainly a product of my own making—it is fiction in so far as all stories are. They are fabricated; they are made. I strove, however, to tell a truthful story. To piece together the textual remains of these events, to glue them together in such a way that what I create is a cohesive representation of the whole experience.

As such, the next chapter takes a somewhat non-traditional form for academic writing. In tracing discourse through chronologically ordered texts, I was able to follow the intertextuality of meeting minutes, press releases, public statements, grant applications, and news coverage. The case narrative, therefore, draws upon numerous sources—interviews, newspaper articles, television broadcasts, internal documents from the Mayor’s office and the Economic Task Force, and publicly accessible Congressional records. In weaving together these discourses, I address aspects of my research questions...
in a non-linear, narrative fashion, and in the chapter that follows I articulate those connections as they occur temporally. Then, in the final chapter, I pull apart these interwoven threads, organizing my discussion by taking each research question in turn in order to draw specific conclusions about theoretical and practical implications.

Although the next chapter reads very narratively, I took great pains to note the sources of my information throughout. However, in the interest of creating a more readable account, I minimized parenthetical references in favor of integrating source descriptions in the course of storytelling. Extended quotes from participants’ interviews are indicated in the following chapter by italicized, inset text. Rather than using a traditional block quote, however, I chose to adopt a form of poetic transcription (Faulkner, 2010) in order to aesthetically represent the meter and pacing of participants’ spoken words while simultaneously drawing attention to the ways in which their stories structure and shape the case narrative. As LeGreco and Tracy (2009) acknowledged, the entire analysis process is an interpretive project: “Just as researchers actively lifted out patterns and themes through the structured questions, writers also make choices about which story a case could and should tell” (p. 1535).

Following Ellingson (2011), I selected excerpts from interview transcripts that articulated relevant themes and details in particularly compelling ways. Editing out extraneous verbiage—words and phrases that did not directly serve the story—I manipulated spacing, line breaks, and punctuation as I physically arranged these excerpts on the page in poetic form. I did not reorder the chronology of comments or intermingle the words of multiple interviewees. Wherever I added words for the sake of clarity, those additions are placed in brackets. Wherever I removed words to avoid redundancy and non
sequiturs, those deletions are indicated by an ellipses (…). Informed by an interpretive sensibility, I chose to employ this poetic form in order to more closely represent my participants’ spoken cadence.

I shared an early version of this case study narrative with my participants in an effort to ensure that their experiences were represented fairly, to give them an opportunity to offer their own interpretations, and to confirm that the language I used in this analysis chapter was accessible to an audience outside of academia. So, although I punctuated beginning, middle, and end, each of my participants also had an opportunity to play an active role in shaping this analytical text.

Researcher’s Role and Reflexivity

As I set out to study a community so close to home for me, I want to keep in mind Ellingson’s (2009) advice to take special care to respect participants’ experiences as valid, representing them in analysis in ways that honor local perspectives: “At the same time, researchers should take great care not to romanticize participants’ accounts as objective or somehow authentically true in their efforts to respect participants; all perspectives necessarily are partial…” (pp. 13-14). Representing such familiar people and places presents unique opportunities and challenges to this research endeavor. Issues of gaining access were nearly non-existent because, as a rhetorical citizen (McKerrow, 2010) of the Wilmington community, I had established long-term relationships with many of my participants.

My greatest concern was and continues to be that I do justice to the complexity of this situation. I do believe that I have heightened awareness of the partiality of my account due to my relationship to the town, and continually moving between theory and
observation in a process of reflexive abduction (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009) helped me to avoid the pitfalls of either glossing over the particularity of this research situation or missing the forest for the trees.

As such, my relationships with the people and places that interact to create the community of Wilmington informed and enriched my research design, writing, and interpretation at every step of this project. As I write, I continually seek to interrogate the ways in which my personal experiences color my representations of community building in this particular context. As a representation, this dissertation is necessarily separate and different from the lived actuality. Limited by language and my own understandings, the research narrative composed on these pages is not the full experience. It cannot be. However, I hope that my writing provides rich enough details so that the reader can engage with me in an ongoing interpretive process.
CHAPTER FOUR: CASE NARRATIVE

Part I: The Announcement

In May of 2008, Mayor David Raizk flew to Germany to represent the city of Wilmington at the grand opening of DHL’s new hub in Leipzig. As he sat on the plane next to his wife, Mayor Raizk worked to calm his lingering anxiety about the trip. Three months earlier, Wilmington city officials caught wind that the major international shipping company was conducting a business analysis for restructuring their US operations. Rumors speculating on changes had been floating around ever since, but DHL’s stateside representatives asserted that the company had no intentions of abandoning their commitment to the city of Wilmington.

In fact, when, in a February 22, 2008 teleconference, Ohio Lieutenant Governor Lee Fisher asked about the effect of possible restructuring plans on Wilmington, DHL officials indicated that no more than 25-30 jobs would be affected at that hub. DHL’s Executive Vice President of US Operations John Cameron stated that the company had made a $3 billion investment in the US and—while they did not expect to see gains from this investment for a couple years—DHL could not thrive as a global company without the Wilmington facility. Cameron even reported possible expansion plans, citing DHL’s order of seven new Boeing 777s to fly from Wilmington to Europe (L. Curliss, meeting minutes, February 22, 2008).

Despite these assurances, the Mayor still had reasons to worry. The housing market was collapsing in the US, and businesses were beginning to feel the pinch of the Great Recession, which according to retrospective economic analyses, US markets had been suffering through for about five months. According to the Bureau of Labor
Statistics, unemployment rates in Ohio had steadily increased from 5.7% at the beginning of the recession in December to 6.2% in May. Mayor Raizk expected a bit of downsizing. Businesses all over the country were making these sorts of cuts.

When the Mayor landed in Germany, his fears began to subside. After all, State of Ohio officials had offered him reassurances, stateside DHL representatives seemed unconcerned, and here he was in Germany, being treated like royalty. The new hub was opening in a small town out in the countryside of Leipzig. Mayor Raizk sat as a guest of honor at the opening ceremony, and German Federal Minister of Finance, Peer Steinbrück, gave the keynote address. Reflecting on that moment, Mayor Raizk recounted,

*In his address he mentioned Wilmington, Ohio.*

*So I was getting a little more in my comfort zone...*

*And you’ve got all these pictures of Wilmington and everything.*

*I’m thinking,*

*This can’t be bad.*

Feeling more at ease, the Mayor began looking forward to the latter half of his trip. He would spend a couple more days in a whirlwind business junket and then enjoy exploring Germany with his wife. Maybe they would cruise down the Rhine River and do a little sightseeing.

Setting his pre-flight anxieties aside, the Mayor excitedly embraced playing the role of international ambassador. He toured Berlin and met with members of the German Bundestag, the national Parliament. As he spoke with these German officials, he jovially extolled the virtues of his hometown, encouraging them to come visit this “wonderful
international port” in Wilmington, Ohio (D. Raizk, personal communication, June 21, 2012).

On May 28, 2008, Mayor Raizk’s travels brought him to DHL’s world headquarters in Bonn, on the banks of the Rhine River. In the late afternoon, as the sun began sinking over the former West German capital city, top DHL officials met in another building in the Deutsche Post complex for an important investor call. The Mayor watched on a computer screen with his host, Wolfgang Pordzik, DHL’s political liaison in Washington, D.C.

Across the world in Wilmington, Randy Riley gathered with the other Clinton County Commissioners to watch a web broadcast of the call. Randy was serving as President of the Board of Commissioners and he was excited to hear DHL’s announcement (R. Riley, personal communication, May 4, 2012). He knew the company was considering major changes, and he anticipated good news for the city of Wilmington. Since DHL’s parent company, Deutsche Post World Net (DPWN) acquired the Wilmington Air Park in 2003, DHL contracted ABX Air and ASTAR Air Cargo to transport packages from the Wilmington facility. As a result, on May 28, 2008 the Wilmington freight hub employed approximately 6,000 ABX workers, 1,000 ASTAR workers, and 1,200 DHL workers (Economic Task Force Fact Sheet, August 27, 2008; reported numbers fluctuated quite a bit in news coverage as several figures were often conflated—total jobs at the air park, direct and indirect job loss in the area, total number of DHL jobs lost nationwide as a result of this hub closing, and so on). Randy explained to me his expectations for the May 28, 2008 announcement, based on his understanding of DHL’s organizational structure at that time:
So even though it [the Air Park] was DHL’s responsibility and they owned it,
They were contracting ABX to staff the sort center.

And I thought that was kind of odd.

If I was running this big multi-million, billion dollar business,
I would certainly want all those people working for me.

So quite honestly, when they were talking about having this big press conference
And there were going to be major changes,
I thought,

Looking at it as a commissioner who had been working with this for over a year,
My thought was,

Oh cool,

They’re gonna take over the sort center.

They’re gonna step up and say,

As of this date, these employees are gonna be DHL employees...

We’re gonna phase out the ABX portion of this,

But we will maintain ABX as one of our major flyers.

So Randy Riley and David Raizk, sitting in front of computer screens in Wilmington and
Bonn, anticipated changes in DHL’s organizational structure. In fact, they even
anticipated net losses in total employment at the Wilmington Air Park. However, they did
not anticipate anything close to the full extent of those changes and consequent losses.

Citing an unacceptable expected EBIT (earnings before interest and taxes) loss of
$1.3 billion in 2008, DPWN officials leading the investor call outlined their new plan for
restructuring DHL’s US Express business, focusing on three primary areas (DHL Express
USA, 2008). First, they announced intentions to reduce infrastructure network capacity by consolidating and closing smaller sorting facilities and reworking routing plans for greater efficiency. Second, DHL planned to reduce overhead and other administrative costs. Finally, and most shocking to David Raizk, Randy Riley, and other Wilmingtonians watching this call, DPWN officials announced a proposed contract between DHL and United Parcel Service (UPS), whereby UPS would provide package sort and airlift capacity for DHL Express US domestic and international shipments within North America. UPS, that is, would be effectively taking over the job of 8,200 ABX, ASTAR, and DHL employees currently working at the Wilmington hub.

Mayor Raizk instantly recognized the implications for the city of Wilmington and arranged a meeting with John Mullen, DHL Express Global CEO, immediately following the call. Mayor Raizk recalled their interaction vividly:

_Here I am from Wilmington, Ohio,

And I’m on the 40th floor of one of the largest companies in the United States

Or in the world,

And they just told me that they’re pulling out of my town._

*And I said, wow._

*What do you say?*

*So, I said, “Do you have a deal with UPS?”*_

*Well, we think we do._

*“Is there anything we can do to restructure a deal that will change your mind?”_*

*No, I don’t think so._

*Every question was that way._
And I said, well,

And I remember this dramatically because I—

Sometimes I use really stilted language, and I said,

“Well, would you consider returning the airport to from whence it came?”

And he says,

“Well, that might be a possibility.”

With these words, a seed of possibility was planted for an eventual donation of
the air park back to the community of Wilmington, which many local leaders felt would
be essential to economic development without DHL. And so, David Raizk left DHL’s
world headquarters, his head in a fog. His wife whispered, “How bad is it?” He shook his
head and said, “Oh, it’s unimaginable.” Back at their hotel in Cologne, the Mayor and his
wife walked across a bridge, past the Cathedral of Cologne, the only structure in this city
still standing at the end of the devastating bombings of World War II. They walked
across the bridge and ate dinner in the courtyard, under the shadow of the cathedral. The
whole evening had an air of solemnity and gloom. He shot off a quick email to his
Executive Assistant, Laura Curliss, before boarding an emergency flight home: “Worst
news possible. Start getting the meetings lined up.”

Part II: Economic Task Force Forms

No sooner had Mayor Raizk’s plane touched US American soil, and a frenzy of
organizing activities, meetings, and phone calls began. One recipient of these frantic
phone calls was regional development director for the Ohio Department of Development
(ODOD), Kevin Carver. In his 30 year tenure as a public servant, Kevin had served as
executive director for community and economic development in Montgomery County,
city manager for the Dayton suburb of Riverside, and deputy city manager for the Dayton suburb of Huber Heights. In 2008, as a regional director for the ODOD, Kevin was responsible for overseeing development in a nine-county area in west central Ohio, including Clinton County. He reported to Lt. Gov. Lee Fisher, who also served as the head of the ODOD at that time.

Kevin’s phone was among the first to ring as the Mayor and his staff began organizing a response. Kevin described that moment and the consequent organizing efforts to me:

*I remember getting a call from one of the governor’s communications people Saying that the governor was going to be in Wilmington on a Sunday.*

*And I said,*

*Well, great.*

*And she said,*

*No, you don’t understand. You need to be there too.*

Kevin knew that DHL had recently held an investor call and that some restructuring of the Wilmington hub was possible. However, in his time as regional director, most of his attention was focused on the more densely populated urban center of Dayton, and he was fairly unconcerned with the possibility of structural changes within one organization in the small town of Wilmington, Ohio. That is, he was unconcerned until this phone call.

Kevin traveled to Wilmington with Governor Ted Strickland and Lt. Gov. Fisher to meet with the Mayor and assess the situation. Kevin described his boss at the time, Lee Fisher, as being particularly motivated to act and to act quickly:

*He just grabbed hold*
And was just voracious and determined and focused hard.

He was relentless about—we need to get this up

And we need to understand this better

And we need to go at this

And we need to go at that.

And he did that with not only his own staff,

With me and some people in Columbus,

But he did it with the leadership of this community too.

The first-responders, the state and local leaders reacting to DHL’s announcement, recognized that because of the size of the Air Park and the number of people employed, the DHL facility was really a regional job center. As such, the impending crisis would not be isolated to Wilmington or even Clinton County. ABX Air, the DHL contract company with the largest number of employees at the Air Park, drew employees from at least 45 counties in Ohio, as highlighted by the colored counties in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Ohio Counties Affected by Potential Closing of DHL’s Hub in Wilmington.

The blue regions on the map represent those counties in which the Wilmington Air Park was the largest single-site employer of residents. ABX Air employed 2,358 people from Clinton County, 1,583 people from Highland County, 576 people from Greene County, 448 people from Montgomery County, and 369 people from Fayette County (Economic Task Force file).

Because of the potential for regional hardship, these first responders knew they needed to craft a regional response. Mayor Raizk and Lt. Gov. Fisher quickly decided to co-chair a task force. Co-chair Raizk lent the task force legitimacy in the local community and nearby counties, which might have otherwise been distrustful of disconnected state officials and other outsiders coming into town to tell them what to do. Co-chair Fisher lent his politically recognizable name to the effort and connected the task force to a larger network of state and national resources that would be needed in the coming months. Although Lee Fisher could not always attend meetings due to his other obligations as Lieutenant Governor, he maintained contact with the Mayor and his staff and remained engaged in the unfolding events in Wilmington and the surrounding region. Kevin Carver stood in as his representative at all task force meetings.

Deciding leadership, then, was the easy part; compiling the task force was a much more complicated task. Kevin described their process for designing the response team:

*We sat down over and over and over
And sort of built a list of who needs to be on that committee.*

*Who’s important?*

*Who’s the stakeholder?*

*Where’s the community leadership?*
And we ended up with, I don’t know, 35ish people.

It may have gotten up to 37 or 38 at some point in time.

So we had representatives from ASTAR,

From ABX/ATSG,

And we actually invited the head DHL guy that was here.

He came once or twice.

We met every two weeks.

It started from a sense of

Let’s get everybody together.

Let’s get everybody on the same page.

Let’s get people focused on what the issues are and how we can respond.

It just wasn’t enough.

The Economic Task Force’s (ETF) One-Year Report to the community, distributed on May 28, 2009, listed a total of 41 participants, which included politicians at the city, county, state, and federal levels of government; union representatives from the AFL-CIO, Air Line Pilots Association International, and the Airline Professional Association; administrators from the high school, community college, and liberal arts institution in Wilmington; CEOs of local businesses; spiritual leaders; and others connected to economic planning and development (see Table 1).

When Kevin said, “It just wasn’t enough,” he was referring to the insufficiency of full task force meetings, which 30-40 members attended every two weeks. Mayor Raizk remembered these meetings as being very efficient and businesslike, and maybe they were. But the task force meetings received criticism on two fronts: the size of the group
### Table 1

**Economic Task Force Members as of May 28, 2009**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Government</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>U.S. Government</strong></td>
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| US House of Representatives | Mike Turner  
David Hobson  |
| US Senate | Sherrod Brown  
George Voinovich  |
| **State Government** |  |
| Department of Development | Lee Fisher  
Kevin Carver  
Quinten Harris  
Ronda Kinnamon  |
| State House of Representatives | David Daniels  |
| State Senate | John Carey  |
| Department of Transportation | Hans Jindal  |
| **County Government** |  |
| Adams County | Brian Baldridge  |
| Brown County | Margery Paeltz  |
| Clinton County | Randy Riley  
Mark Brooker  
Jeff Linkous  |
| CC Regional Planning Commission | Chris Schock  |
| Fayette County | Tony Anderson  
Rob Hedrick  |
| Green County | Howard Poston  |
| Highland County | Gary Heaton  
Mike Rector  |
| Montgomery Co. Port Authority | Ron Parker  |
| Ross County | James Caldwell  |
| **City Government** |  |
| Mayor’s Office | David Raizk  
Laura Curliss  |
| Wilmington City Council | Fred Ertel  
David Hockaday  |

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<td>Air Line Pilots Association International (ASTAR Pilots)</td>
<td>Landon Harmon</td>
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<td>Joe Hete</td>
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<td>Mark Policinski</td>
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<td>Keith Hyde</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Religious</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Wilmington Area Ministerial Assc.</td>
<td>Dean Feldmeyer</td>
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Source: ETF One-Year Report to the Community (2009)
and the fact that the meetings were closed to the public. Task force leadership attempted to address each of these issues independently, and so I discuss them in a similar fashion.

**Criticism #1: Too Large to Act**

First, some critics of the meetings felt that the group was too large for meaningful action. Certainly, group communication scholars have argued that, in time, larger and larger groups reach a point of diminishing returns (Bettenhausen, 1991; Hare, 1982; Wheelan & McKeage, 1993), where the problems of coordination and motivation eventually outweigh the advantages of having an ever-expanding pool of skills, talents, and resources. Perhaps the full task force met that limit.

However, the full ETF was not designed as a decision-making body so much as an information-sharing body. The bi-monthly task force meetings provided a forum for the people most active in shaping economic development efforts in the region to share information, co-construct a coherent story about the crisis and response, and coordinate efforts to support that story. At the first meeting of the ETF, Mayor Raizk instituted a centralized network structure by naming chairs to five subcommittees: (1) Retention Committee – Lee Fisher, Lieutenant Governor; (2) Workforce Committee – Keith Hyde, Director of Workforce Services Unlimited; (3) Economic Impact Data and Analysis Committee – Mark Brooker, Clinton County Administrator and Economic Development Director; (4) Redevelopment Committee – David Raizk, Wilmington Mayor; and (5) Community Outreach Committee – Randy Riley, President of Clinton County Board of Commissioners.

These subcommittees took responsibility for decision-making and action on specific tasks. As such, each committee existed as an entity both joined with and separate
from the rest of the task force. Each subcommittee, then, existed in the words of Burke (1950/1969) as “at once a distinct substance and consubstantial with another” (p. 21). Unified under the broad mission of providing guidance, leadership, and information regarding the impact of DHL’s business decisions to leaders and policy makers, the subcommittees represented important component parts that could be differently emphasized according to the demands of the situation. This act of early delegation and organization proved vital to the leadership’s quick response.

**Criticism #2: Too Private and Exclusive**

While some complained that the task force was too large, others felt that the structure of the meetings unnecessarily excluded interested parties. This second criticism originated from community members closed out of the meetings. One drawback of a centralized network structure and controlled communication flow is the potential for communication underload. That is, because a large number of people receive source messages only after they have been carefully crafted, revised, and widely dispersed in the form of public statements, press releases, or community reports, Wilmingtonians closed out of the meetings recognized that the information they received was necessarily partial and strategic.

In the language of the Montreal School, Wilmington citizens’ access to conversation (intersubjective negotiations of cognition and social order) with decision-makers was severely limited. Extensive conversations in subcommittees and then full meetings of the task force preceded any interactions with the larger community. In this way, malleable conversations between task force members moved from the site (discourse-world) of experience into the surface (text-world) of memory and record,
becoming a unified text that could be referenced by ETF members in conversations with community members. As a result, ETF members enjoyed fuller access to text and conversation than most community members who were closed out of these meetings.

A sense of fear and uncertainty was palpable in the affected region, and where information was lacking, speculation reigned. Mark Rembert, who did not enter as a key player until several months following the restructuring announcement, recalled feeling frustrated that the task force meetings were closed to the public:

*At the time, I thought it was like, total BS because it was closed doors.*

*Now, I understand why it was*

*And I respect it much more for what an amazing act of leadership it was.*

*Where they missed something was getting the community involved.*

*Coming up with something that the community could do*

*To feel like a part of the economic development process.*

*It was just—*

*It was more of a, “Oh, we’ll take care of it.”*

In anticipation and response to this criticism, members of the task force did work to mitigate fear and widespread panic by providing information to the general public through regular press releases and occasional public meetings. The tasks of drafting these messages and organizing these meetings were often delegated to Laura Curliss, Executive Assistant to Mayor Raizk, who essentially became the city’s communication director and public relations specialist overnight. In her words:

*I like to say,*

*As of May 28, 2008,*
I had a job dropped in the middle of my job, just to deal with all this...

At first it was shocking.

It was literally like when somebody dies in your family.

You know, you’re doing stuff

And it’s busy

And you bury them

And you’re cleaning out the family home

And it’s all kind of like a bit of a haze...

I dread to think what would have happened

If the person sitting in my seat

Didn’t have a lot of communication skills and smarts, you know?

I mean, I’m a lawyer.

I’m used to writing a lot of stuff and a lot of volume.

And so volume

And stuff coming at me

And thinking quickly

And focusing messages

If we didn’t have it...

(trails off, shaking head)

According to Laura, at the end of every task force meeting she sat down with Kimberly Ratcliff, vice president and crisis management specialist from Paul Werth Associates Public Relations firm. Together, they drafted press releases based on their notes from the
meetings. After every meeting they would ask each other, “Okay, what do we know? What can we say?”

For better or for worse, the leadership of the ETF decided at the beginning that these meetings would be closed to the public in order to facilitate an open, frank discussion among politicians and business leaders who might otherwise hesitate to speak for fear of being held accountable for those words in another context. The messages people outside of the meetings could access were carefully crafted press releases, speeches, and reports. Given the climate of fear and uncertainty among some citizens at that time, any barrier between themselves and the sources of information could be perceived as a lack of transparency. In our interviews, several local leaders acknowledged this criticism, but also spoke of the value of having an enclaved space for working through how to articulate their message.

The task force formed, therefore, with the dual purpose of crafting a coherent narrative and coordinating regional response efforts. At this point, our story diverges. The national news media ran with the carefully crafted transorganizational narrative while local, regional, and federal officials worked more quietly on coordinating a complex interorganizational response. Because both parts of this story are important in their own right, let’s take them one at a time, beginning with quieter acts of coordination (the noisier moments of which were captured in media reports) before moving to the more widely recognized national news media narrative that beamed into millions of people’s living rooms to wrench their hearts and open their pocketbooks.
Part III: Coordinating an Interorganizational Response

At that first ETF meeting, Mayor Raizk and the Steering Committee defined the group’s collective goals. Although he knew from his brief meeting with John Mullen following the investor call that the likelihood of convincing DHL not to leave the Wilmington hub was slim to none, Mayor Raizk also recognized the political beating he would receive if he did not make a public effort to retain the multinational corporation. Therefore, the ETF pursued two simultaneous goals: find a way to keep DHL from leaving Wilmington and begin aggressive regional redevelopment.

Save the Jobs: Investigating Anti-Trust Implications

Because DHL had publicly announced their intention to partner with UPS, members of the task force approached their first goal by investigating potential anti-trust implications of a deal between two of the top international shipping companies in the world. On June 5, 2008, the Ohio congressional delegation met to discuss the issue. During that meeting, they drafted a letter to send to the Attorney General, the US ambassador to Germany, and the German ambassador to the US, which would call for thorough investigations of the legality of DHL and UPS’s intended contract. The letters described the proposed deal between DHL and UPS, the anticipated economic effects on southwest Ohio, and the lack of opportunity ABX Air had been given to provide DPWN with alternatives to abandoning the Wilmington hub. The delegation presented these draft letters on June 11, as Mayor Raizk and Lt. Gov. Fisher presided over the first ETF meeting in the Kelly Religious Center on Wilmington College’s campus.

At this first meeting, Nan Kohnen, representing US Senator George Voinovich, explained that the likelihood of winning an anti-trust lawsuit against DHL was marginal,
but encouraged the task force to make the case anyway because a legal battle on this front would slow DHL’s ability to move forward with finalizing plans with UPS. According to Laura Curliss’s paraphrased meeting minutes, Kohnen reportedly advocated building the anti-trust case so as to buy time for ABX Air, ASTAR, and the ETF to create a competitive package to lure DHL away from UPS, wooing them to stay at the Air Park.

As members of the task force launched their letter-writing campaign to bring the proposed contract to the attention of lawyers and politicians in positions of power, a community coalition began forming with the support of local pilots’ unions. 125 people attended the coalition’s first public meeting, which was facilitated by Mark Dimondstein, lead field organizer with the American Postal Workers Union, AFL-CIO. Meeting attendees consisted of members of the Teamsters Local 1224 and the Air Line Pilots Association, as well as area residents and non-unionized air park workers. According to an article covering the meeting in the *Wilmington News Journal*, fears were high among attendees that DHL’s business decision-making hinged on workers’ performance:

> Several people said it is very important for employees to do as good a job as ever because DHL probably can immediately cancel its hub services contract here based upon poor performance due to high absenteeism or the intentional sending of shipments to the wrong destination. (Huffenberger, 2008a)

In this article, workers expressed confusion regarding action. They felt hurt, angry, and scared at the thought of losing their air park jobs and wanted to act out on those emotions so DHL officials would recognize the human consequences of their decisions. However, since a contract had not yet been signed, options still hypothetically existed to keep DHL in Wilmington, and so workers did not want to spoil that possibility.
The coalition solidified under the name of “Save the Jobs, Save Our Community,” which some media reports also referenced as Save Ohio Jobs. In letters members sent out to potential supporters, Save the Jobs defined their mission as focusing around three primary objectives: (1) communicate opposition to DHL’s proposed restructuring plan; (2) utilize paid advertising to communicate locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally “the concerns and impact of the proposed restructuring on the residents of Wilmington and Ohio and the resulting loss of competition to consumers in the U.S.”; and (3) generate and disseminate fact-based information to inform media, policy-makers, and affected workers and residents. Captain Joe Teuchert, a pilot with ASTAR Air Cargo, served as the group’s spokesperson and helped to organize a trip to Germany in which air park workers met with DPWN officials, members of the German media, and representatives of the German government (Huffenberger, 2008d).

As part of their efforts, Save the Jobs members led multiple petition-signing campaigns. At the end of June, a group marched together from the Teamsters Local 1224 parking lot on the air park grounds to the DHL Administration Building to deliver petitions signed by more than 9,300 people (Huffenberger, 2008b). As they marched, participants chanted in unison, “What do we want? Keep the jobs! When do we want them? Now!” Upon entering the cavernous white lobby, Spokesperson Teuchert approached a security guard and asked to speak with the senior-most manager on the site. “You got him right here,” said the guard, referring to himself. After handing over the signed copies, Teuchert asked the guard to forward on the petitions to DPWN. No one from DHL’s management staff in Wilmington was present to accept the petitions and
when reporters inquired about their absence, they were told to contact the communications office of DHL Americas in Plantation, Florida.

On July 14, members of Save the Jobs met in Columbus, Ohio to deliver a second set of petitions bearing more than 11,000 signatures to the offices of Gov. Ted Strickland and Attorney General Nancy Rogers. This time, 80 representatives of the grassroots coalition gathered on the steps of the Ohio Statehouse with three requests. First, they asked presidential candidates John McCain and Barack Obama to come to Wilmington and meet with affected workers and residents. Second, they requested that the Ohio Attorney General “aggressively pursue every anti-trust action available” to halt the proposed deal between international shipping giants. Finally, they expressed their gratitude to Gov. Strickland, urging him to “remain firm” in his commitment to Wilmington-area workers and residents (Huffenberger, 2008c).

Members of the ETF and Save the Jobs continued their tireless efforts to raise awareness of DHL’s proposed deal and the effects it would have on the southwestern Ohio region, calling for anti-trust action through these extensive petition and letter-writing campaigns. In an August 4, 2008 letter to Assistant Attorney General Thomas Barnett and Federal Trade Commission Chairman William Kovacic, US Senators Herb Kohl and Orrin Hatch, chairman and ranking member respectively of the Antitrust Subcommittee of the Senate Committee on the Judiciary, officially called for federal review of anti-trust implications of the proposed contract between DHL and UPS. Political leaders, union presidents, local business owners, and college administrators gained access to their largest decision-making audience to date on August 19, 2008, during a Joint Field Hearing of the House State Government and Elections Committee.
and Senate Finance and Financial Institutions Committee. This hearing was the first of many large-scale discussions probing possible anti-trust violations by DHL/UPS. On September 9, members of the task force testified in front of the full Judiciary Committee of the US House of Representatives. On September 16, 2008, state and local representatives spoke on behalf of Wilmington as the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure considered the effects of a proposed arrangement between DHL and UPS on competition, customer service, and employment within the express package industry.

The motivation driving all of these efforts was to give creative minds and persuasive tongues an opportunity to articulate an alternative plan to DHL that might be attractive enough to convince them to keep their operations in Wilmington. However, on November 10, 2008, after nearly six months of frantic politicking, protesting, and letter-writing by task force members and supporters, DHL officially announced that it would end its domestic shipping in the United States, limiting its business to international shipping and closing the Wilmington hub (Burkey, 2008; Huffenberger, 2008e). Efforts to save the air park jobs had failed. Come January, those jobs would no longer exist. It was time for a different strategy.

*Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats: Planning for Redevelopment*

From the very beginning of the response efforts, task force members quietly prepared for the possibility that an anti-trust lawsuit would not save the jobs at the Wilmington Air Park. As they worked relentlessly on Plan A (save the jobs), they simultaneously pursued Plan B: aggressively plan for redevelopment. The Redevelopment Sub-Committee, led by Mayor Raizk, sought out model cases of
successful redevelopment, facilitated the hiring of Rafael Underwood as Economic Recovery Coordinator for the region using a US Economic Development Administration grant, engaged graduate students from the University of Cincinnati to develop a strategic plan for Clinton County’s economic future, and issued a request for information (RFI) for facility development, which resulted in 12 proposals from groups interested in redeveloping the Air Park.

Before redevelopment plans of the Air Park could be considered as feasible possibilities, however, the task force needed to negotiate ownership rights. So long as DHL owned the facility, no one but DHL could sell it. Fearing the Air Park would quickly fall into disrepair, a small contingency from the task force began meeting with DHL officials in the ODOD Executive Conference Room on the 29th floor of Riffe Tower in Ohio’s state capital. Mark Barbash, chief economic development officer to the Department of Development, accompanied Gov. Strickland, Lt. Gov. Fisher, Mayor Raizk, Kevin Carver, Clinton County Port Authority Board Chairman John Limbert, and occasional rotating task force members in these discussions.

Kevin Carver described an early meeting to me in which DHL sent Wolfgang Pordzik, their Vice President of Legislative Affairs in Washington; Jon Olin, their Senior Legal Counsel from their US headquarters in Florida; an international representative from DPWN; and Marv Larger, an executive at Exel Logistics, a company which is part of the supply chain division of Deutsche Post DHL. According to Kevin, this meeting was “pretty ugly and didn’t last a long time and there wasn’t a whole lot that got accomplished.”
By the next meeting, John Limbert began losing his patience. Frustrated and tired with the political dynamic of these discussions, John left the meeting room with the general sentiment of, “Okay, let’s get this thing either resolved or let’s just not have any more meetings.” The meetings were being held in a secure conference area, which meant that there was only one way in and one way out. A central bank of elevators in the center of the building offered the lone exit from the floor.

As Kevin tells the story, John then approached the elevators and found himself standing in awkward silence next to Marv Larger waiting for the doors to open and offer them reprieve and escape. The elevators in Riffe Tower are notoriously slow, so they waited together in heavy silence. After several seconds, John broke the tense quiet with a sarcastic sigh, “Well, that went really well, didn’t it?” Marv laughed, acknowledging that this second meeting was, like the first, neither good nor fun.

The doors to the elevator slid open and the two men graciously stepped into their escape vessel. As Marv settled into one corner of the car, John’s eyes explored his riding companion’s face and a spark of recognition caused his forehead to burrow in searching thought. “I know you,” John said.

Marv looked at John and said, “Where did you go to high school?”

One elevator ride and a few words of cheap talk later, John and Marv realized that they had attended the same parochial high school in Dayton, Ohio, some 45 years earlier. In fact, they learned that they grew up within three blocks of one another in an old north Dayton neighborhood. As the doors slid open on the bottom floor of Riffe Tower, John and Marv decided to conduct their own informal meeting over an adult beverage down the street. After receiving approval from their respective “sides of the table” to continue
their discussions “offline,” these informal conversations between Marv and John continued for the first five or six months into the year-long formal negotiations. Kevin Carver attributes the first major breakthrough in negotiations to that initial elevator ride conversation.

So, during the year following DHL’s restructuring announcement, several task-force-coordinated responses were occurring simultaneously. Members of the Retention Committee spread their story to potentially influential politicians to pursue anti-trust implications and a select group of ETF representatives met with DHL officials to try to negotiate a deal for donating the Air Park to a public entity. At the same time, the Workforce Committee set up retraining facilities and one-stop transition centers to proactively assist Air Park employees facing impending job loss and members of the Redevelopment Committee sought federal grant money and conducted a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis of Clinton County to determine the strongest sectors for future planning.

Because many of these response efforts required a substantial amount of resources, part of the task force’s plan for addressing the potential economic impact of DHL’s departure involved broadcasting a carefully crafted narrative of impending economic disaster to whoever would listen. As then-County Commissioner Randy Riley said, the thinking at the time was, “Any publicity is good publicity so long as they get your name right.” Situating their story within a broader social narrative surrounding the US economy, the ETF welcomed politicians, celebrities, and journalists to Wilmington with open arms.
Part IV: Crafting a Narrative for a National Audience

National media broadcast the plight of Wilmington across the U.S., highlighting the economic impact of job loss, failing businesses, and people struggling to make ends meet. In many of these national renderings, Wilmington’s story fulfilled the basic requirements for a traditional romance narrative (Frye, 1957): idyllic perfection disrupted by some problem of separation from this ideal. In this section, I describe the national coverage of events in Wilmington and consider the unintended consequences of this coverage for economic development in the area.

On Tuesday, December 16, 2008, the first major media production rolled into town to produce a special interest story on Wilmington. Scott Pelley and the CBS News crew set up interviews with Mayor Raizk, Air Park employees, and volunteers at Sugartree Ministries. I remember being surprised when I watched this broadcast because they referred to Sugartree Ministries as “the local soup kitchen,” which I suppose it always has been, but until that story, I had never called it that. In my mind, soup kitchens only existed in other places or times: poor urban centers or the long-ago days of the Great Depression.

A week before the camera crew rolled into town, Solly Granatstein, producer of 60 Minutes, sent out letters to potential interviewees. The Mayor’s office had a copy of one such letter saved in their archives. Following a brief introduction, the body of the recruitment letter proceeded as follows:

I’m working on a story about how the DHL-related layoffs are hurting Wilmington. Speaking on behalf of everybody at 60 Minutes, our hearts go out to
everybody in town, especially those who are losing their jobs and otherwise going through hard times.

We were really sorry to hear, through the Sheriff’s department, that your home is in foreclosure. As we see it, even though you do not work for DHL directly, it’s possible that this turn of events is part of the general economic downturn in Wilmington. In any event, I’d really like to talk to you about your situation.

This recruitment letter provides insights into *60 Minutes* approach to telling Wilmington’s story. They entered the town looking for stories of how “DHL-related layoffs are hurting Wilmington.” They sought interviewees by looking at foreclosure notices and unemployment records. As a result, the story they told was a bleak one.

To catch a glimpse of the dreary image of Wilmington conjured up by national media reports like this one, readers barely needed to move beyond the headlines: “Residents fear DHL move will devastate region” (Hannah, 2008a); “Small Ohio town despairs as DHL cuts jobs” (National Public Radio, 2008); “Wilmington mulls life without major employer” (Hannah, 2008b); “Ohio city devastated by loss of DHL” (*Associated Press*, 2008); “Special delivery: Ho Ho Shop ease the pain of the recession for Wilmington families affected by DHL layoffs; shop expects to assist nearly 1,500 kids this year; hundreds still in need of holiday presents” (*PR Newswire*, 2008); “Hard times hit Ohio town hard; biggest employer in town of 13,000 laying off 7,500” (Lynch, 2008).

If readers managed to move beyond the headline, the stories’ introductions expanded upon the misery merely suggested in the eye-catching large print above the
fold. James Hannah narrated the trauma poignantly in his November 1, 2008 *Associated Press* article, in which he began,

As she stood on her front porch with two small pumpkins at her feet, tears begin to roll down the cheeks of Becky Smith. The 46-year-old mother of four and 20-year employee with ABX Air is frightened for her future, as are many in this southwest Ohio community of 12,000 that has found itself to be a focal point in this election year.

Or, in this anonymously authored story from the *AP Wire* on November 30, 2008:

The storefronts are empty in the heart of downtown, windows marked by signs declaring ‘For Rent’ and ‘For Sale.’ A local charity is inundated with phone calls from parents with the same plea: Help us put toys under our Christmas tree. This is the state of affairs in Wilmington, a southwest Ohio city that is struggling to stay afloat as the impending shutdown of an air shipping hub threatens to sink many of its 12,000 residents into unemployment. (‘Ohio city devastated by loss of DHL,’ 2008)

Journalist after journalist expressed similar sentiments as s/he began a story replete with references to pain, suffering, struggle, sadness, dark hours, fear, sacrifices, victims, downsizing, bankruptcy, crisis, and broken dreams.

I consider the implications of deficit-based narratives more fully in Chapter 5, but for now, I will simply say that the focus on future deficit and potential loss in national media coverage activated certain normative obligations and created a sense of urgency for outside action and intervention. Whatever advantages these stories may have provided, though, the bleak national coverage accomplished very little by way of
assuaging local anxiety or putting that nervous energy to productive use. For that part of the story, we turn to Mark Rembert and Taylor Stuckert.

**Part V: Organizing for Nontraditional Economic Development**

In early 2008, Taylor was volunteering for the Peace Corps in Bolivia, where he worked in the Agriculture Extension program, and Mark was living and working in West Philadelphia for a start-up public relations firm. After Taylor left for the Peace Corps, Mark decided he was unhappy in his job and quit with the intention to join the Peace Corps as well. He eventually wanted to do development work in the US but thought he would be more competitive for domestic jobs if he attained international experience first (M. Rembert, personal communication, May 10, 2012). But then, DHL announced their restructuring plan. Mark reflects on that time:

*I remember just being fascinated from afar.*

*I couldn’t even wrap my head around it at the time.*

*I remember going to parties and everybody asking me about it.*

*Nobody ever asked me about Ohio or Wilmington*

*And then all the sudden everywhere I’d go people were asking about it*

*Because it was such a big news story at the time.*

*I eventually decided, why am I still here?*

*I should go back home.*

*That’s where the action is.*

So, in August of 2008, Mark moved back to Wilmington, which was something he never thought he would do. Like many high-achievers from rural parts of the United States, Mark planned to leave his hometown and never look back. Curiosity brought him
back. He got an internship at WYSO, the Miami Valley Public Radio station, in order to better situate himself as an observer. This new position gave him the authority to call people in town and request interviews. He used this unique access to begin blogging about the situation in Wilmington from an economist’s perspective. And then, Taylor came back unexpectedly.

Taylor returned home to Wilmington prematurely when the Peace Corps was evacuated from Bolivia due to political turmoil. Mark and Taylor moved into The Red Brick, a downtown building that housed a yoga studio and Mark’s mother’s counseling office. With Taylor’s return, Mark intensified his observations:

- *All that stuff became more fun to show up at because there were two of us.*
- *And then, I think we just started talking.*
- *We just talked to more and more people and realized—*
  
  *There was such an opportunity.*

*There was such a nervous energy in everyday people.*

In November 2008, in an attempt to harness that energy and direct it toward something productive, Mark and Taylor founded Energize Clinton County (ECC). To reiterate from Chapter 1, their initial website described ECC as an organization dedicated to working with the Wilmington community to realize its potential, capitalize on its resources, and respond to what Martin Luther King, Jr. referred to as “the fierce urgency of now.” According to the website’s information page, the organization’s name came from “the energy [Mark and Taylor] felt when we chose not to accept this fate and began to contemplate the now-available opportunities, and the amazing potential for our hometown” (Rembert & Stuckert, 2008).
On November 20, 2008, Taylor publicly trumpeted ECC’s arrival in a letter to the editor in the *Wilmington News Journal* in which he proposed green technologies as a viable solution to Wilmington’s economic woes. The next day, ECC’s website went live with two blog entries clarifying the purpose of the organization. The first entry highlighted Greensburg, Kansas as an “excellent example of not only a town that demonstrated sheer strength in their ability to recover from such an immediate disaster, but did so in a manner that has set a precedence in how small towns can… rise out of the ashes and prosper.” The second blog entry announced a new media coverage page in which Mark and Taylor provided links to stories that “shift the national media spotlight on Wilmington away from focusing only on the crisis and towards the amazing hope we have that Wilmington will one day serve as a model for Green economic development.” The first two links led to stories in the *Daily Kos*, an explicitly liberal political analysis blog, and *Treehugger*, a sustainability blog that links itself to traditionally liberal environmentalists in its very title.

The youthful energy and optimism that Mark and Taylor brought to finding opportunity among the rubble of this economic disaster inspired hope in some and skepticism in others. The skeptics rooted their criticism in a description of the Wilmington High School graduates as naïve political puppets for the Obama administration. The newly elected president had won, by most accounts, due to the youth vote, and Mark and Taylor did not do much in these early days to dispel rumors that they were implementing a liberal agenda. In addition to their choice of sources for their first blog entries, Taylor’s references in the letter to the editor also leaned left by citing Barack Obama and the progressive think tank Center for American Progress in support of his
argument that green is the way to go. Clinton County residents have voted overwhelmingly in favor of Republican candidates in recent years, supporting George W. Bush through two elections and rallying for John McCain in 2008. As such, Mark and Taylor’s “liberal” agenda did not necessarily resonate with some of the more conservative members of the community.

However, in the face of economic crisis, many people were eager for good ideas and open to innovative solutions, regardless of the political leanings of their sources. One such person was Rob Jaehnig, a Republican city council member representing the 4th ward. According to Rob, his involvement with ECC was intimately connected to his own experiences with unemployment following DHL’s departure:

*At the same time that DHL was closing their doors,*

*Con-way was going through a restructuring and I found myself,*

*After 20 years with the company,*

*On the outside looking in.*

*Let go due to consolidations and staff reductions and so forth.*

*Nothing of my own fault, but I found myself unemployed.*

*And the day that I lost my job and my company car and so forth,*

*I got home*

*And my wife basically gave me 45 minutes to feel sorry for myself.*

*And then said,*

*Tonight is the first meeting of Energize Clinton County.*

*We’re going.*

*Suck it up.*
What are you going to do, just sit in here and mope?

Let’s get out there and get involved.

And so I went to that meeting that night.

Mark and Taylor’s message resonated with Rob because his life circumstances at that moment demanded that he start doing things in a different way. From that moment forward, Rob threw himself into volunteering and getting involved with creative problem solving in Wilmington. Because of all the hullabaloo around the town, he found plenty of activities to keep himself busy. Beginning with that first ECC meeting, Rob felt inspired to participate in less obvious forms of economic development. He recalled a conversation with his wife following his participation with a project hosted by Feed the Children in which several semi-trucks rolled into town to stock Sugartree Ministries:

It was another one of those life-changing moments.

And my wife says,

This is what you do.

These big projects that change the face of what’s going on.

That’s what you do.

And so, I started looking for economic development jobs,

Jobs that make a difference...

Finally I ended up with CIFT.

CIFT stands for the Center for Innovative Food Technology. This statewide center focuses on developing food and agricultural technologies as a form of economic development. According to Rob,

Most people, when they think of [economic development]
They think of the traditional method, which is

Convince companies to build their new location in our community.

That’s standard economic development.

What we do is not that.

What we do is we help the businesses that are already in the state,

Help them grow,

Produce new product lines, new technologies.

Have them grow and hire and build new facilities,

Hopefully here in Ohio.

And grow the employment base by making those that already here stronger,

And help solve problems to keep businesses here that are thinking about leaving.

Like Rob Jaehnig, Mark and Taylor sought to bolster non-traditional economic development in the region. As they found their grounding in the community, they quickly found a network of likeminded others eager to collaborate on problem-based projects.

In late 2008, Mark and Taylor first met Chris Schock, Executive Director of the Regional Planning Commission (RPC). Chris’s boisterous, excitable personality combined with Mark and Taylor’s idealistic visions for Wilmington’s redevelopment generated a creative synergy amongst the triad. Just months earlier, the RPC had kicked off a Buy Local campaign as a consortium with the Chamber of Commerce, Wilmington College, and a couple local nonprofit organizations. Chris Schock recalled their first meeting:

So, Mark, Taylor, and I met...

And [the RPC] had just talked about [starting this Buy Local Campaign]
But we had no one to run it.

These guys,

They have the right mentality.

I understand Taylor is coming from an international development background—

We share that mentality because that’s where I’m schooled from.

It’s like,

This is perfect.

We’re on the same plane about what needs to be done for the future,

So let’s just do it...

Let’s contract them to run the Buy Local campaign

And give them something—

A tangible project—

That will really make a name for ECC.

At this point in the story, ECC forged a strong partnership with the Regional Planning Commission. Together, they focused on building a more resilient local community by “hardening” local businesses. Chris was a former FEMA employee, and so the language of “hardening” is rooted in his years of emergency preparedness and response work in the context of natural disasters. He described hardening as follows:

FEMA would call it hardening when buildings are leveled in a hurricane

And they come in

And they say we’re going to harden the school.

We’re going to make the school more durable

So that it can’t be blown down by a hurricane.
Okay.

So, that’s the kind of effort we’re trying to do

In the sense of

We’re trying to harden local businesses through the Buy Local campaign,

We’re trying to harden them through energy efficiency,

We’re trying to harden the community of young professionals by having a Fellow’s program.

We’re trying to do those kind of things, okay?

And then the farmer’s market

And the community visioning

And the airpark master plan,

All of it fits in different ways of hardening, right?

Diversify the airpark, so it’s better hardened

So you’re not having an economic disaster because one employer leaves.

Unfettered from zoning and regulation commitments due to the lack of regional economic activity in the wake of DHL’s departure and informed by his experience as a FEMA employee, Chris led an effort to “plug the leaks” of local wealth outflow in the metaphoric bucket of Clinton County—leaks that were largely unnoticed or ignored in the preceding years of wealth and plenty. This plan to “plug the leaks” focused on promoting five elements of “the local”: (1) local visioning by collaborating with other members of the Economic Task Force to engage in more contemplative thought about the region’s future; (2) local food by rebranding the Clinton County Farmer’s Market in 2009 and establishing a partnership between Wilmington College and CIFT; (3) local
businesses through the development of the Buy Local First campaign; (4) local energy as led by ECC in establishing a Green Enterprise Zone, installing solar panels at a city-owned industrial site, and facilitating energy audits of local homes and businesses; and (5) “local yokels” by creating the Clinton Community Fellows program and launching efforts to attract and retain young professionals (Mallow, Schock, & Romanos, 2012).

All of these projects sought to accomplish two tasks: cultivate project-based collaboration between community members and build a more resilient local network by increasing complex interdependence. As one illustration, consider the Buy Local First campaign. This project was born from the suggestion that for every $100 spent, $68 stays in the local economy when spent at a locally owned business and only $43 stays in the local economy when spent at a big box/chain store (Civic Economics, 2008). According to Chris Schock, the primary purpose of this campaign was to encourage local spending by building a local communication infrastructure connecting consumers and businesses.

The pre-Buy Local model consisted of businesses connected to their consumers, but nothing more (see quadrant 1 below). The first step of the Buy Local First campaign was to provide a centralized site for listing local businesses (quadrant 2 below). Then, the Regional Planning Commission and ECC (represented by Chris, Mark, and Taylor) began hosting weekly coffee meetings with local business owners to facilitate relationship building and to brainstorm project collaborations and joint promotions (quadrant 3 below). Finally, the campaign launched a keychain promotion where supporters of the Buy Local First campaign could receive a keychain from any participating local business. This keychain provided discounts, proclaimed local loyalty, and linked consumers into a
network to receive email promotions and updates from participating businesses (quadrant 4 below).

![Network Diagram](image)

**Figure 2:** Buy Local First Campaign Network.

Source: Chris Schock, reproduced with permission.

As Chris suggested, the Buy Local campaign did give Mark and Taylor a tangible project over which to take ownership. It also helped them to broaden and rearticulate their goals as an organization. According to their updated website (2012), Energize Clinton County is working to develop a new model for rural development, which they call “mass localism”: 114
Since our founding, we have worked with our community to develop initiatives that re-localize our economy to support our community’s economic redevelopment. These initiatives include supporting local entrepreneurs through our Buy Local First campaign, growing the local food economy by creating a thriving farmers’ market where growers and shoppers can meet and do business, and by keeping more wealth in our community by helping businesses and homeowners save money through energy efficiency, or produce more energy locally using renewable technologies.

Through the Buy Local campaign, Mark and Taylor began working more closely with established groups in the community such as the Clinton County Regional Planning Commission, Wilmington College, city government, and local businesses. Through these collaborative relationships and increasing clarity of ECC’s purpose as an organization, Mark and Taylor began to acquire a support staff for their projects as they developed an ever-expanding network of volunteers.

One of these volunteers eventually became a full-time member of their staff and an active participant in redesigning rural economic development in southwestern Ohio—Dessie Buchanan. Like Mark and Taylor, Dessie was born and raised in Wilmington and then soon after graduation from high school fled Small Town, USA as quickly as possible. She completed an undergraduate degree in Anthropology at Washington University in St. Louis and then went even further away to a small village in rural Wales to complete her Master’s degree. After seven years away from Clinton County, Dessie moved back to Wilmington in 2008 to figure out where to go next. In her words:

*I saw moving back to Wilmington not as a permanent decision,*
But kind of like a stepping stone.  

Just a place to come back home before I made my next move.  

But definitely not with the intention of permanently staying here.

Dessie didn’t connect with many people during her first months back in Wilmington, but she kept seeing Mark and Taylor around town. They were acquaintances in high school and so they would casually talk when they saw each other. Dessie was experiencing extreme culture shock as she readjusted to being in the rural United States, and she enjoyed hearing about the ideas Mark and Taylor were beginning to develop as ECC evolved. She recalled being struck by the idea of a Buy Local campaign from the early days of its existence:

I remember we had all these late nights of just brainstorming

About what projects would be good for Buy Local

And what that even meant

And why that was important

... And I look back four years or five years ago even

... It wasn’t even something in my mind.

I supported local businesses, I would think,

But it wasn’t something that I was intentionally like,

Oh, this is good.

I didn’t think twice about shopping in Wilmington or going to the mall.

Most of the time, I just went to the mall,

Because it was easier

And I knew it
And that's just what we did growing up.

We just went to the mall.

So, it was neat to kind of be in a discussion with that

And now looking back

And seeing how much has changed,

Just my mentality.

So, at the very beginning, I kind of helped with some of the initial ideas,

Like our keychain program,

Where people got discounts for signing up

And becoming part of the network.

And when you talk about networks,

That's the foundation of Buy Local.

Even though we didn’t necessarily know it at that point.

In 2009, Dessie became an AmeriCorps Vista. In this role, she continued her work with the Buy Local campaign and took on additional responsibilities as the coordinator for the county farmers’ market. When she started, the market had been in existence for nearly a decade, but her job was to increase visibility and accessibility of fresh food in the county. To that end, Dessie facilitated the Electronic Benefits Transfer program, which allowed the Clinton County Farmers’ Market to begin accepting food stamps. In the summer of 2012, she introduced credit and debit card programs for the farmers’ market and acquired grants to expand and develop Buy Local campaigns in six other counties in southern Ohio. The goal with all of these projects is the same: develop a sustainable, resilient local
economy and prove that the rural United States can, not just survive but, \textit{thrive} in a global economy.

Conclusion/Epilogue/Prologue?

On October 6, 2012, I presented this case at the Organizational Communication Mini-Conference in Norman, Oklahoma. One of the first questions from the audience came from Dr. Larry Browning who wanted to know how the story ends. What are the unemployment numbers now? How was everything resolved at the Air Park? Did the Economic Task Force and Energize Clinton County succeed? Some of those questions are easier to answer than others.

How does the story end? I recognize that, as the author of this dissertation, I have a responsibility to punctuate a particular moment as the end. However, even titling this section “conclusion” feels premature to me. Wilmington’s problems are not solved, nor will they ever be. Solutions to old problems eventually lead us to new problems. If I waited for all loose ends to be neatly tied, however, this dissertation would never be complete.

As different bodies began filling the seats and rooms and spaces of authority and decision-making, a transition occurred. Mark Rembert accepted a position as Director of the Chamber of Commerce. Kevin Carver put his years of regional development experience to work by hanging up his hat at the Ohio Department of Development and taking a leadership position with the Clinton County Port Authority. The County Commissioners hired Bret Dixon as Economic Business Development Director. Randy Riley ousted David Raizk as Mayor of Wilmington. The Economic Task Force dissolved. In 2012, Mayor Riley established a new group, the Economic Development Work Group.
Although these shifts did not occur all at once, accumulative role changes could be read as an epilogue to the focusing event narrative or a prologue to the maintenance narrative. Either way, the demands on the people occupying these positions have changed as the people themselves have changed. In many ways, the economic crisis served as a paradigm shift for Wilmington (Kuhn, 1962). Previous models of economic development were disrupted by new understandings of dependency and vulnerability in a global market. New models of local sustainability were introduced and are already being taken for granted as Wilmingtonians adjust to this new normal.

So, what is the status of Wilmington’s economy? By most accounts from 2008, Wilmington should be a ghost town in the absence of DHL. In May 2008, the unemployment rate in Clinton County rested below state (6.2%) and national (5.5%) averages at 5.3%. That number began a steady incline following DHL’s restructuring announcement, spiking at 16.1% in June 2010. Of course, in the summer of 2010, Ohio and the rest of the United States suffered economically as well, but with a state unemployment rate of 10.0% and a national average of 9.5%, Clinton County’s growing unemployment lines dwarfed most of the country at that time (Bureau of Labor Statistics). As DHL closed their Wilmington hub, Clinton County plunged into a severe economic tailspin from which few outside spectators expected the constitutive communities to recover.

In May 2012, four years after DHL’s announcement, those rates for Clinton County stood at 9.9%. So, the Wilmington area still boasts some of the higher unemployment numbers in the state (Ohio’s unemployment rate sat at 7.3% in May 2012, 1.1% better than the national average), and their recovery is far from over. In this
concluding section, I provide a general overview of the state of real estate, public education, and business in Wilmington four years after DHL’s restructuring announcement in order to describe in clearer detail the challenges and opportunities the people of Wilmington face in the years ahead.

*Living in Wilmington: Residential Sales and Foreclosures*

In 2008, the real estate market crashed nationwide as the housing bubble burst. In Clinton County, these real estate challenges were exacerbated by skyrocketing regional unemployment due to DHL’s departure. And so, property sales plummeted in 2008 and selling prices continued a steady decline until they bottomed out in 2011 at an average price of $90,970 (falling from $136,671 five years prior). As one might expect, foreclosures hit their high in 2009, with 352 foreclosure sales received, though 2010 was hardly any better (see Figure 3).

*Figure 3: Clinton County Foreclosures (2008 – 2012).*

Data Source: Clinton County Sheriff’s Office.
Since the housing bubble burst in 2008, Clinton County’s residential housing market has leveled out, and as of 2012, those selling prices appear to be ticking upward (see Figure 4).

![Diagram of Clinton County Residential Housing Market Selling Price (2006-2012).](image)

*Figure 4:* Clinton County Residential Housing Market Selling Price (2006-2012).

Data Source: Peele & Lundy Realtors, Inc.

It is too early to proclaim an economic recovery by any means, but these indicators do suggest modest improvements in the Clinton County housing market in the last year.

**Learning in Wilmington: Public Education**

As prospective businesses consider Wilmington as a possible home for their operations, they negotiate with the city, county, and state for tax incentives as part of their welcome package. Public schools survive on district taxes, and school administrators often find themselves represented in economic development meetings as both an obstacle and an incentive to negotiations. With regards to the latter, businesspeople tend to be interested in the health of the local school districts, especially if
they plan to recruit workers from or send their children to these institutions. The schools act as an obstacle in negotiations, however, as administrators find themselves fighting tooth and nail against abatements and other business incentives that increase financial pressure on the already overextended schools. According to Wilmington City Schools’ Superintendent Ron Sexton:

*We had an abatement with Airborne Express*

*And three years before it was going out, they sold out to DHL.*

*So, we start over again.*

*We have 14 years with DHL,*

*Three years before the abatement is ready to run out,*

*And all the sudden we’re going to see all this new money,*

*DHL leaves.*

*So, we’ve been burned before by agreeing to give up access to bring business in.*

Given the stress of economic hardship on the public education system, Wilmington City Schools has maintained remarkable stability with pre-crisis enrollment numbers of 3,267 students in the 2007-2008 academic year and post-crisis numbers of 3,272 students in the 2010-2011 academic year (the last year in which Ohio Department of Education data was available). Ron elaborated on those numbers for me:

*The first year after DHL left, we kept thinking*

*How much is our enrollment going to slip?*

*Parents are going to have to start moving.*

*It didn’t slip.*

*It went up almost 50 kids.*
Do you know why?

Because Adams County and Pike County and some of our poor areas of the state heard about all the—

Rachael Ray is coming to Wilmington.

So-and-sos coming to Wilmington.

They have food kitchens.

They have all these things.

When a person comes to register to bring their kids to school,

We gave our little script:

We’re glad to have you.

We’re excited to have you.

Tell me, what brings you to Wilmington?

Most of it was not jobs.

Most of it was not, “We’re excited about the school districts.”

It was,

We hear that there could be some supplies and some money here.

There was aid.

There was the thought that there was all this aid coming

To this poor devastated community.

And all the sudden our free and reduced lunch just started sky rocketing.

So, rather than an indication of stabilization, steady enrollment numbers communicated to Ron Sexton an increasingly dire situation for the public school system. The school was losing revenue, but responsible for educating an even larger number of students.
Furthermore, these students were increasingly coming to school with stories of difficult family finances, home lives breaking or broken under the pressure of unemployment, domestic abuse, child abuse, substance abuse, and a severely under-resourced support network outside of the school.

I have known Ron my entire life—he coached high school wrestling with my father for nearly 20 years, and he was my high school principal before stepping into the role of superintendent in early 2008. Before this interview, I had never seen him look so tired or sound so defeated. When I asked him about what he believes needs to happen, what his vision is for the future of the schools, he simply shook his head and sighed:

_It’s hard to talk idealistic._

_I’ve got to live day-to-day in_

_What we can do today that can cut money or save money..._

And, without stopping to take a breath, he went on listing some of the most immediate concerns, from leaking roofs to growing class sizes.

In an effort to stay afloat, the school district has made some difficult cuts. French classes are now only offered online or through distance learning, gifted education classes have been cut to the state minimum at the elementary school level, staff members and nonessential faculty (like reading interventionists) have seen their positions evaporate. And of course, they are dealing with the same pressures of increased surveillance experienced by public schools across the country with the rise of standardized testing and increasingly rigorous demands for accountability.

I left Ron’s office feeling more than a little overwhelmed and depressed at the challenges facing Wilmington City Schools in the coming years. In the wake of DHL’s
departure, the school system has struggled to respond adequately to the multiplicity of multifaceted problems overburdening their personnel. When I asked Ron what questions he hoped could be addressed by this study, he could only think of one: Where are the schools failing? How are the schools part of the problem, and what can they do differently to be part of the solution? As Advanced Placement, foreign language, and other “specialty” classes are cut, as teachers and staff see decreases in their own numbers but increases in enrollment, as schools attempt to operate under all of these pressures, how can they better prepare Wilmington students to succeed upon graduation? What jobs should teachers even prepare their students to hold? Prepare them for local jobs that do not currently exist? Encourage entrepreneurial spirit and problem solving? Or, prepare them to leave if they can.

Making a Living in Wilmington: Small Business, Industry, and the Air Park

In 2008, many media sources cited task force predictions that one in five small businesses would fail as a result of DHL leaving Wilmington. As an indicator of economic activity in Clinton County, I reviewed all vendor licenses issued from 2008 until 2012, and noticed one striking feature in particular: in those years, Clinton County issued the largest number of vendor licenses for any two consecutive months in December 2008 and January 2009 (13 and 38 respectively). For whatever reason, 20 of these 51 licenses were issued for kennels or dog breeding. Thinking back to the timeline of events surrounding the air park, in November 2008, DHL announced that it would be leaving the domestic shipping business in the US altogether, and by January 2009, approximately 3,500 air park employees had received Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notifications (WARN notices) and an additional 1,200 workers had resigned.
Presumably, this spike in vendor license applications could be related to this activity at the air park, which would suggest an increase in small business activity as laid-off workers sought creative entrepreneurial solutions.

**Figure 5:** Clinton County Vendor Licenses Issued (Monthly, 2008-2012).

Data Source: Clinton County Auditor’s Office.

At the air park, people working in economic redevelopment have yet to fill all the vacancies left by DHL, but neither have the facilities fallen into disuse and disrepair. Some spaces have been easier to fill than others, though. The administration building is almost at full occupancy, housing offices for ATSG (ABX Air’s parent company), the Clinton County Port Authority, and Cargill AgHorizons. Airborne Maintenance & Engineering Services (AMES), a subsidiary of ATSG, has been repairing and maintaining planes in several hangars in the air park and are expanding operations. In
November 2012, AMES received approval from necessary state, county, and local officials to move forward with building a new 100,000 square foot joint utility maintenance and painting (JUMP) hangar at the Wilmington Air Park. This project promises jobs for 259 people as soon as construction is complete. The building of this JUMP hangar has not been an uncontroversial project, however. This deal was moved forward with development incentives that directly affect local revenues (such as public schools) and there was much debate whether the jobs tied to this project would, in fact, be “new” or just new titles for existing airpark jobs.

The large sort facility, the F Building, has been more difficult to sell to prospective businesses. This building was equipped with state-of-the-art machines, conveyer belts and tilt trays specially-designed by DHL to process incredible amounts of freight each day. The F Building served such a specific purpose in DHL’s time at the air park that few companies could feasibly move in and run their operations out of the space as-is. Furthermore, the expense and engineering involved with dismantling and removing DHL’s extensive sort infrastructure is daunting to say the least. As a result, the massive sort facility has sat empty, collecting dust. That is, except for when it was being used to host Mike Huckabee’s Republican presidential primary debate on jobs or when it was made over as the hull of a ship for eight scenes of Marvel’s Avengers movie that premiered in US theaters in the summer of 2012.

Other air park spaces that have been used creatively in the absence of stable employers are the runways and parking lots on the south end of the park. These locales became popular interview sites as multiple interviewees would walk with me or drive with me through the same geographical locations but tell me, at various times,
converging and diverging stories. Through these interviews, I was able to address my fourth research question: *How do community leaders coordinate transorganizational narratives in relation to physical spaces?* In response to RQ4, then, the majority of my interviewees positioned their stories about what Wilmington was, what it currently is, and what it possibly could be in the very same locales most prominently featured in public discourse and in media coverage of events—at the air park, down Main Street, and in the offices of people with power and authority.

Several participants drove me around the air park as part of our interview, and three people actually parked in the same vacant parking lot near DHL’s welcome center. This lot provided overflow parking to accommodate the huge number of employees working at the air park in its heyday. The space resembled long-term parking lots at commercial airports, with a shelter in the center where a shuttle would pick up and drop off passengers at their cars and the sort facilities. Now, the lot sat empty and tiny blades of grass shot out through cracks in the pavement.

Three times I sat in this lot with participants, listening as they told me three very different stories. Randy Riley parked alongside the road across from the lot and contrasted its current empty, quiet, and motionless state to the bustling activity of cars, people, and shuttles when the air park was in full operation. David Raizk parked in the exact same spot on the side of the road to tell me his story of hearing DHL’s restructuring announcement while representing the city of Wilmington in Germany. Rob Jaehnig did not park at all. Rather, he drove around the lot in slow figure eights and drew my attention to details I had overlooked in my previous visits:

*Do you see the streaks in the pavement?*
The peel outs?

The cracks and so forth?

If you follow them,

You’ll notice very quickly that it’s actually a track.

This is autocross.

This SCCA Autocross.

Sports Car Club of America.

So, as we moved through these locales, interviewees constructed retrospective accounts of social interactions by engaging vivid place-specific memories and they imagined possible futures as their stories layered on top of each other in my memory, notes, and narrative representations.

Related to this line of thought, my fifth research question asked, “How do community leaders negotiate meanings when shared public spaces become sites of definitional contention?” Perhaps most surprising to me in conducting this research was that I did not find much incommensurability among the stories local leaders told, but rather, instances of either collaboration or isolation. That is, as stories converged, interviewees spoke of joint projects and coordinated efforts like the Buy Local First campaign, which involved many community organizations and businesses and was collaborative by design.

In contrast, when stories diverged, it was mostly that community leaders were speaking about projects isolated from one another in time or space. Organizationally, various leaders in Wilmington have committed to minimizing the distance between community actors by creating greater opportunities for interpersonal connections to be
strengthened through iterative interactions in multiple setting, such as the Chamber of Commerce and Regional Planning Commission’s coffee hours for small business owners and Randy Riley’s economic development workgroup. Building these connections between agents engaged in similar projects presents potential identity challenges to one’s sense of expertise, ownership, or territoriality; however, the opportunities to share scarce resources, benefit from unique combinations of organizational assets, and build synergistic relationships has encouraged many in the post-DHL Wilmington community to seek out more avenues for creative problem-solving.

As Rob’s interview demonstrated, autocross, land speed racing, and other high-speed sports is one such example of outside entities, private companies, and public organizations working together to put the vacant airpark spaces to good use and attract thousands of distant visitors to the town of Wilmington. In 2011, the Clinton County Port Authority approved the East Coast Timing Association’s bid to hold five events in 2012 on airpark property. The first event occurred in April and drew crowds of approximately 3,000 people, according to Convention and Visitors’ Bureau director Debbie Stamper. Although the Port Authority does not profit much from these sorts of events, the town gains exposure to a wider audience and local restaurants and hotels benefit from the influx of people.

These event-based creative uses of space are only temporary solutions to Wilmington’s economic problems, but they keep Wilmington on the map and in the minds of people outside the region. Additionally, the joint planning of these sorts of events indicates a continued willingness among community members to collaborate on projects that can conceivably benefit portions of the populous. In an effort to survive,
Wilmingtonians working toward economic development in the time since DHL’s departure had to be more innovative than ever before. Scarce resources made collaboration a necessary, if not always comfortable, part of the process. In the next chapter, I write more explicitly about the conditions that necessitated cross-sector collaboration in Wilmington and Clinton County, but for now, consider Mark Rembert’s reflections on the value of collaboration among local leaders:

*We gain more valuable information*

*When we share it than when we hold it to ourselves.*

...*We have a hard time convincing people of that.*

*Whereas for us [ECC], you know, we talk all the time.*

*We don’t hold anything back.*

*Because you never know—and we learned that!*

*You never know when a piece of information gets into the right hands,*

*You may never expect it,*

*How it blossoms into something else.*

**Summary**

In the immediate aftermath of DHL’s departure, politicians, businesspeople, nonprofit organizations, educational institutions, workers, and residents came together in various efforts to respond to a regionally devastating economic disaster. Much was accomplished in the first several months and years of responding and rebuilding. The director of Workforce Services Unlimited, Keith Hyde, gave me a list of nearly 750 displaced airpark workers for whom his organization had directly facilitated retraining and placement for new careers ranging from medical assistants to mechanics to yoga
instructors. City and county officials negotiated public ownership of the Wilmington Air Park, and managed to creatively (if incompletely) utilize the spaces left vacant in DHL’s wake. A movement toward mass localism has redefined economic development and local sustainability for this town and has inspired some residents to think differently about their own living, working, and spending habits in order to participate more directly in the construction of a particular type of small town community—one that will hopefully be stronger, more resilient, or in the words of Friedman (2008), “untouchable” in the contemporary global economy.

Plenty of challenges define their ongoing efforts, and easy solutions are not readily available. Local schools are struggling to meet their own high standards for educational success while simultaneously fighting legal battles to ensure sufficient funding and toiling tirelessly to provide a healthy learning environment for students whose personal and home lives are often anything but stable and secure. The static population is aging, which happens as the years pass, but the younger generations are not choosing to stay or return in high enough numbers to repopulate the town, and regional unemployment rates provide some indication of why they might be fleeing. In a July 26, 2012 Weekly Briefing, a publication sent out by the Wilmington Chamber of Commerce to its online subscribers, Mark explained:

In 2011, 589 young people graduated from our four local school districts. Over the course of their education, our community invested more than $50 million in their education. The vast majority of our graduating seniors go off to some of Ohio’s best colleges, including Wilmington College and Southern State, while others attend school across the country. And while our $50 million
investment is off being transformed into the future leaders and economic drivers of our community we sit and we wait for them to come home.

The problem is they’re not coming back. Between 2000 and 2010 the Clinton County population increased by nearly 4-percent, yet the population of young professionals aged 20 to 35 fell by 4-percent. If the young professional population had grown at the same rate as the county population as a whole during that time we would have more than 600 young people living in our community than we have today.

So where is the return in our investment? What is happening to the millions of dollars that we invest in our young people? In most cases, they’re taking the investment we have given to them and turning it into value for another community. They’re working and running companies not in Clinton County. They’re supporting businesses not in Clinton County. They’re paying taxes to local governments not in Clinton County. And they’re serving as leaders for communities not in Clinton County.

The solutions that community leaders in Wilmington have begun to offer to these many challenges are multifaceted. From the business perspective, those working in economic development express a commitment to diversifying the business landscape of the county to safeguard against the same sort of single-site dependency that created this crisis.

Efforts to encourage more people to live, work, and spend their money locally invoke a protectionist rhetoric in order to create more conscious consumers and keep more money in local markets. Attracting and retaining the 18-45 age brackets requires, yes, greater attention to cultivating a strong sense of place, identification with
community, and loyalty to locality—but also, a strong educational foundation and preparation for the sort of careers that will be valued. When I write of value, I mean that workers will feel that the work they are doing contributes meaningfully to their local community, region, or world. This sense of worth and purpose requires an alignment of personal and community values, which creates a foundation for local identification and rootedness in place.

In the next chapter, I unpack this case through a more focused analysis of the discursive work done by various transorganizational narratives I have introduced here. In so doing, I address my third research question—How do transorganizational narratives function to mobilize collective action?—by answering the following focused questions: What governmental obligations are activated and what policies are supported by telling stories of economic crisis, disaster, or opportunity? How do these narratives function as a rhetorical resource for attracting/repelling businesses or retaining/expelling and attracting/repelling community members? As I demonstrated in this chapter, during the initial response to DHL’s restructuring announcement, ETF members maintained high levels of control regarding characterizations of the affected people and locales. And so, as I attend more closely to the narrative aspects of this case, I also more clearly address my first two research questions regarding the ways in which local and national speakers constructed the community of Wilmington in public discourse. In answering these questions, I interrogate the implications of narrative for research and policy-making.
CHAPTER FIVE: POLICY IMPLICATIONS OF TRANSORGANIZATIONAL NARRATIVES

From an organizational communication perspective, Wilmington’s case offers many opportunities for rich analysis. The conditions that made possible such a dramatic event—from the complex organizational structure of Deutsche Post World Net to Wilmington’s dependence on the large corporation’s subsidiary DHL and the extreme prevalence of this sort of model in the global economy—warrant analyses all of their own. The organizational design choices and decision-making processes instituted by leaders of the Economic Task Force are equally compelling topics for future analysis. Task force members’ efforts to coordinate an interorganizational response—enabled and constrained in their dual roles as both representatives of their own organizations and members of this interorganizational group—demonstrated both the value and challenge of interpersonal connections and contact across multiple contexts. However, in this chapter I set aside these intriguing issues to focus on the role of transorganizational (boundary-spanning) narratives in mobilizing and fragmenting collaborative action with regard to Wilmington’s economic development.

I chose to focus on this aspect of the case in order to develop a narrative model for better understanding the relationship between public communication, perceived policy options, and the organization of collaborative action in times of unplanned change. Currently, the two primary sources for communication-oriented studies in collaboration are the fields of management and crisis communication. Management research predominantly focuses on planned changes like mergers and acquisitions; and crisis communication considers unplanned changes resulting from disasters and emergency, but
primarily directs their analytical attention to interorganizational efforts to prepare for, mitigate, or respond to the aspects of these situations that could potentially damage an organization’s reputation.

Thus, a management scholar would likely analyze the subject case of this dissertation by focusing on negotiations between Deutsche Post World Net and UPS and the obstacles encountered in developing a successful partnership. When partnership negotiations fell through, however, DPWN shut down DHL operations in the US and their decision initiated unplanned changes for the city of Wilmington and much of southwest Ohio. Conceiving of the case in this way piques the interest of crisis communication scholars who would likely focus on Mayor Raizk’s public relations efforts and his strategies for launching a multifaceted campaign aimed at maintaining the city government’s legitimacy and saving face in spite of the departure of the area’s largest employer. My formal academic training is in neither of these areas, so my interpretations of this case likely look somewhat different. I did not focus my attention on interorganizational negotiations, although those conversations and consequences set the scene and motivate the action of interest. And I did not subject Mayor Raizk’s PR plan to a formal campaign analysis, although the resultant discourse is of great interest to this study.

Instead, informed by narrative and political normative theory, I analyzed the dominant transorganizational narratives that thrived in public discourse as community leaders responded to DHL’s restructuring plan. Studying the sequencing of various genres of transorganizational narrative clarifies the opportunities and constraints leaders encountered regarding collaborative problem solving and economic redevelopment. To
that end, I analyze the discursive “work” done by the opportunity-focused asset narratives, as well as the discourses of crisis and disaster central to public deficit narratives. That is, I consider the ways in which local and national speakers constructed the community of Wilmington in public discourse (RQ 1 and 2) and how the resultant transorganizational narratives functioned to mobilize collective action around local economic development following DHL’s restructuring announcement (RQ3).

At various times following DHL’s departure, the voices represented in the public discourse of local news and city council meetings rose in cacophonous debate over economic issues concerning the community. Some people spoke passionately of great opportunities for improving living conditions—beautification, vibrancy, and growth. Others spoke with equivalent fervor of an economic burden growing heavier every day—failing businesses, foreclosed houses, and broken dreams. These two visions of Wilmington seemed incommensurate, and yet, both represented lived experiences of citizens coping with the uncertainty brought forth by dramatic economic changes in their community.

The differences in these perspectives are represented by Barge (2006) in his discussion of two approaches to community building, in which he distinguished between the deficit or needs-based model and the appreciative or asset-based model of development. The deficit model highlights the community’s problems and shortcomings in order to mobilize action from outside. An asset model emphasizes possibilities and resources instead of constraints and problems. Barge noted the ways in which the asset model builds hope and positive affect, acknowledging also that this approach’s emphasis
on positive language holds the possibility of being exclusionary in settings where people are voicing negative sentiments.

In an effort to bring together policy studies and communication, this chapter considers the policy implications of narrativizing asset and deficit-based models. Wilmington’s case qualifies as what political scientist Thomas Birkland (2006) would call a “focusing event,” which is an occurrence that triggers a discernible increase in attention paid to policy problems. Because of the size and location of this DHL facility, the company’s restructuring announcement served as a regional, state, and national focusing event—not just a local one. I proceed by first describing the particular sequence of transorganizational narratives in Wilmington’s case. I then examine “crisis” versus “disaster” rhetoric to consider the normative obligations activated by each of these deficit-based narratives. As I compare the deficit and asset-based narratives, I consider opportunities and obstacles to cross-sector collaboration and discuss possible implications for both policy-making and research.

Sequencing Transorganizational Narratives: Wilmington’s Case

One of the primary communicative functions of the Economic Task Force was to construct a coherent narrative about what was happening in order to disseminate information and control the message. Therefore, while task force members certainly disagreed with each other at times, by the time their messages appeared in publicly accessible forums, their story was fairly unified. The fact that so many influential entities at local, regional, and state levels served as members of the task force contributed to the ease with which their collectively-constructed version of the story dominated publicly accessible discourse surrounding the focusing event. The subcommittee meetings served
as conversational sites for working through details, coming to collective decisions, and
developing plans of action. The full task force meetings served as important sites for
information sharing, and the resulting press releases became artifacts of their
convergence—textual representations of major points of agreement among ETF members
that were then crafted into narratives for public consumption through the media or later
conversations. When I write of the “dominant narratives” in this chapter, I do not mean to
strip the many members composing the task force of their own interpretive differences.
However, I do hope to draw attention to the organizing practices of the ETF by analyzing
the publicly accessible texts that resulted from members’ private meetings, conversations
with the media, and official statements.

The general public story that local leaders told about this focusing event went
through a couple rounds of revisions over the four years following the initial restructuring
announcement. These narrative shifts are analytically intriguing because each version has
a particular rhetorical effect and calls for meaningfully different political action. In this
section, I describe the narrative shifts in task force discourse from that of crisis to disaster
to opportunity.

_Crisis Narrative_

Initially, the dominant public story told by task force members was what I am
calling a crisis narrative. A crisis is a particular type of focusing event that is induced by
the action or inaction of a particular organization (Birkland, 2006). In this version of the
story, DHL played the role of the villain organization inducing crisis for the virtuous
town of Wilmington and its hardworking residents through their decision, announcement,
restructuring plan, or proposed partnership with UPS. In a June 1, 2008 document
outlining media tips for local leaders speaking about events at the airpark, the PR firm Paul Werth & Associates clearly articulated the trajectory of the crisis narrative in their advice to potential speakers to frame the story as “the decision of a faraway logistics giant devastat[ing] a small Ohio community.” The crisis narrative is characterized by this sort of blame-attributing language, which dominated public discourse in the first six months following the focusing event announcement in May of 2008.

During the time the crisis narrative dominated public discourse, the advertised goal of the task force was to convince DHL not to leave. Although the retention committee pursued this goal by multiple means, the efforts that received the greatest media attention revolved around anti-trust implications of a proposed deal between UPS and DHL. The rationale for pursuing anti-trust allegations was twofold. First, some ETF members hoped that the threat of an anti-trust lawsuit would give DHL officials greater incentive to slow their movement toward a partnership with UPS and to consider a counter-offer from ABX. Second, even if DHL refused to consider a counter-offer from ABX, the media coverage of anti-trust allegations might apply enough pressure to ensure the best severance package possible due to heightened attention.

Greimas’s (1987) theory of narrativity purports that narratives are characterized by one of two possible transformations: transformation from a state of disjunction (not having) to a state of conjunction (having) or the inverse. A crisis narrative then, begins with a state of conjunction. Wilmington is first described as a town of plenty, full of jobs, hope, and goodness, as epitomized in the opening of this article from October 25, 2008 in an Australian newspaper, the Sydney Morning Herald:
Five years ago, the giant German courier DHL took over a small logistics company at the airport outside Wilmington, a quaint Ohio town with a charming main street, pretty weatherboard houses and a small liberal arts college. A quintessential middle-sized, Midwestern town, Wilmington is the sort of place you'd like to raise your family. The nearly 10,000 jobs DHL created was a boon for a town of 13,000 and the struggling rural counties around it. Other companies flocked to the Air Park to take advantage of being able to ship goods direct from Wilmington to the rest of America overnight. (Davies, 2008, p. 33)

This state of conjunction is transformed to a state of disjunction through no fault of the transformed subject. In a crisis narrative, an identifiable external transforming agent does exist—the organization responsible for the focusing event through its action or inaction (in this case, “the giant German courier DHL,” which “took over a small logistics company” in idyllic Wilmington). DHL became the villain of this story, responsible for the bad fortune of the virtuous town through its decision to abandon Wilmington and take away all of the jobs and goodness.

And so, following a sort of retribution plot, a crisis narrative calls for the punishment of the villain. In the three congressional hearings investigating possible antitrust implications of a partnership between DHL and UPS, this aspect of the crisis narrative is especially clear. In his August 2008 testimony to the House Judiciary Committee, Mayor Raizk beseeched those representatives to take seriously the risk DHL’s proposed partnership with UPS posed to competition in the package delivery industry:
Given the recent history of acquisitions of smaller air carriers by both companies and the significant anti-trust waivers embedded in the Open Skies Agreements, a picture starts to form. In Wilmington, a foreign-owned company, with huge assistance from the state and local government, took over ownership and operations of the largest private airport in the United States, a state-of-the-art facility. In a little over three short years, if they complete this transaction, they will have taken two American companies [ABX and ASTAR Air Cargo] that had significant market share off the board. In the process, they will displace almost 10,000 American jobs. For at the end of the day, this is about people. These are not just numbers; these are our friends and neighbors, our families. How will they pay their mortgage? How will they feed and clothe their kids? How will they educate their children? Please think about these hardworking Americans as you consider these issues.

In this testimonial excerpt, Mayor Raizk situated DHL’s restructuring plan within a “history of acquisitions of smaller air carriers.” He mentioned this trend of consolidation within the context of the Open Skies Agreements, which is an international accord passed in March 2008 allowing airlines to operate more freely across the Atlantic Ocean and increasing access to foreign markets (Kanter & Clark, 2010). In this way, he argued that moves to remove regulatory barriers in the international air-cargo industry created a business environment that facilitated monopolies by large corporations, which care only about numbers, not “our friends and neighbors, our families.” DHL is characterized as the villainous behemoth, callously taking away jobs that “hardworking Americans” need to survive.
Political theory suggests that social interference is justified when a focusing event is due to intentional causation—when someone is to blame. Theories of causation, which drive the plots of these focusing event narratives, serve four primary political functions: (1) challenge or protect an existing social order; (2) assign responsibility to particular actors to rectify their wrong; (3) legitimate and empower particular actors as “fixers” of the problem; and (4) create new political alliances among victims to the causal agent (Stone, 1987). The crisis narrative assumes intentional causation, and so, in the case of DHL, the policy implications of this narrative are clear. DHL brought harm to southwestern Ohio through their decision-making and should be held accountable for their actions. Therefore, punish the villain and legislate corporate responsibility.

The crisis narrative, while potentially politically efficacious, was simultaneously threatening to delicate negotiations regarding a possible donation of the air park from Deutsche Post World Net back to the city or county, a move which was considered by some members of the task force to be vital for Clinton County’s post-DHL redevelopment. Needless to say, DPWN officials were less than pleased by the negative press the corporation received during the first six months following their restructuring announcement. As Clinton County Port Authority director Kevin Carver explained:

*Marv Larger in particular, who was leading that [donation negotiation] effort,*

*And Wolfgang Pordzik and probably John Olin*

*And two or three other people who were involved in those very delicate meetings*

*Were saying,*

*Look.*

*You can’t beat us around the face and eyes if you really want us to donate.*
I mean, on the other side, you’ve got a mayor, 

Who is the leader of this community, 

Who people are looking at and expecting to fight back 

And expecting to say, 

Hey. 

You guys can’t get away with this. 

You’re doing bad things to this community.

In this way, the role requirements of various task force members put them at odds with one another at this juncture. John Limbert, the task force member most intimately involved in the donation negotiations, beseeched the mayor to bring an end to the negative press directed toward DHL for fear that officials would walk away from the negotiation table if they were pushed much harder. Mayor Raizk, in contrast, felt that keeping the crisis narrative in the headlines, with its villainization of DHL and clear mandates for action, kept pressure on DHL officials to take responsibility for negative consequences of their restructuring plan and compensate affected parties respectively. And so, much to Marv Larger and company’s chagrin, the crisis narrative dominated public discourse until November 2008.

By November, the anti-trust investigations had succeeded in garnering enough negative publicity for DHL that UPS no longer desired to enter into a business relationship with them. In fact, UPS turned their attention away from negotiating a partnership and toward attracting DHL’s customers. A UPS sales card on file in the Wilmington mayor’s office read as follows:
Turning DHL’s Restructuring into New UPS Opportunity. Goal: Help customers understand the impact the DHL changes will have upon their business. Potential impact areas that DHL customers may be experiencing: potential rate fluctuations; potential pickup and delivery time issues; single carrier responsibility; customer service. Changes DHL is making: Closing more than 34% of its operating centers in the US; eliminating more than 17% of its pickup and delivery routes; utilizing UPS to fly their air packages. Focus on UPS Strengths: Consistent, competitive rates; reliable pickup and delivery times; single carrier handling of shipments—from pickup to delivery; customer service support that is recognized as the best in the industry; industry-leading technology for easy shipment processing.

As a partnership with UPS appeared less likely, ETF retention committee members hoped that the top officials at DPWN would be more likely to consider a proposal for changes at the Wilmington Air Park from ABX and ASTAR representatives. However, instead of continuing its operations out of Wilmington and throwing out the plans for massive changes, DPWN decided to end DHL’s domestic shipping in the US altogether. So, there was no longer an anti-trust lawsuit to pursue and no longer one clear entity to blame and punish. And so, the language of the dominant public story shifted from crisis to disaster.

*Disaster Narrative*

In contrast to a crisis, a disaster is an uncontrollable act of fate or nature to which government can only respond. Wilmington, in this narrative was represented as Everytown, USA, a symbol of the times and a poster child for the Great Recession. In this version of the story, the faceless “economic downturn,” compared to Hurricane Katrina and various other natural disasters, wreaked havoc on this idyllic hometown. This
version of the story is very similar to the crisis narrative insofar as the disaster narrative is also characterized by a transformation from a state of conjunction to disjunction through no fault of the transformed subject. However, in the disaster narrative, an identifiable external causal agent does not exist, except through the personification of an abstraction.

To elaborate on the typical storyline adopted in disaster narratives of Wilmington’s condition, consider as an example the introduction to celebrity chef Rachael Ray’s Thanksgiving special episode, “Thanksgiving on Main Street,” narrated by Morgan Freeman (Freed & Farley, 2009). Her show began with an American flag waving in the reflection of a downtown Wilmington window. Grain silos and combines broke the serenity of a sunset horizon. The camera panned historic downtown and the old-fashioned, small-town Murphy Theatre. All the while, a slow, meandering melody played softly in the background. Freeman narrated in a slow, low baritone: “When you sit down at your table tomorrow, surrounded by those you love, what will make you thankful? Will you give thanks for your family? For the feast you share? Or maybe you’ll give thanks for your hometown and the neighbors who always seem to be there when you need them most. A town like Wilmington, Ohio.”

As Freeman continued speaking, the camera panned over picturesque neighborhood streets, trees glowing radiant yellows and vibrant reds in the autumn light. The music faded and the camera cut to a middle-aged blonde woman, struggling to speak through the tears choking her words in her throat: “Wilmington is the type of town you wish you were from. You see those movies where they have a nostalgic little town. You think it’s fake. It’s not fake. It’s Wilmington, Ohio.” This wholesome Americana image of Wilmington was not limited to visual media. Take, for example, the opening to a
December 16, 2008 article in *USA Today*: “Walk along the streets of Wilmington’s historic downtown and the storefront names seem lifted from a Frank Capra film. Smith’s Barber Shop, First National Bank, A&A Insurance, Granny’s Country Cupboard. This is small-town America from an era when most of America was small-town” (Lynch, 2008). In this way, the disaster narrative begins from the same premise as the crisis narrative. Both describe a virtuous place full of virtuous people and then narrate a transformation from a state of conjunction to one of disjunction. The difference lies, however, in the perpetrator of disjunction.

In the disaster narrative, news story after news story began with this nostalgic description of small-town America only to abruptly juxtapose that image with analogies from citizens and reporters alike to terrorist attacks, third world poverty, and natural disasters:

“Call it ground zero. Wilmington is ground zero. We’ve got to get back to being America, because right now, we’re losing sight of what my son died for and what those other 16 soldiers died for. We’re losing sight of it. We need to fight hard to get it back” –Wilmington resident, Mike O’Machearley (Klug & Flaum, 2009).

“You know Larry, you expect this in the third world country, but not in our home turf, not in the United States of America. I mean, when you see these lines [of people outside the food pantry], it’s really hard to understand—this is like Katrina” –CNN Correspondent Kyra Phillips (Phillips, 2009).
As media sources contrasted pre-recession, idyllic Wilmington with post-recession, devastated Wilmington, the town was cited repeatedly as the worst-case scenario, archetypal ghost town victimized by a suffering national economy.

Media sources held Wilmington up as symbolic of more far-reaching economic conditions in the US. *USA Today* wrote that, “This corner of southwestern Ohio has been slipping behind for years, reflecting the erosion of American manufacturing and its relatively high-wage blue-collar jobs” (Lynch, 2008). Pelley lamented on a January 25, 2009 episode of *60 Minutes*, “When President Obama spoke of ‘the winter of our hardship’ in his inaugural address, no one in America understood that better than the folks we met in Wilmington, Ohio” (Klug & Flaum, 2009). And, in perhaps the most eloquent description of Wilmington as a microcosm of a devastated America, Paul Leonard, former Mayor of Dayton, Ohio, and adjunct professor of Urban Affairs at Wright State University, poetically stated, “If America has caught an economic cold, Wilmington, Ohio has contracted economic pneumonia” (Hannah, 2008c). In all of these examples, DHL was no longer villainized as the causal agent of disjunction. Instead, in this version of the story, DHL was cast as a victim of a cruel economic downturn as well. The company’s “business decisions” faded into the background and the struggles of such a powerhouse in the international shipping industry were used as evidence of the severity of this Great Recession.

Local officials in the Wilmington area were generally excited to see how much attention their little town was attracting on the national stage. In our interview, Mayor Raizk cited the *60 Minutes* coverage as one of the highlights of the response efforts. In these broadcasts, Wilmington residents were being held up as “real America.” Here were
loyal blue-collar workers in a pleasant rural town in the heart of the Midwest. They are resilient, hardworking, and proud. And, this media coverage certainly drew attention to the town’s plight and maintained a sense of urgency regarding rapid response.

However, any celebration of Wilmington residents’ resilience was situated within extensive descriptions of devastation, helplessness, loss, and fear in which their only hope for rescue comes from good-hearted outsiders. In this way, individuals affected by DHL’s departure were characterized in the national media by invoking a hyphenated relationship to a mythic American identity. By a “hyphenated relationship,” I mean that these individuals were both connected to and removed from this idealized role. Drawing on the work of a dozen scholars on the mythic American national identity, Jansson (2003) constructed a table listing the characteristics of the archetypal American national identity:

Table 2

*The Archetypal American National Identity.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Americans are:</th>
<th>American society is characterized by:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Optimistic</td>
<td>Wealth, prosperity, and economic abundance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powerful and强</td>
<td>Upward mobility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingenious</td>
<td>Geographic (horizontal) mobility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-reliant</td>
<td>Equality of opportunity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral and good</td>
<td>Justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resourceful</td>
<td>Expansiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic</td>
<td>Classlessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peaceful</td>
<td>Individual liberty and freedom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rational</td>
<td>Success and victory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innocent</td>
<td>Newness and youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uniquely influential</td>
<td>Progress and change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptable</td>
<td>Devotion to science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vital</td>
<td>Ability to overcome obstacles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alive</td>
<td>Capacity to transform the environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growing</td>
<td>Exceptionalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rising</td>
<td>Individualism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analyzing representations of Wilmington and its residents suggests that the national media created a disconnect between these columns by emphasizing the Wilmington residents as exemplifying everything that “Americans are,” but within an “un-American” society. No wealth, prosperity or economic abundance. A lack of mobility, opportunity, and justice. A sudden acute awareness of class. Defeat. Despair. Incapacity. Reliance on others.

In the disaster narrative perpetuated by the national media, casting Wilmington citizens in the role of “damsel in distress” allowed the national viewing audience to cast themselves as the chivalrous heroes. For example, Rachel Ray’s Thanksgiving special concluded with a call to action, asking viewers to volunteer at their local food pantry or donate funds to organizations dedicated to helping towns like Wilmington. A disaster narrative, therefore, holds the potential for rousing people to take action and help however they can, which sounds like a positive outcome (and indeed, it is). The risk, however, is that these roles become internalized as objective social facts. More specifically, the victim identity can become habitualized and reified through reiterated performances of the archetypal role. Therefore, the disaster narrative about Wilmington reinforces a role distinction, characterizing Wilmington residents as the victim in need of rescue and the national viewing audience (or politicians, celebrities, and charity organizations such as Feed the Children) as the savior.

According to these news stories, amid the bleak landscape of this devastation, hope emerges on the horizon in the form of good-hearted Americans reaching out to their less fortunate neighbors in Wilmington. On February 19, 2009, the Oklahoma-based nonprofit relief organization Feed the Children rolled into Wilmington with 11 semi-
trucks full of food to stock the local food pantry, Sugartree Ministries (Hannah, 2009a; see also, “Feed the Children,” 2009). On May 10, 2009, comedian Jay Leno offered a free Mother’s Day show, which he called, “The Comedy Stimulus Tour” (Hannah, 2009b). In October 2009, celebrity chef Rachael Ray came to town to renovate the local soup kitchen and host an early Thanksgiving dinner for the town (“Rachel Ray offers dinner to jobless Ohioans,” 2009). Her show aired on November 25, 2009 (Freed & Farley, 2009).

On each occasion, national news sources picked up the inspiring stories and celebrated the ways in which people across the country were coming to help this small town. Certainly, the people of Wilmington responded graciously and the need was real; yet, even these seemingly positive accounts contributed to unintended consequences. As officials responsible for economic redevelopment quickly discovered, some entrepreneurs and business-owners interpreted these shows as evidence that, as a desperate town, Wilmington might make an ideal site for a risky business.

To this point, Clinton County Economic Business Development Director Bret Dixon said that, when he was hired in 2011, businesspeople were still citing the national stories and personalities—60 Minutes, Rachael Ray, and Glenn Beck—as their motivation for coming to Wilmington. Of course, attracting attention, assistance, and development ideas was part of the rationale behind inviting politicians, celebrities, and journalists into the town in the first place. However, Bret pointed out another effect:

*People came here*

_Because they figured there was some kind of financial incentive to being here,*

_Federal government grants or what have you._

*So, they would say*
You’re probably the people I need.

I need $30 million.

Well, for what?

Well, I haven’t been in this business before,

But I know this is a great idea, right?

They would get traction, because they’d have a good story.

They had a lab or something.

They’d come here looking for the money.

But that’s not how it works.

Remember, however, that national news sources did not construct this disaster narrative out of nothing. The Economic Task Force played an instrumental role in shaping this story through their gatekeeping capabilities and control of public information. Of course, task force members did not support a disaster narrative with the intention of perpetuating the victim role for affected community members, even if that characterization was a rhetorical effect. Rather, those members of local leadership who celebrated the media attention this story attracted spoke specifically about the political efficaciousness of the disaster narrative in maintaining a sense of urgency and attracting resources for support and redevelopment.

From a political perspective, then, naming the focusing event was a rhetorical act with powerful implications. Specifically, when speakers in local and national levels of public discourse named the event as a crisis or disaster, they invoked a slightly different narrative structure, which characterized DHL as either a villain or co-victim, respectively, in relation to the affected workers, families, and community members. The deficit
narratives of crisis and disaster, depressing as they might have been, carried with them clear policy mandates. Crisis, as a focusing event of intentional causation, calls for the punishment of the causal agent and the legislation of responsibility. Disaster, as a focusing event of accidental causation, calls for assistance to the affected community and the legislation of support. The challenge with these deficit narratives—although undeniably politically effective—was that their prevalence led to a reiterated role performance in which Wilmingtonians were recurrently cast as passive victims. For a consideration of a very different version of the story, I turn now to an asset narrative of opportunity.

*Opportunity Narrative*

In November 2008, around the same time that the disaster narrative gained prominence as the dominant discourse emanating from task force spokespeople, a very different story emerged in public forums to challenge the negativity of deficit rhetoric. This narrative took disaster as its starting point for a turn toward opportunity and innovation. That is, the transformation in this version of the story was from disjunction to conjunction, and the characteristic language spoke of “ris[ing] out of the ashes and prosper[ing]” and using this turn of events as an opportunity to “re-energize our local economy” (Stuckert, 2008; “For Wilmington, the Future is Now,” 2008). Unlike the deficit narratives, the asset narrative is not devoted to restoring some idealized past. Rather, this dynamic living story claims that now is the time to create the next chapter, rather than waiting for it to be written by someone else. In this way, the archetypal villain and victim characters do not hold, as the transformed subject is also assumed to be the causal agent for change.
This sort of asset narrative is politically challenging, however, because there is not one particular legislative mandate, and in moving from a state of not having to having, the story appears to have reached a happy, even if not entirely resolved, state. As a result, action may be more dispersed and mobilizing and maintaining collective efforts becomes extraordinarily difficult. As I described in Chapter Four, the original purpose of Energize Clinton County was to provide a productive outlet for people’s nervous energy and to transform an economic disaster into opportunity. Initially, Mark Rembert and Taylor Stuckert hosted a number of public meetings, but as the organization became more clearly established, ECC’s co-founders began rethinking their engagement strategies. Mark Rembert explained:

I don’t know if it was a successful change or not,

But we made a conscious decision at a certain point because we realized

That the idea of community engagement as community meetings

Wasn’t going to get us very far.

Because it was always the same people

And because they weren’t necessarily productive meetings...

So then what we did was

We said,

Okay, instead of like building an organization that engages people,

Let’s create an organization in which our programs are—

Our programs for people are involved in economic development...

If I’m more conscious about how I’m spending my money, I am involved.

That is involvement...
That is more powerful than showing up at a community meeting.  

I’d rather them go have dinner at the General Denver  

Than come to a community meeting.  

So that’s the way that we’ve tried to structure it, is that—  

We call it,  

ECC tries to transform citizens into agents of economic change.  

The primary challenge of an opportunity narrative is the open-endedness of it. In the early months of this narratives’ prominence, ECC’s lack of authoritative text to clarify roles and responsibilities and provide an overall sense of what the organization was became apparent. ECC sought to grant citizens access to conversation (intersubjective negotiations of cognition and social order), which was severely lacking in the organizational structure between community members and the task force. While these meetings produced forums for interaction, the end-product was not a widely legitimized text that could then be used to organize the collection of individuals into a collective group with a discernible identity. In this way, malleable conversations between community members remained at the site (discourse-world) of experience, without the subsequent creation of an organizational surface (text-world) of memory and record.  

The Clinton County Convention and Visitors’ Bureau new slogan—*an open invitation*—epitomized the asset narratives’ strengths and challenges. Tellers of the asset narrative said, this time of bad fortune is an opportunity for change, innovation, and reinvention. This town is a blank canvas and it can be whatever you want it to be. However, absent transformational leadership—organizing horizontally, motivating others to transcend individual goals, and networking to build a strong resource base toward
some expressed vision—the blank canvas of an opportunity narrative can cast the transformed subject into as passive a role as the deficit narratives. After all, Wilmington is not altogether unique. It is a nice community with small-town charm and a loyal workforce. The world has millions of places that fit that bill. Simply opening the gates to the city and saying, “Come in! Make it what you want it to be!” is likely not enough, and this approach certainly would not solve the structural problems of disconnection between people and the places where they live and work.

However, Mark Rembert and Taylor Stuckert’s response to the challenges of an asset narrative in community building can be instructive for others working in economic redevelopment. In an effort to develop a shared object of attention for an opportunity-based narrative, Energize Clinton County, in partnership with the Regional Planning Commission and various other project-based collaborators, have worked to create a more resilient sense of “the local” toward which redevelopment efforts could be directed. Mark explained:

*We frame everything based on the dollars in our local community,*

*Which you know with the Buy Local campaign is easy…*

*We’ve at least had success not opening ourselves up to attack*

*In our work on energy efficiency,*

*Which in some places,*

*If we didn’t handle it correctly,*

*Just talking about that would have been a point of attack.*

*But we just framed it within the same context.*

*We talked about it at a Tea Party meeting.*
When you tell all the people about the money they’re spending
To a faceless utility company somewhere
That’s not reinvesting in our community,
That doesn’t care about our school, you know,
That we’re reliant on these outsiders
But there’s a way that we don’t have to be as reliant.
We could keep more of that here.
That makes sense.
People get that.

This rhetoric of a “mass localism” movement provided a broad vision toward which efforts could be organized. Adopting this language to describe their redevelopment efforts, Mark and Taylor staked out an area of emphasis for ECC that provided clearer opportunities for strategic collaboration and coordination.

In a dramatic rebranding effort, Clinton County’s seven core economic development leaders—Bret Dixon (Business Development); Randy Riley (Mayor); Kevin Carver (Clinton County Port Authority); Chris Schock (Regional Planning Commission); Mark Rembert (ECC and the Chamber of Commerce); Rob Jaehnig (Center for Innovative Food Technology); and Debbie Stamper (Convention and Visitors Bureau)—launched a website on January 10, 2013 identifying the local economy’s core sectors as aerospace, agriculture, manufacturing, healthcare, and small business. This site (http://www.wccchamber.com/economic-development/economic-development-partners/) links to all seven leaders’ webpages and identifies each member’s particular focus area. Through these efforts to construct legitimized publicly accessible texts, economic
development leaders in Clinton County have begun organizing around an asset narrative. This story presents its own challenges for maintaining participation and action, and the way forward is sure to be neither simple nor noncontroversial. And yet, I suppose that challenge is part of the dynamism of social and political organization.

Presence in Transorganizational Narratives

The purpose of this chapter is not to suggest that deficit narratives are inherently bad and asset narratives are inherently good. Such a conclusion would be overly simplistic and not altogether insightful. Rather, I am arguing that naming a focusing event as a crisis, disaster, or opportunity is a rhetorical act with powerful political implications. I have already indicated the ways in which these asset and deficit narratives are differently oriented toward particular policy possibilities, but in this section I argue that another distinguishing aspect of these transorganizational narratives is their orientation to presence, a word which invokes both the spatial and the temporal. Pezzullo (2007) stated, “More than simply ‘showing up,’ being present…like roll call in school, indicates the significance of someone literally coexisting with another in a particular space and time” (p. 9). Therefore—to be “here” but focused on the past or future, to be “now” but focused on the elsewhere—to be there and to be then is not to be present.

The deficit narrative is oriented toward the “not here” and “not now.” The basic storyline is one of nostalgia for the past, hope for the future, or desire for elsewhere. As a plotline characterized by transformation from states of conjunction to disjunction, its storytellers lament how they once had something but now have lost it, how they could be someone but they are not currently. The present is defined by separation in this deficit narrative structure, and the implied suggestion is that all will be resolved when the
separated parties are reunited. As a result, in crises and disasters, Birkland (2006) noted, “Recovery is often defined as return to the status quo, even when the event revealed that the status quo placed people and property at risk” (p. 175). It should come as no surprise, then, that deficit narratives tend to support a reactive orientation to policy-making. In contrast, the asset narrative demands presence and participation. You are in the here and now and you cannot not live it. This story describes a future dependent upon positive action now, and the policies it supports are proactive.

And yet, that description of deficit narratives as presence-adverse and asset narratives as in the moment creates a false dichotomy between the co-constituting forces of presence and absence (Derrida, 2001) and ignores the ways in which narrative weaves through many moments in time and space (Cunliffe, Luhman, & Boje, 2004). Asset and deficit narratives, then, construct particular places in the relations between presence and absence, time and space, memory and invention.

In the deficit narrative, we make present the absent in acknowledging its absence. In our imagination, memory, and hope, our aching acts as a placeholder, saying in effect, “This spot was once filled; it can be filled again.” In this way, the downtown streets and buildings of Wilmington, the empty air park, all of these locales become defined by the ghosts of what they once were (and therefore what they could be restored to once again). With the deficit narrative, then, what is absent is what we want, and we strive to make present the absent through the articulation of our longing. And yet, this story of loss and separation can be so debilitating when adherence to the not-present forecloses the possibility of other ways of being and denies agency beyond that which is exercised through the act of articulating longing for another time and place while still living and
breathing here and now. In this way, crisis and disaster narratives can have the effect of casting affected subjects as passive victims; but they each have clear policy mandates, which allow for swifter and surer political action.

With the asset narrative, in contrast, the present is what we have and so we make absent our longing for other times and places in our commitment to being here and now. In this storyline, Wilmington’s downtown streets and buildings, its empty air park, sit open, blank canvasses for creative innovation with no obligation to return to some saccharine image of “how things used to be.” Idealistic and glowing in theory, this story can seem so callous, offensive, and disrespectful to the good that the now-absent once brought into our lives. As a result, asset narratives are often untenable for political leaders in the immediate aftermath of a focusing event. Imagine if, upon hearing DHL’s restructuring announcement, Mayor Raizk gave a speech about the company’s potential absence being an opportunity for innovation in Wilmington. His constituents expected political action and implicitly demanded a deficit narrative. A primary challenge of asset narratives rests in their tendency to make significant demands for transformational leadership while simultaneously failing to activate normative obligations for speedy policy action.

Implications for Cross-Sector Collaboration

All of this analysis points to both challenges and opportunities for cross-sector collaboration as various actors are differently enabled to become spokespeople for particular types of stories. Collaboration refers to “cooperative relationships that develop between organizations to leverage resources and solve problems beyond the scope of any single organization” (Koschmann & Isbell, 2009, p. 2). Koschmann, Kuhn, & Pfarrer
(2012) note that the cross-sector collaborations’ tendency to involve members with contrasting goals and approaches (Selsky & Parker, 2005) and be prone to gridlock and fragmentation (Gray, 2000) make these partnerships problematic and complicated. However, contrasting approaches and fragmentation are only problematic when the “cooperative” aspect of collaborative relationships is narrowly understood as unified action. I am arguing, to the contrary, that contradictory narratives can function as a collaborative resource in community development.

Etymologically, cooperation means to work together, but even oppositional performances can work together to maintain a particular definition of a situation (Goffman, 1959). In the case of community development following a major focusing event, like what occurred in Wilmington, both the asset and deficit narrative speak to lived experiences and real needs of affected community members; however, both of those narrative forms cannot easily be spoken simultaneously by the same entity without the risk of appearing to be a duplicitous and untrustworthy speaker. At the micro-level of interaction, descriptions of the town as a disaster zone or a blank canvas of opportunity appear to be indisputably at odds with one another.

However, when these contradictory discourses are set in dialogue with each other, a rich complementary narrative emerges in which the community is devastated by disaster, yet resilient and committed to moving forward with vision and vigor. The asset narrative is internally focused and serves to enact agency and connect local resources, while the deficit narrative is externally focused and serves to mandate legislative action and attract external resources. Of course one speaker can say, “This has been a difficult time and the community has been hit hard, but we will move forward gallantly because
we are a resilient people!” Removed from its narrative context, this statement could fit with either a deficit or asset orientation. However, as I have demonstrated in this chapter, narratives of crisis, disaster, and opportunity structure plotlines and develop characters to support particular types of social and political action. Therefore, to tell deficit and asset narratives simultaneously would be as impossible as performing a tragedy and comedy at once. A comedy may include tragic elements, but those elements do not a tragedy make.

And so, the value of contradictory narratives as a collaborative resource becomes clear. Two parties (A and B) can tell stories conceived to be at odds with one another. To the extent that A and B rely on one another to tell their own versions of their stories in order to leverage certain resources and solve problems that would be unsolvable by either one approach, A and B collaborate. In Wilmington, the deficit narrative did important discursive work. It mobilized external resources from individuals, organizations, and collectivities outside of the affected region by activating normative obligations to intervene and by creating a sense of urgency in a time of need. Meanwhile, the discursive work of the asset narrative consisted of mobilizing internal resources to connect local individuals, organizations and collectivities by creating opportunities for participation in economic redevelopment and a sense of accountability for action or inaction in the present moment. In this way, the co-existence of asset and deficit narratives contributed to a multifaceted interorganizational approach to economic redevelopment in a critical moment for one small town in the rural United States.
CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION

From the beginning of this project, the questions that most deeply captivated my curiosity revolved around heavily theorized topics of publicity: How does the materiality of bodies, buildings, streets and fields intersect to create public spaces? How do divergent and convergent stories create the discursive space of the public sphere? How do component parts of public spaces and spheres intersect to construct particular publics? What is the relationship between publics, people, spaces, and spheres? I wanted to understand communities in all this complexity—as built, discursive, and imagined. In this concluding chapter, I do not attempt to create a totalizing picture of some definitive structure that we will call the community of Wilmington now and forever. Rather, I provide a summary of my motivations for conducting this study and discuss the theoretical and practical implications of this research, as well as limitations and directions for future research.

From a theoretical perspective, I wanted to study the discourses shaping Wilmington’s public spaces and publics in these spaces so as to better understand the communicative constitution of organization at the level of a non-metropolitan municipality. Organizational communication scholars have much to contribute to contemporary understandings of organizing practices across organizational boundaries, but in order to make such contributions, scholars must first seek research opportunities outside of traditional workplace settings. In the workplace-as-container model, organization exists through the creation of and adherence to authoritative texts, which emphasize relations of power and legitimacy, clarify roles and responsibilities, and provide an overall sense of what an organization is (Kuhn, 2008). When the
interorganizational boundaries blur or circumstances require collaboration outside of the workplace container, negotiations of power, legitimacy, roles, and responsibilities necessitate the creation of more macro-level authoritative texts.

To date, scholars in communication studies have largely left these more macro-level analyses to sociologists and political scientists. However, the communication discipline is uniquely equipped with analytical tools to move among micro, meso, and macro levels to consider interpersonal, group, organizational, and mass communication in interaction with one another. Discourse tracing, as one methodological example, facilitates this movement between levels of analysis. And so, a primary objective of this dissertation was to consider how patterns of communication (conversation and text) organize our world into perceptible collectivities. To that end, I considered how the discourse of “community” was claimed by or attributed to a collection of individuals and how an organizational structure that might be recognized as “community” emerged through communication.

My motivation for studying the ways in which local leaders in the Wilmington area organized across organizational boundaries—and the opportunities and challenges they experienced in their cross-sector collaborations—was that hopefully other dependent communities, whose collective identities are intimately tied to one corporation or one industry, might recognize themselves in Wilmington’s story and learn from their struggles. From a more applied perspective, I wanted to study the economic redevelopment efforts in Wilmington because of a deep sense of responsibility to use this extensive research opportunity to answer meaningful questions for the giants who have lifted me to such great heights (to harken back to my dedication page epigraph). Growing
up in a very rural setting, where most of my friends and family members work as farmers, mechanics, teachers, and factory workers, I have always sought to study topics with the goal of analyzing, questioning, and influencing real societal action. I am a second-generation college student and the first person in my family to pursue a doctoral degree. I consider my education to be a great privilege, and I take seriously the obligation to use these opportunities I have been afforded to the benefit of those communities that have shaped me along the way. What better way to show that appreciation than through a dissertation project about one such community.

I began this dissertation with a discussion of the guilt and shame I feel with regards to the hollowing out of my own communities in the rural United States, the evacuation of educated and talented young people, and the resultant aging of the population and erosion of the local economy (Carr and Kefalas, 2009). That specter of rural brain drain underlies this whole dissertation. Wilmington was a dependent rural community, whose sense of place and sense of community was intimately tied to the economic activity at the air park. And so the Stayers positioned themselves in relation to the agricultural and aerospace industries celebrated in the area, and the Leavers distanced themselves and sought greener pastures elsewhere. All the possible reasons Stayers stay, Leavers leave, and Returners return are outside the scope of this study, but DHL’s departure did draw greater attention to the disproportionate number of Leavers this community sheds each year, which suggests particular paths for redevelopment efforts in the coming years if Wilmington truly hopes to develop a sustainable and resilient local economy. I discuss practical implications like these later in this chapter, but now, I begin with a description of conclusions regarding each of my five research questions.
Theoretical Implications

To explain the significance of my interpretations in this study, in this section I examine the key theoretical implications of this research by individually addressing each research question originally outlined in Chapter Two. In so doing, I provide a general summary of the conclusions I have drawn based on my analysis of four years’ worth of discourse surrounding Wilmington’s local organizational efforts amid dramatically changing economic conditions. As I address each question, I am driven by an intrigue with the specific role of language in constructing a sense of shared social reality, tempered by a desire to move between levels of analysis to situate these micro discursive constructions within a broader macro socio-political structure. As such, each research question was rooted in a particular discursive level. The case narrative (Chapter Four) and analysis (Chapter Five) sought to weave together these questions to demonstrate the ways in which local practices and broad social narratives interact with and shape one another. In the following sections, I pull these interwoven threads apart to summarize my interpretations regarding each separate question.

Research Question One

The first research question asked, “How do local speakers ‘name’ the community of Wilmington in public discourse regarding local economic conditions?” The primary source of discourse used to address this question existed at the meso-level. As a reminder from Chapter Three, meso-level discourses connect and coordinate local practices, and in this dissertation I considered Wilmington City Council meeting transcripts, local news coverage, and Economic Task Force documents at this level. For the purpose of this research question, the task force documents of greatest interest were press releases,
reports to the community, and other forms of external communication (as opposed to the
internal documents of meeting agendas, memos, and the like), as these texts served as
primary sources for quotations and other pieces of information that later reappeared in
local and national news coverage.

Naming is a political act, which I sought to demonstrate in the last chapter
through my discussion of the policy implications of distinct transorganizational
narratives. I am certainly not the first person to suggest the power of a name
(Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet can likely claim the most well-known lamentation to
this effect). Bakhtin (1981) and McGee (1980), each in their own way, drew scholarly
attention to the ideological baggage of language in general—the fecundity of meaning
that accumulates as words acquire historical relevance, social significance and political
power. Zarefsky (2006) explained that names in particular play an important role in
symbolically shaping our social spaces by implying certain definitions: “The name is, in
effect, an implicit argument that one should view the thing in a particular way” (p. 404).
Beyond this power to indicate the boundaries of social spaces, names also provide insight
into issues of place such as belonging and position (being “out of place”). As Aden,
Pearson, and Sell (2010) explained,

just as town names emblazoned on road signs tell us where we are in relation to
other places on geographic maps, the names people use in everyday discourse
reveal the location of social boundaries marked with implicit ‘Welcome’ or ‘No
Trespassing’ signs for particular groups of people. (p. 281)

Naming and placing, then, are mutually-constituting acts insofar as each serves to
recognize and position some entity in relation to its environment.
From a narrative perspective, questions of naming focus on character
development and setting the scene. As such, my analysis surrounding this research
question was guided by character-based focused questions such as, “How are characters
organized in time and space?” and “What archetypal characters live in stories?” and
setting-based focused questions such as “What do storytellers identify as the setting(s) of
action?” and “How do contexts give rise to particular stories” (Harter, 2013, p. 38).

During the initial response to DHL’s restructuring announcement, Economic Task Force
members served as the primary sources for public statements regarding the focusing
event. As a result, these local rhetors maintained high levels of control regarding
characterizations of the affected people and locales.

In this dissertation, I made the pragmatic decision to adopt a distinctly
communicative understanding of identity construction by attending specifically to the
role of reflexively circulating discourses in creating a sense of identity at individual and
collective levels. This perspective is consistent with the discourse tracing methodology
and inspired by Warner’s (2002) description of the discursive formation of a public. In
his words,

No single text can create a public. Nor can a single voice, a single genre, even a
single medium. All are insufficient to create the kind of reflexivity that we call a
public, since a public is understood to be an ongoing space of encounter for
discourse. Texts themselves do not create publics, but the concatenation of texts
through time. (p. 420)
I work from the assumption that all identities are constructed in similar fashion—that is, sense of community and sense of self emerge not from a single authoritative voice, but from the rhythms and convergences of cacophony.

The texts circulating in the months and years following DHL’s departure about the affected locale and the people constituted a particular shareable social conception of the community of Wilmington. In public discourse originating from local sources, the people affected by DHL’s announcement were primarily named as either “workers” or “community members” followed by “families” as a close third. This naming of affected parties as workers, community members, and families in the deficit narratives of crisis and disaster helped to characterize them as idealized blue-collar Midwesterners. Each of these broad categorical identity groups are defined based on loyalty—to a place of employment, place of residence, or particular group of people. In this way, <the People> were constructed as virtuous, hardworking, family-oriented community members.

This word, “community” is an interesting one because in local discourse it was frequently used to describe both the affected people and the geographic area of impact (i.e., the community of Wilmington; the Clinton County community). “Community” is one of those purposely ambiguous terms used so ubiquitously that it risks being emptied of meaning altogether. Employed strategically, the vague “community” can be stretched to encompass wherever the audience happens to be. After all, “the more ambiguous the message the greater the room for projection” (Eisenberg, 1984, p. 233). However, an idea that I would like to explore further in future work with this set of discourses revolves around the idea that a sort of discursive blurring occurs in this use of language, in which the observable and salient attributes of people and places become ascribed to the other in
public memory. I believe closer analysis of this phenomenon of discursive blurring can help to explain how particular bodies, buildings, streets, and fields become layered with a sort of narrative residue that imbues them with shared or contestable public meanings.

*Research Question Two*

The second research question guiding this dissertation asked, “How do speakers in the national media ‘name’ the community of Wilmington in coverage of local economic conditions?” To harken back to Chapter Three again, macro-level discourses consist of broad social narratives. So, the national media coverage, as the discourses of interest for this research question, existed at this macro-level.

When I began this dissertation project, I expected to find a more dramatic difference between local and national characterizations of the affected people and places. I expected these differences because of my own experiences. On May 28, 2008, I was working as a research intern under David Niven, Governor Ted Strickland’s speechwriter. I worked on the 30th Floor of Riffe Tower (one floor above the site of the air park donation negotiations a few months later) four days a week, and then drove through Wilmington to my parents’ house in Fayetteville every weekend. I knew the possibility of the hub closing was serious, and I followed the story closely as I sent out daily news clips to all State of Ohio employees at 6:30 every morning. But the governor’s office was a site of planning and action and when I drove through Wilmington the town did not appear suddenly different to me—desolate or despairing. And so, when I went back to Georgetown, Kentucky in the fall to begin my senior year of college, I was aware of the unfolding situation with DHL, but I also knew that people were working on solutions.
And so, I pushed the situation to the back of my mind until November. When
DHL announced their decision to leave the domestic shipping business in the US
altogether, one of my college roommates called me into our living room to watch a news
report highlighting the town where I went to high school. The story they told was a bleak
one, and I expected to go home at Thanksgiving to a ghost town. The day after
Thanksgiving, I went up to Wilmington with my family to watch the annual Holidazzle
parade, and there I met up with Mark and Taylor who told me about their ideas for
Energize Clinton County. Standing there on Main Street, watching the lighted floats pass
by, catching up with friends, and hearing about this exciting new project, I felt like my
observable reality was at odds with the national news reports about the town that I had
seen on television in Georgetown.

Not until I dug through the ETF documents and sorted national and local news
coverage into chronological order did I notice that the task force truly did control the
public story about Wilmington to a large degree. National news sources almost
exclusively referenced the affected people as “workers” and “families” (with the
occasional additional nomenclature of “real people” or “folks”) and almost always
described the affected place as a “small town” in the state of Ohio. The body of national
news stories often replicated the core information included in local discourse, even
including quotes from the same people. Because task force members were coached by
one PR firm in order to tell a consistent story, the language used in these quotes rarely
deviated from the initial media tips laid out by Paul Werth & Associates in early June
2008, which reminded potential spokespersons that a good media message:
1. Is interesting to the media: The decision of a faraway logistics giant devastates a small Ohio community.

2. Is interesting to the audience: This is a hometown message. Citizens of any small community can see themselves in the place of Wilmington residents.

3. Is in YOUR best interest: Focuses on the best interests of the community and how to move forward.

Since both levels of media coverage emphasized similar information in the bodies of their reports, the primary difference between local and national coverage rested in the framing of the story. Framing studies make up a prolific area of study in journalism, and this research generally tends to demonstrate the ways in which manipulations in elite framing produce particular media effects in a public viewing audience (see, for example, Druckman, 2001; Levin, Schneider, & Gaeth, 1998; Scheufele, 1999). In this way, the framing mechanisms utilized in local versus national coverage of Wilmington’s focusing event are not inconsequential.

While local news sources simply provided updates on ongoing events, national media sources had to begin by introducing the affected people and place and situating this focusing event within a broader social narrative. In the summer of 2008, these national stories tended to begin by highlighting this small town in the political bellwether state of Ohio as an explanation for why economic platforms could determine whether John McCain or Barack Obama would take up residence in the White House following the November election (see, for example, National Public Radio, August 2008). Following the election, Wilmington’s story was resituated within a broad social narrative about the United States’ role in a global economy, and the struggles of this town became
representative of the effects of the “economic downturn” (e.g., Voice of America News, November 2008) and the national recession (PR Newswire, December 2008).

So, how did the national media “name” the community of Wilmington in their coverage of local economic conditions? Not radically different from how local sources did. In both cases, the focusing event was generally described using a negative attribute frame, which emphasized job loss. According to Levin, Schneider, & Gaeth (1998), negative framing supports less favorable evaluations. As a result, the naming and framing of the focusing event in Wilmington likely created a media environment that facilitated viewer identification with the “workers” and “families” of the affected communities and supported unfavorable evaluations of whatever entity could be blamed.

In local coverage, the scope of the blame extended primarily to DHL or its parent company DPWN, but the framing of national news stories situated DHL’s departure within broader social narratives surrounding economic policy in the 2008 presidential election (and the concurrent rhetoric of Obama’s “hope and change” or McCain’s “maverick-y straight-talk”) or, later, the Great Recession. In this way, Wilmington served as a microcosm of a devastated American economic system in need of serious reform. This sort of framing, then, can matter in how media consumers made sense of the focusing event. However, this dissertation did not evaluate effects of these messages on public opinion; so, a fruitful direction for future research could include an experimental study to determine the relationship between disaster framing and public support of particular policy options.
Research Question Three

The third research question I posed asked, “How do transorganizational narratives function to mobilize collective action?” Although these transorganizational narratives were widely broadcast through public forums including local and national media sources, the primary source of discourse I analyzed to address this question existed at the micro-level of interaction. In order to make sense of local leaders’ rationales for constructing and sequencing these narratives of crisis, disaster, and opportunity in the manner they did, I relied on peripatetic interviews with the speakers and ethnographic observations to contextualize the public discourse in the built environment of Wilmington.

According to Carr (1986), narrative is “our primary way of organizing and giving coherence to our experience” (p. 65), and in my interviews with local leaders, I wanted to understand how they gave coherence to the events surrounding DHL’s departure and how that story fit with their current economic redevelopment efforts. I wanted to trace leaders’ efforts to reorganize their own life-stories into chronological accounts in order to make sense of their surroundings and regain control by discursively reducing uncertainty through narrative construction.

A central claim in this dissertation has been that the stories we tell about the materiality of our worlds changes the conditions for understanding, engaging with, and deliberating about public policy and social action, and so, I wanted to gain access to more than the artifactual texts presented as living stories in news coverage and listen to how leaders constructed the retrospective account after some time had passed. What were the “lessons learned” from this focusing event and how did various versions of the story support particular redevelopment efforts moving forward?
The shutdown of DHL’s operations at the air park was a destabilizing moment for many Wilmington residents. It did not make sense with many local people’s conception of sound business planning. They found it difficult to rationalize using God’s will. For so many reasons, that moment lifted the smokescreen of coherence for their collective story about who they were, currently are, and possibly could become. In revising their narrative-in-progress, local leaders were reminded of their own authorial limitations. Through conversations with one another, ETF members offered each other new explanations; they sought to reorganize their understandings, reattribute meaning, and reestablish coherence. As they crafted, revised, and recrafted transorganizational narratives to explain the focusing event (as a crisis, disaster, or opportunity) they activated different normative obligations depending on the narrative structure invoked. As a result, various narrative forms mobilized different forms of social action.

This question is most explicitly answered in Chapter Five, so I will not belabor my argument here. Rather, I will offer this brief summary. Deficit and asset narratives each have rhetorical effects based in their ability to mobilize resources (either externally or internally) and activate normative obligations regarding social or political action. The particular discursive work accomplished by each of these narrative forms point to the value of cross-sector collaborations as different spokespeople are enabled and constrained by their multiple group memberships. This portion of my dissertation argues for a reconceptualization of cooperation in order to consider how contradictory narratives can function as collaborative resources.
The fourth research question asked, “How do community leaders coordinate transorganizational narratives in relation to physical spaces?” In designing this research project, I made methodological decisions to attend deliberately to interactions between material and discursive constructions of community. Through peripatetic interviewing, which I described in great detail in Chapter 3, my participants and I traversed through time and space. Social interactions occur in physical settings. In “walking the city” of Wilmington with me, my participants molded the fluid, unfixed representational spaces that we moved through into words, describing what could be. We moved between the perceived-conceived-lived triad (Lefebvre, 1991).

For individuals involved in these social interactions, these physical settings (locales) retain a narrative residue: “Layers of memory are embedded into built space” (Massey, 2001, p. 473). That is, revisiting these locales (physically or mentally) gave rise to retrospective accounts of those social interactions by engaging vivid place-specific memories. In our interactions in the present, we could dwell in the placeness—the stories inflected with past—and we could marvel at the spaceness—the open-ended raw potentiality. In this way, space, place, and temporality were not disconnected. They interpenetrated each other, serving as a particular orientation toward material and symbolic relationships.

Not surprisingly, many of my participants constructed their stories around the air park. Mayors past and present, David Raizk and Randy Riley, and current city council person, Rob Jaehnig, each drove me around the air park as we talked. Economic business development director for the county, Bret Dixon, and Clinton County Port Authority
director, Kevin Carver, each met me inside the large administration building on the air park campus. For these participants, the air park served as a symbolic site of a history of booming economic activity, a present of largely unused resources and creative short-term projects, and a future yet to be determined.

Keith Hyde, director of Workforce Services Unlimited; Chris Schock, director of the Regional Planning Commission; Debbie Stamper, the director of the Convention and Visitors’ Bureau; and Ron Sexton, Superintendent of Wilmington City Schools each decided to meet with me in their offices. Although they spoke of events at the air park and on Main Street and in the schools, these people are largely planners and administrators of different sorts, and so their primary sites of activity are these office spaces.

Mark Rembert, director of the Chamber of Commerce and co-founder of ECC; and Dessie Buchanan, project coordinator for the Clinton County Farmer’s Market and Buy Local First campaign were the only two people to walk with me. Mark met me in South Street Coffee, a new small business that had just recently opened. From there, we walked around the block to the historic General Denver, which he described as “both an illustration of what’s happening economically and a project for us…If the General Denver hadn’t been there, none of this would have happened.”

In the past five years, this old hotel has transformed itself, and Mark told me that that transformation really took off when he and Taylor convinced the owners to start serving draft beer. To help the small business owners pay off the investment, Mark and Taylor offered to throw a party for them, which they called the General Denver Draft. In the summer 2012, Great Lakes Brewing Company sponsored the now-annual party and
the GD (as the hotel/pub is affectionately called by its regular customers) has become a de facto meeting place for the activist crowd in Wilmington. Mark described it as a bipartisan crowd: “Both liberal and conservative. You know, people that are involved in the community hang out here. Because that’s where you go to have conversation. You go to run into people there.” Dessie also walked me to the General Denver, and along the way we stopped in at the Mural Parking Lot, the weekly site of the farmers market, and The Crave, a new locally-owned candy store that Dessie considered to be representative of the creative entrepreneurial activities going on in town.

And so, the majority of my interviewees positioned their stories about what Wilmington was, what it currently is, and what it possibly could be in the very same locales most prominently featured in public discourse and in media coverage of events—at the air park, down Main Street, and in the offices of people with power and authority. Except one interviewee who has not been mentioned by name again since I first introduced her in Chapter 3: Lori Williams.

Lori was not a member of the Economic Task Force and she does not meet with the current Economic Development Workgroup. She is not a politician or business leader or someone who might immediately come to mind when local people think of key players in regional development. However, if you dig around long enough on most large community projects in the Clinton County area, Lori’s name is bound to pop up. She is the current director of Parks and Recreation for the City of Wilmington, a former ABX/ATSG employee, the first supervisor/mentor of the Clinton Community Fellows program through her involvement with the philanthropic group the Clinton County Foundation, and a member of well-known and long-established Wilmington family. She
has an amazing ability to connect seemingly disparate segments of the Wilmington community to more efficiently use resources and build bridges between silos.

Lori drove me to parts of Wilmington that I had looked past or driven by my whole life, parts of Wilmington that never appeared in national news coverage and were never mentioned in public statements about those affected by DHL’s decision or the economic downturn. We drove through a park in a southeastern neighborhood in town, which Lori said looked like a “foreclosed property” when she first stepped into her new formal role as the director of Parks and Recreation. She pointed to the street corner to indicate a hot spot for local drug dealing. She was the only interviewee to drive me through residential sections of town and to talk about quality of life in terms of crime levels, dignity, and public safety. Lori represented for me one absent voice of many, speaking on behalf of one ignored part of “the community” that I came to see more clearly because of her.

Lori’s interview, to me, provided a glimpse into what could be missing from the master narratives of local and national media. Simply driving a route that no other participant drove drew my attention to the limited scope of the stories I had been listening to and reading. After all, the Wilmington Air Park was the largest employer in six counties and drew employees from more than half of Ohio’s counties. And yet, my participants only traveled with me around one affected city in one affected county. Of course, all of my participants’ primary offices were located in Wilmington’s city limits; but still, several of them work for the entire county and chose to spend the duration of our interview at the air park, down Main Street, or in other sites that were prominently featured in media narratives.
Lori’s interview suggested to me that the unity of elite narratives might be the product of a textual convergence that was achieved through iterative interactions between these key players as they talked with each other in formal meetings and engaged in informal conversations over dinner or drinks at the General Denver, and that outside of their circles, a different story might emerge with different characters in different locales. Therefore, the lived experiences of everyday community members are only ever partially represented in the accounts that become dominant in telling and retelling a focusing event narrative across multiple forums over many years. And as certain underrepresented voices grow louder in the cacophony of public discourse, they too might join the convergence, shifting the dominant narrative perhaps, but also obscuring the absences of others in their claims of difference.

After all, when Mark and Taylor founded ECC, they were the disruptive voices of “opportunity” challenging the dominant deficit narratives of the time and encouraging decision makers to look in previously ignored places (like old buildings that could be renovated to be more attractive and energy efficient or local businesses that could help to attract and retain the area’s young people) for creative solutions. Some convergence began to occur as ECC collaborated with these community leaders on projects and problems, and a current challenge the organization faces concerns how to sustain interest and remain dynamic after establishing their legitimacy in the community. All of this points to the value of disruptive voices to serve as a reminder that dominant narratives are always partial, incomplete, and temporally bound.
Research Question Five

The fifth research question asked, “How do community leaders negotiate meanings when shared public spaces become sites of definitional contention?” As with the first two questions, I initially posed this question based on the distinction I saw between the news coverage I accessed from Georgetown, Kentucky in 2008 and my impressions of the situation based on my own observations and interactions with friends and family in the area.

Before delving into the evolution of my interpretations regarding this question, though, let me define the public spaces of interest to this section. Even defining “public” is a complex endeavor because slabs of concrete, wooden beams and grassy fields do not contain within their materiality some pre-determined level of publicity. The shifting boundary between public and private is only determined in social action. So, first, what do I mean by “public”? A (discursive or material) public space is potentially open to all, of concern to all, known to all, and/or constituted by all (Asen & Brouwer, 2001). What makes physical and symbolic arenas “public” spaces, then, is their potentiality to be used in that way. Physical and symbolic arenas, topics, people—none of these are inherently “public.” Publicity only exists as a realized potentiality. Public and private spaces do not exist as fixed, a priori categories but come into existence as products of social action.

In posing this research question, I expected to find competing proposals for filling spaces left vacant by DHL’s departure. I wanted to gather together the various visions articulated for these spaces and map out potential overlaps and disconnections in order to better understand the opportunities and obstacles for collaborative action. However, people were not really fighting over single lots with competing ideas for development.
Rather, Wilmington and Clinton County officials announced widely, as the Convention and Visitors Bureau slogan read, “An open invitation.” They said, “Here we are, a blank canvas! Come and we will be what you want us to be!” Even Mark and Taylor’s green energy proposals, though initially met with some skepticism by many in the highly conservative county, gained enough traction to succeed in establishing the city as a Green Enterprise Zone in 2009. However, this wide-open invitation meant that the city avoided defining itself in a way that might turn away any potentially interested investors, and so also neglected to pitch itself in a way that might attract particular ones. This broadcast-approach to economic development created a sort of identity crisis for the town as a whole because local leaders failed to articulate a unique sense of place to set Wilmington apart from the enormous number of indistinguishable Main Street, USAs.

And, to be fair, in recent months, as I have been writing the final chapters of this dissertation, the power of this criticism has weakened as many of my interviewees have been involved in projects to directly address this community-level identity crisis. First, Energize Clinton County has rebranded itself as a mass localism movement and focused its mission to build a more resilient local economy. In this way, Mark and Taylor are helping to develop a clearer image of what such a town could look like in practice. Second, and very importantly, the Economic Development Workgroup has finally launched their new webpage, which clearly identifies key sectors that have long histories and hopefully even longer futures in Clinton County. These small changes have made available authoritative texts for public consumption that effectively construct an organizational surface—a sort of textual scaffold—upon which further economic development organizing efforts can build.
Practical Implications

Given my commitment to designing this dissertation study as both a theoretical inquiry into organizing practices of cross-sector collaborations and as a practical project of engaged scholarship, I offer this discussion of practical implications for those people in similarly situated communities that recognize themselves in Wilmington’s story. Specifically, I suggest three areas upon which members of local leadership can reflect in order to potentially revise their practices in ways I believe will benefit their communities as a whole. In this section, I proceed by outlining each practical implication one at a time.

First, this case study has demonstrated the vital need to develop models for identifying economically dependent communities in order to build and maintain more resilient communication infrastructures in times of economic prosperity. Vulnerability and risk are inherent parts of living socially with others and so I am not suggesting that such a model would eliminate unemployment, mass layoffs, or large site shutdowns. However, assessing risk, building communication networks, and developing response and recovery plans in case of a disruptive economic focusing event could aid in more quickly organizing collective action.

Related to this recommendation to build and maintain more resilient communication infrastructures in times of economic prosperity, a second practical implication of this research is that local leaders need to diversify their social networks on both individual and organizational levels. As I mentioned in Chapter Three, when the Wilmington Air Park was decommissioned as a military base in the 1970s, the town created the Community Improvement Corporation and the Regional Planning Commission in an effort to build more resilient community structures. In this way, certain
networks already existed from that previous crisis that allowed local leaders to activate latent connections, rather than needing to build them from scratch in the moment. As a result, the ETF had already been meeting and working together for months before the first waves of layoffs occurred at the DHL facility. Time and again I was amazed to learn of the important role these interpersonal connections played in lubricating difficult collaborations and negotiations (like, for example, the way in which the informal meetings between John Limbert and Marv Larger eventually led to Deutsche Post World Net’s generous air park donation). Municipalities should not wait for crisis to strike to develop these cross-sector relationships or begin plotting economic emergency plans.

Finally, this case study points to the potential need to think more broadly about possible avenues for public participation in community development and the local economy. As Mark Rembert suggested, perhaps meetings designed to solicit ideas, share information, and vent frustrations should only be a limited part of what we consider “civic engagement.” That is, perhaps attending or speaking out at these meetings is not always the most useful form of community involvement.

During the summer of my observations, I attended a meeting Lori Williams convened at Galvin Park to hear community members’ ideas for improving the park. In addition to Lori and me, only three other people attended the meeting. A librarian from across the street came to express her concerns regarding drug deals and graffiti in the gazebo. The other two women had helped construct the new pavilion and playground as a memorial to one of their sons who had died in a car accident. These three individuals were already highly involved in the park development and Lori was visibly disappointed in the meeting turnout.
Eager to involve more new faces, Lori caught the attention of a woman walking toward the playground with two young children and asked if she was here to attend the meeting. The woman dryly answered no and continued walking, but Lori stopped her again to ask what she would like to see improved in the park. Shrugging, she suggested swings or a grille maybe. As she was talking, the little girl that the woman brought waddled towards her at a full sprint, tripped on the concrete lip jutting out from the pavilion due to soil erosion, and fell hard, crying before she even hit the ground. As the woman dusted off the child’s scraped knee, she said, “Well, and maybe fix that edge.”

This moment complicated the idea of engagement as solely or primarily discursive and emphasized instead the value of presence and participation. The woman did not come to the park to participate in the meeting and she only reluctantly provided her ideas for improvements. However, the little girl demonstrated an immediate need in her use of the space, and Lori jotted down in her notes a reminder to smooth that edge as soon as possible.

Energize Clinton County, too, sought to develop a more participatory model of engagement in which local residents could contribute to economic redevelopment by supporting local businesses and being more intentional about how and where they spent their money. In Mark’s words, “ECC tries to transform citizens into agents of economic change.” Lori’s efforts and Mark’s comments suggest a need to reconceptualize community engagement.

In a 2004 volume of National Civic Review, political theorist Archon Fung posed a question to deliberation scholars Iris Marion Young and Jane Mansbridge: “Some people argue that participatory and deliberative democracy are unrealistic because most
people don’t really want to spend their time and energy in political discussions and
decision making. How great a problem is this for proponents of deliberative democracy?”
(p. 47). Their responses indicate the discursive bias many deliberative scholars share
when they speak of participation and engagement in public decision-making. Young
advocated integrating more deliberative processes into the workplace so these meetings
are not supplemental and shortening the work day or week so citizens have more time for
participation in public meetings. Mansbridge argued for making attendance easier and
focusing on more important issues. Neither of these responses considered the possibility
that public meetings might not be the best solution for increasing participation,
engagement, or deliberation.

I am not advocating here the total abolition of public meetings, nor am I seeking
to idealize a consumerist model of civic engagement. However, if a goal of deliberative
democracy is to increase public participation and engage people in decisions that affect
the whole community, perhaps scholars need to look beyond the formal spaces of public
meetings to think more broadly about deliberation in community life. Furthermore, I am
suggesting that these cases draw attention to the inadequate levels of citizen involvement,
which is all too common in economic development and planning. <The People> were
perhaps the most obviously absent interested party in this dissertation project—an issue I
discuss in greater detail in my next section: limitations.

Limitations

This dissertation, though the lengthiest piece of prose I have written to date, is not
an endless document. As such, I made several strategic decisions to limit the scope of the
current study to a manageable size. In this section, I justify those strategic decisions and
explain three limitations of this study. Specifically, I qualify my ability to make claims about the communication processes of the Economic Task Force given the discourses to which I had access, I justify my decision to privilege elite discourses in this study, and I discuss the limitations of a single-case study.

First, I was not present at Economic Task Force meetings and did not have access to recordings or transcripts of the actual meeting discourse. Therefore, my representations of task force meetings and negotiations relied upon the retrospective accounts my interviewees constructed for me and textual artifacts like meeting minutes, press releases, and memos. As a result, much of what I know about task force discussions occurred during the full meetings of the ETF, as very few textual artifacts existed from the smaller meetings of the subcommittees. The full meetings of the ETF were primarily information-sharing sessions, so evidence of many of the important conversations where ETF members sorted through conflicting information and made decisions regarding what actions to take is now limited to the caprices of distant memory and selective storytelling.

Second, I made a conscious choice to focus my analysis on the constructions of community and transorganizational narratives that were most dominant in public discourse. In so doing, I privileged the elite discourses of those people in positions of authority and power. Absent, then, were the voices of the “community.” However, “publics do not exist apart from the discourse that addresses them” (Warner, 2002, p. 416). And so, I sought to study the elusive public by studying the mechanisms that attempted to contain and name it.

Finally, I must acknowledge the distinct limitations of a single-case study. The most common critique of case study methodologies is that one cannot generalize on the
basis of a single case (e.g., Abercrombie, Hill, & Turner, 1984). However, in choosing a case study approach, I do not intend to suggest that all economic focusing events unfold as this one did or that contradictory narratives always function as a collaborative resource in transorganizational responses. Rather, in choosing a case study approach, I made a commitment to search for “black swans.” In his advocacy of “falsification” as a means of testing propositions, Karl Popper (1959) provided the example that if the proposition is made that “all swans are white,” then even one observation to the contrary would have great significance because it would falsify the proposition and stimulate additional research and more refined theory-building. Similarly, I am attracted to case study approaches because they are “well suited for identifying ‘black swans’” (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 228). In particular, this case study challenges the narrowness of current definitions of cooperation and collaboration that presuppose unified action on the part of all actors. The case study approach certainly cannot make the broad claims of generalizability that large-scale quantitative studies can, but this limitation with regards to breadth is chosen in order to accomplish great depth instead.

**Directions for Future Research**

When I initially proposed this project, I planned to conduct a comparative case study analysis using Wilmington as a rural example and Detroit, Michigan as an urban example of economic redevelopment of a dependent community following the collapse of their leading industry. My committee wisely recommended that I focus on an in-depth analysis of Wilmington in order to contain the scope of this dissertation project. Many times throughout this process, I have silently thanked them for this recommendation. I sorely underestimated the amazing wealth of resources that my participants would make
available to me. Additionally, narrowing my focus to this single case afforded me greater opportunities to refine my questions before applying them in a larger context.

That being said, this project has inspired me to pursue several lines of future research. This dissertation made good use of a broad swath of discourse surrounding the events in Wilmington following DHL’s restructuring announcement in 2008; however, many studies could still be developed by focusing in on smaller selections of the collected discourses. For example, in my interviews, most of my participants sketched out the “community network” as they saw themselves positioned in it. As they drew out these diagrams, they spoke to me about ways in which these formal and informal connections influenced their ability to collaborate with various individuals and organizations. Much work remains to be done to understand how local communities might construct more resilient communication infrastructures, and I believe a close analysis of this unexamined portion of my data could begin to address some of those questions.

As I reflected upon this idea of constructing resilient communication infrastructures, I became truly intrigued with the possible contributions communication scholars could make to the work being done in emergency management policy and practice. Chris Schock’s language of “hardening” in the face of economic disaster caught my interest and I believe this is another area ripe for further research. In the height of economic activity at the air park, Wilmington was incredibly dependent upon this one site for an enormous amount of the area’s gross domestic product. How, in situations like this, is economic complacency communicatively constructed?
Relatedly, when communities decide to allow large corporations or environmentally threatening industries (like mining or drilling operations) to establish themselves within their boundaries, how is economic necessity constructed in relation to environmental or cultural risk? Massive multinational corporations and high-tech resource extractions industries set up in small rural communities for various reasons—availability of land and resources, low operating costs, minimal governmental interference—and build up the local economy to support their immediate needs. These businesses promise more jobs than the host town has residents and the resultant influx of people shapes the contours and the culture of the town (think, for example, of the influence of these industries on local values and culture: coal mining in rural West Virginia, copper mining on the reservation lands of Nevada, and hydraulic fracturing in western North Dakota). When unemployment numbers are high, how are threats to current conditions constructed in relation to the necessity of these particular economic solutions? An interesting area of research would investigate the ways in which these towns and industries grow up around each other through the competing rhetorics of “opportunity,” “necessity,” and “risk.”

Finally, the very language of “economic disaster” opens up fascinating possibilities for future studies. For example, what normative obligations regarding governmental responsibility to prevent, mitigate, and respond to focusing events are activated in the rhetoric of “natural” versus “human-made” disasters? Clearly, human factors play a role in so-called natural disasters like wildfires, and complex systemic factors play a role in economic and environmental disasters. So, communication scholars
are well-positioned to consider what contradictions exist in language and ethics surrounding disaster policy.

Given the valuable role I believe communication scholars can and should play in addressing social problems surrounding disaster policy, I would not be satisfied with this research project if the only product was this dissertation document. Already, though, it has become more than that. One problem for economic redevelopment in Wilmington that kept coming up in my research was the evacuation of young people (brain drain) and the resultant aging population. To help address this issue and incorporate creative solutions into future planning, I am working with an interdisciplinary team of researchers and practitioners on a two-part project. In collaboration with the Wilmington Chamber of Commerce, Clinton County Regional Planning Commission, and the City of Wilmington, our research team is designing a survey and a series of three forums to investigate what factors young people (ages 18-44) consider in deciding where to live, work, and spend money. Additionally, we will be analyzing the relationship between sense of community and expressions of civic engagement. In this way, I hope my research can serve the town of Wilmington and hopefully provide useful information for similarly situated towns.
As I wrote about the flight of young people in rural America and celebrated the efforts of those small town leaders developing creative strategies for attracting and retaining this much-desired age bracket, I finalized my own plans to move more than 2,000 miles across the country to Reno, Nevada.

I am a Leaver. And in the rural U.S. there are millions of us.

Perhaps my work with local leaders to address some of these issues surrounding the effects of brain drain on the regional economy is my own way of trying to purge myself of the guilt that I feel for leaving. My extended family has long, deep roots in southwest Ohio, and despite their words of support and pride, I feel as if my departure is a betrayal to the people and the places that I have called home. I recognize southwest Ohio’s need for those in positions like mine to step into leadership roles to tackle local problems with an entrepreneurial spirit and decades of service, and I simultaneously feel like my purpose is larger than the places I have already come to know. There is more to see, more to learn, more to experience.

But if life is a continual process of becoming, presumably there will always be more to see, learn, and experience; and I am choosing then to live in destinations and spend my vacations visiting home, rather than the opposite. How can I make sense of this perpetual geographical restlessness in relation to my concurrent admiration for intentional place-making and my commitment to meaningful community building?

Perhaps what I am feeling is not only or entirely the guilt of betrayal. Perhaps I am also projecting my own fears of becoming disconnected, forgotten, and without a home. A rootless professor:
As citizens of the cosmo polis, the mythical ‘world city,’ professors are expected to owe no allegiance to geographical territory; we’re supposed to belong to the boundless world of books and ideas and eternal truths, not the infinitely particular world of watersheds, growing seasons, and ecological niches. (Zencey, 1996, p. 15)

I think there is something beautifully romantic and adventurous about the world of ideas and I am inexplicably drawn to it with an unquenchable curiosity. And yet, this dissertation process demonstrated to me time and again the amazing value of studying these intimately particular worlds in which we find ourselves rooted. I have never felt like more of an “insider” in the Wilmington community than when I returned to it after seven years of absence to write this dissertation.

In many ways this dissertation is my love letter to the communities that have shaped me. Although I am moving to the mountains of western Nevada this summer, when I think of home I will always think of shucking late summer corn in the back yard with my siblings as the soft glow of fireflies flash against the hazy twilight sky, sitting on straw bales around a bonfire with good friends, and seeing that glimmer of recognition when a stranger hears my last name and immediately calls up my whole family tree, telling stories of my parents teaching them in high school or my brother painting their fence. I am a Leaver, but rural America will always be my home.
REFERENCES


Doran, J. (2008, March 30). Where jobs are scarce and bellies empty: In vast swathes of the Midwest, working families are turning in desperation to food handouts and loan sharks. *The Observer.*


Feed the Children mobilizes to help families affected by DHL closing in Ohio; 4,400 families received food and supplies. (2009, February 21). *Business Wire*.


For Wilmington, the future is now [Editorial]. (2008, December 1). *Wilmington News Journal*.


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Levin, I., Schneider, S., & Gaeth, G. (1998). All frames are not created equal: A typology and critical analysis of framing effects. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 76,* 149-188. doi: 0749-5978/98


Special delivery: Ho Ho Shop ease the pain of the recession for Wilmington families affected by DHL layoffs; shop expects to assist nearly 1,500 kids this year; hundreds still in need of holiday presents. (2008, December 15). *PR Newswire.* Cleveland, OH.


APPENDIX A: CAST OF CHARACTERS

(Listed in order of initial interview)

Randy Riley – Mayor, City of Wilmington (2012-present); former County Commissioner

Chris Schock – Executive Director, Clinton County Regional Planning

Mark Rembert – Director, Chamber of Commerce; Co-founder, Energize Clinton County

Rob Jaehnig – Director, Center for Innovative Food Technology; City Councilperson

Debbie Stamper – Director, Convention and Visitors’ Bureau

Dessie Buchanan – Program Coordinator, Buy Local First; Clinton Co. Farmer’s Market

Lori Williams – Director, Parks & Recreation; former ABX employee

David Raizk – Mayor, City of Wilmington (2000-2012)

Laura Curliss – Executive Assistant to Mayor Raizk

Bret Dixon – Director, Clinton County Economic Business Development

Kevin Carver – Director, Clinton County Port Authority; former ODOD employee

Ron Sexton – Superintendent, Wilmington City Schools

Keith Hyde – Executive Director, Workforce Services Unlimited, Inc.

Nate Cline – Case Manager, Workforce Services Unlimited, Inc.

Chas Wiederhold – Former Clinton Community Fellow; DAAP Student
### Proposal Title

Constructing “Community” in a Changing Economy: A Case Study Analysis of Local Organizing in the Rural United States

### 1. Investigator(s) Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First</th>
<th>Anna</th>
<th>Middle</th>
<th>M.</th>
<th>Last</th>
<th>Wiederhold</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Address</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td><a href="mailto:aw275709@ohio.edu">aw275709@ohio.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone</td>
<td>(740) 593-4903</td>
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**Co-investigators**

<table>
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<th>Name</th>
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| Department |  |

| Email       |  |
| Phone       |  |

**Training Module Completed?**

| Yes | X | No |

**Advisor Information (if applicable)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Laura W. Black</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address</td>
<td>43 W. Union Street, Athens, OH 45701</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td><a href="mailto:Laura.black.1@ohio.edu">Laura.black.1@ohio.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone</td>
<td>(740) 593-4690</td>
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**Training Module Completed?**

| Yes | X | No |

**Research Assistants**

<table>
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**Training Module Completed?**

| Yes | X | No |

### 2. Study Timeline

**a. Anticipated Starting Date** (Study, including recruitment, **cannot** begin prior to IRB approval. This date should **never** precede the submission date)

| As soon as possible, pending IRB approval |

**b. Duration of Study**

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### 3. Funding Status

**a. Is the researcher receiving support or applying for funding?**

| Yes | X | No |

**If YES**

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<th>List Source</th>
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relationships with this sponsor.

Funding will be used for:

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4. **Review Level**

Based on the definition in the guidelines, do you believe your research qualifies for?

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<td>6, 7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Full Board Review</td>
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</table>

5. **Recruitment/Selection of Subjects**

a. Maximum Number of Participants to be Enrolled – If screening occurs, include number that will need to be screened in order to get the N necessary for statistical significance. 25

b. Characteristics of subjects (check as many boxes as appropriate).

<table>
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<th>Minors</th>
<th>Disabled (Physically/Mentally)</th>
<th>Elementary School Students</th>
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<td>X Adults</td>
<td>Legally Incompetent</td>
<td>Middle School Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prisoners</td>
<td>Cognitively Impaired</td>
<td>High School Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pregnant</td>
<td>Non-English Speaking</td>
<td>University Students</td>
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c. Briefly describe the criteria for selection of subjects (inclusion/exclusion). Include such information as age range, health status, etc. Attach additional pages if necessary.

Participants will be selected for inclusion in this study based on their involvement with interorganizational networks in Wilmington, Ohio that are focused on creating a shared, achievable vision for the future of this community. Key informants in this community organizing process, and the initial entry point for this study are the Clinton County Regional Planning Commission, the county commissioners, and Energize Clinton County (http://energizecc.com). Because I am interested in studying the formation and maintenance of networks of individuals and organizations collaborating with each of these initial informants, I plan to use snowball sampling to contact other local leaders active in these community networks to invite them to participate in my study. All participants will be 18 years of age or older and capable of giving informed consent to participate in the study.

Some interviewees could potentially be policy makers or elected officials. I do not anticipate that these participants would be exposed to any greater risk than other participants because they are already on public record expressing opinions on the same
topics we will potentially be discussing. However, if any of my participants are concerned about anonymity, they will have ample opportunities to notify me (see 6d, 7b, and consent form); in which case I would ask those participants to select pseudonyms, and I would use direct quotes from those individuals minimally throughout the dissertation. Furthermore, I would ask their permission for inclusion of their quotes in subsequent publications. As I mentioned above, I do not anticipate any risk to public officials or local leaders should my notes get subpoenaed; however, to minimize any potential for harm, on the consent form I will remind all participants of the potentiality that local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies could have access to their comments if required under subpoena. In this way, by signing the consent form, participants will acknowledge all possible risk involved with whatever they choose to discuss with me.

d. Please describe how you will identify and recruit prospective participants.

Participation in this study will be voluntary. Participants will be included based on snowball sampling originating with the organizational leaders mentioned above. I will explain my role as a researcher conducting a study looking at issues of community organizing and public identities. No effort will be made to coerce or pressure participants to take part in the research, and every effort will be made to ensure that they understand my role and interests as a researcher.

e. Records

Are you accessing private, i.e. medical, educational, or employment records?  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
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<th>X</th>
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</table>

If YES, Describe process for obtaining approval for the use of the records or for securing consent from the subjects. Attach a letter of support from the holder or custodian of the records i.e. primary physician, therapist, public school official.)

f. Please describe your relationship to the potential participants, i.e. instructor of class, co-worker, etc. If no relationship, state no relationship.

I went to high school in Wilmington, so I could interview community leaders who knew me as a student at Wilmington High School. My access to this population is due in part to my membership in the Wilmington community.

g. Performance Sites/Location of Research

<table>
<thead>
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<tr>
<td>Other – Describe below and provide letters of cooperation and/or support</td>
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6. Project Description

a. Please provide a brief summary of this project, using non-technical terms that would be understood by a non-scientific reader. Please limit this description to no more than one page, and provide details in the methodology section.
Wilmington, Ohio is a town of 12,000 residents, situated between Cincinnati, Dayton, and Columbus on the flat southwestern farmlands of the Manufacturing Belt. Most people in the region are employed on local farms, in county schools, or, until May 28, 2008, at the Wilmington Air Park through the German-based mail and freight shipping company DHL. In May 2008, as a result of a struggling economy and decreasing profitability, DHL decided to close its doors on domestic shipping in the United States, focusing its attention on the international market instead. As a result of the hub closing, about 8,000 people in Wilmington and the surrounding area found themselves suddenly unemployed.

National media have broadcast the plight of Wilmington across the U.S., highlighting the economic impact of job loss, failing businesses, and people struggling to make ends meet. While the media portrayed Wilmington’s story as a cautionary tale for the rest of the United States regarding the threat of deindustrialization and the changing economy, local development networks have formed in order to create their own visions for the future of this rural community.

Through a case study analysis, I consider how organizational networks and communities constitute each other through Wilmingtonians’ efforts to redefine a sense of local identity. The stories we tell about who we were, who we are, and who we can be are both inspired and limited by the physical conditions of our lived environments. As such, this study seeks to understand the interrelationships between symbolic and material constructions of “community” to tease out the ways in which perceptions of incommensurability arise between leaders’ interpretations of the past and visions for the future. In this way, I hope to discern opportunities and obstacles to large-scale organizing in the midst of dramatic change.

b. Please describe the specific scientific objectives (aims) of this research and any previous relevant research.

Five initial research questions will guide this study:
RQ1: How is membership in transorganizational networks communicatively constructed and maintained by local leaders?
RQ2: How do speakers in the national media “name” the community of Wilmington in their coverage of local economic conditions?
RQ3: How do local speakers “name” the community of Wilmington in public discourse regarding economic conditions?
RQ4: How do community leaders coordinate transorganizational antenarratives (imaginative visions for the future) in relation to physical spaces?
RQ5: How do community leaders negotiate meanings when shared public spaces become sites of definitional contention?

I have not published research on this topic yet, but I have delivered the following relevant conference presentation about the situation in Wilmington, OH:
c. Methodology: please describe the procedures (sequentially) that will be performed/followed with human participants.

The primary methods used in this study will be observation and qualitative interviews.

From an ethnographic foundation, I will be utilizing participant-observation, walking interviews, and the analysis of organizational artifacts to conduct this research. Creswell (2003) describes ethnography as a qualitative research strategy in which the “researcher studies an intact cultural group in a natural setting over a prolonged period of time by collecting primarily observational data” (p. 14). Although this specific study may not fulfill all of these conditions, I will be influenced by these principles as I focus on gaining insight into the work of community networks in Wilmington. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) define a participant-as-observer to be a “researcher who enters the field setting with openly acknowledged investigative purposes” (p. 147). Although a participant-observer’s main focus is to observe the organization as it operates, the researcher also takes on many of the responsibilities of a legitimate member of the organization. However, according to Lindlof and Taylor (2002), it is acknowledged by the organizational members that the researcher is not expected to fully integrate herself into the routines of the group. For the purpose of this inquiry, I hope to position myself as a participant-observer within the Wilmington community.

In order to gain more insight into the experiences of the community network members, I plan to facilitate interviews with willing participants. These interviews will be conducted while walking through meaningful parts of the community with participants. Practitioners in the field of development have been primarily responsible for the creation of a participatory approach called Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), which is a methodological framework being employed by this study. Chambers (1997) described PRA as being a qualitative approach to inquiry that privileges local knowledge, using secondary data as context. Researchers using PRA should be critically self-aware of biases regarding place (where you go), person (whom you meet), and season and time of day (when you go). The process consists of seeking out experts to observe directly, obtaining information through systematic walks with participants called transect walks, semi-structured interviews, and stories. In this way, the research site moves from an artificial or sanitized office setting to the physical sites of interest within the community. Mobility invites interruptions and external noise by embracing the dynamic setting of an active community (Atkinson, Delamont, & Housley, 2008). Transect walks, which have been used primarily by development practitioners, are predetermined courses that researchers walk with community members in an effort to glean local knowledge about places passed along the way.

My vision for data collection is a slight modification of PRA, in that I accept the general
framework but would like for my participants to choose the routes through public places for our walking interviews. Guided by this approach, I plan to interview community leaders by walking through parts of the town that they have developed, are currently developing, or would like to develop. All interviews will be recorded using digital audio recorders, attached by an armband to the upper arms of both researcher and participants for best audio quality while walking. These interviews will be transcribed so the actual discourse will be available for close analysis. Please see Appendix C for my interview protocol for these walking interviews.

Since there will be two audio recordings of each interview (one on the researcher’s arm and one on the participant’s arm), I plan to compare the written transcripts against both audio recordings. Disparities will be clarified in consultation with participants, but where irresolvable, will be marked in the text of the transcript. Written transcripts of each interview will be shared with the interviewee for member-checking prior to analysis. In this way, participants will have an opportunity to respond to my representation of our interaction and provide their own interpretations. My participants’ comments and questions during these member-checking sessions will largely shape the focused questions that I will later use in analysis (discussed in greater detail later in this form).

In order to supplement my expertise in attending to discursive interpretations with a more specialized attention to the enabling and constraining features of the built environment, I will re-walk the routes of each peripatetic interview with my brother, Chas, who is a student of architecture in the University of Cincinnati’s College of Design, Architecture, Art, and Planning (DAAP). Chas has worked for architecture firms in Cincinnati and Chicago and in the summer of 2011 participated in a project designing and building a sustainable community center in Tanzania. During the summer of 2010, Chas participated in a community development program, Clinton Community Fellows, aimed at reducing the brain drain in Wilmington. He was selected for this experience based on his unique design background. Chas was paired with small businesses and nonprofits in the Wilmington community that required or would benefit from additional design capacity or the design thinking process. Chas’s understandings of the built environment of Wilmington will create another layer of interpretation to this study through his specialized attention to the architectural aspects of sites, such as volumes within space, enclosure and exposure, views in and views out, entry and egress, proximity, and materiality. Chas will not be conducting interviews or acting as a research assistant. Rather, he will act as an expert informant in the area of design.

I also feel that unique insight into the work of these community networks could be gained through the analysis of organizational artifacts. ECC’s website is rich with information about the organization including in-depth information about the goals and mission of the organization, upcoming events, news coverage, and information about the founders. The organization also distributes occasional emails to members of an ECC ListServ. These messages contain information about the status of upcoming events and achievements of its members, along with requests for participation and donations. Analyzing these artifacts will provide me with the opportunity to further understand the mission of the organization.
Works Cited in this Section


d. Describe any potential risks or discomforts of participation and the steps that will be taken to minimize them.
I anticipate no potential risks or discomfort based on participation in this research project. However, depending on what participants share with me, it is possible that their comments might have social, political, or economic ramifications within their community. At any time, participants may ask to have their names removed from my data and they may ask that any specific comments not be used for research purposes.

e. Describe the anticipated benefits to the individual participants. If none, state that.
(Note that compensation is not a benefit, but should be listed in the compensation section on the next page.)
Ideally, through participating in this study, local community leaders will gain awareness of other individuals and organizations working to achieve similar goals in their local environment, creating opportunities for collaboration. However, they may not benefit personally by participating in this study.

f. Describe the anticipated benefits to society and/or the scientific community in lay language. There must be some benefit to justify the use of human subjects.
This study is important to society because, in investigating the communicative processes of community organizing, I hope to contribute to the growing body of knowledge surrounding issues local economic development. Too often, only distant populations in countries half a globe away are highlighted as victims of unintended consequences of globalization. While these are certainly important populations to study, there are communities right down the road that are currently under-studied and at risk in this rapidly changing economy.

The silent crisis experienced in rural U.S. settings like Wilmington has been referred to as a “hollowing out,” which Carr and Kefalas (2009) defined as, “the devastating loss of educated and talented young people, the aging of the population, and the erosion of the local economy” (p. ix). As shifts in the global market create fewer post-industrial options for rural people than metropolitan Americans (Cole, 2009), the rural small town threatens to disappear altogether. Therefore, in conducting this study I hope to contribute to the knowledge base that can better equip communities to organize and adapt in times of rapid change.
7. Confidentiality

a. Check all that apply

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<tr>
<td>Data will be recorded with identifying information, e.g. name, SSN, oak id, etc.</td>
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<tr>
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b. If master code list is used (3rd option); please provide detail, such as how/where code list is securely stored, when it will be destroyed, etc.).

Due to my membership in the Wilmington community, familiarity with many study participants, and nature of the study, I expect that most participants will be willing to fully participate in this study as they would a journalistic approach to covering their stories. Although I hope that all participants agree to let me use their real names and organizations in this case study, I will allow participants to choose from various privacy options regarding their identities as connected to interview data.

Because this is a small community, and because many potential interviewees are on public record expressing strong opinions about their visions for future development, I expect that few people will choose to remain anonymous precisely because, for some individuals, their very opinions might be considered “identifying” information. However, if any of my participants are concerned about anonymity, they will have an option to have their identifying information removed from the study, in which case their names and organizational information will be replaced by pseudonyms and no images of the participants will be included as part of the study.

Names will be linked to this pseudonym only through a master list, to which only the researcher will have access. Furthermore, this linkage will be broken when analysis and verification are complete by shredding all hard copies and permanently deleting all digital copies of the master list. All identifying information that participants do not wish for me to include will be destroyed at this time (approximately June 2013). These participants’ identities will be protected through the use of pseudonyms in papers, conference presentations, or publications that may result from this study. Furthermore, I would use direct quotes from those individuals minimally throughout the dissertation, and I would ask their permission for inclusion of their quotes in subsequent presentations and publications.

c. If data is stored with identifiers, please provide details of how data will be stored securely (i.e. locked cabinet, password protected, etc.) as well as timeframe of when data will be de-identified.

All data will be stored on the researcher’s password protected laptop, which she keeps in her locked apartment. Data will be backed up on an external hard-drive, also stored in the researcher’s locked apartment. At the conclusion of analysis, all identifying data will be destroyed (approximately June 2013).
d. Data Sharing

| Will identifiable data be shared with anyone outside the immediate research team? | Yes  | X  | No |

If YES, please describe

| If participants agree to have their identities shared in my dissertation, identifiable data would be accessible to anyone who reads my research. However, this data would only be shared with the explicit consent of participants. |

e. Recording

| Will participants be Audio recorded? | Audio recorded? | Yes  | X  | No |
| Will participants be Video recorded? | Video recorded? | Yes  | No | X |

If YES, please describe how/where recordings will be stored, who will have access to them, and an estimate of the date (month/year) that they will be destroyed.

| Audio files will be transferred directly from the digital recorders to the researcher’s laptop computer, which is stored in her locked place of residence. It is also important to note that the laptop computer is password-protected. Only the researcher has knowledge of this password. Additionally, these recordings will be saved to an external hard drive. The external hard drive back-up will also be stored in her locked place of residence. These recordings will be available only to the researcher. Audio recordings for those participants who wish to remain anonymous will be destroyed with all other identifying information that participants do not wish for me to include when analysis and verification are complete. (approximately June 2013). |

f. Additional Details (if needed)

---

8. Compensation

a. Will participants receive a gift or token of appreciation? Yes  No  X

If YES, list the item and its approximate value.

b. Will participants receive services, treatment or supplies that have a monetary value? Yes  No  X

If YES, please describe and provide the approximate value.

c. Will participants receive course credit? Yes  No  X

If YES, please describe non-research alternatives to earn the credit, the number of points awarded and what percentage of total points for the course it represents. If you are using the Psychology Pool, which has already established guidelines that provide these details to the IRB, simply write Psych Pool.
d. Will participants receive monetary compensation (including gift cards)?

If YES, please detail the amount per session and total compensation possible. Additionally, describe what compensation amount is paid to participants who discontinue participation prior to completion.

If University funds are used to compensate participants, minimally, the name and address of participants will need to be provided to the Finance Office at OU. If participants will be paid $100 or more in a calendar year, participant social security numbers must be provided to Finance. The consent form must reflect this.

9. Instruments
a. List all questionnaires, instruments, standardized tests below, with a brief description, and provide copies of each, labeled as APPENDIX C.

The questions for my walking interviews are included in Appendix C.

10. Data Analysis
How will the data be analyzed? What statistical procedures will be used to test hypotheses; if qualitative, how will data be coded, etc.

In order to attend to the community organizing efforts of Wilmingtonians at both micro and macro levels of analysis, I will adopt a method developed by LeGreco and Tracy (2009) called discourse tracing. LeGreco and Tracy’s method is a systematic qualitative research approach to studying the interrelationships between broad social narratives and particular local practices.

The first step of discourse tracing consists of defining a case using a rupture or turning point. In this study, the critical moment defining the case is May 28, 2008, the date that DHL announced that they would be closing the Wilmington hub. The second step of discourse tracing requires that I gather micro, meso, and macro-level discourses, order them chronologically, and conduct a close reading to elicit emergent themes. In this study, any data directly involving human subjects exists at the micro level. Meso-level discourses consist of city council meeting transcripts (available to the public online), organizational mission and vision statements, and city-wide policies. Macro-level discourses consist of supplemental texts gleaned from national media sources covering the economic conditions in Wilmington.

All of these texts will be ordered chronologically, consistent with the discourse tracing methodology. The analysis process is then guided by two specific tasks: developing a series of questions toward the data in order to trace discursive practices and developing a case study based on the answers to those questions. Beginning with reading transcripts and fieldnotes to gain a holistic sense of the discourses, I will then manually code the data through careful tracing of particular discursive markers determined significant
according to the structured questions I ask. I will develop these questions over the course of my research and initial reading, informed by my participants’ insights and my own experiences, training, and goals. These questions can be philosophical (e.g., “What is the purpose of transorganizational networks?”), extensions from past literature (e.g., “Are community building efforts more paternalistic or participatory?”), and/or context specific (e.g., “How is the Economic Alliance Network organized and legitimized in discourse?”). I plan to use the qualitative analysis software NVivo 8 to organize data and structure the coding process.

Works Cited in this Section

11. **Informed Consent Process**

   a. **Select One of the Following Options**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>I am obtaining signed consent for this study (Attach copies of all consent documents as Appendix A).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I am requesting a waiver or alteration of Informed Consent (provide details below and attach information that will be provided to participants regarding the study (email, cover letter) as Appendix A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Waiver of signature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>___ Exempt study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>___ Waiver needed to protect the privacy of participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>___ Waiver needed due to cultural norms (e.g. wary of forms needing signatures)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>___ Impracticable (online or phone study)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>___ Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Deception (incomplete disclosure)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>___ Necessary to avoid participants altering behavior (e.g. not informing of 2 way mirror; providing cover story)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Complete waiver of consent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

   Provide additional information regarding the waiver, if needed.

   Attach copies of all consent documents or text and label as APPENDIX A. Please use the template provided at the end of this document.

   b. How and where will the consent process occur? Will participants have an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered? What steps will be taken to avoid coercion or undue influence?
At the start of our interactions with each participant, I will explain my research interests and discuss why I am asking for their participation and assistance. The consent process will occur prior to discussion. This research will not be possible without the willingness and cooperation of participants. I will emphasize to each individual that their participation is strictly voluntary. They do not have to participate. I will make sure to emphasize that if they choose not to participate their remarks, as well as my interactions with them, will not be noted or considered in the research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>c. Will the investigator(s) be obtaining all of the informed consents?</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

If NO, identify by name and training who will be describing the research to subjects/representatives and inviting their participation?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>d. Will all adult participants have the capacity to give informed consent?</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

If NO, explain procedures to be followed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>e. Will any participants be minors?</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>X</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

If YES, include procedures/form for parental consent and for the assent from the minor.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>f. Will participants be deceived or incompletely informed regarding any aspect of the study?</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>X</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

If YES, provide rationale for use of deception.

If YES, attach copies of post-study debriefing information and label as APPENDIX D. Additionally, complete the questions related to a consent form waiver or alteration.
**Investigator Assurance**

I certify that the information provided in this outline form is complete and correct.

I understand that as Principal Investigator, I have ultimate responsibility for the protection of the rights and welfare of human subjects, conduct of the study and the ethical performance of the project.

I agree to comply with Ohio University policies on research and investigation involving human subjects (O.U. Policy # 19.052), as well as with all applicable federal, state and local laws regarding the protection of human subjects in research, including, but not limited to the following:

- The project will be performed by qualified personnel, according to the OU approved protocol.
- No changes will be made in the protocol or consent form until approved by the OU IRB.
- Legally effective informed consent will be obtained from human subjects if applicable, and documentation of informed consent will be retained, in a secure environment, for three years after termination of the project.
- Adverse/Unexpected events will be reported to the OU IRB promptly.
- All protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. Research must stop at the end of that approval period unless the protocol is re-approved for another term.

I further certify that the proposed research is not currently underway and will not begin until approval has been obtained. A signed approval form, on Office of Research Compliance letterhead, communicates IRB approval.

**Primary Investigator Signature**

(Please print name)  

**Co-Investigator Signature**

(Please print name)
Faculty Advisor/Sponsor Assurance

By my signature as sponsor on this research application, I certify that the student(s) or guest investigator is knowledgeable about the regulations and policies governing research with human subjects and has sufficient training and experience to conduct this particular study in accord with the approved protocol. In addition:

- I agree to meet with the investigator(s) on a regular basis to monitor study progress.
- Should problems arise during the course of the study, I agree to be available, personally, to supervise the investigator in solving them.
- I assure that the investigator will report adverse/unexpected events to the IRB in writing promptly.
- If I will be unavailable, as when on sabbatical or vacation, I will arrange for an alternate faculty sponsor to assume responsibility during my absence.

I further certify that the proposed research is not currently underway and will not begin until approval has been obtained. A signed approval form, on Office of Research Compliance letterhead, communicates IRB approval.

Advisor/Faculty Sponsor Signature ___________________________ Date ________

(Please print name) __________________________________________

*The faculty advisor/sponsor must be a member of the OU faculty. The faculty member is considered the responsible party for legal and ethical performance of the project.
Title of Research: Constructing “Community” in a Changing Economy
Researchers: Anna Wiederhold

You are being asked to participate in research. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks. It also explains how your personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to sign it. This will allow your participation in this study. You should receive a copy of this document to take with you.

**Explanation of Study**
The goal of my research is to better understand communicative aspects of community organizing. My research would seek to understand how you build connections with other people and businesses in the community and what role those relationships play in creating a sense of community identity.

Your participation in this research is strictly voluntary. You do not have to participate. If you choose not to participate, or wish at any time to end your participation in the study, neither your remarks nor our interactions with you will be noted or considered in our research.

**Risks and Discomforts**
No risks or discomforts are anticipated with your participation in our research. However, depending on what you share with me, it is possible that your comments might have social, political, or economic ramifications within your community. At any time, you may ask to have your name removed from your data and you may ask that any specific comments not be used for research purposes.

**Benefits**
This study is important to society because, in investigating the communicative processes of community organizing, I hope to contribute to the growing body of knowledge surrounding issues of local economic development. Ideally, through participating in this study, local community leaders will gain awareness of other individuals and organizations working to achieve similar goals in their local environment, creating opportunities for collaboration. However, you may not benefit personally by participating in this study.

**Confidentiality and Records**
In signing this consent form you are agreeing to be interviewed for the purposes of the study described above. You are further agreeing that the interview may be electronically recorded. Please choose one of the following options:
A) I agree that my name may be used for the purposes of this study.

OR

B) I do not wish my name to be used or my identity otherwise disclosed in this study.

If you choose option A, identifying information will be retained for research purposes indefinitely. Following our interview, you will have opportunities to review and verify transcripts of your comments. Also, you may at any time contact me and decide that you do not want your identifying information used, at which time the procedures of option B (outlined below) will be used instead.

If you choose option B, please read the following description of how your identity will be protected, should you choose to participate: Study information will be kept confidential by use of pseudonyms and through careful storage of all recorded data. Names will be linked to this pseudonym only through a master list, to which only the researchers will have access. Furthermore, this linkage will be broken when analysis is complete by shredding all hard copies and permanently deleting all digital copies of the master list. All identifying information will be destroyed by approximately June 2013. Identities of participants choosing this option will be concealed through the use of pseudonyms in papers, conference presentations, or publications that may result from this study.

Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:

* Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research;
* Representatives of Ohio University (OU), including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at OU;
* Local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies if required under subpoena.

**Contact Information**

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact Anna Wiederhold by email at aw275709@ohio.edu or by phone at (740)593-4903.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Jo Ellen Sherow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740)593-0664.

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By signing below, you are agreeing that:

- you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered
- you have been informed of potential risks and they have been explained to your satisfaction.
• you understand Ohio University has no funds set aside for any injuries you might receive as a result of participating in this study
• you are 18 years of age or older
• your participation in this research is completely voluntary
• you may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Signature_________________________________________ Date ____________

Printed Name__________________________________________

Version Date: [4/26/12]
Dear __________,

I am a 2005 graduate of Wilmington high school and I am currently writing my dissertation at Ohio University on the ways individuals and organizations in Wilmington and Clinton County have been working together to build up the local economy since DHL left in 2008. You are receiving this email because of your active leadership in the Wilmington community.

If you are interested, I would like to interview you about how you build connections with other people and businesses in the community. As part of this interview, I would like to see some of the projects that you have been involved with or sites of future projects that you hope to see happen in the Wilmington area. As an example, if you (or an organization that you are a part of) were active in creating the community garden on Rombach Avenue, I might meet you at your office and walk or drive with you to the garden, conducting the interview as we go.

This is meant to be a fairly informal conversation about your role in the community, your vision for the future, and opportunities for and obstacles to community collaboration and development that you have encountered. Your participation in this research is completely voluntary and if you choose to end your participation in the study at any time, neither your remarks nor our interactions will be considered as part of this research.

If you are interested in participating or have any questions about my study, please email me at aw275709@ohio.edu or call my cell phone at (847)209-5099.
APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

I: Demographic Information

Date: 
Name/Pseudonym: 
Age: 
Sex: 
Occupation: 

II. Warm-Up Questions

How long have you lived in Wilmington/Clinton County (CC)?
- How did you come to be in Wilmington/CC in the first place?
- How did you find yourself in your current position in the community?

Tell me about the organizations you work for in CC.
- How long have you worked for ____________?
- What do you do in your current position?
- How do you, personally, and your organization, more generally, work with other members of the Wilmington and CC communities?
  - What is gained through collaboration?
  - What challenges or obstacles have you faced in working with others in the community?

To what extent do you think that other people in the Wilmington community agree with what you are trying to accomplish?
- Where are you finding support?
- Where you are finding resistance?

III. Project-Based Questions

Tell me about this project.
- How would you describe the goal of this project?
- Who was involved in the planning and execution of this project?
- What role did your organization play in this project?

Tell me about this setting.
- How has this place changed over the past few years?
  - What was this place before your project?
  - How is this space currently being used?
  - What is your vision for the future of this project/place?
Why did you choose to show me this project?

Can you recall any particular moments of pride or frustration that you experienced in your work on this project?

IV. Narrative-Based Probes

Character development
- When participants mention other people and organizations, ask:
  - Tell me more about him.
  - Could you describe her to me?
  - How have they been involved?
  - What is their story in relation to ______?

Setting/context
- When participants mention particular places, ask:
  - Where is that?
  - Can you describe that place to me?

Plot
- As participants tell stories, ask:
  - What happened to lead up to that point?
  - What sort of future do you envision? What do you think will happen next?
  - What stories do you think are not being told enough about ______ in the media and in the community?

V. Closing Questions

Is there anything that I haven’t asked that you think would help me understand the ways individuals and organizations in Wilmington and Clinton County have been working together to build up the local economy in recent years?

Would you like to ask me anything?
APPENDIX F: IRB APPROVAL

The following research study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at Ohio University for the period listed below. This review was conducted through an expedited review procedure as defined in the federal regulations as Category(ies): 7

Project Title: Constructing "Community" in a Changing Economy: A Case Study Analysis of Local Organizing in the Rural United States

Primary Investigator: Anna M. Wiederhold
Co-Investigator(s): 

Faculty Advisor: Laura W. Black
Department: Communication Studies

Rebecca Cale, AAB, CIP
Office of Research Compliance

Approval Date 04/26/12
Expiration Date 04/25/13

This approval is valid until expiration date listed above. If you wish to continue beyond expiration date, you must submit a periodic review application and obtain approval prior to continuation.

Adverse events must be reported to the IRB promptly, within 5 working days of the occurrence.

The approval remains in effect provided the study is conducted exactly as described in your application for review. Any additions or modifications to the project must be approved by the IRB (as an amendment) prior to implementation.