

The Heidelberg Project: Impacting the Detroit Community

Introduction

The Heidelberg Project brings art, social critique, and activism together on two blocks in Detroit -- specifically on Heidelberg Street. Now in its 26th year, the Heidelberg Project was for many of those years the passion of one artist, Tyree Guyton, who grew up on Heidelberg Street. Disheartened as he watched the street empty of one family after another to be replaced by drug squatters or the houses demolished, Guyton began to use the street – and its houses and trees and anything else – as a canvas for what would become an outdoor art environment. In serious conflict with the city of Detroit for more than a decade, the Heidelberg Project garnered world wide attention and soon was attracting visitors from around world while simultaneously being overlooked, dismissed, or embattled in Detroit.

The history of the Heidelberg Project is interesting but there are several specific points about the organization that deserve special attention, especially as relates to its social network. The first point is that for years the organization was not really much of an organization at all, it was a person – Tyree Guyton. As recently as 2010, the most recent year for which IRS Form 990s are publicly available, the annual expenditures of the Heidelberg project were \$90,000. The Heidelberg Project is a very small cultural arts organization. The question arises as to whether an organization this small can have a significant impact on its block let alone on the city of Detroit.

The second remarkable point, when taken together with its small budget, is that we estimate (based on a site visit and guest books dating back to almost its start) that the Heidelberg Project attracts approximately 35,000 nonlocal visitors annually. The visibility and draw of the Heidelberg Project for its limited budget is remarkable. Visitors are important for economic impact, but they are, after all, nonlocal visitors. We wondered whether a cultural arts organization such as Heidelberg could have community impact through its local social networks when it operates on such a small budget. That is the question examined in this paper.

We asked the Heidelberg Project to provide us with a list of community initiatives in which they were involved, along with their partners in those initiatives. They provided us with a list of initiatives and events for the period 2010 and 2011. We determined that four of the initiatives satisfied our requirements to be considered part of a social network:

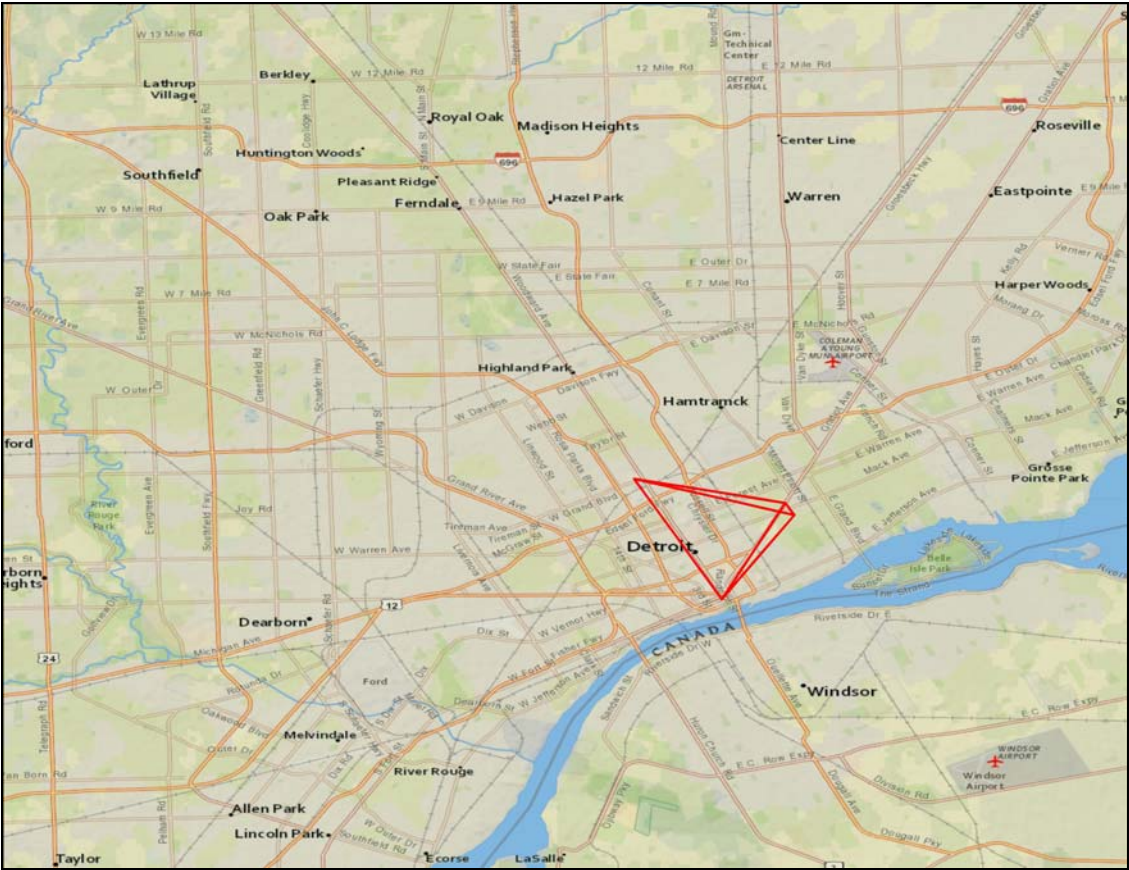
- We could identify a set of specific organizations linked together by virtue of their mutual participation in an initiative.
- The initiative exists over some period of time, requiring more than a single meeting.
- The initiative brought partners together in physical contact with one another, allowing for the possibility of an exchange of information and resources that could allow partners to respond quicker and more effectively to challenges and opportunities.

The four initiatives we identified and present here are the Emerging Artists program; the Young Artists program; ACE2; and Arts Corps Detroit. We discuss each of these networks in turn and provide geographically based maps of the networks.

Emerging Artists Network

Heidelberg’s Emerging Artists initiative chooses artists with few or no gallery exhibitions and provides them the opportunity to showcase their work in the Heidelberg Project Gallery. Its partners in the project are local shops that are largely involved in supporting the artist reception. There are four partners in the emerging artists network, which is presented in *Figure 1*(in red).

Figure 1
Emerging Artists Network

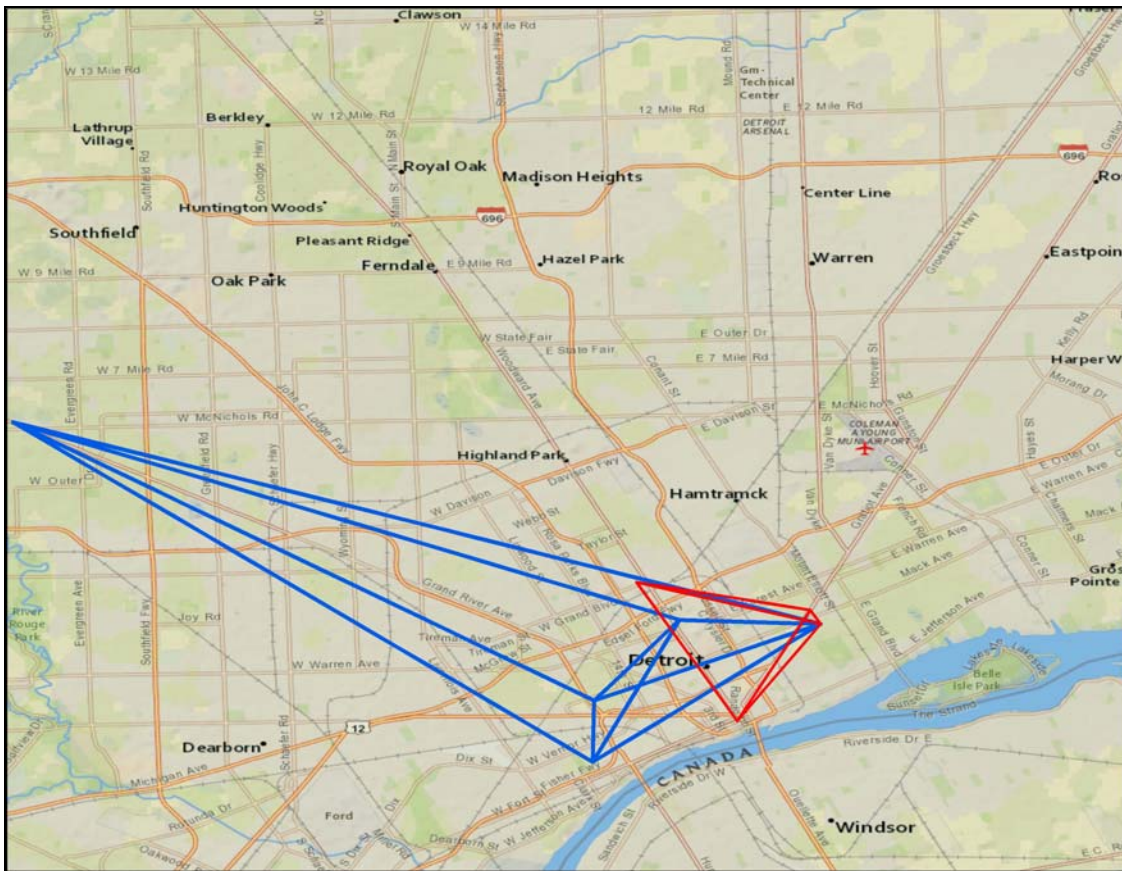


This network is both small and quite local. The distance between Heidelberg Project and the furthest partner is about 4 miles.

YAH Network

Heidelberg Project's YAH initiative stands for Young Artists/Young Adults/Young Activists of Heidelberg. It allows young adults between the ages of 18 and 35 to gain professional development in the cultural arts and become leaders in the Detroit community. There are four Detroit partners in the YAH network. Three are cultural arts organizations and the fourth one is Covenant House Michigan, a sanctuary for abused, neglected, or homeless young people. *Figure 2* presents Heidelberg Projects YAH Network (in blue).

Figure 2
YAH (Young Artists/Adults/Activists of Heidelberg) Network

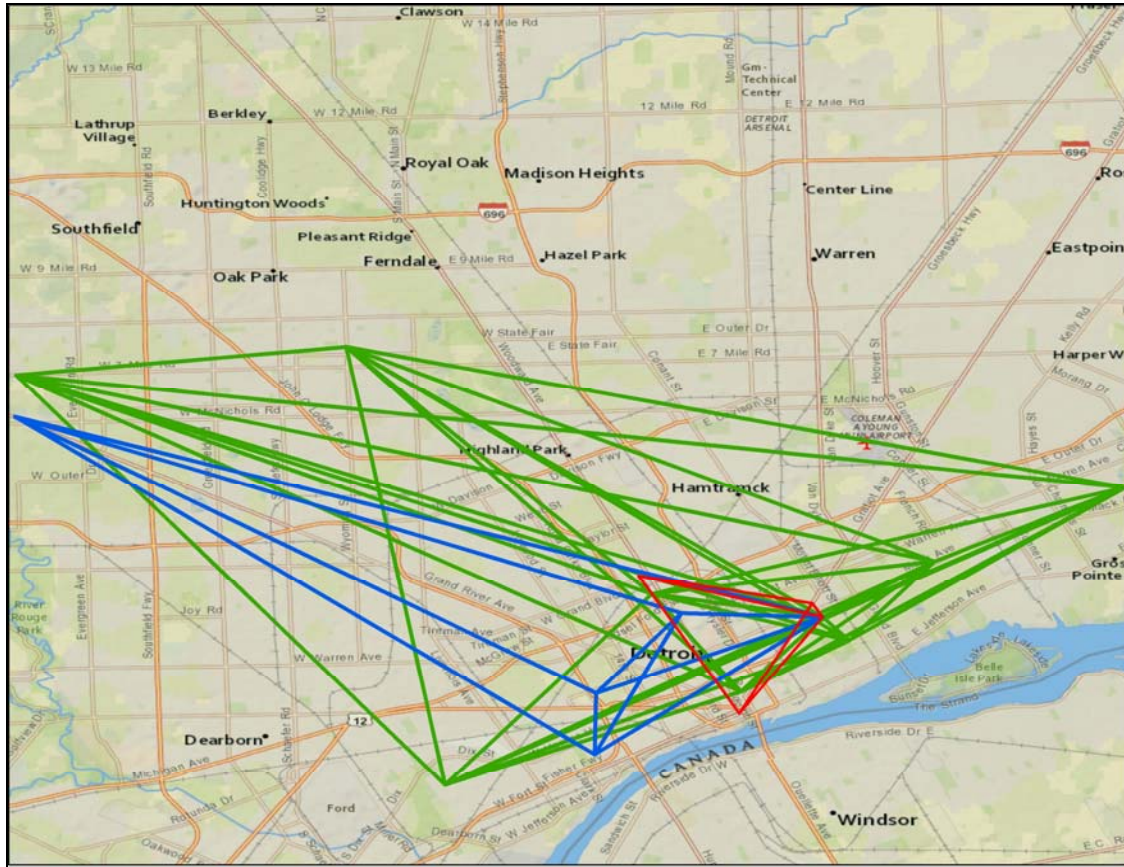


We see in *Figure 2* that Heidelberg's YAH network is not any denser than its Emerging Artists Network, although the geographic area of the network is greater, with the furthest organization about 15 miles from Heidelberg. Additionally, the Heidelberg Project listed the Julliard School in New York City as a partner in the initiative, although the distance involved there was too great to map meaningfully as part of a community network.

ACE2 Network

Heidelberg's ACE2 initiative is short for ACE2: Art, Community and Environmental Education. It is a schools-based program designed to counteract the declining offerings in the arts in public education. The program involves a school visit, presentation and workshop, field trip to Heidelberg Street, and a visit to the artist's studio. *Figure 3* presents the ACE2 network (in green).

Figure 3
ACE2 (Art, Community and Environmental Education) Network



Heidelberg's ACE2 network is more complex and geographically larger than the previous two networks. ACE2 has 8 partners and they include educational institutions, arts organizations, an environmental organization, and a local soup kitchen.

Conclusions

We began this paper by noting how successful the Heidelberg Project has been at attracting visitors to its site, especially considering how modest its annual budget is. This motivated us to collect data on Heidelberg's social network in Detroit to determine if it had also succeeded at building partnerships within the Detroit community. Such partnerships are important for both the organizations involved and the community because they results in an exchange of ideas and experiences that allow organizations to respond more quickly and effectively to future challenges and opportunities.

We conclude that the Heidelberg Project is succeeding at building a social network. It has attracted partners to its own initiatives and has been invited to join larger initiatives started by others. The number of initiatives with which Heidelberg is involved is in keeping with the modest budget with which it works. The geographical extent of Heidelberg's network, expanding to different neighborhoods in Detroit and beyond, is greater than we expected. The results of Heidelberg's social network analysis are consistent with the visitor data in suggesting that the Heidelberg Project accomplishes an amazing amount on its limited budget.