

Investigating the Impacts of Geneva Night Out on the Community/ies

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Abstract

During the fall 2016 and spring 2017 semesters, I developed an independent research project for my Independent SIE, under the supervision of my academic advisor, Professor Robin Lewis of the Environmental Studies department. During this time, my role was to investigate the impacts of Geneva Night Out, (GNO), on the Geneva community/ies. Throughout the course of my research I conducted archival research to understand more about the history of GNO, and what venues and artists have participated since the beginning of GNO. Additionally, I conducted a series of informal interviews with community members, and administered surveys to GNO attendees.

Problem Statement & Literature Review

By talking with community members, local residents and business owners, I hoped to grasp a more comprehensive understanding of the effect(s) GNO has on Geneva's many sub-communities. Not only did I hope to gauge the impacts of GNO on the community/ies here, but also come to some conclusions about the ways in which GNO might become more attractive and inclusive to all Geneva residents and visitors in the future.

Throughout academic literature, various authors strive to characterize community through a broader lens as "a group or company of people living fairly close together in a more or less compact, contiguous territory, who are coming to act together in chief concerns of life" (Queen, 1923, p. 375). According to Selznick (1996), "community" is characterized as a group experience and is further depicted as a system of shared beliefs, interests and commitments of a united group. More often than not, "group of people," "shared space," and "shared values" are common phrases in definitions of community.

Due to the variety of community/ies existing close to or far from our own social context, communities are increasingly important to study in order to make sense of its meaning and impacts on individuals or groups. If we, as individuals, step outside our own social context to observe and analyze the type(s) of community/ies in which we are embedded, we can better grasp the significance of "community," which thus, can help individuals develop a stronger sense of place and purpose.



Research Design

My main objective during this project was to gain insight into the perspectives of local community members, residents, and business owners on the impacts of GNO on the surrounding communities. Not only was I interested in hearing about individual's personal thoughts on the event itself, but I also wanted to learn more about which population(s) he/she believes GNO serves and what, if anything, could be changed in the future to make GNO a more inclusive event. My primary tasks included:

- Conducting archival research to develop a list of all previous GNO events and the venues and artists they hosted;
- Documenting my observations as I participated in GNO events throughout the year;
- Administering surveys to GNO attendees during the event to compile demographic information on who attends, as well as attendees' overall impressions of GNO; and,
- Conducting semi-structured interviews with local business owners, GNO organizers, and community members to gain insight into their perspective(s) on and role(s) within the event.

Results & Discussion

GNO is a vehicle for showing community pride.

- Out of my 41 survey respondents, 90% described GNO in an overtly positive manner.
- Moreover, several survey respondents highlighted how GNO promotes local artists and businesses while also fostering valuable neighborhood and community collaborations.

There are structural factors that limit how inclusive GNO is presently.

- Several individuals feel as though there is not much to do at GNO and/or the events hosted by GNO are always the same.
- Due to interpersonal hurdles such as socioeconomic class and/or access to a car or childcare, attending GNO is simply not a possibility for some.
- Several study participants articulated that minorities are excluded from this event (due, at least in part, to a perceived access cost), and that the selection of participating venues and artists significantly encourages "white-washing" of downtown Geneva.

While GNO is not the perfect tool to build community, it is a step in the right direction.

- Despite the fact that recent attempts at urban renewal in Geneva have negatively impacted some members of the community, GNO is still an active attempt to join sub-communities together in a shared space.
- Geneva, as a community, should recognize and celebrate its diversity, and GNO has the potential to showcase how central diversity is to a healthy community.

Conclusion & Recommendations

- Based on my research, I suggest that GNO organizers adjust their advertising materials to include artists' and performers' bios and websites, so that those interested in attending GNO can learn more about what they can see and experience.
- Additionally, some individuals feel that the events are always the same. It might be worth the investment to recruit more regional artists, (from the FLX region), with new or different styles to present at GNO to add more variety.
- Additionally, other individuals expressed that there should be less alcohol-based entertainment, and more community building activities, which would give younger age groups something positive to do.