Original Research

The People-Place Dilemma: The Challenge for Anchor Networks in Legacy Cities

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Abstract

Anchor movements rest on the premise that people- and place-based initiatives can be mutually reinforcing. The community development movement, however, has been haunted for years by the people-place dilemma – the idea that efforts to help people harm efforts to uplift places and vice versa. Most of the literature on the anchor strategy has focused on one horn of the dilemma, namely, the problem that revitalizing a place may lead to rising housing costs that burden and ultimately displace longtime lower-income residents of the neighborhood. In this article, we examine the other horn of the people-place dilemma -- that helping people in disinvested communities may enable them to move elsewhere, leaving behind poorer communities. We examine this issue through a case study of the St. Louis Anchor Action Network (STLAAN), a collaboration of 16 anchor institutions. St. Louis is a classic legacy city that once enjoyed rapid growth but is now characterized by a falling population and high poverty. We document longstanding trends that have drained STLAAN's focus geography of people and resources, as well as more recent growth of an "eds and meds" economy that presents an opportunity to address decades of disinvestment and decline. We document STLAAN's efforts to invest in its focus geography and the people who live there and conclude with research proposals that could help guide anchor initiatives facing similar challenges.

Keywords: anchor institutions & initiatives, economic & community development, uneven development, racial and economic segregation, legacy cities, community-engaged research

Introduction

The power of place has been thoroughly recognized by researchers (Sampson, 2012; Sharkey, 2013). In a series of studies starting in 2014, Raj Chetty and his colleagues have documented how the neighborhood people grow up in affects their economic success. Based on the ability to follow people over time and space using millions of income tax returns, the Opportunity Insights project demonstrated how exposure to 70,000 different neighborhoods in the United States affects the ability of children to escape poverty (Chetty & Hendren, 2015). More recently, leveraging data from 21 billion friendships on Facebook, they have shown how friendship networks that extend across economic classes can help people in poverty get ahead. However, high levels of economic segregation across neighborhoods mean that friendship networks are often segregated by income (Chetty et al., 2022a; Chetty et al., 2022b). If you live in a poor neighborhood where your friends are also poor, other things being equal, your likelihood of escaping poverty is lower. The Opportunity Insights project has removed all doubts, if any were left, that place matters.

The anchor movement aims to help disadvantaged places and the people who live in them. Ideally, people- and place-based initiatives are mutually reinforcing. As people move up economically, they will spend more at local businesses and have more resources to invest in their homes, enhancing the entire community's well-being. Similarly, as community development efforts succeed at cutting crime, improving schools, and attracting jobs, the ability of individual residents to succeed economically will also improve.

The people-place dilemma has haunted efforts to improve poor places, the idea that people- and place-based initiatives are not reinforcing but conflicting. The literature on the people-place dilemma goes back almost half a century and continues up to the present. (See especially the special issue of *the Housing Policy Debate with an introduction by Galster, 2017; the debate between Orfield et al., 2015 and Goetz, 2015;* Powell & Mendian, 2018; Berube, 2019; and Mallach & Swanstrom, 2023.) The literature on anchor initiatives has focused on one horn of the dilemma: helping places revitalize can hurt longtime, lower-income residents by driving up rents and displacing them. The University of Pennsylvania's efforts to revitalize West Philadelphia, for instance, have been criticized for leading to gentrification and displacement (Melamed, 2018). Research has demonstrated that the threat of displacement is a problem in anchor work (Hodges & Dubb, 2012; Walker & East, 2018; Baldwin, 2021).

The anchor movement has focused on the problem that place-based initiatives may harm residents because the most prominent anchor initiatives have been in cities, usually on the two coasts, with expensive housing markets. In addition, most anchor initiatives have been focused on the neighborhoods next to major medical complexes and institutions of higher learning – classic spaces for gentrification. The people-place dilemma looks different in legacy cities,

especially if the effort is focused on a geography that extends well beyond the neighborhoods immediately bordering "eds & meds." In such a context, anchor initiatives must grapple with the other horn of the people-place dilemma. This problem is helping people who may harm communities by enabling residents to move out, leaving behind even poorer places.

Legacy cities are cities that were industrial powerhouses earlier in the Twentieth Century but have since experienced substantial losses of industrial jobs and population. The Lincoln Institute of Land Policy Legacy Cities Initiative has identified nearly 100 legacy cities, mostly in the Midwest. They define legacy cities as cities with at least 50,000 population that have "sustained population decline of at least 20 percent from their peak historic population levels, and poverty rates higher than the national average in five of the last 10 years" (Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 2023).

The St. Louis Anchor Action Network (hereafter STLAAN or the Network) is a collaboration among sixteen anchor institutions in St. Louis, Missouri, a classic legacy city. The origin story of STLAAN begins in 2014 when the University of Missouri-St. Louis (UMSL) joined the Anchor Dashboard, a collaboration of six universities. Funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and facilitated by the Democracy Collaborative, the Anchor Dashboard designed a set of metrics to track the condition of the communities around universities and well as the "effort" by anchor institution working in these communities (Dubb et al., 2013). UMSL's anchor work began in the same year as the shooting of Michael Brown and the unrest in Ferguson, which is less than a few miles from UMSL's campus. The unrest in Ferguson exposed the longstanding severe spatial and racial inequities in north St. Louis City and County. As UMSL began to implement an anchor strategy in a 2-mile radius around its campus (Swanstrom, Guenther, & George, 2019), it soon became clear that a larger geography needed to be addressed, and UMSL lacked the resources to impact it significantly.

In 2020, UMSL leadership approached other anchor institutions in the St. Louis metropolitan area to form a regional collaborative to advance this work. Anchor collaboratives have emerged across the country to advance equitable and inclusive economic development by "more intentionally aligning and leveraging the significant everyday business activities of local anchor institutions in local hiring and purchasing, place-based investing and community wealth building practices …." (Porter et al., 2019, p. 6). STLAAN includes all major institutions of higher education in St. Louis (Washington University, Saint Louis University, University of Missouri-St. Louis, Webster University, Harris Stowe State University, St. Louis Community College) and the major medical providers (BJC Healthcare, Mercy, and SSM Health), along with other institutions (the St. Louis Zoo, Equifax, St. Louis Federal Reserve Bank, Ameren, Great Rivers Greenway, Missouri Botanical Garden, and one private corporation, Edward Jones. STLAAN's stated mission is to "facilitate sustained investment in St. Louis people and places, driven by a collective commitment to advancing racial equity, removing barriers to economic opportunity,

and fostering a more inclusive regional community" (STLAAN, 2022). STLAAN uses human and physical capital to achieve its objectives (Garton, 2021).

Formed in October 2021, unlike most anchor initiatives, STLAAN is not focused on neighborhoods immediately adjacent to the anchor institutions but rather on a larger, more distant geography encompassing 22 disinvested ZIP Codes with a population of about 280,000 (Figure 1). The initial goal of the Network is to increase hiring and business contracts in the focus geography by 10 percent within three years. Aided by Edward Jones, UMLSL serves as the backbone organization of the collaborative.

Our basic methodology in this paper is to conduct a case study of STLAAN to better understand the challenge of anchor work addressing a disinvested geography in a legacy city. We attempt to answer questions like: How serious is the problem that people who get jobs with anchor institutions may leave the focus geography? How can anchor collaboratives, like STLAAN, encourage people to stay in the community as their economic prospects improve? We use quantitative and qualitative data to address these questions. The quantitative data includes publicly available data from the U.S. Census Bureau, as well as data generated by the anchor institutions themselves. We do not use these data to test hypotheses or evaluate the success of the initiative (it is too early for that) but rather to examine trends across time and space to better understand the challenges facing the Network. Our qualitative data is based on interviews with residents of the focus geography and participant observation. One of us has been involved in discussions about strategy for the Network since its inception. Another author has been the STLAAN Post-Doctoral Research Fellow for the past year and a half and has participated in various Network committees.
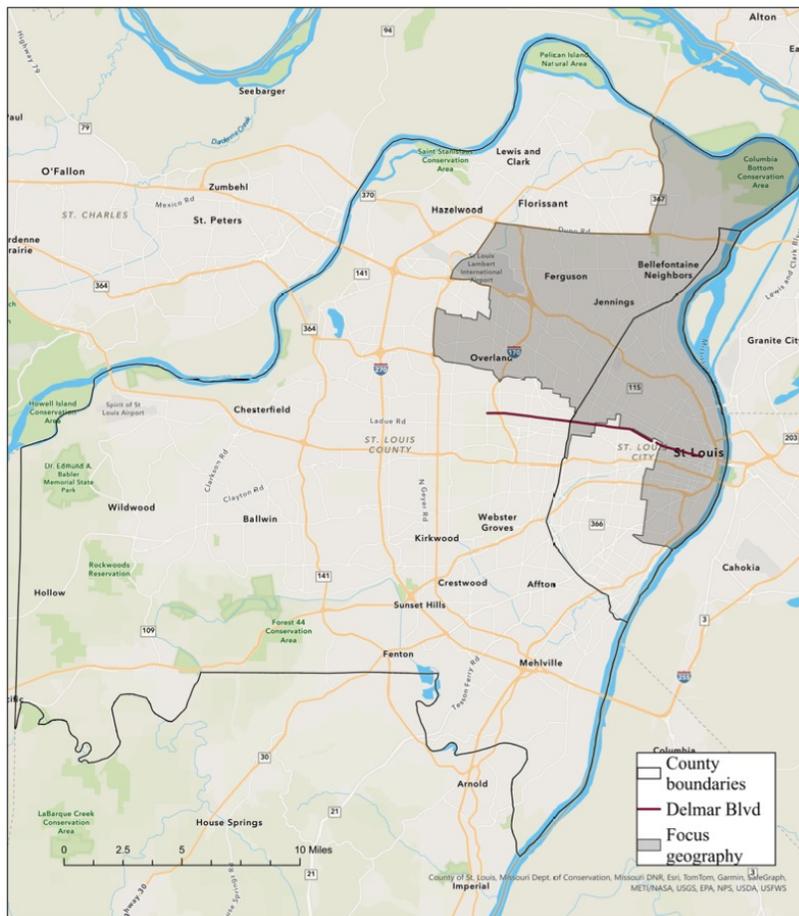
FIGURE 1. STLAAN focus geography map.

Leaky Bucket: The Challenge of Spatial Inequality

The success of anchor initiatives depends on households remaining in place as they benefit from anchor interventions. Anchor institutions will not realize their goal of facilitating sustained investment in disinvested communities if these communities are leaky buckets with households leaving as soon as they have the resources to do so. The United States is a liberal capitalist democracy; no one can be forced to live anywhere. Every household can move wherever they want based on their perceived self-interest. The biggest constraints are economic. People in poverty have fewer choices on where to live in a metropolitan area because they cannot afford higher rents or home prices. As households move up the economic ladder, they have more choices -- with the important exception that the choices of people of color are constrained by racial discrimination and animosity. (For a summary of evidence on the persistence of racial discrimination in housing markets, see Yinger & Oh, 2015.)

As a classic legacy city with a long history of out-migration and residential segregation, St. Louis presents daunting challenges for anchor initiatives wishing to support residents and the

neighborhoods they inhabit. If all places within a metropolitan area had equal resources, such as jobs, tax bases, good schools, and amenities, the people-place dilemma would be greatly attenuated, if not disappear entirely. The greater the degree of inequality, the greater the motivation to move and the more difficult it is to keep upwardly mobile households in historically disinvested communities. And if local government and school district boundaries overlap spatial inequalities, the motive to move will be even greater. In 2012, the St. Louis metropolitan area ranked third among peer metropolitan areas in the number of municipalities and school districts per 100,000 population (East-West Gateway Council of Governments, 2015, p. 111). Research confirms that other things being equal, the greater the fragmentation across municipalities and school districts, the greater the level of economic and racial segregation (Weiher, 1991; Heikil, 1996; Bischoff, 2008; Rothwell & Massey, 2010). In general, by requiring more actors to coordinate their actions to address issues, institutional fragmentation makes anchor work more difficult by increasing the costs of collective action (Swanstrom et al., 2019).

STLAAN's focus geography was chosen by identifying all census tracts in St. Louis City and County with poverty rates over 20 percent that were also majority African American (Figure 1). These census tracts represent a nearly contiguous geography spanning the city-county boundary, reflecting that there are now more impoverished people living in the county than in the central city. This disinvested geography has its roots in a long, tangled history of racist public policies and private practices. In *Mapping Decline*, Colin Gordon (2008) documents how racially restrictive covenants prevented Black residents from buying homes in more privileged parts of the region. Real estate agents could lose their license if they sold a home to a Black person in a White neighborhood. By the 1970s, urban renewal projects had designated many Black neighborhoods as "blighted" and demolished them, pushing Black residents into North St. Louis City and County (Gordon, 2008). Generally, Black residents were confined to neighborhoods north of the infamous "Delmar Divide." Because of historical and contemporary patterns of racial discrimination in labor markets, housing, and bank lending, these communities are poorer and have diminished tax bases to support public services.
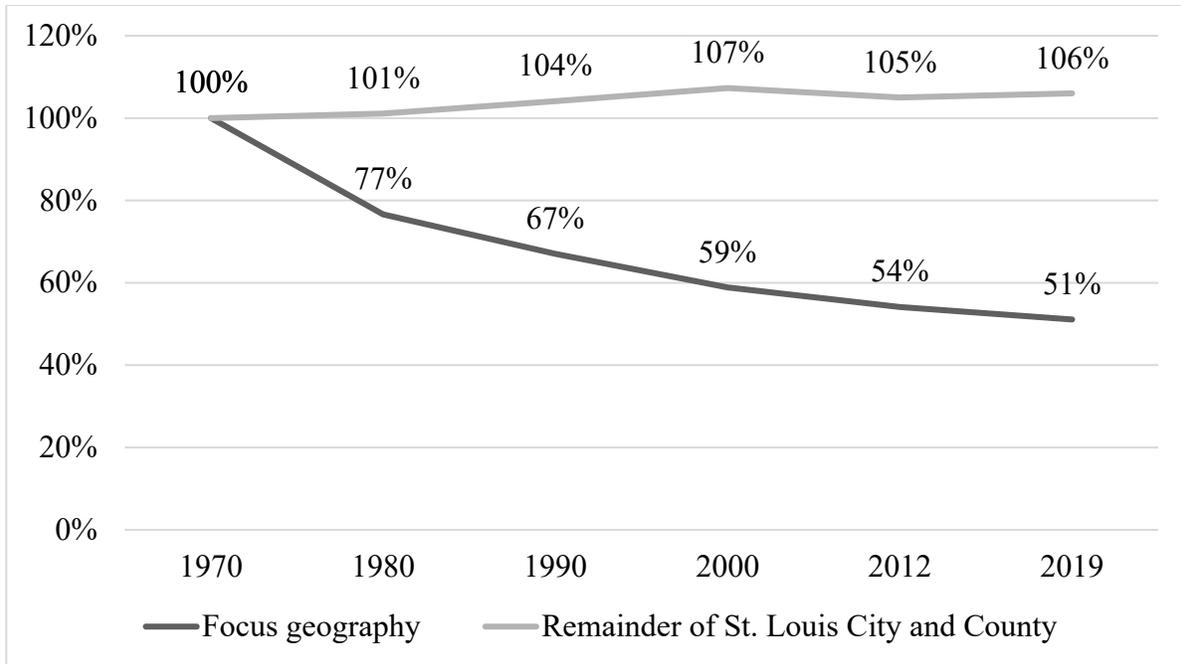
FIGURE 2. Population change as percentage of 1970 population.

We illustrate the diverging demographic shifts between the focus geography and St. Louis City and County using historical census data (1970 to 2000) and American Community Survey 5-year estimates (2012 and 2019). As Figure 2 shows, the population within the focus geography has fallen almost 50 percent since 1970, while the remainder of St. Louis City and County has grown slightly. A shrinking population causes many problems, including high housing vacancy rates and fewer neighborhood retail outlets.
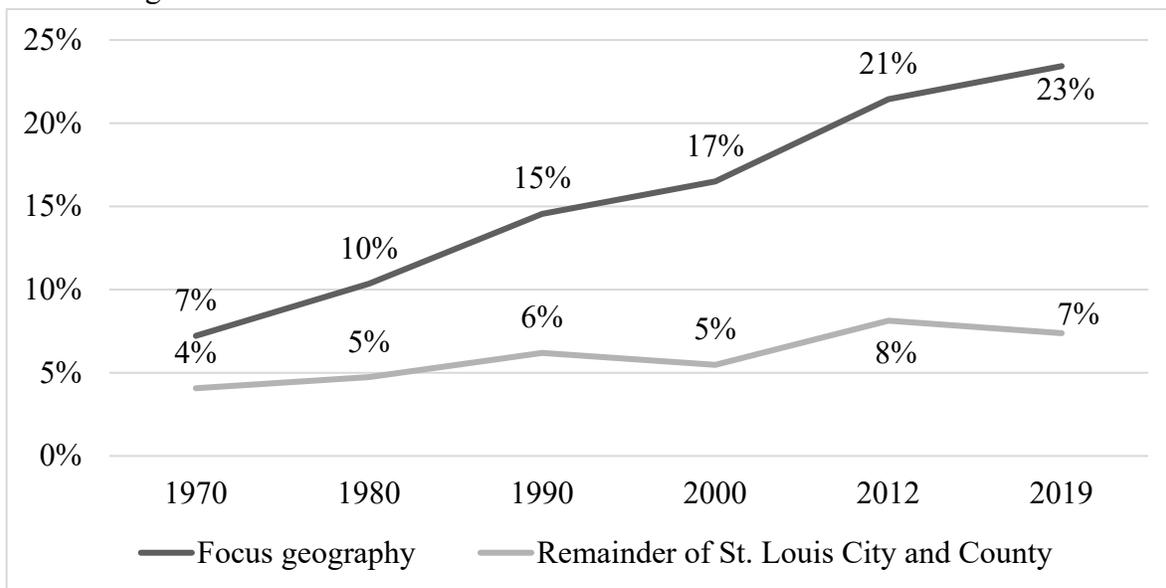

FIGURE 3. Percentage of vacant housing units.

Depopulation has led to the closing of neighborhood public schools due to declining enrollment. Recently, the St. Louis Archdiocese announced closing 34 parishes; more than half of these closures are in North St. Louis City and County (Bernhard, 2023). Many parochial schools in the focus geography have also closed due to declining enrollments. Overall, population decline puts fiscal pressure on local governments because they must maintain the same public infrastructure, such as streets and parks, with fewer taxpayers to pay the bills.
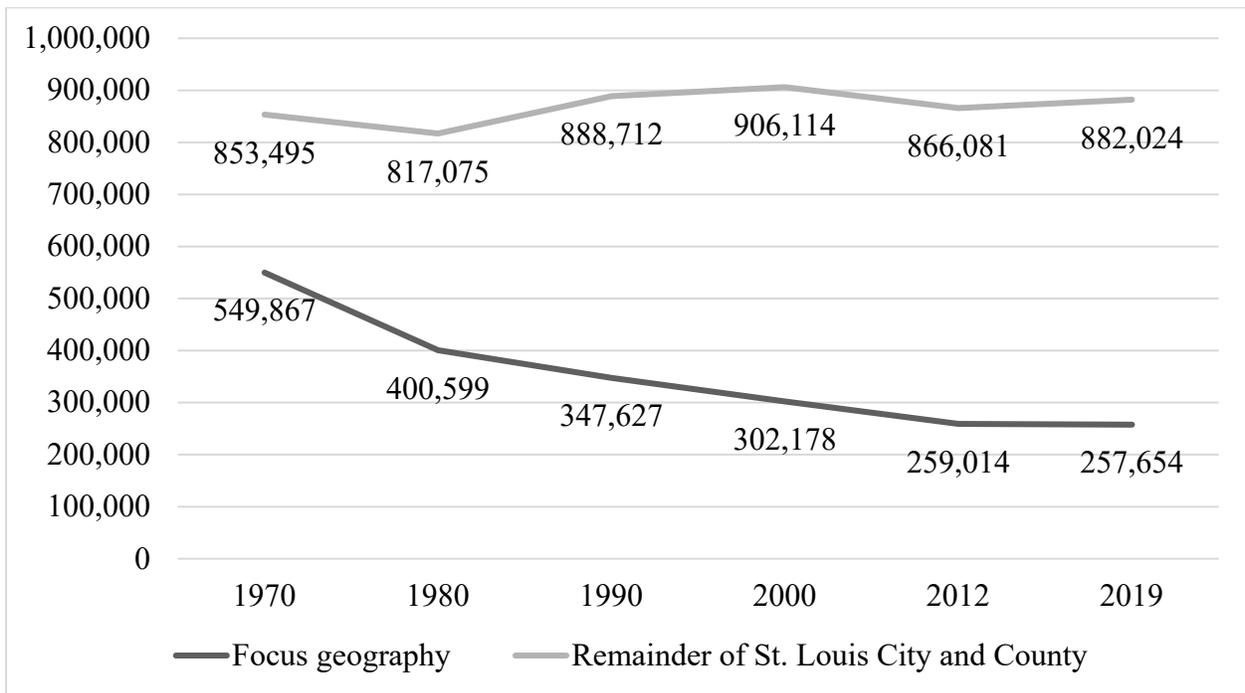

FIGURE 4. Number of residents not in poverty, 1970-2019.

The problem is not just that the population is falling but that the *nonpoor* population is declining. Between 1970 and 2019, the focus geography lost 292,462 nonpoor residents while the rest of the City and County gained residents living above the poverty level. (We use the end date, 2019, for ACS 5-Year Estimates based on 2015-2019 data.) The number of people in poverty in the focus geography increased from 55,889 in 1970 to 84,009 in 2019, while the number of people in poverty fell in the rest of the City and County. A small portion of the decline in the nonpoor population and the increase in the population in poverty in the focus geography was probably due to downward mobility. Undoubtedly, *deindustrialization*, or the loss of industrial jobs, is a key part of the story. Between 1967 and 2012, the number of manufacturing jobs in the City of St. Louis fell by 86.8 percent, from 131,900 to 17,422 (U. S. Census Bureau, *Economic Census, Census of Manufacturing*, as reported in the *County and City Data Book*, various years). Many of these jobs were in or near the focus geography. Given the huge loss of nonpoor households, however, clearly, many nonpoor households left the focus of geography during this period.
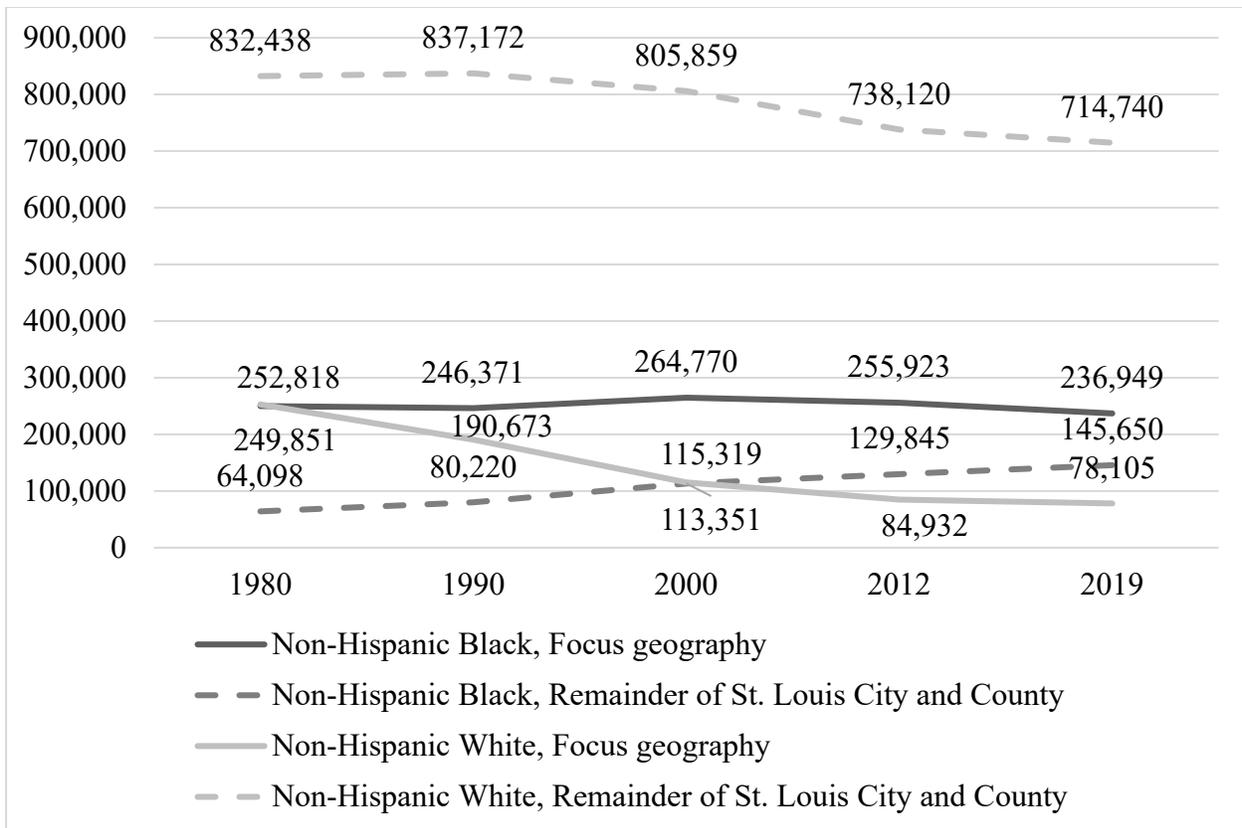
FIGURE 5. Number of residents by race, 1980-2019.

White flight has also been a major cause of falling population in the focus geography. According to 2019 American Community Survey data, over 90 percent of the population in the metropolitan area identifies as either non-Hispanic White or non-Hispanic Black. Like many midwestern legacy cities, St. Louis has relatively low levels of immigration, and it remains largely fixed in a White-Black binary. St. Louis is among the country's top ten most segregated metropolitan areas (Logan & Stults, 2021). Figure 5 shows that White flight has been a major cause of population loss in the focus geography.

Interestingly, in recent decades the focus geography has also experienced a loss of Black residents too, with "Black flight" accelerating since 2010. From 2000 to 2019, the focus geography population fell by 27,821. As Figure 6 shows, over two-thirds (18,924/27,821) of this decline was black households not in poverty. Alan Mallach's research (2020) highlights the exodus from Black "middle neighborhoods" in North St. Louis City and County and the economic toll the exodus creates for the remaining residents. The motivations behind Black flight are different than those behind White flight. According to Mallach, a key contributor to the Black exodus was the subprime foreclosure crisis that pummeled the housing assets of Black communities and induced them to evacuate their neighborhoods in North City & County (Mallach, 2020). Black flight also heightens the consequences of the people versus place

dilemma by further incentivizing the remaining Black families in STLAAN's focus geography to flee west into the suburbs or south into better-resourced communities in the metropolitan area.
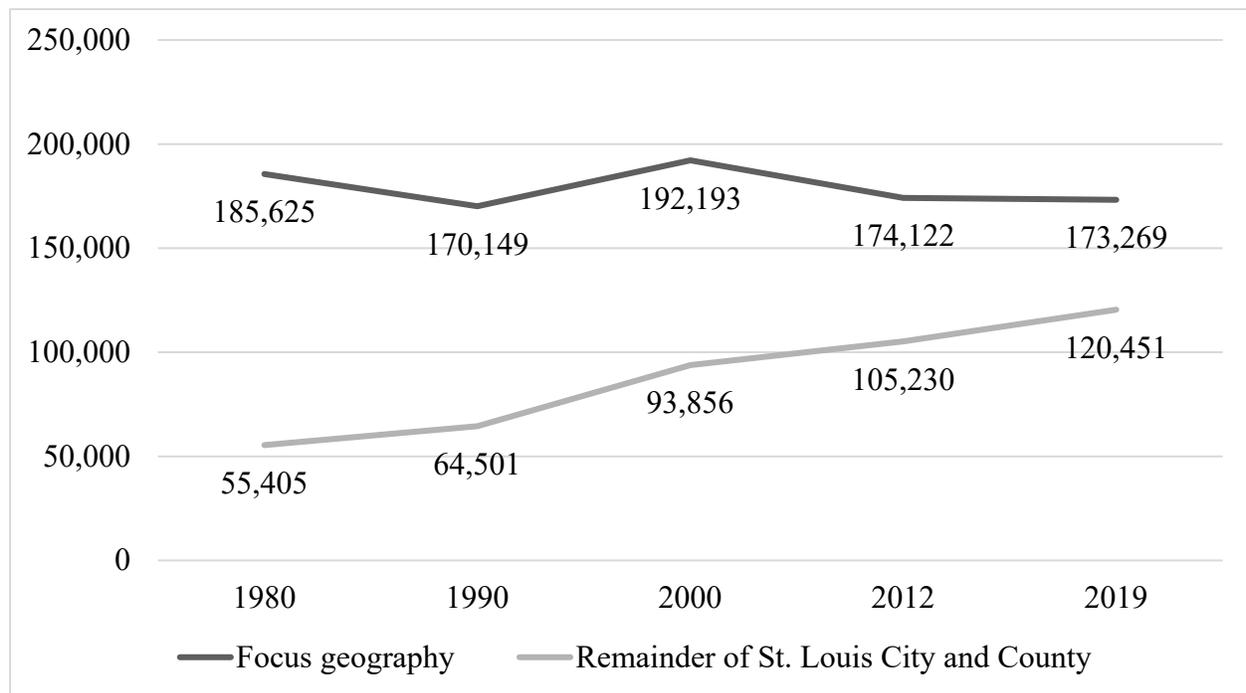

FIGURE 6. Number of black residents not in poverty, 1980-2019.

In sum, STLAAN's focus geography has historically been a leaky bucket. When given the opportunity, many households, both Black and White, leave. The data supports the idea that as people in the focus geography move up economically, they often choose to move out. This means that the positive spillover benefits of local hiring in the focus geography will leak out of the focus geography, frustrating efforts to facilitate investments in the area. Fortunately, other trends could be leveraged to help fill the bucket and uplift residents in the STLAAN focus geography.

Filling the Bucket: Taking Advantage of the Growing "Eds & Meds" Economy

While manufacturing jobs have declined in St. Louis, a new service sector economy has emerged based on the new information and innovation economy. The huge industrial fortunes accumulated in the Twentieth Century in legacy cities helped to endow universities and their affiliated medical and research complexes. These are classic anchor institutions, tied to a specific location "by reason of mission, invested capital, or relationships to customers or employees" (Webber & Karlstrom, 2009, 4). They are not leaving St. Louis. They have also spun off new jobs in biotech, including the Cortex Innovation District, which, beginning in 2002, supports 15,000 permanent jobs in 425 companies (Cortex, n.d.). Most jobs in the eds and meds economy are in the Central Corridor in St. Louis that borders STLAAN's focus geography and could serve

as an economic base for revitalizing north St. Louis City and County. In addition, many of the young professionals in the new eds & meds economy prefer to live in mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly urban neighborhoods. These trends in jobs and residential living patterns offer an opportunity to re-fill the bucket of STLAAN's focus geography.

The growth of "eds and meds" employment in St. Louis has been extraordinary. According to the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia's Anchor Economy Dashboard, 115 hospitals in the St. Louis region have 82,800 employees, generating a total income of $6.2 billion, and 71 institutions of higher education have 38,100 employees, generating $1.9 billion in income. Considering direct, indirect, and induced effects, anchor employees generate $15 billion of economic activity (Federal Reserve Bank: Philadelphia, 2024). The *potential* of anchor institutions to address historical race- and place-based inequities is enormous. The challenge is that until now, suburban commuters have held the majority of jobs in the new service economy, not focus geography residents. In 2015, 75.8 percent of those who worked in the Central Corridor lived in the suburbs (Longitudinal Employer-Household Data, LEHD, as supplied by On the Map).

The second trend that can support the anchor strategy is the increasing preference of young, educated professionals for city living (Ehrenhalt, 2012). Rebounding neighborhoods in St. Louis are benefiting from an influx of young, educated professionals. Between 1980 and 2010, rebound neighborhoods in St. Louis saw huge increases in the percentage of residents employed in professional occupations (Swanstrom et al., 2017, p. 338). According to survey research, younger people, especially highly educated younger people, have more tolerant attitudes on racial issues (Hochschild et al., 2012, p. 115). Reflecting these attitudes, young people have chosen to live in more integrated neighborhoods (Lichter et al., 2017, p. 245). The most racially diverse neighborhoods in St. Louis are those with high percentages of young, educated professionals (Mallach & Swanstrom 2023, 173).

While racial diversity does not stop neighborhoods from rebounding, very few neighborhoods north of Delmar that are *predominantly* Black have revived. According to a study of "rebound neighborhoods" in St. Louis: *"Not a single majority Black neighborhood in 1970 that was surrounded by other Black neighborhoods rebounded in the subsequent decades"* (Swanstrom et al., 2017, 340). With nearly all White housing demand off the table north of Delmar, it is very difficult for these neighborhoods to revive. This applies to most of STLAAN's focus geography.

In short, the growing "eds and meds" economy in St. Louis has great potential to revive STLAAN's focus geography. Jobs are growing in the Central Corridor, which borders the focus geography. If people who live in the focus geography could get jobs at anchor institutions, this would pump new economic life into disinvested communities. Similarly, if young professionals were willing to live in focus geography communities, that would also pump new resources into

the area. This could, of course, lead to gentrification and displacement of longtime residents. Still, the steep population loss in the focus geography means ample room for newcomers without displacing existing residents. While many St. Louis neighborhoods are experiencing an influx of educated professionals, gentrification looks far different in a legacy city like St. Louis compared to hot market cities on the coasts. One study of gentrification in St. Louis found little evidence of direct displacement (Swanstrom & Ploger, 2020). The challenge for the anchor movement in St. Louis is not to avoid too rapid a revitalization that pushes the poor out of the community but to keep upwardly mobile households in the community while it is regenerating.

Re-Filling the Bucket: Promoting Stickiness and Place Loyalties

Long-term success depends on community development efforts that increase the "stickiness" of the focus geography so that people and businesses stay in the community as they move up economically. Anchor collaboratives must understand, however, that they have a limited role to play in place-building. Anchor collaboratives, like STLAAN, are in no position to lead community development work within disinvested geographies. Currently, STLAAN lacks the capacity to do this work, but, more importantly, community economic development should be controlled by the residents themselves, not by corporate entities led by people who live outside the community. Anchor institutions are usually nonprofits, but they have interests that may, and often do, conflict with the interests of community residents (Baldwin, 2021; Mallach & Swanstrom, 2023, pp. 201-210). Given this caveat, STLAAN's strategy for supporting stickiness through place-based initiatives is based on three tactics: a) community partnerships, b) community impact investing, and c) community-engaged research.

One method STLAAN uses to support "stickiness" is community partnerships. The network began by implementing a community engagement process to determine the best ways to center community voices in its work. STLAAN quickly learned that many residents and community organizations in the focus geography found it difficult, if not impossible, to engage with large, complex anchor institutions. The Network sought to create "on-ramps" to help individuals and community organizations engage with its members. One method has been to embed community partners in designing strategies and implementing programs. STLAAN has engaged more than 125 community partners in executing a shared action plan for achieving local hiring and business contracting. These efforts demonstrated that many in the community hold strong attachments to their neighborhood that support their decisions to remain in place. The Network sees community engagement as foundational to its efforts to promote stickiness.

STLAAN recognizes that stickiness will require place-based investments supporting wealth-building in the long run. The Network has begun to take its first steps in place-based investments. The St. Louis Community Credit Union (SLCCU) partnered with STLAAN to provide loans to residents and businesses in the focus geography. SLCCU is a not-for-profit

financial cooperative collectively owned by about 58,000 account-holding members from across St. Louis and beyond. Certified by the U.S. Treasury Department as a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI), SLCCU is formally recognized as a Black-owned Minority Depository Institution (MDI). In 2021, SLCCU partnered with STLAAN anchor member BJC HealthCare, one of the largest healthcare organizations in the United States, and the Missouri Foundation for Health to launch the Community Impact Deposit Program (CID). Participants in CID, like BJC, deposit funds at SLCCU, which then uses this enhanced liquidity to provide loans to individuals and businesses in the 22 ZIP codes of the focus geography. In 2022, the CID program issued 4,867 loans, or 32 percent of its loan portfolio, to individuals and businesses in the focus geography. The loans have pumped $35.2 million into the focus geography, forwarding the partnership's mission of creating strong pathways for households to build generational wealth through small business and home ownership (St. Louis Community Credit Union, 2022).

STLAAN has also promoted community wealth building by supporting homeownership for anchor employees. In 2023, STLAAN members Washington University and BJC launched the *Live Near Your Work* (LNYW) program to help their employees buy homes within the STLAAN focus geography. The LNYW program extends a $12,500 home loan to all benefits-eligible employees who buy a home in the focus geography. It is a forgivable loan, with 20 percent forgiven each year they stay in the home so that after five years, the loan turns into a grant. By building household wealth and boosting the local tax base, LNYW helps to reduce spatial inequity.

Finally, STLAAN has launched a community-engaged research program to prioritize residents' perspectives in understanding the people-place dilemma. Qualitative data on the lived experience of people in their communities is a necessary complement to quantitative data on conditions in the focus geography. Residents consider many variables beyond economic considerations when deciding where to live. (Skobba & Goetz, 2013; Krysan & Crowder, 2017). Researchers have documented how residents in distressed neighborhoods often rely on *social ties* to provide them with emotional and social support to weather the disadvantages of their neighborhoods and remain in place (Zahnow & Tsai, 2021; Curley, 2009; Curley, 2010). Researchers have also called attention to *neighborhood attachments* that residents hold independently of social ties that help them feel anchored to their neighborhoods (Woldoff, 2002; Skobba & Goetz, 2013).

To better understand these place-based social ties, STLAAN has begun a research project that will begin with one-on-one qualitative interviews with anchor employees who live in the focus geography. We have received approval from UMSL's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct research on human subjects. We guarantee that all interviews are voluntary and that all responses remain strictly confidential. Pledging that no one will be quoted without their permission will help to ensure frank and honest answers. In order not to bias the sample or create preconceptions, the flyers asking for volunteers say nothing about STLAAN. Respecting their

time, we pay each interviewee $25. The interviews aim to answer two questions: a) What are the pathways to anchor employment for focus geography residents? b) What factors influence anchor employees to stay or leave the focus geography?

A particular emphasis of this research is the issue of black flight noted earlier. STLAAN has commenced a qualitative study exploring how Black households across the socioeconomic spectrum construct knowledge profiles justifying their decisions to leave or remain in neighborhoods across St. Louis City and County. By understanding the symbolic narratives of both African Americans who stay in the focus geography and those who leave, STLAAN can help community development actors tailor place-based investments to support current residents' decisions to stay and potential residents to move into the focus geography.

Conclusion: Future Research

Our research supports the idea that anchor collaboratives focused on large, disinvested geographies in legacy cities face a challenge: the benefits to the community of local hiring by anchor institutions may leak out if residents choose to move out as their economic prospects improve. The challenge for anchor collaboratives is how to make disinvested communities "stickier."

STLAAN is still figuring out its role in the broader processes of community development. Anchor collaboratives should not direct community development, but they can provide resources for the community and build the infrastructure to facilitate resident-driven community development. Earlier, we discussed a few of the place-based initiatives STLAAN has begun to implement, including impact investing and employer-assisted housing. With institutions of higher learning being key members of anchor collaboratives, we believe one key role they can play is conducting research to facilitate the work of actors on the ground in guiding community development. We see this research in two different buckets: quantitative and qualitative.

Quantitative Research

Anchors need to track both their institutional efforts and conditions within the focus geography. (For a comprehensive compilation of data that should be included in an "anchor dashboard," see Dudd et al., 2013, pp. 16-17).) This should include, for example, not only data on how many employees live in the focus geography but whether they receive a living wage and how many are in supervisory positions. Besides tracking institutional progress in local hiring and procurement, anchor collaboratives need to track trends in disinvested communities. STLAAN has begun collecting data on trends in the focus geography on important indicators, such as population, median income, poverty rates, housing values, and vacancy rates. To make this data meaningful, comparisons between the focus geography and the remainder of the metropolitan area speak to

the issue of whether the area is keeping up or falling behind. What matters for future development is not so much how the focus geography is doing in absolute terms but how it is doing relative to the rest of the region. People in a metropolitan area make choices on where to live or invest largely based on the relative, not absolute, merits of places.

It is important, however, not to reinforce negative stereotypes by treating the focus geography as monolithic or only reporting data that could reflect negatively on the area. While the overall trends in the 22 ZIP Codes of STLAAN's focus geography are mostly negative, aggregate averages obscure the fact that sub-geographies within the area are showing signs of renewal. Collecting data at the census tract level makes it possible to track neighborhood trends over time and identify areas rebounding from decline (Swanstrom et al., 2017). Anchor collaboratives need to push back against simplistic stereotyping of lower-income African American communities.

An important function of anchor collaboratives is to spread the news about positive trends in their focus geographies. Anchor collaboratives should collect and disseminate data on the assets or strengths within the focus geography. Asset-based community development (ABCD) is a proven approach (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). For example, STLAAN has developed a Community Business Tool cataloging all businesses within the 22 ZIP Codes (https://www.stlaan.org/stlaan_anchor_networkcommunity_business_tool). It breaks local businesses down by sector (NAICS codes) and identifies those that are minority-owned (MBE), women-owned (WBE), etc. The online searchable tool enables anchor institutions and any other institutions to search for businesses that meet their contracting needs. This promotes the business assets of the focus geography, facilitating connections all the way from a hospital contracting with a construction firm to a university department choosing a catering company.

Qualitative Research

Quantitative data is useful, but it cannot capture the lived experience of employees at anchor institutions and their lives in community. If done right, qualitative research using interviews and focus groups can supplement community engagement activities by giving voice to people who live in disinvested communities. This requires ensuring community residents can speak their minds by ensuring confidentiality and that their views will be taken seriously. We have found that people are eager to talk about their communities. These interviews provide an opportunity to learn about the people-place dilemma from the perspective of people living it. Qualitative research can contribute to a knowledge infrastructure that can help guide grassroots community development initiatives.

In conclusion, STLAAN has only taken the first steps in what will need to be a long journey if it is to succeed. Anchor collaboratives have the *potential* to impact communities that have been disinvested for decades positively. Whether they succeed will depend on their own sustained

efforts along with the efforts of countless other community actors. Research has an important role to play in ensuring that efforts to improve the lives of individuals also improve the lives of the places they live in.

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