



ORLANDO

Profile of Metro Orlando: Executive Summary

The Profile of Metro Orlando was created for the Thriving Cities Project of the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture (IASC) at the University of Virginia. The report was prepared by a five-member Orlando Profile Research Team (OPRT) that identified “leading voices” in Metro Orlando with key influence or an understanding of the Six Endowments outlined by the IASC. The OPRT conducted unstructured interviews and assessed the public comments of the leading voices in order to create a list of Essential Subjects for each Endowment—the areas of greatest threat or potential.

To facilitate its work, the OPRT created a working definition of *thriving*: “where the sum of past decisions meets the collective hope for the future.” For Metro Orlando, past decisions have helped build America’s most visited city, which received 59 million visitors in 2013. Orlando was also the ninth-fastest-growing city in the United States in terms of population in 2013. Rapid population expansion is nothing new to Orlando. The growth of its Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), which includes Orange, Seminole, Osceola, and Lake Counties, has remained very strong since 1970, averaging a net gain of eighty-eight people per day between 1970 and 2010. This tremendous growth has been fueled by the tourism and hospitality industry and its leading purveyor, Walt Disney World, which opened its doors in 1971. And it is this same growth that has created Orlando’s greatest challenges and opportunities.

Orlando’s hope for the future is that its economy will sufficiently strengthen and diversify so that all residents can have a greater opportunity to prosper. Its service sector work force is vulnerable to the rapidly changing tides of not only a regional economy but, because Orlando is an international destination, the global economy as well. The cyclical nature of the tourism economy creates seasons of widely varying demand on social services that make it difficult to develop a viable independent sector. It is believed that if Orlando forms a cohesive identity that incorporates its successful tourism brands while not being exclusively defined by them, the area will strengthen by attracting other industries that require skilled labor and creativity.

Link to Profile of Metro Orlando [http://www.iasc-culture.org/docs/Profile_for_Metro_Orlando.pdf]



Thrivng Cities

In the city, our futures are as intertwined as our traffic, bound together in a dynamic web of complex interactions, relationships, pursuits, and interests. No one is set apart. We rise and fall with the health of our cities.

An initiative of the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture at the University of Virginia, the Thriving Cities Project is developing a new paradigm for evaluating that web of well-being in today's cities. Thriving Cities is committed to transforming data-driven research into action-oriented insights and tools that will empower key stakeholders—including local philanthropists, city officials, planners, religious leaders, educators, business people, academics, non-profits, and residents—to ask and answer the question: *what does it mean and take to thrive in my city and how can I contribute?*

Thriving is about realizing our fullest potential as individuals and communities. Thriving shifts thinking from conventional deficit perspectives to an asset orientation, empowering leaders and citizens to see beyond common problems to collective possibilities. This starts by securing a basic threshold of material security and civic empowerment, which then underwrites deeper prospects for both the good life and the public good.

While it is not always easy to see, a concern with thriving reminds us of the benefits and obligations that come with belonging to a commonweal. Thriving cannot be accomplished alone. From cradle to grave, we rely upon countless others—people and institutions—in order to flourish. Thriving is a holistic endeavor that is impossible outside relationships of reciprocity and interdependence and outside shared contexts of opportunity. In these ways, thriving unites under one word a number of other critical concepts such as prosperity, health, sustainability, social equity, and happiness.

The Thriving Cities Project is a group of unconventional urbanists, coming from many backgrounds and places, developing an assessment toolkit built upon the concept of thriving. It offers a holistic framework built around six interconnected realms of public life, such as the arts, the environment, community service, and the economic sphere. Taken together, these realms form the civic ecology of a city and define its potential for “thriving.”

Engaging a city in this manner enables practitioners to understand the dynamic interconnections inherent in their place in a way that takes them beyond conventional urban-assessment methods, which too often fortify siloed thinking by amplifying easily obtained data at the expense of deeper connections and insights. The result of the Thriving Cities Project will be a set of tools that helps reveal hidden connections, build unusual coalitions, and unite isolated communities.

To become involved contact us at thrivingcities@virginia.edu or visit us at www.thrivingcities.com.