"Natural" Cultural Districts: A Three-City Study—2010-2013

Social Impact of the Arts Project

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"Natural" Cultural Districts: A Three-City Study

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"Natural" Cultural Districts: A Three-City Study

Abstract
From 2010 to 2012, SIAP undertook a study of "natural" cultural districts in three cities—Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Seattle. This report presents findings of two sets of analyses: a citywide analysis of the social geography and cultural ecology of each city and a set of case studies of cultural clusters within the three cities. For each case study, in the following seven neighborhoods, a statistical overview was fleshed out by qualitative study:

- Baltimore—Highlandtown-Patterson Park and Station North;
- Philadelphia—Callowhill/Chinatown North and South Philadelphia; and
- Seattle—Capitol Hill, the Central District, and Chinatown-International District.

The citywide analyses examined the relationship of cultural engagement to social and economic change in the three cities. The case studies focused on the character and evolution of "natural" cultural districts and the challenges posed to their sustainability, including the role of cultural space. The broader goal of the project was to understand the dynamics of the community cultural ecosystem, connections between cultural ecology and community wellbeing, and implications for policy and planning.

Disciplines
Arts and Humanities | Civic and Community Engagement | Social Policy | Urban Studies and Planning

Comments
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“Natural” Cultural Districts:
A Three-City Study

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Social Impact of the Arts Project

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“Natural” Cultural Districts: A Three-City Study

Contents

Acknowledgments

Chapter 1: Introduction: “Natural” Cultural Districts in Comparative Perspective

Chapter 2: The Social Geography and Cultural Ecology of Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Seattle
Tables and Figures (three-city comparison)

Chapter 3: Baltimore: Station North and Highlandtown-Patterson Park

Chapter 4: Philadelphia’s Callowhill/Chinatown North

Chapter 5: South Philadelphia

Chapter 6: Seattle: Capitol Hill, the Central District, Chinatown-International District

Chapter 7: The Social Impact of “Natural” Cultural Districts

Chapter 8: Conclusion: Policy Implications of “Natural” Cultural Districts
Acknowledgments

Completing this study would not have been possible without the contributions of a number of people. Most important were our interviewees, who generously took time to help us understand their work and communities. Many took additional time to review working papers, for which we are greatly appreciative. We cite contributors at the end of each chapter.

We benefited greatly during the project from a set of energetic and insightful research assistants. During the summer of 2010, Blanca Abramek and Meghna Chandra spent long days and nights scouting cultural clusters in Philadelphia and conducting fieldwork in Callowhill/Chinatown North. During our first field trip to Seattle, in July 2011, Erin Toale organized for us an intense tour of arts spaces and arranged a series of interviews. We enlisted the services of two seasoned professionals to conduct interviews: Thora Jacobson in South Philadelphia and Kathleen Beauchesne in Highlandtown-Patterson Park in Baltimore. Zachary Holzman-Conston undertook archival research. Isabel Boston assisted with data entry.

Several of our Penn colleagues contributed their expertise to the study. Domenic Vitiello shared with us some of his unpublished fieldwork on immigrant communities. Mark was fortunate to serve on Amanda Johnson’s dissertation committee. Her work on planned cultural districts provided an important counterpoint to our work. She shared with us her notes on Seattle, which were particularly helpful.

Susan spoke at the Cultural Space Seattle conference in December 2011, and Mark spoke at the National Symposium on Arts/Cultural/Entertainment Districts and at Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) in Baltimore in April 2012. Attending these conferences allowed us to meet and hear many people active in this field, and our presentations forced us to try to make sense of what we were discovering.

SIAP has benefited greatly over the years from our collaboration with The Reinvestment Fund. Ira Goldstein, Ken Gross, Graciela Cavicchia, and Kim Nunnally contributed to our understanding of Baltimore.

We would like to thank LINC for its support of our first three-city study. Judilee Reed directed LINC when the project began. Over the two years, a number of LINC staff members have worked with us: Ryan Breaux, Candace Jackson, Taya Mueller, Parita Patel, and Rise Wilson. Roberta Uno of the Ford Foundation and Lynn Stern of the Surdna Foundation also took an interest in the work.

Mark Stern and Susan Seifert
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Philadelphia, February 2013
Chapter 1. Introduction:  
“Natural” Cultural Districts in Comparative Perspective

From 2010 to 2012, the Social Impact of the Arts Project (SIAP) undertook a study of “natural” cultural districts in three cities—Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Seattle. The project has had two interrelated parts: a citywide analysis of the social geography and cultural ecology of Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Seattle and a series of intensive case studies of seven cultural districts within the three cities. The citywide analyses focused on understanding the impact of cultural engagement on social and economic change in these cities. The community case studies focused on understanding the evolution of “natural” cultural districts and the challenges posed to their sustainability, including the role of cultural space. The broader goal of the project was to develop a way to improve our ability to invest in and monitor the impact of the arts on community revitalization.

SIAP developed the concept of “natural” cultural district as a way to rethink the relationship of the arts and culture to neighborhood development. Instead of beginning with a particular organization or project, “natural” cultural districts view arts-based community revitalization through the lens of the community cultural ecosystem. These ecosystems are composed of a number of independent elements—some driven by labor or real estate markets, others by a public- or community-oriented mission, and others by private motivation or artistic vision.

Study Rationale

A “natural” cultural district is a neighborhood that has spawned a concentration of cultural agents—organizations and businesses, artists and activists, residents and visitors. SIAP research has demonstrated that concentrations of cultural assets are a reliable indicator of neighborhood revitalization. Cultural clusters improve prospects that a neighborhood will see its poverty rate decline and its population increase. They reinforce ethnic and economic diversity. They stimulate social network formation both
within and across neighborhoods. These social networks are the critical mechanism for translating cultural assets into neighborhood development.

Successful cultural clusters can have an impact on the entire metropolitan area. They encourage the innovation and creativity that spur cultural production. At times the clustering of producers and consumers reaches a critical mass that pushes a neighborhood to a regeneration tipping-point, attracting new services and residents.

This research builds on previous work on the role of creative industries in neighborhood revitalization in Philadelphia by SIAP and The Reinvestment Fund (TRF).

Along with a variety of other scholars, the TRF/SIAP collaboration has focused attention on the role of the arts and culture in what many urbanists refer to as placemaking—an integrated and asset-based approach to community planning and design. This approach underlines that it is a mistake to look at organizations, enterprises, or artists in isolation. The key to building successful cultural quarters in cities is to examine the ecology within which these groups and individuals operate.

A placemaking framework also highlights how the cultural ecosystem functions as an integral element of what Nowak describes as the “architecture of community,” which includes four domains: social capital and civic institutions; public assets and infrastructure; economic assets and market relationships; and regional flows of people, capital, information and ideas.

A community is a process, not a static entity. Capital, people, businesses and institutions move in and out, sometimes changing a location’s meaning and potential within very short periods of time. A place is affected by neighboring conditions, distant policy decisions and unpredictable market trends. Accordingly, place-making requires attention to internal and external changes and exchanges of value and meaning. A community is defined, in part, by its broader spatial and social ecology; it is never merely self-referential, it is constantly emerging, changing and reorganizing.¹

The purpose of the three-city study was to explore the relationship of the arts to the community change process and, in particular, how the cultural sector fits into the social and spatial ecology of urban neighborhoods.

The TRF/SIAP project was limited by geography. Although we could make the case that Philadelphia was a representative American city, we had no way of determining what about our Philadelphia data was unique to the city and what patterns would be found in other cities. This three-city study allows us to place our findings in a comparative perspective.

Research Questions

The project focused on a set of questions that cut across the separate cases studies and grow out of our previous work on “natural” cultural districts.

How does the mix of different cultural assets (commercial firms, nonprofit organizations, and resident artists) influence the spillover effects on the surrounding community?

We know that all cultural districts are not the same. We use our cultural asset database to examine the connections between the composition of cultural districts and the types of impacts they have on the arts and cultural community in general and on the neighborhood in which they are located.

What is the typical time-line for the development of a “natural” cultural district? Is facilities development correlated with faster or slower trajectories?

We believe that the pace of development of cultural districts has a critical impact on their sustainability and impact on their communities. In some districts, change is so slow that the district runs the risk of falling apart because it fails to continue to attract assets. In other cases, the pace of development may be too fast. In these cases, increases in real estate prices and the availability of space may undermine the health of a district or lead to the exit of critical assets. Many artists, for example, are sensitive to finding large spaces at reasonable prices. If a market escalates too quickly, it can impact a district’s ability to attract artists.

What proportion of cultural clusters fail to sustain their development and what factors are correlated with success and failure?

The question of success over time is tackled in two ways. In the case studies, we report the qualitative perceptions of participants about how districts have developed over time and their relative success. Then in Chapter 7, we use the Philadelphia databases from 1997, 2004, and 2010 to examine changes in the composition of cultural districts and their relative success over time.

What are the costs and benefits associated with facilities development? To what extent does it influence an organization’s capacities around artistic production, community benefits, or wider civic engagement? Is there a “tipping point” in the history of a cultural cluster where the process of concentration accelerates? To what extent does facilities development influence this tipping point?

The cultural sector has undergone profound changes in organizational structure and financial sustainability over the past several decades. One area where these changes have had the greatest effect is cultural space development. In each case study, we looked at how local conditions affect the ability of groups to access and maintain facilities. In the conclusion, we examine some cross-cutting themes that emerged from the case studies.
Design of the Study

The study design was based on a set of methods that SIAP has developed over the past decade to track cultural assets at both the regional and neighborhood level and to integrate quantitative, geographic, and qualitative data. The need to build local partnerships to implement the research design was a critical factor in the selection of locations for case studies.

Within each city, the project operated at two levels. First, the research team constructed citywide databases of nonprofit arts organizations, commercial cultural firms, and resident artists and used geographic analysis to identify the location of cultural clusters within the city. Second, the team used a host of qualitative methods—interviewing, participant observation, street surveys, and document review—to tell an in-depth story of a set of districts within each city.

Citywide cultural database development and cluster analysis

The foundation for understanding a city’s cultural economy is three indexes of cultural assets: nonprofits, commercial cultural firms, and artists. SIAP has used a variety of strategies for constructing these indexes, some based on existing data and others on primary data gathering. After collection, the data are transformed into a geographic information system (GIS) that provides detailed information on the cultural assets of each census block group in the urban area.

For each case study, these data were collected during the first year of the project to allow identification and comparison of cultural clusters across the city. Data on nonprofit and commercial cultural firms were generally available, supplemented by primary research on emerging cultural organizations. We were fortunate in identifying sources of specific data on resident artists within each city.

Citywide socio-economic indicators and geographic analysis

A city’s cultural asset database is complemented by a set of socio-economic indicators. These include publicly available government measures drawn from the census and other sources. After socio-economic data are collected, they are likewise transformed into a GIS system that provides information on community characteristics for each block group in the city. Thus, using GIS, we assessed the relationship between cultural assets and community vitality by block group, a fine-grained neighborhood unit of six to eight city blocks.

As in the past, SIAP collaborated with The Reinvestment Fund (TRF) on the socio-economic analyses. For Philadelphia and Baltimore, the study incorporated TRF’s market value analysis (MVA), a statistical yardstick created by TRF for characterizing the underlying dynamics of a locale’s real estate markets.

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2 In our original design, we included an index of cultural participation. Unfortunately, we were able to develop this index only for Philadelphia. We report the data for Philadelphia but could use only three indexes for comparative purposes.
An additional element of the citywide studies was a qualitative scan of the cultural sector in each city. This included a review of the press for a number of years to identify debates and discussion over the development of the cultural sector as well as interviews with leaders of the cultural community. We had not anticipated this as part of the research design when the project began. However, as the project developed, it became clear that—especially in Baltimore and Seattle—the research team needed to gain familiarity with the local history and current debates within the cultural sector.

Local community studies

Analysis of cultural clusters across the city was complemented by a set of in-depth community studies based on quantitative and qualitative data. The citywide geographic and cultural data, for example, were complemented by data on neighborhood and informal venues and arts groups. The local studies drew as well on interviews with proprietors, nonprofit executives, government officials, and community members. The goal was to confirm the validity of conclusions drawn from the quantitative analysis and to add factors not included in that analysis—for example, the role of local leadership, social networks, and community history—that have influenced the dynamics of the cultural cluster.

Selection of Cities for Comparative Study

Time did not allow us to complete the urban data analyses before we chose our case study cities. As a result, we developed a mixed set of criteria for selecting cities, including:

- availability of partners willing to collaborate with SIAP to implement the project at both the citywide and district level;
- potential applicability to other cities/regions; and
- potential to add to theoretical understanding of how “natural” cultural districts develop.

After reviewing data on a variety of cities, we chose Baltimore and Seattle for comparative study with Philadelphia. The choice of these cities was the result of what Patton calls “maximum variation sampling,” an approach that allows the research team to capture and describe central themes that cut across a variety of cases. Among the criteria used to identify cities were the availability of sources of data, regional and local partners, amenability of cultural organizations to participate in the project, and the potential of the project to add to the theoretical understanding of how cultural districts develop.

The three cities taken together provided a set of comparisons and contrasts that maximized the project’s ability to build our understanding of how “natural” cultural districts develop in different social contexts and, in turn, the impacts they have on their surrounding urban area.

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The recent socio-economic history of the cities provides a rich context to understand how cultural clusters operate. Philadelphia and Baltimore represent struggling cities that have shown some signs of revival in the past several decades. Although Seattle is an old city by West Coast standards, its development has been most notable since World War II—precisely the period during which Baltimore and Philadelphia have struggled.

All cities have significant population diversity, but of different types. Baltimore represents a model of the older bi-racial pattern. Non-Hispanic blacks and whites make up 90 percent of the metropolitan area’s population. In the city itself, these two groups make up 94 percent of residents. One section of the city and several suburban sections have significant Latino populations, and two suburban sections have a large Asian-Pacific Islander population as well.

Seattle, in contrast, represents the ethnic mix of many cities that grew rapidly after World War II. The metropolitan area is 77 percent white, with significant representation of Hispanics (7 percent) and Asian Pacific Islanders (4 percent). Within the city of Seattle, eight percent of the population is African American, six percent Hispanic, and 14 percent Asian Pacific Islander. In addition, in the city of Seattle the proportion of residents reporting more than one race is 3.6 percent, significantly larger than either of the other cities. In several sections of the metropolitan area, Hispanics and Asian Pacific Islanders make up over 20 percent of the population.

Finally, Philadelphia is what a Brookings Institution report has characterized as a “re-emerging” immigrant gateway.4 Both Baltimore and Philadelphia have seen their foreign-born population increase since 1990. Much of the growth of immigrants in the Baltimore metropolitan area was a result of the migration of foreign-born residents to the suburbs, but in Philadelphia, immigrant growth has been most rapid in the city itself. Despite this growth, both cities’ foreign-born percentages are well below Seattle’s. In 2007, percent foreign-born was seven percent in Baltimore city, 12 percent in Philadelphia, and 20 percent in Seattle.

One of the key elements in choosing the three cities has been the availability of partners who showed a willingness to collaborate with SIAP in undertaking the project. We will discuss local partners in the individual case study chapters. It is clear, however, that without these partnerships, the study would have been impossible.

**Organization of the Report**

The report is divided into eight chapters, including this introduction.

Chapter 2, “The Social Geography and Cultural Ecology of Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Seattle,” examines recent census data on the three cities and compares them across several dimensions, including socio-economic status, ethnic composition, and diversity. It then uses the SIAP cultural databases to describe similarities and differences across

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the three cities. The chapter describes the cultural asset index used to combine all the cultural data into a single measure. Finally, the chapter looks at relationships between the cultural asset index and various socio-economic variables.

Chapters 3 through 6 summarize the case study districts within the three cities. These chapters include a statistical overview of the social geography and cultural ecology of the districts, descriptions of their history and current conditions, and a discussion of challenges the districts face that will influence their future development.

Chapter 7 examines two of the central analytical purposes of the study: types of “natural” cultural districts and community impacts associated with “natural” cultural districts. The chapter proposes two typologies for assessing cultural districts. The first focuses on the composition of districts, that is, the types of cultural assets present in a particular district. The second focuses on the economic advantage and spatial location of districts. It suggests that socio-economic and location advantage is a productive way to view differences between districts. The chapter then uses the two typologies to examine outcomes associated with the clustering of cultural assets. We find that the composition typology is a productive way to examine the artistic trajectories of districts, while the economic and spatial typology allows us to examine the social and economic spillover of cultural clustering on neighborhoods.

Chapter 8 undertakes three tasks. First, it summarizes the central findings of the report. Next it looks at the implications of the report for policy. These are broken into three categories: vitality of the cultural sector, connections between cultural ecology and community wellbeing, and implications for cultural space. Finally, the chapter identifies a set of questions for future research.
Chapter 2. The Social Geography and Cultural Ecology of Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Seattle

This chapter presents an analysis of connections between the social geography and the cultural ecology of the three cities in the project—Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Seattle. SIAP’s previous research in Philadelphia has demonstrated that the social environment exerts a powerful influence on the extent and geography of cultural engagement in a particular city. This relationship, in turn, provides the connections through which arts and cultural resources influence a wider range of social phenomena.

Data and Methods

The research team devoted over a year to constructing a set of cultural indicators for each of the three cities. The cultural indicator data were then combined with a database of existing census data (including the 2005-09 American Community Survey summary file) to construct the analysis file.

Cultural indicators

We constructed indexes of three types of cultural assets: nonprofit cultural organizations, commercial cultural firms, and resident artists. Two of these indexes begin with sources that are available nationally—the IRS list of exempt nonprofit organizations and the InfoUSA list of commercial enterprises. Although in each city we supplement these with local sources, the national lists provide a degree of comparability across the three cities.

The resident artists’ index has no national sources. Instead, it was constructed through a process of identifying possible sources and then bringing those sources into the database. We were able to construct a resident artist index for each city, using local databases of funders and service organizations. In Philadelphia, the Pew Fellowship for the Arts and the Leeway Foundation were our primary sources of data on resident
In Seattle, the Seattle Office of Arts and Cultural Affairs and Artist Trust generously allowed us to access their databases. Finally, in Baltimore, we constructed a resident artist index using data collected on alumni of the Maryland Institute College of Arts (MICA) and of nominees for the Baker Artist Awards established by the William G. Baker, Jr. Memorial Fund.

In Philadelphia we were able to supplement the cultural asset index with data on cultural participation constructed from the List Co-Op of member organizations of the Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance.

All of the data used to construct our cultural indexes were then converted to census block group counts of two types. First, we aggregated the data by counting the number of each index (nonprofit organizations, commercial firms, and artists) within each block group in the respective cities. Second, we estimated the number of nonprofits, commercial firms, and resident artists that were located within one-quarter mile of each block group. The rationale for this procedure is that organizations, businesses, and artists are to some extent resources for their surrounding communities. A quarter-mile buffer translates into a five-minute walk, so the resulting counts tell us how many nonprofit arts programs, for example, are easily accessible to the residents of a particular block group.

The indexes for each city were then processed using factor analysis to produce a single variable that best captures the distribution of the indexes. A separate analysis was conducted for each of the three cities, which included both the point and buffer estimates of the available indexes for that city. This resulted in four variables for Baltimore, seven for Philadelphia, and six for Seattle to be included in the analysis, as shown on the table below.

The analyses explained over 82 percent of the variance in the variables in Baltimore, 62 percent of the variance for Philadelphia, and 60 percent of that for Seattle. The relatively low figures for Seattle and Philadelphia suggest that a multi-factor analysis might be appropriate in these cities; but for the present analysis, we confine ourselves to the single best factor for capturing variation in these indexes within each city.

The factor analysis produced a cultural asset score for each block group. Within each city, the distribution of cultural asset scores had a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one. To make these scores easier to interpret, we transformed these scores into a percentage of the citywide average. That is, a cultural asset index of 100 indicates that a particular block group had the same density of cultural assets as the citywide average.

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1 Additional contributors to the Philadelphia artist database were: InLiquid, Philadelphia Independent Film & Video Association (PIFVA), Philadelphia Live Arts Festival & Philly Fringe, Stockton Rush Bartol Foundation, and Theatre Alliance of Greater Philadelphia.

2 The US Census Bureau divides census tracts into block groups, its smallest geographic unit. Generally, a block group before 2010 was a cluster of approximately six to eight city blocks. Beginning with the 2010 census, the Census Bureau has enlarged the size of a block group somewhat. The data reported here—from the 2005-09 American Community Survey summary file—uses the older block group boundaries.
average, a score of 50 means the density is half of the citywide average, and a score of 200 means the block group’s density is twice the citywide average.

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<th>Philadelphia</th>
<th>Seattle</th>
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</table>

**Census data**

We use two different census files to provide the social context for the analysis. To examine citywide characteristics, we use the 2000 census and the 2009 American Community Survey (ACS) public-use microdata samples (PUMS). To examine variation in these characteristics within each city, we turn to the ACS summary file for 2005-09.

The 2000 and 2009 PUMS file provides *individual level* data on a one-percent sample of residents of the three cities. The use of individual data allows us to provide very detailed analyses of the work and household structure of each city. However, to protect respondents’ confidentiality, the geography of the PUMS file goes no lower than the public use microdata area (PUMA), a unit that represents approximately one hundred thousand people. For the most part, we use these data to provide citywide estimates of key characteristics as a means of comparing and contrasting the three cities.

Late in 2010, the Census Bureau released its first aggregate summary file based on the American Community Survey (ACS). The ACS summary files are intended to replace the “long-form” summary files that had previously been produced on the decennial censuses of 1980, 1990, and 2000. Instead of a once-in-a-decade snapshot of census tracts and block groups, the ACS summary files promise an annual profile of these smaller census geographies. However, the price of more frequent updates is a decline in their temporal precision. In other words, in place of census tract and block group
estimates for a single year, the ACS combines five years’ worth of data. The first of these files covers the years 2005-2009.

Although the ACS summary files have great promise, as with many “firsts” the initial round of data pose a number of challenges. First, especially in the survey’s first several iterations, some researchers have raised concerns around the accuracy of the data. Although recent years have received better reviews, it will be several more years until the earlier surveys are dropped from the five-year files. Second, although five one-percent samples (ACS five-year file) produce the same number of cases as one five-percent sample (decennial census long-form file), the margins of error associated with the five-year file are considerably larger. As a result, the Census Bureau has provided fewer tabulations at the block group level than it did for the decennial files. As one remedy for the margin of error problem, the 2010 block group geography enlarged the size of block groups. However, the 2005-2009 file continued to use the smaller block groups based on the 2000 census.

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3 The second of the ACS summary files, for 2006-10, was released in late 2011. However, this file used a new set of census tract and block group boundaries. As a result, the data are not compatible with the 2005-09 file.
Social Geography of Three Cities

In this section, we first use the results of the 2000 and 2009 public-use microdata samples (PUMS) to describe changes in the socio-economic composition of Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Seattle over the past decade and how the cities compare to one another on key characteristics. The PUMS provide detailed information about individuals and households across entire cities but give little information about the geographic location within cities. Because our project is focused on ecology—how different social and institutional elements come together in particular neighborhoods ("natural" cultural districts), we then turn to data on individual block groups within the three cities. These data are precise about location but are less precise about the characteristics of individuals and households within those geographic areas.

Social geography across cities, 2000-09

The recent socio-economic history of the three cities provides a rich context for comparison of changing patterns in social geography and cultural ecology. Philadelphia and Baltimore represent struggling post-industrial cities that have shown some signs of revival in the past several decades. Seattle, although an old city by West Coast standards, has seen its most notable development (along with expansion of aircraft and high-tech industries) since World War II—precisely the period during which Baltimore and Philadelphia have struggled.

Between 2000 and 2009, Seattle enjoyed continued population growth. The total population of the city increased by 10 percent from a shade under five hundred, sixty thousand (560,000) to nearly six hundred, seventeen thousand (617,000). Philadelphia also grew, from 1,513,445 to 1,547,251, which made the front page of local newspapers because it reversed a half-century of population decline. Still, the two percent increase hardly made a dent in the large declines that had preceded it. Baltimore, in contrast, continued to lose population; the overall decline, from 651,428 to 636,851, was 2.2 percent over the nine years.

These differences were reflected as well in the geographic mobility of the population. In 2009, 1.2 percent of Seattle’s population had lived in a different county a year earlier. In Philadelphia and Baltimore, by contrast, only 0.6 percent of the population was recent migrants.

Migrants to the three cities represented a diverse population stratum. As we would expect, they were often young adults. For example, in Baltimore, 32 percent of those who had moved from a different county in the previous year were in their twenties, compared to only 16 percent of the population that had lived in the city a year earlier.

Because of their youth, migrants had a contradictory social profile. On the one hand, they were much more likely to possess a bachelor’s degree than the stable population. In Baltimore and Philadelphia they were more than twice as likely to have a bachelor’s degree, while in Seattle 24 percent of migrants and 13 percent of stayers had a bachelor’s. Yet they were not a particularly affluent population. In Baltimore, 46
percent of migrants were in the bottom 40 percent of households based on income. The comparable figures for Philadelphia and Seattle were 69 percent and 50 percent.

Migrants also contributed to the increased ethnic diversity of the three cities. In Baltimore, 25 percent of migrants and only two percent of stayers were Asian Pacific Islander, and five percent of migrants were Hispanic compared to two percent of stayers. In Philadelphia, the proportion of migrants who were Asian Pacific Islander (27 percent) and Hispanic (23 percent) far outnumbered their proportions among stayers (5 and 11 percent respectively). In Seattle, too, the proportion of migrants who were Asian Pacific Islanders and Hispanics were much greater than in the population that had been in the county a year earlier.

**Household structure**

Patterns of household structure in the three cities reflected broader changes in Americans’ domestic lives. In 2000, the percent of households composed of a married couple with children did not exceed 19 percent (Philadelphia) in any of the cities, while the percent of households composed of single persons or a group of unrelated persons was between 40 and 55 percent. Female-headed households with children, however, in 2000 composed 21 and 19 percent of households in Baltimore and Philadelphia respectively, but only 7 percent of those in Seattle. (Figure 2-6)

The cities experienced some important shifts in household structure over the decade. The number of married-couple-with-children households dropped by between 2 and 4 percentage points in the Eastern cities, but actually increased a bit in Seattle. Female-headed households with children fell by between 1 and 2 percentage points in each city. The largest shift, however, was the continuing expansion of persons living alone. Their representation increased by nearly 6 and 4 percent, respectively, in Baltimore and Philadelphia and by two percentage points in Seattle. (Figure 2-7)

**Employment status**

Throughout the past decade, as we would expect, the labor market status of Seattle residents was better than that of people living in Baltimore and Philadelphia. In 2000, 74 percent of Seattle residents between 16 and 64 years of age were at work, and the percentage remained at that level in 2009. In both Eastern cities, the rates were 57 percent in 2000 and had changed by less than one percent in 2009. Unemployment, however, did increase. In Seattle, the unemployment rate was 3.7 percent in 2000 but had risen to 4.9 percent by 2005. It fell between 2006 and 2008 but then ticked up to 5.5 percent in 2009. In Baltimore, the rate began the decade at 7.0 percent, stayed between 7 and 8 percent between 2005 and 2008 and then spiked to 9.2 percent in 2009. Similarly, Philadelphia’s unemployment rate rose more rapidly in the early 2000s, from 7.2 to 8.6 percent. After falling to 6.8 percent in 2008, it jumped to 9.9 percent in 2009. (Figures 2-1 and 2-2)

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4 The percentages reported here are for the one-percent ACS samples for the given year. As a result, they are subject to more sampling error than a multi-year sample.
All racial and ethnic groups experienced the spike in unemployment. In 2000, unemployment rates for Hispanics were 4, 8, and 6 percent respectively in Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Seattle; but by 2009, they stood at 10, 11, and 9 percent respectively. While still lower than the rates for non-Hispanic blacks in all three cities, the gap between Hispanics and African Americans had closed over the decade. (Table 2-1)

**Socio-economic status and economic inequality**

Educational attainment is the measure of socio-economic status most associated with cultural engagement. In this respect, we find a glaring contrast between Seattle and the Eastern cities. In 2000, 47 percent of adults in Seattle had at least a bachelor’s degree, while in Baltimore the percentage was only 19 percent and in Philadelphia only 18 percent. Over the course of the decade, Seattle’s proportion of college-educated adults increased to 55 percent, while Baltimore and Philadelphia’s rates increased to 26 percent and 24 percent respectively. (Table 2-2)

As the educational attainment data would suggest, average incomes were substantially higher in Seattle than in the other cities. In 2000, average household income was over sixty-four thousand dollars a year in Seattle, but just over forty-one thousand dollars in Baltimore and Philadelphia. Over the course of the decade, real incomes stagnated in all three cities. Baltimore recorded the largest increase in percentage terms—from 41,489 to 42,805 dollars, while Seattle’s average household income increased about one thousand dollars. Philadelphia’s average household income actually fell by more than a thousand dollars from its 2000 figure, although most of that decline had occurred between 2000 and 2005. As we noted above, part of this decline is attributable to the low economic standing of recent migrants to the city. (Figure 2-3)

Seattle’s poverty rate—11.6 percent in 2000 and 10.9 percent in 2009—was about half that of the two other cities. Yet, Philadelphia and Baltimore were moving in opposite directions. The two cities had nearly the same poverty rate in 2000, but by 2009 Philadelphia’s rate (25.4 percent) was 4.6 percentage points higher than Baltimore’s (20.8 percent). (Figure 2-4)

Poverty provides one measure of economic inequality. To gain a broader perspective, we compare three figures—the median (or 50th percentile) income in each year, the cut-point for the tenth percentile, and the cut-point for the 90th percentile. Comparing the tenth and fiftieth percentiles tells us how the lowest-income households are doing compared to the average households. The 90/10 comparison measures how well the lowest- and highest-income groups are doing, while the 90/50 comparison measures how well the top income group is doing compared to average households. An increase in the ratio indicates an increase in inequality between the two groups.

Between 2000 and 2009, the cities of Baltimore and Philadelphia declined in economic equality. In Baltimore, for example, although the indexes of inequality fell between 2000 and 2007, they increased sharply during the recession. By the end of the decade, both the 90/10 and 90/50 indexes had increased. Philadelphia showed a similar pattern,
although the gap between the poorest and richest citizens rose more sharply than it did in Baltimore.

Again, the most striking contrast was between the two Eastern cities and Seattle. In Seattle, all three indexes were lower than in the other cities, indicating less income inequality overall. In 2000, for example, the 90/10 index stood at 10, indicating that the richest 10 percent of families had incomes that were ten times those of the poorest 10 percent. This compared with figures of 15 and 17 in Baltimore and Philadelphia respectively. What is more, the increase in the ratio in Seattle (from 10 to 10.3) was not nearly as substantial as its increase in the other cities. While in Baltimore and Philadelphia the recession seemed to cause a spike in inequality, in Seattle the three indexes actually declined after 2007. (Table 2-3)

Race, ethnicity, and immigration

It is widely recognized that the ethnic composition of the United States is changing rapidly. The Census Bureau has estimated that within 40 years, non-Hispanic whites will no longer compose a majority of the American population. The two-race model that dominated the nation at the middle of the last century has given way to one in which Hispanics\(^5\) and Asian Pacific Islanders\(^6\) make up significant shares of the population, and many Americans identify themselves as having ancestors of more than one race. American cities have generally been in the lead in the shift to a multi-polar ethnic paradigm.

Each of our study cities has a distinctive ethnic and racial profile. Baltimore remains closest to the old two-race model. Non-Hispanic blacks and whites together made up 95 percent of the city’s population in 2000 and this proportion fell only to 93 percent in 2009. In both years, the black population was roughly twice as large as the white population. Baltimore’s Hispanic population increased from twelve thousand in 2000 to nineteen thousand in 2009. Although a substantial increase, Hispanics still composed only 2.4 percent of the population in 2009. The number of Asian Pacific Islanders increased from ten to twelve thousand over the same years. (Figures 2-8 and 2-9)

Among the three cities, Philadelphia saw the largest changes in ethnic composition over the decade. In 2000, there were slightly more whites than blacks in the city, and together the two groups composed 85 percent of the population. By 2009, African Americans, although they outnumbered whites by more than thirty thousand, saw their percent of the total population drop slightly. The Hispanic population increased by nearly fifty thousand and the Asian Pacific Islander population by more than twenty thousand. As a result, in 2009 the two groups’ share of the population stood at 12 and 6 percent respectively.

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\(^5\) Hispanic American and Latino American are terms used to identify Americans, regardless of race, with origins in Latin America or Spain.

\(^6\) Asian-Pacific Islander (API) and Asian-Pacific American (APA) are terms used to include both Asian Americans and Pacific Islander Americans.
Seattle had substantial Hispanic and Asian Pacific Islander populations in 2000 and their proportion of the population did not change much during the decade. The white population rose from 68 to 69 percent, while the black population decreased from 8 to 7 percent. Hispanic and Asian Pacific Islander populations each increased by 1 percent. In contrast to the other cities, Seattle had relatively notable numbers of American Indians and Multiracial residents. The American Indian population actually fell from .9 percent in 2000 to only .4 percent in 2009, while the multi-racial population remained at 4 percent.

Much of the shift in the ethnic composition of the population is fueled by immigration. In 2000, 18 percent of Seattle's population was foreign-born, and this proportion remained constant during the decade. In contrast, Philadelphia’s foreign-born percentage rose from 9 percent in 2000 to 12 percent by the end of the decade, an increase of more than forty thousand people. Baltimore, too, saw an increase in its foreign-born population, from 5.2 percent in 2000 to 6.9 percent in 2009. Of the three cities, only Philadelphia had a significant Puerto Rican population throughout the decade, around 3 percent. (Table 2-4)

Not only did the number of foreign-born residents change over the decade; the places where they were born also shifted. In Baltimore, in 2000, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago—each with about 2,500 residents—were the leading countries of origin; with Germany, Korea, Mexico, India and the Philippines each contributing over one thousand residents. By the second half of the decade, the Mexican population had more than doubled to 3,510. Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago remained important countries of origin, although their numbers had not increased appreciably. The Chinese and Philippine resident population grew during the decade.

Philadelphia’s immigrant community also changed in composition. Vietnamese and Indians remained significant sources of foreign-born residents in 2000 and 2005-09. They were joined by Chinese, who increased from seven thousand, five hundred to over twelve thousand people (7,500 to 12,000), Dominicans (3,928 to 7,725), and Mexicans (3177 to 7,341). During the same period, older immigrant groups like Italians and Germans became less prominent sources of residents for the city.

The changes in the immigrant population were less dramatic in Seattle. Filipinos remained the largest foreign-born group, although their numbers fell from fourteen to twelve thousand. Some newer, smaller groups—including Somalis, Ethiopians, and Eritreans—became more prominent by the end of the decade. Together, their numbers swelled from around five thousand to more than eight thousand.

**Housing tenure**

Philadelphia has long been known as the “city of homes.” The presence of a large stock of affordable row houses has allowed even households of modest income to purchase their homes. As a result, the percent of Philadelphia households that rent their homes is substantially lower than that in the other two cities. In 2000, only 40 percent of
Philadelphia households were renters, compared with 48 percent in Baltimore and 51 percent in Seattle.

Within each housing market, well-off households were more likely to own than to rent, but across the cities there were substantial differences. In 2005-09, for example, in Philadelphia of the two lowest income quintiles, only 64 percent and 52 percent were renters; that is, between 36 and 48 percent of low-income households were homeowners. In Baltimore and Seattle, a substantially higher proportion of low-income households were renters. (Table 2-5)

**Changing Neighborhood Patterns**

The above discussion relied on PUMS data to describe the characteristics of the entire population of the three cities. In this section we will draw on individual block group data to describe the changing social geography of neighborhoods in the three cities. Of particular interest are the factors that we have found in previous studies to be closely related to the cultural ecology of cities. We know, for example, that socio-economic status—particularly educational attainment—and distance from the center of the city sharply differentiate neighborhoods’ cultural assets. Cutting against these factors to some extent is diversity. In particular, we are interested in changing patterns of economic, ethnic, and household diversity.

**Socio-economic status**

As we noted in the citywide data, Seattle is a far more affluent city than Philadelphia or Baltimore. Forty-seven percent of its residents lived in a block group with a per capita income over $38,814, while the comparable figures for Philadelphia and Baltimore were 7 and 10 percent, respectively. In Seattle location and physical attributes seemed to influence the location of higher-income households, with waterside neighborhoods dominating the highest income stratum. Lower-income areas tended to be farther from downtown, especially to the south and east of the center. Most of Baltimore’s block groups had per capita incomes less than twenty-five thousand dollars. Areas around the Inner Harbor and Fells Point and neighborhoods north and west of the center (Guilford, Tuscany/Canterbury, Blythewood) were the only areas with per capita incomes over sixty thousand dollars. Philadelphia displayed a similar pattern. Much of the city had low per capita incomes, with neighborhoods surrounding Center City and the Northwest the only areas with incomes over forty thousand dollars. Northeast Philadelphia and Roxborough were characterized by more middle-income block groups with per capita incomes ranging from fourteen to thirty-eight thousand dollars. (Figures 2-10 a-c)

A similar pattern was evident in the distribution of the population with at least a bachelor’s degree. Here again, Seattle’s status was notable. Block groups in which half the adult population had attained a bachelor’s degree or more comprised 60 percent of the population in Seattle but only 15 percent in Baltimore and 10 percent in Philadelphia. The educational attainment map of Seattle is more clearly differentiated than the income map. The lower educational attainment sections of the city are entirely
south of the center with the extreme southern sections of Great Duwamish and the Southeast having the lowest rates of educational attainment. The University of Washington district—which did not have particularly high average incomes—did have high levels of educational attainment. In Philadelphia and Baltimore, the educational attainment map generally reflected the income map. (Figures 2-11 a-c)

**Occupational status and poverty rate**

In previous investigations, we have found that the presence of professionals and managers in a neighborhood is associated with cultural engagement. As with the other measures of socio-economic status, the most striking feature of the three-city comparison is how many more neighborhoods in Seattle have high concentrations of these high-status occupations. Virtually the entire city north of downtown has significant concentrations of professionals and managers, while only sections of south Seattle have low levels. (Figures 2-12 a-c)

In contrast, Baltimore and Philadelphia have many neighborhoods dominated by low-status occupations. Where Seattle was dominated by high-professional neighborhoods, in Baltimore they were restricted to the areas around the Inner Harbor, Fells Point, and a wedge of northwest Baltimore. In Philadelphia we find a familiar pattern with neighborhoods around Center City and Northwest Philadelphia dominating, while much of the city had relatively few professionals and managers.

The flip-side of high income, educational or occupational status, of course, is poverty. Here again, the data for Seattle stand in sharp contrast to that of the other cities. In Seattle, poverty rates over 30 percent are restricted to relatively few pockets. One of the surprising features of Seattle’s social geography is the concentration of a pocket of low-income people in the center of downtown. The fact that the term “skid row” was coined in the city represents a continuing reality; many low-income men and women continue to live—either housed or not—in the center of the city. The other notable areas of poverty are neighborhoods in southeast Seattle. (Figures 2-13 a-c) 7

In contrast to a few pockets, large areas of Baltimore’s east and west sides have very high rates of poverty. Yet, even these concentrations of high poverty appear modest compared to the picture in Philadelphia where large sections of both West and North Philadelphia are dominated by poverty rates in excess of 30 percent.

**Economic diversity**

We noted above that in previous Philadelphia research we found two major elements of the social demography of the arts: socio-economic standing and diversity. But what happens when these two elements are combined? In the past we identified diverse neighborhoods with high concentrations of both poverty and professionals and managers as particularly likely to have high concentrations of arts and culture. In our last examination of these factors—using the 2000 census data and our cultural asset index for 2004, we discovered a decline in the presence of these economically diverse

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7 The University of Washington campus is another apparent pocket of poverty.
(“pov-prof”) neighborhoods as well as a decline in the correlation between these factors and concentration of cultural resources.

In the current three-city study, we have found that between 2000 and 2005-09 the proportion of pov-prof neighborhoods in all cities increased by about two percentage points. In some ways this is surprising because the criteria for identifying these block groups became more stringent as both the average poverty rate and the percent of the labor force in professional and managerial occupations increased between the two surveys.

The small increase in the number of economically diverse neighborhoods hid a considerable amount of churning. Only three percent of block groups in the three cities were pov-prof in both the 2000 and 2005-09 data. During the same period about 7 percent of block groups ceased to be pov-prof, while 9 percent moved from economic homogeneity to diversity. Four in five block groups were never economically diverse.

Using Philadelphia as an example, the expansion of pov-prof neighborhoods was quite widespread. Neighborhoods close to Center City—historically the most diverse sections of the city—accounted for some of the growth; but much change occurred in neighborhoods in West, South, and North Philadelphia, suggesting that economic diversity expanded in historically black neighborhoods as well.

**Ethnic composition and diversity**

As noted above, Seattle diverges from the Eastern cities in its ethnic composition with a significantly higher proportion of Asian Pacific Islanders and a much lower proportion of African Americans. These differences influence the geographic distribution of ethnicity as well. The presence of African Americans in Philadelphia and Baltimore has contributed to their history as “hyper-segregated” cities—to use Massey and Denton’s term. As recently as 1990, the dissimilarity score—the proportion of the population that would have to move to an integrated neighborhood to distribute the population equally—for the two cities stood at 75 and 71, respectively. Over the past twenty years, these indexes have dropped modestly, from 75 to 68 in Philadelphia and from 71 to 65 in Baltimore. In contrast, Seattle’s dissimilarity score in 2010 was 49, compared to a score of 56 in 1990.

Yet, the combination of these modest declines in black-white segregation and the growth of the “non-black-white” population—especially Hispanics and Asian Pacific Islanders—are changing the ethnic maps of the cities. In Philadelphia, for example, the proportion of residents living in an ethnically diverse neighborhood increased from twenty to fifty percent over the past two decades.

In examining ethnic composition, we classify each block group by the representation of the four major ethnic groups. Neighborhoods in which more than 80 percent of the

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residents identify as one race or ethnicity are defined as homogeneous. The remaining block groups are considered diverse and are classified as black/Hispanic, black/white, white/API, or other diverse.

In 2000, 52 percent of Baltimore’s population lived in homogeneous black neighborhoods, 14 percent in white neighborhoods, and the remainder (34 percent) in ethnically diverse neighborhoods. Among the diverse areas, the majority (23 percent) lived in integrated black/white neighborhoods. Little changed in Baltimore between 2000 and 2005-09. The proportion of the population living in homogeneous white block groups dropped to 13 percent. Black/Hispanic and white/API neighborhoods, which in 2000 had each represented less than 1 percent, in the later years represented between 1 and 2 percent of the population. (Figure 2-14a)

Philadelphia changed more rapidly. In 2000, 30 percent of the population lived in black neighborhoods and 28 percent in white neighborhoods. Along with the 1.5 percent of the population that lived in Hispanic or API block groups, sixty percent of Philadelphians lived in homogeneous neighborhoods. By 2005-09, this balance between homogeneity and diversity had shifted markedly. In the later years, only 28 percent and 23 percent of the population, respectively, lived in black or white block groups. Although the percent of the population living in homogeneous Latino neighborhoods had increased from 1.4 to 1.7 percent, overall a clear majority of Philadelphians lived in diverse neighborhoods with 19 percent living in neighborhoods with significant representation of at least three different groups. (Figure 2-14b)

The one exception to this story line is the continuing segregation of African Americans. Reflecting a national pattern, the vast majority of black Philadelphians and Baltimoreans continued to live in neighborhoods that were homogeneous. Where only 38 and 52 percent of whites lived in homogeneous white neighborhoods in Baltimore and Philadelphia, 76 and 62 percent of blacks in the two cities lived in homogenous black neighborhoods.

Seattle, in contrast, remained ethnically diverse and stable. In 2000, 44 percent of the population lived in homogeneous white neighborhoods and the remaining population in diverse neighborhoods, including 38 percent who lived in neighborhoods in which three or more groups had a significant representation. (Figure 2-14c)

If we examine the shift in block groups, we find that the situation in Baltimore was not as stable as the year-by-year figures suggest. In 2000, of its 380 black block groups, 344 remained homogenous black, and the remaining 36 became diverse. More pronounced, of the 102 white block groups, only 72 remained white with the other 30 becoming diverse. Yet, there was some movement as well from diversity to homogeneity. Of the 220 block groups that had been diverse in 2000, only 167 remained diverse, 39 became homogeneous black and the other 14 homogeneous white. (Table 2-8)

In Philadelphia, too, the aggregate figures hid a good deal of movement back and forth. Among the 633 black block groups in 2000, 529 remained black and another 102 became diverse. The 424 white block groups split with 284 remaining homogeneous and
the other 140 becoming diverse. Among the 25 Hispanic block groups, 18 remained Hispanic and the other 7 became diverse. In 2000, 689 block groups were diverse and, of this number, 544 remained diverse. Among the diverse block groups that became homogeneous, 61 became white, 63 black, 19 Hispanic, and 2 API.9

There were also block group shifts in Seattle, but not nearly on the scale of Baltimore and Philadelphia. Between 2000 and 2005-09, 61 block groups that had been homogeneous white became diverse and 62 that had been diverse became white, leaving 206 stable white and 237 stable diverse block groups.

Household structure and diversity

As noted earlier, all the cities in this study have been affected by national trends away from “traditional” married-couple families and toward the growth of one-person and other nonfamily households. These general patterns have led to some notable geographic patterns. In previous work we have noted that cultural engagement is higher in areas with high concentrations of both young adults and nonfamily households. These two factors often overlap geographically because young adults are the age group most likely to live in nonfamily households (including those living alone).

All three cities conformed to this pattern. In Baltimore the proportion of block groups in which persons 18 to 34 years of age composed 40 percent of the population increased from 6 to 12 percent, and in Philadelphia the proportion increased from 7 to 13 percent. The proportion of young adult block groups in Seattle already stood at over 20 percent in 2000 and had risen to 25 percent by 2005-09. Similar trends affected the concentration of nonfamily households. The proportion of block groups in which they constituted half of all households increased from 20 to 36 percent in Baltimore, from 19 to 35 percent in Philadelphia, and from 46 to 49 percent in Seattle.

We define household diversity as a block group that has a concentration of nonfamily households greater than fifty percent and in which more than 40 percent of the population is between the ages of 18 and 34. In Baltimore and Philadelphia, about five percent of the population lived in block groups that were household diverse in both years, while in Seattle nearly 20 percent of the population did so. Seattle enjoyed the largest percentage point increase of people living in household diverse block groups as four percent of the population lived in block groups that had formerly been household diverse and seven percent in block groups that became diverse. (Figures 2-15 a-c)

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9 In later analyses, we incorporated the two API block groups in Philadelphia into the diverse category because there were too few to analyze separately.
Cultural Ecology of Three Cities

In this section, we first analyze the ecology of cultural resources in each of the three cities by examining patterns of concentration among the three primary indexes: nonprofit cultural organizations, commercial cultural firms, and resident artists. Then, in order to get a more precise sense of how the three cities compare and contrast, we examine the relationship between the social geography discussed earlier in the chapter and the cultural ecology of each city.

Cultural ecology citywide

Table 2-9 compares the average scores for the cultural indexes that we currently have for the three cities. As the table makes clear, the three cities have different cultural ecologies. In terms of counts per block group, Seattle has a higher concentration of assets than either of the Eastern cities, while Baltimore and Philadelphia are roughly comparable on commercial culture. The recent Creative Vitality Index commissioned by the Philadelphia Office of Arts, Culture, and the Creative Economy ¹⁰ noted that the city stood out in terms of the density of nonprofits—a portrait confirmed by these counts. Seattle appears to have a greater number of nonprofits, but they are less prominent than the number of commercial cultural firms and resident artists. The resident artist data for Seattle is eye-popping and may—to some extent—be a product of differences in how the data for Seattle and Philadelphia were gathered. Still, they are supported by the census counts for artists, which show that in 2009 artists made up 4.6 percent of the Seattle labor force, nearly four times the Philadelphia proportion (1.2 percent). ¹¹

One conclusion to draw from these comparisons is that there might be an absolute and a relative dimension to the study of “natural” cultural districts. Compared to the Eastern cities, virtually all of Seattle has a high density of cultural assets. At the same time, within each city, we are able to identify those sections with a particular concentration. In the remainder of the chapter, we use the same scales of concentration for all three cities so we can capture both of these aspects of cultural clusters.

Baltimore

Baltimore stands out as a the city in which all three types of cultural assets are concentrated in the same neighborhoods. Downtown neighborhoods have very high concentrations of nonprofits, commercial firms, and artists. This concentration stretches north through Mount Vernon and the Station North District as far north as the

¹⁰ The December 2010 report described the findings of a three-year index, 2006-2008, developed by Western States Art Federation (WESTAF) for the Philadelphia Office of Arts, Culture, and the Creative Economy.

¹¹ If we compare the census and resident artist counts, they suggest that in Seattle, the ratio was one-in-three artists (5,051 of 14,358), while in Philadelphia the ratio was a bit higher than one-in-five. Of course, our counts and the census only roughly represent the same universe. For a discussion of using the census data on artists occupations, see Mark J. Stern, “Artists in the Winner-Take-All Economy: Artists’ Inequality in Six U.S. Metropolitan Areas, 1980 – 2000.” [www.sp2.upenn.edu/siap/docs/dynamics_of_culture/]
Homewood campus of the Johns Hopkins University. To the east, the Fells Point neighborhood also has significant numbers of assets, and this concentration includes the Patterson Park and Highlandtown neighborhoods to the north. The final cultural asset index for Baltimore, then, is not surprising, with higher scores in the central axis and a few neighborhoods bordering the inner harbor. (Figures 2-16 a-c)

**Philadelphia**

Like Baltimore, Philadelphia shows a consistent concentration of cultural assets in Center City and its surrounding neighborhoods. In addition, sections of Northwest Philadelphia, including Manayunk, Mount Airy, and Chestnut Hill have significant scores on all of our indexes.

Yet, there also are some important differences among the types of resources. The locations of resident artists, in particular, stand out. Several neighborhoods to the northeast of Center City (Fishtown, Kensington) and in West and South Philadelphia are centers for artists, but not necessarily on the other indexes. Philadelphia is the only city for which we have consistent data on cultural participants. As we’ve learned elsewhere, cultural participation rates are more tied to a neighborhood’s socio-economic status. As we would expect, the relatively high-income neighborhoods of Northwest Philadelphia have among the highest cultural participation rates in the city. (Figures 2-17 a-e)

As a result of this divergence of the concentrations of organizations and enterprises on one hand and participants and artists on the other, the final cultural asset index captures a relatively wide set of neighborhoods. Certainly, the importance of Center City remains, but other neighborhoods with strength on one or more of the indexes also score relatively high on this index. Again, Mount Airy, Chestnut Hill, and some outlying sections of West Philadelphia have high scores.

**Seattle**

Seattle has elements of consistency and divergence in the concentration of its cultural assets. Organizational assets—both nonprofit and commercial—have fairly similar patterns. Downtown and neighborhoods immediately adjacent to it are the major focus of organizational location, with smaller concentrations in Ballard, Fremont, the University District, and Capitol Hill. Neighborhoods to the South of Downtown (SoDo, Georgetown) also show significant strength along these dimensions. Nonprofits are a bit more concentrated exclusively in downtown than the commercial firms. (Figures 2-18 a-d)

Resident artists don’t show an entirely different pattern, but the index does have distinctive features. As we have noted elsewhere, the dynamism of the Seattle housing market is a challenge to artists, especially those of modest means. In our fieldwork, we encountered many artists who had moved from some more traditional cultural clusters (First Hill, Capitol Hill) to more outlying neighborhoods. The one section

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of the city that does not show up at all in our organizational data but is a major focus of resident artists is the Central District. Again, the availability of relatively affordable housing combined with proximity to the more established cultural clusters makes this neighborhood attractive to many artists.

The opposite may be the case with Chinatown-International District. Its scores on resident artists are relatively modest, despite the fact that it has high concentrations of cultural organizations. Recent reports in the press suggest that this situation may be changing, with more artists—finding themselves displaced from Pioneer Square—locating space in the C-ID.13

Taken together, then, the overall cultural asset index for Seattle identifies the “usual suspects” in and around downtown, with outlying clusters in Ballard, Fremont, and south of downtown. One surprise is the relatively low index scores of the University District as a result of the low number of artists in the area.

**Social Geography of Cultural Clusters**

Here we take a look at the relationship between the socio-economic characteristics and the cultural ecology of each city. The analysis focuses on three dimensions of social geography—distance from downtown, socio-economic status, and dimensions of diversity.

One surprise from the analysis is the role of housing tenure. Based on our fieldwork in Seattle, we became sensitive to the role of rent in influencing where cultural activity occurs. However, because housing tenure is highly correlated with other measures of socio-economic status, it is difficult to identify its unique role. We have been able to devise a measure of renter concentration that controls for socio-economic status, which turns out to have a significant correlation with cultural asset indices in the three cities.

**Distance from downtown**

Space and place play an important role in the development and growth of “natural” cultural districts. One of the most basic elements of the spatial reality of these neighborhoods is *distance from downtown*. In all three cities, the downtown is a center for many mainstream cultural institutions, a fact reflected in the cultural asset indexes (CAI).

In all three cities, distance from downtown was a very powerful predictor of the cultural asset index. The score for the farthest block groups ranged from 45 percent of the citywide average in Seattle to 71 percent in Baltimore, while the block groups near downtown had scores ranging from 176 percent of the citywide average in Baltimore to 219 percent of the average in Seattle. (Table 2-10)

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13 *The International Examiner* (September 21, 2011)
**Socio-economic status**

Based on earlier work in Philadelphia, we found that various measures of socio-economic status were strongly correlated with various dimensions of cultural engagement. Yet, because Seattle’s socio-economic profile differs so radically from that of the Eastern cities, we found that social and economic status plays a different role in cultural ecology of the Emerald City. Here we focus on per capita income and educational attainment, as well as occupational status, poverty, and inequality.

**Per capita income**

In all three cities, per capita income was significantly associated with the cultural asset index. The poorest block groups consistently had scores between 26 and 28 percent below the citywide averages, while richer sections of the cities had progressively higher scores. In Baltimore and Philadelphia, the richest block groups had the highest scores by wide margins (by 61 and 102 percent). In Seattle, by contrast, the fourth quintile had the highest score (130 percent of citywide average) while the top quintile’s score was only 112. (Table 2-11)

These differences were reflected in the measures of association. In Philadelphia and Baltimore, per capita income explained 19 percent and 11 percent of the variance in the cultural asset indices, respectively. In Seattle, by contrast, it only explained 4 percent, still statistically significant but a much less importance influence.

**Educational attainment**

In previous analyses, the proportion of the adult population in a block group with at least a bachelor’s degree has been an important predictor of the cultural asset index. Again, because of Seattle’s unique social profile—simply, that a much larger percent of the population possesses advanced degrees, we had reason to suspect that this relationship would be modified in that city.

The relationship of Baltimore’s cultural asset index to the percent of adults with a bachelor’s degree looked more like Philadelphia than like Seattle. In both Eastern cities, the CAI of a neighborhood rose steadily with the increase in average educational attainment. Among the block groups with the lowest educational achievement, the CAI’s were 73 and 67 percent of average in Baltimore and Philadelphia, and then rose to 186 and 206 percent among those with the highest percent of adults with a bachelor’s degree. The correlations of low educational attainment and low cultural engagement held in Seattle as well; the lowest quartile’s CAI was 76 percent of the citywide average.

Yet, as the educational level of block group increased in Seattle, the CAI did not increase as in the other cities. The CAI peaked in the middle quintile (40-59th percentile of all adults with a BA) and then actually fell below the citywide average in the most educated quintile. It may very well be that the middling CAI of the University District—and its relatively high educational level—explains some of this eccentricity. Part of the explanation lies purely in statistics; because a high proportion of BA’s is so common in Seattle neighborhoods, it tends to have less explanatory power because the differences between neighborhoods is not as sharp as it is in our other cities.
These differences were reflected as well in the measures of association. Although percent with at least a bachelor’s degree was statistically significant in all three cities, the eta-square ranged from .28 in Philadelphia and .20 in Baltimore to only .04 in Seattle. (Table 2-12)

**Occupational status**

A similar pattern was present as well in the concentration of professionals and managers in the three cities. In Baltimore and Philadelphia, the CAI increased as this percentage increased, and the occupational variable explained 24 percent of variance in Philadelphia and 12 percent in Baltimore. In Seattle, the relationship was not consistent; the CAI varied little between the 2nd and top quintile—only from 102 to 109—and, in fact, was not statistically significant. (Table 2-13)

**Poverty and inequality**

The correlation between CAI and socio-economic status is much stronger in Philadelphia and Baltimore than in Seattle. To some extent, this may be a function of the affluence of the West Coast city. The relatively large population that is well-educated and professional means that the variation across the city’s neighborhoods is not as great as in Philadelphia and Baltimore. At the same time, although Seattle is not without poverty and inequality, our measures of household inequality were much lower there than in the Eastern cities. Although Seattle certainly possesses concentrations of cultural assets, they are determined less by these socio-economic markers than in the other two cities.

The same pattern holds true with respect to inequality among block groups. Unfortunately, the census does not provide a measure of income inequality (Gini coefficient)\(^\text{14}\) at the block group level. We used instead the Gini coefficient for census tracts and applied it to the block groups within each tract. As a result, we lose a level of sensitivity in the data (because individual census tracts might include block groups of varied income inequality). Also, because the data are based on relatively few tracts rather than many block groups, we must be aware that the statistical power of the analysis is less than it appears.

Income inequality explains a moderate amount of variation in the CAI in the three cities. It is strongest in Philadelphia where it “explains” 10 percent of the variance in the CAI. In Baltimore and Seattle, it explains 7 and 5 percent of variance. In all three cities, the least equal census tracts had the highest CAI scores—between 136 in Seattle and 162 in Philadelphia. In all three cities, the CAI scores of the most equal 40 percent of the population were also well below average and the middle forty percent was near the citywide average. (Table 2-14)

**Dimensions of diversity**

\(^\text{14}\) The Gini coefficient is a measure of the inequality of income distribution that can range from 0 to 1. A value of 0 represents complete equality (everyone has equal shares of income), and a value of 1 represents complete inequality (one person has all the income.)
The topic of social diversity is characterized by both good news and bad news. When SIAP first began studying cultural assets in Philadelphia in the 1990s, diversity was both less common and more influential on cultural asset scores than it has become. In the 1990s, only a minority of the population lived in a block group with any type of diversity, but block groups that were diverse had distinctively higher cultural assets. Today, a majority of Philadelphia block groups are ethnically diverse, and many others display one or another type of diversity. However, because diversity is more common, the distinctive cultural profile of diverse block groups has faded. We have no way of telling what has happened in Baltimore and Seattle over the past several decades, but diversity overall has become a more contingent influence on culture in Philadelphia.

**Economic diversity**

As in the previous section we define economic diversity as a block group with both a poverty rate and a percent of adults in professional and managerial occupations that are greater than or equal to the citywide average. Because this measure is based on census data, we were able to examine change in pov-prof status between 2000 and 2005-09. As noted earlier, just below 20 percent of all block groups in the three cities was pov-prof in at least one of those census files. (Table 2-15)

Economic diversity was correlated with the CAI in the three cities, and the relationship was fairly consistent across them. The 80 percent of block groups that were never pov-prof between 2000 and 2005-09 had a CAI below the city average (between 86 percent in Baltimore and 96 percent in Philadelphia). At the other extreme, the stable pov-prof neighborhoods had CAI’s that were about twice the citywide average (or two and one-half times, in the case of Baltimore). Of course, these block groups accounted for 2 to 5 percent of the entire population. Finally, block groups that transitioned—either became homogeneous or became diverse—were somewhere in between, falling a low as 108 percent of average (Philadelphia) to as high as 143 percent (Seattle).

Although qualifying as a pov-prof neighborhood increases the likelihood that a block group will have a high CAI, overall the variable has a relatively modest influence on the CAI. It is strongest in Baltimore, where it explains 13 percent of the variance in the CAI and weakest in Philadelphia, were it explains only 3 percent of the variance. In Seattle, the eta-square is 8 percent.

**Ethnic diversity**

Ethnic diversity did not have a consistent relationship to cultural engagement in the three cities, primarily because each city’s ethnic composition was so distinctive. Recall that Baltimore remains primarily a black/white city, while Philadelphia has added a significant Latino and Asian Pacific Islander population. Seattle, with relatively few African Americans, is divided between homogeneous white and ethnically diverse block groups.

Ethnicity has no statistically significant relationship with the CAI in Seattle. The CAI of diverse neighborhoods is only two percent above the citywide average, and the index of homogeneous white areas is three percent below it.
The differences in Baltimore and Philadelphia are closer to one another. In both cities African American and, in the case of Philadelphia, Latino neighborhoods have the lowest CAI—all below 70 percent of the citywide average. Homogeneous white neighborhoods consistently have the highest CAI—about 130 percent of the citywide average. In Baltimore ethnically diverse neighborhoods also have a CAI in this range (135), but in Philadelphia they are just 103 percent of the citywide average. (Table 2-16)

The measures of association between ethnic composition and the CAI in the Eastern cities are moderate—.11 in Baltimore and .05 in Philadelphia. Yet, given the correlation between ethnicity and socio-economic status, it is doubtful that these relationships would stand up if we control for other possible influences.

**Household diversity**

Across the country, household diversity is on the rise. A larger share of the population is living in nonfamily households, and sections of the city with many nonfamily households attract a large proportion of young adults. In 2005-09, the proportion of the population living in block groups with diverse household structures was 10 percent in Baltimore, 8 percent in Philadelphia, and 26 percent in Seattle.

The presence of nonfamily households, in particular, was associated with the CAI. The sections of the three cities with the highest concentration of these households had CAI’s that were between 176 and 208 percent of the citywide averages, while the index for other sections of the city were all below the citywide average. The eta-squares of the relationships were between .15 in Baltimore and .31 in Seattle. (Table 2-17)

When we add the presence of young adults to our measure of household diversity, we again find a strong relationship to our cultural asset index. In Baltimore, the CAI for household diverse neighborhoods was 236 percent of the citywide average, while in Philadelphia it was 242 percent. Although the figure was lower in Seattle, only 159 percent, one must look at this given the much higher proportion of neighborhoods that were household diverse. (Table 2-18a)

Overall household diversity explained 21 percent of the variance in the CAI in Baltimore, 18 percent in Philadelphia, and 13 percent in Seattle. All of these figures were statistically significant. What is more, changes in household diversity had an even stronger relationship to CAI, with eta squares of .28, .26, and .16 in the three cities.

Neighborhoods that were household diverse in both 2000 and 2005-09 had CAI’s of 329 in Baltimore, 303 in Philadelphia, and 180 in Seattle. Neighborhoods that were never diverse had index scores well below the city average, while the neighborhoods that moved either in or out of the diverse category had scores in between. (Table 2-18b)

**Housing tenure**

The three-city study has given us a fresh appreciation for the relationship of housing tenure to cultural assets. Overall, the percent of households that rent is substantially associated with the CAI. In all three cities, the higher the proportion of renters in the population, the higher the concentration of cultural assets. The relationship of renting
to CAI is particularly strong in Seattle where it explains 18 percent of the variance. In the other cities, the percent renting explains only 3 and 5 percent. (Table 2-19)

One problem in determining the unique importance of housing tenure is that it is highly correlated with other measures of socio-economic status. The negative correlation of renter percentage with per capita income, in fact, tends to suppress its positive correlation with the CAI. In order to disentangle these, we used regression analysis to estimate the percent renters corrected for the influence of socio-economic status. (Figure 2-19) Controlling for income, the top quintiles’ CAI were above 150 percent of citywide average in all three cities. The eta-squares jump from 3 to 8 percent in Baltimore, 5 to 8 percent in Philadelphia, and 18 to 28 percent in Seattle. (Table 2-20)

Why should a high number of renters matter for cultural districts? The flow of people and firms in and out of a neighborhood may itself increase a neighborhood’s vitality. Obviously this is not always the case, especially if the in and out flows are imbalanced. Yet, the lack of a settled community life may stimulate residents to think and rethink their cognitive map of a neighborhood, just as mobility changes the social map. Because we did not expect to focus on renter percentage in this project, we are not in a position to test this hypothesis. It does, however, suggest that the relationship of culture and neighborhood instability may be a topic that deserves further study.

**Social Geography and Cultural Ecology—A Multivariate analysis**

In order to examine the overall association of the social and geographic variables with the cultural asset index, we performed a series of regression analyses using the general linear model procedure. Overall, the variables in the analysis explained an impressive share of the variance in the CAI in all three cities, but different variables were more important in some cities than in others. In fact, only one variable—distance from downtown—was statistically significant in all three cities. Seven variables were included in the final model: percent nonfamily households, percent with at least a bachelor’s degree, per capita income, distance from downtown, corrected percent renters, ethnic composition, and change in household diversity. The adjusted multiple R-squares ranged from .39 in Baltimore to .52 in Philadelphia and .44 in Seattle. (Table 2-21)

In Baltimore, the strongest variable in the multivariate analysis was change in household diversity. In particular, block groups that were household diverse in both 2000 and 2005-09 had a CAI that was 235 percent of the citywide average. Ethnic composition also remained an important predictor, with diverse and white block groups more likely to have a high CAI than African American sections of the city.

In Philadelphia, all variables except the corrected rental percentage were statistically significant. Distance from downtown, by far, had the largest association with the CAI, followed by changes in household diversity. Again, areas that had stable diversity had the highest CAI. Socio-economic differences as reflected in per capita income and percent of adults with at least a BA also had a considerable influence on the CAI, with partial eta-squares of .38 and .29, respectively.
When other variables are controlled, ethnicity had relatively little impact in Philadelphia. Although the variable was statistically significant, only one contrast—the gap between black and ethnically diverse block groups—was judged to be significant, and even this difference was not dramatic. Controlling for other variables, the CAI of black neighborhoods was 175 percent of the citywide average and of diverse areas was 187 percent.

Seattle’s results were the most distinctive of the three cities. Educational attainment, ethnic composition, and changes in household diversity were not at all significant in explaining CAI. Besides distance from downtown, the next strongest variables were per capita income, with an eta-square of .04, and nonfamily households with an eta-square of .03. These variables’ influence was in the expected direction; neighborhoods with many nonfamily households and/or with higher incomes were more likely to have high CAI’s.

As noted, we investigated the role of percent renters because of our experience in Seattle. As it turns out, Seattle is the only city in which this variable (corrected for per capita income) is statistically significant when other influences are taken into consideration. What stand out are the block groups in the top quintile on the corrected renter percentage variable. While the bottom 80 percent of block groups have CAI’s between 72 and 76 percent of the citywide average, these high-rent, high-income neighborhoods have a CAI that is 115 percent of the average.
Trends in Cultural Ecology and Social Geography

This chapter presents an analysis of the cultural ecology of the three cities in our study—as measured by SIAP’s Cultural Asset Index (CAI)—and the relationship of that ecology to the cities’ social geography. Although many of the patterns we have come to expect were present in the three cities, we are struck as much by the differences as the similarities between the cities.

First, the similarities. Clearly, place matters. Distance from downtown is the one influence that was a significant predictor of the concentration of cultural assets in all three cities.

Surprisingly, socio-economic status had no consistent relationship to cultural assets across the three cities. Per capita income was statistically significant in two of the three cities, but the CAI did not rise consistently with income. Equally unexpected, educational attainment—specifically, percent of the adult population with a BA degree—was not an important influence in either Baltimore or Seattle. In Seattle, it may be that the population overall is so well educated that we don’t find much variation across the city’s block groups.

In Baltimore, the results are a bit less reassuring. It appears that there, simply put, race trumps virtually everything else. Sections of the city that are diverse or white have more cultural resources, and sections that are black have fewer.

Finally, social diversity is not as important as we have come to expect. “Pov-prof” is associated with the CAI, but its influence is not particularly strong and tends to fade in multivariate analysis. Ethnic diversity, which we believed to be a major generator of cultural activity, is no more likely to be associated with a high CAI than a homogeneous white neighborhood.

The one element of diversity that continues to seem important is household diversity. In both Philadelphia and Seattle, the percent of nonfamily households was an important influence on the CAI. In Philadelphia and Baltimore, neighborhoods that remained household diverse in both 2000 and 2005-09 had much higher CAI scores than other neighborhoods.

The arts and 21st century urban communities

American cities at the start of the new century seemed to be moving in two directions at once. On the one hand, the forces of socio-economic stratification seemed to grow stronger. The differences between the rich and the poor, the well-educated and the poorly-educated, and the employed and the unemployed became sharper. This tendency, present in American cities for most of the past generation, was intensified by the recession of 2007-09. The stock market and privileged sectors of the labor market appeared to recover relatively quickly from the economic dislocation, while those at the bottom of the status hierarchy have faced a prolonged period of stagnation.

At the same time, forces making American cities more complex and diverse also gained speed. Neighborhood economic diversity, which had actually declined during the 1990s,
picked up speed and became more common. The influx of immigrants continued to shift American cities away from the black/white paradigm. As a result, the proportion of urban dwellers living in an ethnically diverse block group exploded. Finally, the decline of married-couple families led to increases in alternative family forms and the concentration of young adults and non-family households in districts in all three cities.

Forces of social inequality and social diversity can cut across or reinforce one another. In some cases, economic and ethnic diversity are transitory, for example, when diversity is simply a point in the “upgrading” of a neighborhood. In other cases, the presence of diverse ethnic identity might temper the impact of economic inequality.

What is most striking about these trends, however, is their unsustainability. Inequality blights diversity. It drives out the economically precarious and—to the extent that race and ethnicity are still highly correlated with economic standing—reduces the possibilities of achieving racial integration.

These potential crosscurrents of economic hierarchy and social diversity pose a particular challenge to the arts and culture simply because both are correlated with the presence of cultural resources. Residents who are well-off are more likely to be engaged in the arts, and the neighborhoods in which they live tend to have higher concentrations of cultural resources. The same can be said of diverse neighborhoods. Whether the arts serve as a marker of economic and cultural status—as a means of dividing people and communities—or as one of multiple dimensions of diversity will provide the real test of the arts’ social impact in the coming years.
Figure 2-1. Percent of adult population unemployed, three cities 2000-2009

Source: IPUMS $^1$

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$^1$ Census microdata used in this report are based on authors’ calculations from Steven Ruggles et al Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 5.0 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2010).
Figure 2-2. Percent of adult population not in labor force, three cities, 2000-2009

Source: IPUMS
Table 2-1. Percent of adults who were unemployed, by ethnicity, three cities, 2000-2009

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Source: IPUMS
Table 2-2. Educational attainment of adults, three cities, 2000-2009

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Source: IPUMS
Figure 2-3. Average household income, three cities, 2000-2009

Source: IPUMS
Figure 2-4. Percent of population living in poverty, three cities, 2000-2009

Source: IPUMS
Table 2-3. Indexes of inequality, three cities, 2000-2009

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<tr>
<td><strong>Philadelphia</strong></td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>2005</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
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<td>5.5</td>
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<td>4.7</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>17.3</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Seattle</strong></td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>2006</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>11.0</td>
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<td>4.2</td>
<td>11.8</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: IPUMS

Note: Indexes are ratio of average per capita household income of the 10th, 50th, and 90th percentiles.
Figure 2-5. Change in age structure 2000-09

Source: IPUMS
Figure 2-6. Types of households, three cities, 2000

Source: IPUMS
Figure 2-7. Changes in household structure, three cities, 2000-2009

Source: IPUMS
Figure 2-8. Ethnic composition, three cities, 2000

Source: IPUMS
Figure 2-9. Percentage-point change in ethnic composition, three cities, 2000-2009

Source: IPUMS
Table 2-4. Birthplace of population, three cities, 2000-2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Baltimore</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>94.6%</td>
<td>93.8%</td>
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<td>93.4%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puerto Rico and other US territories</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign-born</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Philadelphia</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>87.8%</td>
<td>85.3%</td>
<td>86.2%</td>
<td>85.1%</td>
<td>86.2%</td>
<td>85.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Puerto Rico and other US territories</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign-born</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Seattle</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>81.5%</td>
<td>79.4%</td>
<td>77.9%</td>
<td>80.3%</td>
<td>82.5%</td>
<td>81.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puerto Rico and other US territories</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign-born</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
<td>21.8%</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: IPUMS
Table 2-5. Percent renters, by household income, three cities, 2000-2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Baltimore city</td>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>Seattle</td>
<td>Baltimore city</td>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>Seattle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lowest 20%</td>
<td>75.7%</td>
<td>59.2%</td>
<td>77.2%</td>
<td>75.6%</td>
<td>64.1%</td>
<td>79.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-39th%</td>
<td>60.5%</td>
<td>48.1%</td>
<td>68.8%</td>
<td>62.3%</td>
<td>51.7%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-59th%</td>
<td>47.7%</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td>52.3%</td>
<td>51.0%</td>
<td>44.5%</td>
<td>51.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-79th%</td>
<td>34.9%</td>
<td>31.7%</td>
<td>36.8%</td>
<td>37.2%</td>
<td>35.0%</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest 20%</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
<td>19.8%</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All income levels</td>
<td>48.1%</td>
<td>39.8%</td>
<td>50.7%</td>
<td>49.0%</td>
<td>43.2%</td>
<td>49.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: IPUMS
Figure 2-10. Per capita income of block groups, three cities, 2005-09

a) Baltimore

Source: American Community Survey, summary file 2005-09
b) Philadelphia

Source: American Community Survey, summary file 2005-09.
c) Seattle

Source: American Community Survey, summary file 2005-09
Figure 2-11. Percent of adults with bachelor’s degree in census block groups, three cities, 2005-09

a) Baltimore

Legend

Census blockgroups
Percent with BA

0.000 - 0.123
0.124 - 0.294
0.295 - 0.497
0.498 - 0.707
0.708 - 1.000

Source: American Community Survey, summary file 2005-09
b) Philadelphia

Source: American Community Survey, summary file 2005-09
c) Seattle

Source: American Community Survey, summary file 2005-09
Figure 2-12. Percent of labor force in professional or managerial occupations in census block groups, three cities, 2005-09

a) Baltimore

Source: American Community Survey, summary file 2005-09
b) Philadelphia

Source: American Community Survey, summary file 2005-09
c) Seattle

Source: American Community Survey, summary file 2005-09
Figure 2-13. Poverty rate of block groups, three cities, 2005-09

a) Baltimore

Source: American Community Survey, summary file 2005-09
b) Philadelphia

Source: American Community Survey, summary file 2005-09
c) Seattle

Source: American Community Survey, summary file 2005-09
Table 2-6. Change in economic diversity of block groups, three cities, between 2000 and 2005-09

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic diversity status, 2000 to 2005-09</th>
<th>Baltimore</th>
<th>Philadelphia</th>
<th>Seattle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never economically diverse</td>
<td>81.8%</td>
<td>79.9%</td>
<td>82.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Became homogenous</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Became diverse</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stable diverse</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: American Community Survey, summary file 2005-09
Table 2-7. Percent of adults in professional and managerial occupations and poverty rate, by change in economic diversity status, 3 cities’ block groups, 2000 and 2005-09

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change in economic diversity 2000 to 2005-09</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Percent professional and managers 2005-9</th>
<th>Poverty rate 2005-09</th>
<th>Percent professionals and managers, 2000</th>
<th>Poverty rate 200</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never economically diverse</td>
<td>Baltimore</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>26.9%</td>
<td>21.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>27.9%</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
<td>27.1%</td>
<td>21.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seattle</td>
<td>51.9%</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
<td>47.5%</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>32.6%</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
<td>31.0%</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Became homogenous</td>
<td>Baltimore</td>
<td>30.2%</td>
<td>23.0%</td>
<td>38.3%</td>
<td>36.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>30.9%</td>
<td>28.7%</td>
<td>38.7%</td>
<td>37.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seattle</td>
<td>55.8%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>54.4%</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>35.1%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>41.4%</td>
<td>33.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Became diverse</td>
<td>Baltimore</td>
<td>45.7%</td>
<td>33.7%</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
<td>46.2%</td>
<td>21.5%</td>
<td>32.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seattle</td>
<td>64.6%</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
<td>49.7%</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>48.6%</td>
<td>39.2%</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>27.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stable diversity</td>
<td>Baltimore</td>
<td>55.3%</td>
<td>37.3%</td>
<td>48.2%</td>
<td>34.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>55.1%</td>
<td>46.5%</td>
<td>45.6%</td>
<td>42.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seattle</td>
<td>67.8%</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
<td>58.8%</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>57.5%</td>
<td>38.9%</td>
<td>48.8%</td>
<td>35.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Baltimore</td>
<td>31.1%</td>
<td>21.1%</td>
<td>28.3%</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>30.6%</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
<td>28.0%</td>
<td>24.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seattle</td>
<td>53.7%</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
<td>48.4%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>35.1%</td>
<td>22.1%</td>
<td>31.9%</td>
<td>21.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: American Community Survey, summary file 2005-09
Figure 2-14. Ethnic composition of census block groups, three cities, 2005-09

a) Baltimore

Source: American Community Survey, summary file 2005-09
b) Philadelphia

Source: American Community Survey, summary file 2005-09
c) Seattle

Source: American Community Survey, summary file 2005-09
Table 2-8. Change in ethnic composition of block groups, three cities, 2000 to 2005-09

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic composition 2005-09</th>
<th>Ethnic Composition 2000</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baltimore</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diverse</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baltimore total</td>
<td>380</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>529</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian Pacific Islander</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diverse</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philadelphia total</td>
<td>633</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seattle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian Pacific Islander</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diverse</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seattle total</td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Source: American Community Survey, summary file, 2000 and 2005-09
Figure 2-15. Household diversity of block groups, three cities, 2005-09

a) Baltimore

Source: American Community Survey, summary file 2005-09
b) Philadelphia

Source: American Community Survey, summary file 2005-09
c) Seattle

Source: American Community Survey, summary file 2005-09
Table 2-9. Cultural assets of census block groups, three cities, 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Resident artists</th>
<th>Resident artists within 1/4 mile</th>
<th>Commercial cultural firms</th>
<th>Commercial cultural firms within 1/4 mile</th>
<th>Nonprofit cultural resources</th>
<th>Nonprofit cultural resources within 1/4 mile</th>
<th>Cultural participants per 1,000 residents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baltimore</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>5.89</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Median</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sum</td>
<td>822</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>10.92</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>8.57</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>7.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Median</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sum</td>
<td>2270</td>
<td>2049</td>
<td></td>
<td>1645</td>
<td></td>
<td>41730</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seattle</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>8.91</td>
<td>44.65</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>21.00</td>
<td>1.82</td>
<td>10.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Median</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>32.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>13.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
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<td>Sum</td>
<td>5051</td>
<td>2352</td>
<td></td>
<td>1031</td>
<td></td>
<td>5488</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SIAP
Figure 2-16. Cultural resources, Baltimore census block groups, 2010

a) Baltimore nonprofit cultural resources within one-quarter mile

Source: SIAP
b) Baltimore commercial cultural firms within one-quarter mile

Source: SIAP
c) Baltimore cultural asset index 2010

Source: SIAP
Figure 2-17. Cultural resources, Philadelphia census block groups, 2010

a) Philadelphia nonprofit cultural resources within one-quarter mile

Source: SIAP
b) Philadelphia commercial cultural firms within one-quarter mile

Source: SIAP
c) Philadelphia resident artists within one-quarter mile

Source: SIAP
d) Philadelphia cultural participants per 1,000 residents

Source: SIAP
e) Philadelphia cultural asset index 2010

Legend
Census block groups
Cultural asset index 2010
Lowest
Average
Highest

Source: SIAP
Figure 2-18. Cultural resources, Seattle census block groups, 2010

a) Seattle nonprofit cultural resources within one-quarter mile

Source: SIAP
b) Seattle commercial cultural firms within one-quarter mile

Source: SIAP
c) Seattle resident artists within one-quarter mile

Source: SIAP
d) Seattle cultural asset index 2010

Source: SIAP
Table 2-10. Cultural asset index 2010 (100=citywide average), by distance from city center, three cities’ block groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distance CC (quintiles)</th>
<th>Baltimore</th>
<th>Philadelphia</th>
<th>Seattle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bottom fifth</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-39%</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-59%</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-79%</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top fifth</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SIAP
Table 2-11. Cultural asset index 2010 (100=citywide average), by per capita income 2005-2009, three cities’ block groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Per capita income 2005-09 (quintiles)</th>
<th>Baltimore</th>
<th>Philadelphia</th>
<th>Seattle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bottom fifth</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-39%</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-59%</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-79%</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top fifth</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SIAP
Table 2-12. Cultural asset index 2010 (100=citywide average), by percent of adults with a bachelor’s degree 2005-09, three cities’ block groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent of adults with at least a BA (quintiles)</th>
<th>Baltimore</th>
<th>Philadelphia</th>
<th>Seattle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bottom fifth</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-39%</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-59%</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-79%</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top fifth</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SIAP
Table 2-13. Cultural asset index 2010 (100=citywide average), by percent of labor force in professional or managerial occupations, 2005-09, three cities’ block groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent professionals and managers, 2005-09 (quintiles)</th>
<th>Baltimore</th>
<th>Philadelphia</th>
<th>Seattle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bottom fifth</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-39%</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-59%</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-79%</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top fifth</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SIAP
Table 2-14. Cultural asset index 2010 (100=citywide average), by gini coefficient of census tracts 2005-09, three cities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gini coefficient of census tract 2005-09</th>
<th>Baltimore</th>
<th>Philadelphia</th>
<th>Seattle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bottom fifth</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-39%</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-59%</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-79%</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top fifth</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SIAP
Table 2-15. Cultural asset index 2010 (100=citywide average), by change in economic diversity between 2000 and 2005-09, three cities’ block groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change in economic diversity</th>
<th>Baltimore</th>
<th>Philadelphia</th>
<th>Seattle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never economically diverse</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Became homogenous</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Became diverse</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stable diverse</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SIAP
Table 2-16. Cultural asset index 2010 (100=citywide average), by ethnic composition 2005-09, three cities’ block groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic composition</th>
<th>Baltimore</th>
<th>Philadelphia</th>
<th>Seattle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>70</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td></td>
<td>65</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diverse</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SIAP
Table 2-17. Cultural asset index 2010 (100=citywide average), by percent nonfamily households 2005-09, three cities' block groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nonfamily households, 2005-09 (quintiles)</th>
<th>Baltimore</th>
<th>Philadelphia</th>
<th>Seattle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bottom fifth</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-39%</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-59%</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-79%</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top fifth</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SIAP
Table 2-18. Cultural asset index 2010 (100=citywide average), by change in household diversity between 2000 and 2005-09, three cities’ block groups

a) Household diversity status in 2005-09

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Baltimore</th>
<th>Philadelphia</th>
<th>Seattle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not household diverse</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household diverse</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

b) Change in household diversity status between 2000 and 2005-09

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household diversity status, 2000 and 2005-09</th>
<th>Baltimore</th>
<th>Philadelphia</th>
<th>Seattle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never diverse</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Became homogeneous</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Became diverse</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diverse in both years</td>
<td>329</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SIAP
Table 2-19. Cultural asset index 2010 (100=citywide average), by percent renters 2005-09, three cities’ block groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent renters (quintiles)</th>
<th>Baltimore</th>
<th>Philadelphia</th>
<th>Seattle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bottom fifth</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-39%</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-59%</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-79%</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top fifth</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SIAP
Figure 2-19. Relationship of percent renters and per capita income, Seattle block groups, 2005-09

Source: American Community Survey summary file 2005-2009
Table 2-20. Cultural asset index 2010 (100=citywide average), by adjusted percent renters 2005-2009, three cities’ block groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjusted percent renters 2005-09</th>
<th>Baltimore</th>
<th>Philadelphia</th>
<th>Seattle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bottom fifth</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-39%</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-59%</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-79%</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top fifth</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SIAP

Note: Adjusted percent renters is the residual of the regression of per capita income on percent renters for the three cites’ block groups.
Table 2-21. General linear equation analysis, partial eta-squares, three cities’ block groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Baltimore</th>
<th>Philadelphia</th>
<th>Seattle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percent nonfamily households</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>0.019</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent with at least BA</td>
<td>0.013</td>
<td>0.029</td>
<td>0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per capita income</td>
<td>0.012</td>
<td>0.038</td>
<td>0.039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance from downtown</td>
<td>0.057</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted percent rent</td>
<td>0.008</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic composition</td>
<td>0.019</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>0.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in household diversity</td>
<td>0.107</td>
<td>0.051</td>
<td>0.003</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SIAP

Note: shaded squares are statistically significant.
Chapter 3. Baltimore: Station North and Highlandtown-Patterson Park

This chapter presents findings for the two case study districts in Baltimore—Station North and Highlandtown-Patterson Park. These districts illuminate the diversity of “natural” cultural districts with respect to character and evolution as well as reputation. Station North, long a blighted industrial district north of downtown, is viewed as a location with many cultural assets that have underperformed in the past. As part of the Charles Street axis, the district is highly visible and has attracted sustained interest from many of the most important institutions in the city. In contrast, Highlandtown-Patterson Park is generally regarded as a dynamic community but less significant as a cultural district. It lies far to the east of downtown in neighborhoods that have experienced neither profound decline nor rapid improvement.

What unites Station North and Highlandtown is that both won designation by the state of Maryland as an arts and entertainment district. In both cases, designation validated grassroots activity by artists, nonprofit groups, and cultural entrepreneurs. State designation carries with it a set of tax benefits of which, to the best of our knowledge, virtually no one in Baltimore has taken advantage. Yet, the designation is important to the districts in two ways. It is a rallying point for mobilization of the community around an arts-based identity, which can help draw regional resources and visitors. At the same time, it confers on both districts the challenge of managing expectations. State designation may improve the chance of success, but it also raises the fear of failure.

The modest financial benefit of arts district designation stands in sharp contrast to many other initiatives occurring in the city while this study was occurring. Healthy Neighborhoods has raised and invested 40 million dollars in mortgage and home improvements in fifteen Baltimore neighborhoods over the past decade. The Central Baltimore Partnership—discussed in more detail in the Station North section of this chapter—has worked to bring 200 million dollars to the area. The East Baltimore Development Initiative—a billion dollar partnership led by Johns Hopkins University—has relocated the former residents of a large swath of East Baltimore with the hope of
turning the area into a vibrant place to live and work. Finally, Living Cities—a national collaboration of philanthropies and financial institutions—picked Baltimore in 2010 to receive significant funding to link development, jobs, and public transit hubs.¹

The chapter is organized in three sections. The first section provides a statistical overview of the two cultural districts. Following are two separate sections on the development, current status, and future issues facing Station North and Highlandtown-Patterson Park.

Case Study Districts

The two Baltimore case studies—Station North and Highlandtown-Patterson Park—represent different types of cultural districts, both in terms of their social geography and cultural ecology. This section highlights the significant characteristics of each district and how each fits into the city’s mosaic.

Each of these districts is a state-designated arts and entertainment district and, as a result, has an official set of boundaries.

Figure 3-1. Boundaries of Highlandtown Arts and Entertainment District

The southeast corner of the district, east of South Haven St, is the Crown Cork & Seal complex in Greektown.

In both cases, however, the research team has chosen to focus on the area within the district with the clearest arts and cultural identity. In the case of Highlandtown-Patterson Park, this includes Patterson Park itself and the neighborhoods immediately north (Baltimore-Linwood)\(^2\) and east (Highlandtown) of the park. In the case of Station North, our study area is census tract 1205, which is bounded by the railroad tracks, Howard Street, North Avenue, and Greenmount Cemetery.

---

\(^2\) In recent years, Baltimore-Linwood has also been identified as Patterson Park neighborhood.
In order to provide the historical context for the recent development of these two cultural districts, we compiled census data for the tracts that encompass them. Unfortunately, in the case of Highlandtown-Patterson Park, the match between the definition of neighborhoods and tract boundaries is not perfect. After considerable experimentation, we decided to include six census tracts in our definition of the district. As the above map shows, this definition of the district includes several city blocks to the north and south of the conventional neighborhood boundaries in a way that may skew the analysis. The blocks to the north of the neighborhood are likely to be poorer and less white than the district and those to the south are likely to be more affluent.

In Station North, our task was more straightforward. The official district includes portions of three neighborhoods—Greenmount West, Charles North, and Barclay—but our fieldwork indicated that virtually all of the cultural activity in the district is focused on or south of North Avenue. In particular, we identified three foci of activity: North Avenue between Howard and Charles Streets, Charles Street between Penn Station and North Avenue, and the eastern section of Greenmount West. The North Avenue

![Figure 3-4. Station North district with hubs of arts activity](image)
cluster is anchored by the Load of Fun building and the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) graduate buildings. The Charles Street cluster includes the district’s most established assets, the Charles Theater and (until Dec 2012) the Everyman Theatre. Finally, the Greenmount West cluster includes a number of artists’ residences and workspaces, including the new City Arts building, the Copy Cat building, and Area 405.

Social Geography

**Highlandtown-Patterson Park social geography**

As with many Baltimore neighborhoods, Highlandtown-Patterson Park has seen its population decline since 1950, from twenty-five to fifteen thousand people (2005-09), a 40 percent drop. The pace of the decline has slowed in recent years. The area lost more than five thousand residents between 1950 and 1970 and an additional four thousand between 1970 and 1990. Since 1990, the decline has been more modest, with loss of fewer than one thousand residents between 1990 and 2005-09. This relative stability has been accompanied by a rather startling shift in the age composition of the population. During the 1990s and early 2000s, the number of children under 15 dropped from 19 to 15 percent of the population, and the number of residents over 65 fell from 18 to 8 percent of the population. Meanwhile, the number of young adults between 25 and 44 increased by nearly one thousand or from 32 to 40 percent of the population.

For most of the period since World War II, Highlandtown was a predominantly white community. In both 1950 and 1970, 99 percent of the population was white. Even in 1990, only nine percent of the population was non-Hispanic black; that percentage increased to 27 percent by 2005-09. Since the 1990s, as the maps on Figures 3.5 and 3.6 show, the area north of Patterson Park has become increasingly African American while parts of Highlandtown now have a small African American presence.

By 1990, Highlandtown’s Hispanic population became prominent, increasing from one to two percent between 1970 and 1990. Between 1990 and 2005-09, the growth of the Hispanic population accelerated, reaching 16 percent of the population. A significant share of this growth was due to immigrants, who increased from five to 18 percent of the population between 2000 and 2005-09. As the maps on Figures 3.7 and 3.8 show, much of the immigrant and Latino concentrations were in the Baltimore-Linwood neighborhood to the north of the park.

---

3 The Load of Fun building closed temporarily in August 2012, due to citation for zoning violations, while the owner makes plans for renovations—displacing Single Carrot Theatre and “some 40 other arts groups, galleries, and small businesses.” Everyman Theatre relocated in January 2013 to downtown Baltimore’s west side in the newly designated Bromo Tower Arts and Entertainment District.
Figure 3-5. Percent Non-Hispanic black, Highlandtown-Patterson Park, 1980
Source: Social Explorer

Figure 3-6. Percent Non-Hispanic black, Highlandtown-Patterson Park, 2005-09
Source: Social Explorer
Figure 3-7. Percent Hispanic, Highlandtown-Patterson Park, 2005-09  
Source: Social Explorer

Figure 3-8. Percent foreign-born, Highlandtown-Patterson Park, 2006-10  
Source: Social Explorer
During these years, the educational attainment of the neighborhoods’ adult population increased rapidly. In 1970, only 15 percent of the population had finished high school, and an additional three percent had some college experience. By 1990, high school graduates had increased to 26 percent, and an additional 17 percent had some college. The educational profile of the population changed again after 1990. Where only seven percent of the 1990 population had a bachelor’s degree or more; by 2005-09, 28 percent had attained at least a college degree, including 11 percent with a professional or graduate degree.

By the early 21st century, reflecting both national trends and patterns in cultural clusters, Highlandtown-Patterson Park was no longer a predominantly family neighborhood. After holding steady at between 25 and 31 percent of the adult population, by 2005-09 the never-married constituted 47 percent of the neighborhood’s adult residents. As a result, the proportion of family households fell from 64 to 52 percent of all households.

Relative to many Baltimore neighborhoods, the housing situation in Highlandtown-Patterson Park remained fairly stable even as the population changed radically. Vacancy rates increased steadily, although not as much as in other sections of the city.

ACS 2005-2009 Block Group - % Vacant Housing Units

Figure 3-9. Percent vacant housing units, Highlandtown-Patterson Park, 2005-09
Source: Social Explorer
In 1970, four percent of housing units were vacant; this number increased to eight percent by 1990 and to 22 percent by 2005-09. Meanwhile, among occupied units, the ownership rate declined steadily, falling from 73 percent in 1950 to 63 percent in 2005-09. The Baltimore-Linwood neighborhood to the north of the park saw the largest concentration of vacancies, but large sections of Highlandtown too experienced vacancy rates in the 30 and 40 percent range. As we’ll note below, tensions between homeowners and absentee landlords (especially those accepting Section 8 vouchers) have been a major flashpoint in the neighborhood north of Patterson Park.

**Station North social geography**

The Station North district, In contrast to Highlandtown-Patterson Park, experienced a profound decline in population during the last half of the twentieth century. In 1950 nearly seven thousand people lived in the census tract that constitutes the core of the district. Twenty years later, its population had declined by more than three thousand; between 1970 and 1990, an additional 1,400 people left the area. Since 1990, the area has experienced a small revival, with its population climbing from 2,298 to 2,500.

![Figure 3-10. Population change, Baltimore, 2000 to 2005-09](image)

**Legend**

- Baltimore case study neighborhoods
- Populated block groups
- Population change 2000 to 2005-09
  - Loss more than 243
  - Loss 130-242
  - Loss 46-129
  - Loss less than 45
  - Gained 121
  - Gained 121-268
  - Gained more than 268

The core of the population decline was associated with an explosion in vacant housing. In 1950 only six percent of dwellings were vacant. By 1970 that number had increased
to 16 percent, which was only the beginning of a spiral that continued through 2005-09, when 40 percent of the dwellings in the district were vacant. This explosion of vacancy was accompanied by a decline in the total number of dwellings. As a result, the number of occupied dwellings fell from 1,406 in 1950 to only 701 by 2005-09.

Yet not all social indicators for the district moved in a single direction. The percent of residents who were African American rose from 39 percent in 1950 to 88 percent in 1990. Between 1990 and 2005-09, however, the black share of the residential population fell to 66 percent.

The age structure of Station North suggests considerable change in its composition. The number of children (under 15 years of age) declined from 27 percent in 1970, to 24 percent in 1990, and to 19 percent in 2005-09. The older population waivered from nine percent in 1970, to seven percent in 1990, and up to 10 percent in 2005-09. The young adult population (25 to 34 years of age) rose sharply during the 1970s and 1980s, but fell from 25 to 18 percent between 1990 and 2005-09. Between these last two counts, a notable increase among college-aged residents (18 to 24 years), from 12 to 17 percent, suggests that students and alumni from the adjacent colleges (MICA and the University of Baltimore) may be residing in the district in increasing numbers.

Figure 3-11. Change in non-Hispanic black population, Baltimore, 2000 to 2005-09
Source: US Census
At the same time that college-aged residents are increasing, the educational attainment of the adult population (those over 25) has also increased. In 1970, less than two percent were college graduates. This percentage increased to six percent by 1990 and to 22 percent by 2005-09. The rise in average educational attainment among district residents, however, hid a troubling split. Non-Hispanic white residents of the district were predominantly college graduates. Fifty-eight percent of male and 67 percent of female non-Hispanic whites had earned a bachelor’s degree or more. However, among African American residents, only nine percent of males and six percent of females had earned a college degree.

The image of a split community was reinforced by data on geographic mobility. Among residents without a high-school degree in 2005-09, the vast majority had lived in the same house a year earlier. Among the more educated stratum of the neighborhood, the majority had lived elsewhere in the previous year.

Finally, the poverty rate of the district fell between 1990 and 2005-09, from 50 to 40 percent, but still remains extremely high by any measure. The presence of a large population of students and recent graduates, however, may have contributed to an underestimate of the actual improvement in the economic standing of residents.

Figure 3-12. Percent of population living in poverty, Baltimore, 2005-09
Source: US Census
Cultural Ecology

Although the two districts share official status as designated arts and entertainment districts, they differ greatly in their cultural ecology as well as their relationship to Baltimore’s arts and development communities. Station North is widely recognized as an emerging arts district with regional institutional support. Highlandtown-Patterson Park, on the other hand, is often described as marginal, both geographically and culturally, with only the presence of the Cultural Alliance at the Patterson giving it visibility within the city.

Yet, as is often the case, these perceptions do not fully reflect the realities on the ground. In both districts arts and culture have been integral to community mobilization and development. The contrasting character of revitalization reflects their different neighborhood histories and external support afforded under the aegis of arts district. Highlandtown-Patterson Park, in particular, encompasses cultural resources that are less visible to the outsider and, to some degree, less integrated into the mainstream arts scene of Baltimore city.

Highlandtown-Patterson Park cultural ecology

Cultural resources in Highlandtown-Patterson Park, in contrast to Station North, do not tend to cluster in particular locations. Indeed, this relative lack of density contributes to the perception that not much is happening in the district. In fact, each of the district’s three neighborhoods—Patterson Park, Highlandtown, and Baltimore-Linwood—has its own mix of cultural resources. The overall cultural asset index (CAI) for Patterson Park is 143 (a figure of 100 = citywide average), well above average; while Highlandtown, with a figure of 102 is just about average for the city. Baltimore-Linwood, in contrast, has a cultural asset index of only 59, putting it below that of most of the city. When we take into consideration Highlandtown-Patterson Park’s distance from downtown and socio-economic status, however, the cultural assets of the study district were more impressive. The corrected CAI for Patterson Park and Highlandtown were nearly identical (115 and 116). Baltimore-Linwood’s figure of 99 was equal to that for the city as a whole. Because urban neighborhoods differ so much in size, we compare their specific cultural assets by expressing them as a rate (per 1,000 residents). By this measure, Patterson Park had the highest concentration of resident artists (10 per thousand) and nonprofit organizations (.56 per thousand). Baltimore-Linwood, surprisingly, was the leader in commercial firms with five (1.0 per thousand).

The following maps provide a detailed view of the location of commercial cultural firms, nonprofit cultural organizations, resident artists, and the three asset indexes combined for each of the two districts. Highlandtown-Patterson Park’s commercial

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4 For analysis of cultural asset data, we use the definition of the three neighborhoods rather than the census tract boundaries. The cultural asset index aggregates data on three types of assets—nonprofit organizations, commercial firms, and resident artists—by block group (6-8 city blocks). See discussion in Chapter 2, Social Geography and Cultural Ecology (7-8).
cultural sector is more significant than its nonprofit cultural sector, although Highlandtown’s sole chartered nonprofit organization—Creative Alliance at the Patterson—is an important driver of its cultural district. The maps also show that the district has a moderately high concentration of all cultural assets, with several block groups having asset scores more than 50 percent above the citywide average and others between 50 and 150 percent.

Figure 3-13. Baltimore cultural asset index, nonprofit arts organizations, and commercial cultural firms, 2010
Source: SIAP
Baltimore-Linwood is home to a significant concentration of artists in the district, a legacy perhaps of past efforts by the Patterson Park Community Development Corporation. Indeed, despite the neighborhoods’ diverse socio-economic profiles, artists are concentrated on all sides of Patterson Park.

Figure 3-14. Baltimore resident artists, 2010
Source: SIAP

**Station North cultural ecology**

Station North has a much higher concentration of cultural assets than Highlandtown-Patterson Park. Charles North’s cultural asset index (466) is among the highest in Baltimore city, more than four times the citywide average. According to SIAP’s 2010 inventories, the area was home to 12 nonprofit cultural organizations and 19 commercial cultural firms. Expressed as a rate, these translate into 8.9 nonprofits and 14.1 commercial cultural firms per thousand residents. In addition, we identified 35 artists living in the neighborhood—25.9 per thousand residents.

Greenmount West also has an impressive cultural asset index (351), but the composition of the neighborhood’s cultural resources is quite different. Greenmount has relatively few institutional assets; only three nonprofit groups and one commercial cultural firm were included in our citywide inventory. These translate into 1.8
nonprofits and 0.6 commercial firms per thousand residents. However, the neighborhood has one of the highest concentrations of resident artists in the city. Seventy-one artists were identified in the district, or 42.6 artists per thousand residents.

The Barclay neighborhood is the least culturally active of the three neighborhoods that comprise the Station North district. Yet, this perception is relative to the very intense concentration of assets in the other two neighborhoods. In fact, Barclay’s cultural asset index of 243 indicates that its concentration of assets is more than twice the citywide average. The neighborhood is home to 31 artists, 12.5 per thousand residents, more than three times the citywide average of 3.9 per thousand. Its 2010 inventory also included one nonprofit cultural organization and six commercial cultural firms—0.4 and 2.4 per thousand residents, respectively. This latter figure may be a bit misleading; as the map suggests, most of these resources are located on the perimeter of the neighborhood.

Figure 3-15. Corrected cultural asset index, Baltimore, 2010
Source: SIAP
Station North’s Evolution as a Cultural District

The industrial and commercial area north of Pennsylvania Station in Baltimore—now known as Station North—has suffered a long decline in its functional importance to the city. Once a transportation hub at the center of an industrial port city, the northern part of central Baltimore has been disproportionately blighted by the deindustrialization and depopulation that has plagued the city since the 1950s. Baltimore’s April 1968 riots, in the wake of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., proved to be a watershed event in the downfall of North Avenue as a commercial corridor and the perception of the area as unsafe.

The landscape of Station North is characterized in bleak terms—depopulation, decline, devastation, disinvestment, and devaluation. Because Baltimore is not a transit city, many note, even the property around Amtrak’s Penn Station has been devalued. The revival of downtown Baltimore, beginning with the opening of Harborplace in 1980 and centered on the Inner Harbor, reinforced the marginality of Penn Station and environs.

North Avenue—a major east-west roadway that once connected but now divides many Baltimore neighborhoods—remained shrouded in its perception as a no-man’s-land. However, the once prestigious Charles Street continued to function as the primary north-south corridor connecting the Inner Harbor with suburban communities.

Central Baltimore developers describe Station North’s decline—and revival—in the context of the redevelopment phases of this corridor, from the Inner Harbor and Mount Vernon to the south and extending to Charles Village, Johns Hopkins University, and older suburbs to the north.

In 2000 “the Inner Harbor was OK, and the suburbs were OK.” But between the Inner Harbor and the suburbs was a 2 ½-mile weak area. The founding of the Midtown Development Corporation in 2000, with its One-stop Shop for new homeowners and renovators, has resulted in the renovation of over 100 buildings and increased property values in Mount Vernon and other Midtown neighborhoods.5

Around 2005 Johns Hopkins University, “after decades of focusing only on campus,” began to take an interest in Charles Village, the neighborhood adjacent to its Homewood campus.6 Undergraduate population had nearly doubled since 1987, and it was time to consider the off-campus and community needs of its students. By 2010 and the area surrounding the university “went from shabby genteel to nouveau riche.” Overall, Charles Village has increased in density, housing, and interesting retail.

5 Midtown Development Corporation, development arm of the Midtown Community Benefits District. [midtowndevelopment.org/about/]

In this context, developers typically refer Station North as “the hole in the doughnut.” Redevelopment is a challenge. Residential areas have been afflicted with poverty, drugs, and gangs. North Avenue entertainment and nightlife venues beckon patrons alongside transvestite prostitution. But while North Avenue for many is still taboo, “people are willing to go to Charles Street, even though it’s devastated.” With the Charles Theatre, the city’s oldest movie house and now art house and five-screen multiplex, the Everyman Theatre, and Tapas Teatro Cafe—Charles Street was identified as “the way to get a foothold with the arts.” Besides, the presence of the Maryland Institute College of Arts (MICA), on the other side of the tracks, for decades has spawned up-and-coming artists willing to occupy the district’s ample supply of vacant factories and warehouses.

In this section, we describe the evolution of Station North as a cultural district in four phases: grassroots mobilization, arts district designation, institutional mobilization, and arts district management.

**Grassroots mobilization**

Since the 1950s, the social landscape of Station North had been dominated by poor residents coping with drugs, gangs, and prostitution. However, over the years, the area also evolved as a funky entertainment and underground artists’ district.

**North Avenue and Charles Street**

“Baltimore natives did not recognize Station North as an arts district. But over the years the area had been an entertainment area without designation.” People mentioned places like Odell’s, Baltimore Studio 54, Charles Theater—a famous ballroom and jazz club where the likes of Art Blakey played. “Lots died out after the 1968 riots. There were no more bars or restaurants, just McDonald’s, which has been there forever.”

Despite the devastating effect of the 1968 riots, a lot more than “nothing” was happening on North Avenue all those years. Center Stage continued to produce regional theater at 11 East North Avenue from 1965 through 1974, when the building was destroyed by fire. Jazz and nightclubs were active along North Avenue during the 1970s and picked up disco during the 1980s. Teens came to the area for nightclubs and dancing. Entertainment listings from a 1982 issue of *Baltimore/Washington D.C. African American* newspaper indicate the area’s regional draw.

*Baltimore/Washington African American*
Friday Plus, November 1982, page 5*
Spirited Spots—Disco Madness—Baltimore

*O’Dells, 21 E North Avenue, 752-4449*
If you came to dance, not eat, not drink, not talk, not showboat, you came to the right place. The crowd is

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young and sights are often outrageous, but the party is O’Dells function in Baltimore, and they do not disappoint.

Historic Charles Street, which divides the west and east sides of Baltimore, is associated with mainstream Baltimore culture. But North Charles Street too enjoyed a club scene over the years, as suggested by the 1982 entertainment listings.

_Baltimore/Washington African American_  
Friday Plus, November 1982, page 5  
Spirited Spots—Disco Madness—Baltimore

_The Gatsby, 1815 N Charles Street, 752-4602_  
Presently enjoying the experience of being Baltimore’s most popular club for young “upscale” blacks, The Gatsby offers an always crowded dance floor, two bars, and uninspired disco music. Live jazz upstairs if you can stand the self-imposed exclusivity the clientele up there gets into.

The Charles Theater at 1711 North Charles Street, an historic Beaux Art building originally designed as a cable car barn, has been a movie house since 1939. In 1979 the Charles became a calendar revival house and in 1999 expanded to five screening rooms and continues to run revival series and film festivals.9 In 1990 Everyman Theatre, a new resident theater company, opened nearby at 1727 North Charles St, where it has produced eclectic seasons of live professional theater through 2012.

Around 2000, on North Avenue just east of Charles Street, at 21 E North Ave in the former O’Dells nightclub, film aficionado Michael Johnson opened the Heritage Cinema House showing movies with African American themes every weekend. Next door, in September 2001, Renwick Bass opened The Shops at North & Charles, which housed an art gallery, a music shop, a jewelry store, a photographer, and a clothier—along with five vacancies. Johnson believed that image and history were the biggest barriers to bringing in more businesses and patrons.

_We have imaginary walls in this city … But some of these imaginary walls are beginning to come down. We’re getting folks from the Charles Theatre and the Everyman [three blocks around the corner on Charles Street] and they’re getting folks from us. That’s just a first step. Turning this into an arts district, that’s the big step -- if we can keep tearing down walls._10

Johnson’s heritage cinema program lasted only two years at this site. His dream was to build a theater dedicated to African American films and filmmakers, and the former nightclub was “woefully inadequate.”11 Perhaps the space was inadequate, but the location was premier. Ten years later, MICA Curatorial Practice students are discovering that many black-owned businesses and neighbors do not identify with the arts district designation. Some walls still need tearing down.

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11 Chris Kaltenbach, “Black Film Festival is Reborn in Towson,” _Baltimore Sun_ (May 1, 2003).
Greenmount West industrial district

Meanwhile, since the 1970s, in Greenmount West near Penn Station, artists and students had been working and living in vacant industrial buildings, former factories and warehouses. Industrial lofts were used as studios as well as living space, although residing in an industrial district was illegal. Buildings were not up to code, but space was cheap and accessible, especially for MICA students and alumni. (For example, eight people could share a 2,000 square-foot loft for $2,000 a month.)

Copy Cat Building at 1501 Guilford Ave and The Annex at 409 E Oliver St—In the late 1970s, Charles Lankford bought the five-story brick industrial warehouse at 1501 Guilford Ave, built in the 1890s for the Crown Cork & Seal Company. Lankford initially continued to lease to a variety of light-industrial tenants.

After a while we decided, as an experiment, to take one floor and convert it into artist studios, since we were so close to [Maryland Institute College of Art]. ... Over time, everybody started 'cheating'—instead of renting an apartment and a studio, they would save money by living in their studios. ¹²

The site became known as the Copy Cat Building, named after the Copy Cat Printing Company billboard that stood on its roof for years. In 1983 Lankford purchased another industrial building at 409 E Oliver St, which he also converted to artists’ studios, and called it The Annex.

Cork Factory, 1601 Guilford Avenue at Federal Street—In the mid-1990s urban activist and artist Dennis Livingston and partners paid $200,000 for a 19th century structure built for the Crown Cork and Seal Company, which they called the Cork Factory. The plan was to buy the building for artists, who would own the building cooperatively and each would fix up their own space. Livingston’s death in September 2011 was an occasion to remember his activism as an artist, his bountiful energy, and vast experience—all a part of the grassroots underpinnings of Station North.

‘He was always happiest wearing a tool belt or designing a graphic presentation of complex ideas,’ said Ron Halbright, a co-worker at Jobs in Energy. ‘Dennis was a unique combination of community, environmental and labor visionary, hands-on master carpenter and trainer and day-to-day neighborhood activist.’ ¹³

405 E Oliver Street and Area 405—In February 2001 five “urban artists/would-be rehobbers” formed a partnership with the goal to own an affordable building. Their plan to purchase the four-story factory building at 405 E Oliver St, at a price of $170,000, was more challenging than anticipated.


We went to a dozen or so financial institutions looking for financing. We had banks tell us they would not loan money for commercial property in this part of town—not for any price.

Eventually the artists got financing directly from the seller and settled on the property in March 2002. The 19th century building was built as a brewery, became an industrial equipment manufacturer, and finally a window shade factory. The vast open room, loading dock, and three-ton chain hoists attracted at least two of the artists, Jim Vose and wife Stewart Watson, who are sculptors.

These early developer-owners and artist-owners were instrumental in making the City aware of an emerging artists’ district in Station North and the barriers to its existence. Lankford, in particular, confronted city agencies regarding the legality of his buildings.

As the Copy Cat’s main demographic, artists and students, as a cost saving measure, rented studio space to practice with their bands, to paint, to sculpt, for darkrooms, etcetera, and lived in their studios. Instead of reprimanding his residents—which in itself would have been a difficult task—Lankford made it known publicly that he allowed the renters to live in their studios, that he felt they had the right to live there, and that the law was unnecessary and ineffecual.

In the fall of 2001, Copy Cat resident David Crandall—artist, editor, Towson University arts instructor—pulled together a Greenmount West and Charles North group to draft a proposal to the City for nomination as an arts district. The Station North proposal won the City’s nomination and in January 2002 was so designated by the State of Maryland. Finally, the City began to legalize loft living.

**Arts district designation**

In 2001, the City of Baltimore recognized the existing artists clusters in Greenmount West, as well as cultural and entertainment venues like The Charles and Everyman, by nominating a 100-acre area north of Penn Station—across the railroad tracks and expressway—for State designation as an arts and entertainment district. In January 2002 Station North became Baltimore’s—and Maryland’s—first official arts district. Unlike other designated arts districts in the U.S., where designation is designed to attract artists and associated activities, Station North designation validated local artists and entrepreneurs who had been working in the area for over 20 years.

The official benefits of arts district designation are state and local tax exemptions for artistic activities and availability of Maryland Department of Economic Development funding for arts and entertainment projects. However, the immediate and tangible

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14 Starting in 1999 Lankford campaigned to change the area zoning from industrial to residential, which the City determined to be illegal. “There was no mechanism to allow this type of change. You couldn’t go from industrial to residential.” He then started a campaign to get the law changed.
impact of designation was enabling the City to rezone industrial buildings in Station North for residential use. The City passed a planned unit development (PUD) ordinance allowing residential and commercial uses in the former industrial zone.\textsuperscript{15} By rezoning all industrial buildings in the district, the City legalized artists both living and working in former factories and warehouses. A planned new zone as a special mixed office-residential category allows a range of restaurant, retail, and commercial uses.

Occupied industrial buildings were the first to receive official conversion to mixed-use housing—specifically, the Copycat Building, the Cork Factory, and the Oliver Street Building. Lankford—“now working with the city, instead of against them”—completed extensive fire and safety upgrades to Copycat and the Annex to comply with City occupancy codes. Area 405 artist-owners anticipated approval by the banks, now that their building was located in an arts district zoned for residential and office use. Within a year they had completed conversion of the space into a large gallery, studios, and living spaces. The plan was to rehab the upper floors for lease to other artists.

Arts district designation triggered City concern over vacant and underused buildings in Station North. During its first year, the Mayor’s Station North Advisory Board targeted the former LeBow Clothing Factory (at Barclay and Oliver Streets, Greenmount West) for condemnation, reinvestment and redevelopment. (A year later its owner estimated that converting the factory building to a “mixed-use arts colony” would cost $15 million and not be profitable.)

During the first year, although not required to certify artists to award tax credits, the Advisory Board estimated that there were 385 artists living and/or working in the district.

Of the 385, approximately 160 are artists who live and work in the District in such locales as the Cork Factory, Copy Cat Building, Area 405, Westnorth Studio, Schuler School of Fine Arts, and artists living in street level residences. In addition, approximately 225 artists work – but do not live – in the District. This number includes artists working and studying at the Maryland Institute College of Arts’ Bank Building, Everyman Theater, Intercultural Museum Art Gallery, Cork Factory, Copy Cat Building, Area 405, and Schuler School of Fine Arts.\textsuperscript{16}

**Institutional mobilization**

Institutional initiative has been critical to the evolution of Station North as an arts district. A coordinated strategy by local institutions and external agents has cultivated the arts as part of an integrated community development initiative. “The myth is that

\textsuperscript{15} City Ordinance 03- 532, Council Bill 02-0929, effective May 9, 2003.

\textsuperscript{16} Station North Arts & Entertainment District, Year 1 (FY2003) Annual Report (August 31, 2003). During our 2010-12 fieldwork, interviewees noted the lack of data on number of working artists in Station North. To our knowledge, no one has updated this estimate. Without data on artist by category, it is not possible to assess the impact of Station North redevelopment on the out-migration, in-migration, or stability of artists in the district.
the arts are a vehicle of community revitalization. No. The arts are a component of revitalization.” Station North has been fortunate to be steered by a seasoned leadership team with extensive Baltimore experience in community organizing, community development, and “philanthropy as civic partner”.17

A decade ago, around 2000, along the Charles Street spine were three sets of neighborhoods: at the north end, the fashionable suburbs, Johns Hopkins and Charles Village; at the south end, the “cultural urban village” of Mount Vernon;18 and in between, Central Baltimore—“nothing in the middle of nowhere.” North of Penn Station was a dumping ground for everything, such as methadone clinics and other unpopular service providers. The area straddles three different service districts, so there was no City government. “No one owned it.”

During 2006 Baltimore’s Goldseker Foundation began to reassess its grantmaking along the Charles Street corridor. “We make so many grants in this area. Why is nothing happening?” Goldseker determined that, while a set of cultural organizations served as anchors, overall there were too many players working in isolation, mostly small neighborhood groups with narrow agendas. “We were being nibbled to death. Each group alone or together could stop anything. There was no coherent vision of the area.” The area north of Penn Station, in particular, was virtually devoid of investment.

University development plans

At the same time, “things were happening organically.” The Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) had taken the lead. Long responsible for the concentration of artists living in Greenmount West, MICA in recent years moved into national notoriety comparable to Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) and began to attract students from all over the US and abroad. MICA is the first art school in the U.S. with a Community Arts program (MFA or MA) and, more recently, Social Design (MA) and Curatorial Practice (MFA) programs. “For the future of the school,” says MICA President Fred Lazarus IV, “we need a strong social neighborhood around us. The school’s well-being depends on the neighborhood’s well-being.”

MICA thus began to collaborate with its neighborhood and expand into Station North. Why? MICA needed space but was limited by its location off W Mount Royal Ave in residential Bolton Hill, while the area to the north (Station North) was full of old industrial buildings. Previously, MICA had not been inclined to move in this direction because the railroad tracks and highway served as a huge physical as well as psychological barrier. But with its new focus on design, MICA was more willing to take risks.

In 2000 MICA purchased the Bank Building (former Jos A Bank Clothiers sewing factory), a 120,000 square-foot property at 131 W North Avenue, for $600,000—a good

18 In 1996 eleven local institutions formed the Mount Vernon Cultural District to coordinate efforts “to preserve the integrity of the neighborhood.” Its website has not been updated since 2009.
deal. MICA has incrementally redeveloped the site with artist and design studios to serve as its Graduate Studio Center. While under renovation, the building was open and housed five arts organizations with a lease-support arrangement—"little financial support but great in-kind support." Renovation was completed in the fall of 2012, and the Studio Center is now fully occupied by MICA.

The University of Baltimore (UB), at 1420 North Charles Street, also moved into high-growth mode during the 2000s. A state institution since 1975 and part of the University of Maryland system since 1988, UB was a regional institution and primarily commuter school and feeder for the State system. In 2006 UB was revamped as a four-year program and, with its first class of freshmen starting fall 2007, planned to double its undergraduate population over the next six to eight years. UB is constructing a new building for its School of Law at the intersection of Charles Street and Mt Royal Avenue across from Penn Station. The Law Center is scheduled to open in April 2013.

Likewise, Johns Hopkins University, having doubled its undergraduate population, has found its Homewood campus at 3400 North Charles Street to be “land-locked”. Thus the university needed to expand to the south and facilitate university life south of campus.19 With its Homewood Initiative, Johns Hopkins is now “being intentional” about engaging neighborhoods south of campus.

Integrating role of local foundations

Two local foundations with a mission to support community development (but not the arts)—Baltimore Neighborhood Collaborative (BNC) and the Goldseker Foundation—have been key agents in the integration of the arts as part of a comprehensive community development strategy for Station North. BNC is an investment intermediary linking local and national funders to community-based organizations to facilitate revitalization of Baltimore neighborhoods. Goldseker is a moderate-sized foundation with a focus on the Baltimore region.

In the early 2000s BNC began to lay the groundwork for integrated planning and investment in Station North. BNC with Surdna Foundation supported an ArtSpace study of artists’ need for affordable housing for Station North Arts & Entertainment Inc. In 2006 BNC supported a neighborhood planning process with Greenmount West and Charles North. The report, prepared by market analyst Randall Gross, outlined an action plan with four key strategies: strengthen positive image and identity; establish commercial corridors; provide housing options that attract new residents but prevent displacement of existing residents; and encourage economic development.20

Station North insiders point to “the catalytic support of the Goldseker Foundation” under the leadership of President and CEO Timothy Armbruster. The turn of the 21st

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19 For the past decade, Johns Hopkins University has been active in East Baltimore, where it plans to build bio-science research facilities. East Baltimore Development Inc. (EBDI) was founded in 2003 to manage redevelopment of 31 acres of East Baltimore neighborhoods for redevelopment as a science and technology park for the university.

century was a time of transition for the Foundation and an opportunity to change course. Essentially, the Foundation shifted from a traditional grant-making *modus operandi*—“asking the community to bring things”—to a community investment approach. Armbruster invoked two guiding principles: first, the foundation’s mandate, in the spirit of founder Morris Goldseker, is to put money back into Baltimore neighborhoods; and, second, a private foundation is a very flexible resource, so it must have its own agenda. Upon review of its portfolio and assessment of 35 neighborhoods, the Foundation decided to invest more resources in fewer places and make deeper long-term investments. Also they decided to leverage Foundation funds and influence. “Once we decided where we want to invest, we would try to get co-investors.”

Goldseker decided to target the Charles Street spine—in particular, the neglected neighborhoods east and west of Charles Street and north of Penn Station—for coherent community development. “There was energy bubbling up in the neighborhood but not in any planful way.”

Armbruster’s first step was to recruit key institutional players, senior people from the three major educational institutions (MICA, UB, and Johns Hopkins)—“to get them thinking more broadly, to fold a bigger view into their development plans.” He also recruited veteran community organizer Joe McNeely to help forge a collaborative, a partnership, from the diverse group of interests and organizations.

Phase One was reconnaissance, McNeely talking with 50-60 people, which “identified an appetite for a larger inclusion vision for the area.” Phase Two was to convene 15-20 people and facilitate a meeting series with the agenda to agree on a short list of things to do to make the neighborhood better. The strategy was “enabling people to see a common vision, that they are not laboring alone, that there is potential for a common synergy. We wanted people to see the need for a fusion of political, financial, and human capital.” The convenings resulted in development of task force groups around five goals: commercial development, public safety, code enforcement, sanitation, and housing.

The group now had a common agenda, so it was time for a name and a structure. They decided to become “a virtual community development organization” called Central Baltimore Partnership. The plan was to stay small and build capacity for local community organizations but not compete with existing groups for funding or resources. Goldseker Foundation hired McNeely as an independent contractor, and Greater Homewood Community Corporation served as the back office.

Central Baltimore Partnership also worked to engage the public sector. The “Mayor’s Central Baltimore Initiative,” though only an appendix to the new mayor’s position, proved important to getting the Mayor’s Office and government agencies on board. Once the Central Baltimore Partnership was formed, McNeely required executive

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21 During the 1990s, Tim Armbruster had served as part-time CEO of Baltimore Community Foundation and increased its assets from $9 million to $100 million, part of Goldseker’s long-term plan.
participation. Requiring commissioners—not their subordinates—to attend meetings assured that decisions could be translated into action.

Over a five-year period, Goldseker has gradually reduced support of Central Baltimore Partnership and worked to bring in new investors and co-investors “so that the plan would have a life of its own and not be a Goldseker Foundation project.” But Armbruster is not hands-off. He decided to pull in Jubilee Baltimore, an established nonprofit developer and neighborhood planner, and President Charlie Duff to be the Partnership’s development arm—*de facto* “housing commissioner of Central Baltimore.” Jubilee Baltimore has already completed construction City Arts, affordable rental housing for artists. Early in 2012 Jubilee purchased the abandoned Centre Theater at 10 East North Avenue envisioning “this derelict structure ... as a future centerpiece for the growing midtown arts district.”

The Partnership’s capacity has expanded incrementally. Garland Thomas came in initially as community organizer, working directly with local community organizations. As Deputy Director responsible for fundraising and operations, Thomas supervises VISTA and Public Ally (a University of Maryland social work student) workers as well as staff community planner (a former VISTA worker).

Baltimore Neighborhood Collaborative continues to serve as an intermediary connecting local leaders with national funders, especially important during the recession. Of particular benefit have been connections with Ford and Surdna and with Living Cities, which in 2010 awarded funding to Baltimore for its Integration Initiative. BNC targets a portion of its transit-centered community development investments (Living Cities fund) to the Central Baltimore neighborhoods north of Penn Station (Station North) via annual grants to Central Baltimore Partnership and Jubilee Baltimore, as follows:

- **Central Baltimore Partnership**—Towards implementation of a comprehensive community development strategy within Central Baltimore including promoting transit-oriented development, increasing housing opportunities for different income levels, insuring economic opportunity for low income residents and preventing or mitigating the displacement impact of market-oriented reinvestment.

- **Jubilee Baltimore**—To support implementation of mixed-income, mixed-use development in Greenmount West and Station North.

**Central Baltimore Partnership—a new community development model**

Central Baltimore Partnership (CBP) is not a centralized organization but rather an enabler of its member partners. The Central Baltimore Partnership has 25 member

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22 Jacques Kelly, “Former theater seen as a centerpiece for Baltimore arts district,” *Baltimore Sun*, (February 6, 2012).

23 See Baltimore Neighborhood Collaborative website at bncbaltimore.org re initiatives/grants.
organizations and institutions and seven city agencies “working on a common action agenda.” The partnership represents an alliance among community leaders, higher educational institutions, community developers, neighborhood and community associations, private property owners, nonprofits organizations and government agencies.

The bold vision is sustainable: it calls for a market oriented development process shaped by community goals and values, driven by private investment and environmentally friendly and restorative to the max.24

Central Baltimore Partnership represents a new model of how to do community development work, from the bottom-up, not like a traditional community development corporation (CDC). The traditional CDC model, common from the 1960s to the 1980s, was about training new leaders. CBP is rather a facilitator of its partner organizations toward a common goal of market-oriented investment. CBP’s success has been the nature of the collaboration—public and private, institutional and non-institutional.

This new partner model seeks to be different and sustainable. All funds raised— all moneys—go to the partner organizations. An early lesson for the Partnership was the importance of trust.

Who is the honest convener when people don’t trust each other? When the police commissioner chairs a task force, different people come. You have to stop a meeting if there is an issue of trust. FIRST you need to develop trusting relationships. THEN you can get to the content of the meeting and DO something.

A key part of the strategy has been to incorporate community organizing as part of planning. Neighborhood organizations want action not planning. They want to DO something. The five task force groups—public safety, housing, sanitation, commercial development, code enforcement—have been active and working since their start-up in 2006. Each task force is co-chaired and managed by one of the partners. Currently the Partnership is working to implement a sixth task force on workforce development.

At the center is a comprehensive community development strategy of which the arts are part, but only a part. The focus is on neighborhood revitalization. The Partnership works simultaneously to advance multiple agendas—the arts and entertainment agenda is on a parallel track with that of the member neighborhood organizations. Otherwise the plan would not work, and the community would not support the arts.

The Partnership process has become increasingly strategic: organize, action, plan, and money. The main challenge has been financing for development. Its difficult to get seed capital—cash—for development projects. “We can’t get loans, especially for little projects. This kind of development is under-the-radar and financed out-of-pocket. The danger is that once it’s over-the-radar, we will have to conform to a set of rules.” One new source of funds has been state Community Legacy grants, on average $300-

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$500,000 awards. The Partnership makes joint applications and tries to get three to four groups funded a year.

Currently, a key focus of the Partnership is on engaging Johns Hopkins University and the neighborhoods to the north. Looking forward its challenge is the sustainability of the Partnership in the post community-building/community-organizing phase. How do we keep the collaboration from becoming derailed? The Partnership is NOT building around projects—the issue is not IF we do it, but HOW we do it. The strength of the Partnership is “sustainable relationships.”

In April 2012 at the first National Symposium on Arts, Cultural and Entertainment Districts in Baltimore, MICA president Fred Lazarus IV reflected on Station North district designation—the importance of branding. “State designation of Station North created a brand destination, but the tax incentives were not a driving force. Planning was going nowhere; there was no momentum, no critical mass. The negative forces were stronger than the positive.” Of necessity the arts and entertainment have had to become part of a comprehensive development strategy—which is credited with nearly $500 million of “organic investment” in Station North over the past five years.

**Arts district management—Station North Arts & Entertainment Inc**

Initially, Baltimore Office of Promotion and the Arts (BOPA) had planned to hire an arts district administrator, “a point person on issues from tax abatements to plans for a block party.” That didn’t happen. Around 2005 community members formed a 501c3 nonprofit organization called Station North Arts & Entertainment Inc (SNAE) to manage the arts district. Station North Inc.’s goals are proactive with respect to making the district an artists’ and arts destination. SNAE’s mission statement reads:

> By promoting and supporting artists and cultural organizations in the District, Station North Arts & Entertainment, Inc. seeks to create a vibrant neighborhood where arts, artists and entertainment venues flourish in the midst an economically diverse community with an abundance of healthy residential, retail and commercial offerings.25

Supporting activities include: “marketing, branding, and getting the word out; supporting young entrepreneurs who take risks; and changing the perception of North Avenue, which is stuck in public eye as unsafe since the riots of the late 1960s.” Publicity and media coverage for what Baltimoreans consider a desolate district has been a marked accomplishment. “Four years ago [2006] there

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25 Station North Arts and Entertainment Inc website: stationnorth.org.
were four venues and no media coverage. Now [2010] there are 14 venues, lots of local media, and we just got coverage by the New York Times in its Sunday Travel section.”

Station North Inc. functions as an umbrella organization for multiple neighborhood associations and businesses. An important value of the Station North designation is as “a real estate brand.” The name gives the area its own identity—not “South Charles North or North Mount Vernon” —that is tied to the arts. Station North Inc. attributes the district’s incremental progress to its support of informal arts and entrepreneurs.

We represent artists and arts venues, including eating and drinking establishments—like the Arts Café—and other places where artists gather. The strength of the district is making spaces with multiple uses—the concept of a multi-purpose venue. For example, Joe Squared is a restaurant, gallery, music venue (5-6 nights a week) and bar. Metro Gallery is a gallery with monthly exhibits that also has a stage (for live music, spoken word, and film screenings) and a liquor license. Hexagon is an artists’ collective (but not a 501c3) that runs as an independent music venue, with collective performances ($5 cover charge), and uses its lobby as a gallery.

The concept has worked ... thanks to young entrepreneurs and the fact that none are formal [501c3] nonprofits. There are two 501c3 theater companies in the district; they do theatre and occasionally rent out space.

Because many district venues are active evenings and late nights, Station North Inc. has focused on daytime and weekend activities that attract a range of age and social groups. The strategy has been broad, “bottom-up” programming that draws many people into the district to come and experience, free of cost—for example, a monthly Flea Market, from May to September, on North Avenue; special events like a music festival, Saturday 12-8 PM, with bands and skateboard ramps; and Second Saturdays, when Station North Inc. paid

Final Friday September 2012
Station North 10-Year Anniversary Celebration
Photo: stationnorth.org/photos/

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27 Hexagon Space, a volunteer-run gallery and performance space at 1825 North Charles St (former Lo-Fi Social Club), opened in 2009 and closed in May 2012 (“LOST LEASE”).
venues to make their programs free to the public; and, starting in October 2011, Final Fridays, evenings from 5 - 8 PM.

Artscape Baltimore 2012, summer in Station North
Photo: stationnorth.org/photos/

The biggest boost to expanding cultural participation in Station North has been Baltimore’s ArtScape—“the nation’s largest free arts festival”—an annual summer festival held at MICA and now Station North. BOPA, ArtScape’s producer, estimates its draw at 350,000 people a year over three days and calls it Baltimore’s most inclusive cultural event. In 2008 the festival expanded into Station North, with a move from Mount Royal Avenue up Charles Street to Lafayette. In 2012 the festival expanded for the first time onto North Avenue. Lobbying by Station North Inc. and local artists has enabled Station North to co-host “this fabulous urban arts festival.”

In July 2011 Station North Inc with four partners—the Station North Arts and Design Coalition—received a $150,000 NEA Our Town grant “to revitalize Station North through art and design.” MICA is the leading partner with SNAE, Central Baltimore Partnership, Baltimore Office of Promotion & the Arts (BOPA), and D-center Baltimore, a cross-disciplinary design collaboration. The NEA award has enabled Station North Inc to boost its events and projects—Final Fridays, Open Walls Baltimore, and National Symposium on Arts/Cultural/Entertainment Districts, and D center. The NEA grant goals—“demonstrate that the arts create economic viability in marginal neighborhoods” and “maintain and grow the audience for Station North venues and artists”—allude to the tension of arts-based redevelopment between economic prosperity and inclusion (of artists and entertainers as well as residents and patrons).

Open Walls Baltimore was a Station North mural project was developed by an international street artist and MICA graduate, Gaia, with the support of Station North
Inc. and PNC Bank. Neighborhood revitalization goals were to activate vacant spaces and vacant buildings in Station North and to get people to wander down streets rarely visited.\textsuperscript{28} Artist-curator Gaia saw the project as a “museum for street art” connecting Baltimore with the international world of underground street art. SNAE director Ben Stone believes the $100,000 Open Walls project yields a high return on investment.

“... People always notice murals being painted because they’re big and bright and happening outdoors.” ... Stone points out that the murals are a comparatively cheap way to draw attention to the city and the district. “There’s millions of dollars of work going on to open up the Chesapeake, the new restaurant down the street [at the corner of Lanvale and Charles streets], and no one’s really talking about that,” he says. “And then someone paints a mural and you spend $1,000—even less in some cases—and it gets international press.”

Over two months, from March to May 2012, 29 street artists created 23 murals and installations throughout the district (see site map below). Open Walls events ranged from artists’ talks and community potlucks, to walking and bike tours, to a Final Friday Grand Finale with Dan Deacon.

Station North Inc membership in the Central Baltimore Partnership has been important to the integration of the arts as part of the community development coalition. Arts representatives “sit at the table” with other essential service providers. “It’s a genuine partnership with a lot of people, [each] with a unique focus, working on the same big picture.” The NEA grant has helped boost Station North Inc’s stature within the partnership. As observed by Baker Fund executive director Melissa Warlow: \textsuperscript{29}

Probably the Partnership has provided much of the social and development context in which Station North Inc. operates. But I believe that it is the arts community and the promise of the arts to attract cultural audiences and

\textsuperscript{28} Andrea Appleton, “Wall-to-Wall: Murals by street artists from around the world now occupy Station North,” Baltimore City Paper (May 9, 2012). See also: http://openwallsbaltimore.com.

\textsuperscript{29} The William G. Baker, Jr. Memorial Fund supports Baltimore’s artists and cultural providers and established the Baker Artist Awards to recognize Baltimore area artists.
resident artists that have driven a large part of the investment agenda. Perhaps I am dazzled by recent programming, but I believe that Station North Inc activities go beyond just brand into the realm of public safety and neighborhood revitalization.

With Station North Inc board of directors’ new strategic plan and NEA support, “Station North is poised to begin its second decade as a state-designated arts district on an extremely positive foot.”

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Open Walls Baltimore, March – May 2012, mural sites and artists

Map credit: “Murals by street artists from around the world now occupy Station North,” by Andrea Appleton (with Ben Claassen III), City Paper, May 9, 2012.

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30 MICA Communications, “Station North Arts and Design Coalition receives $150,000 grant from NEA,” (posted July 12, 2011).
Station North Neighborhood Vision Plans and Cultural Clusters

The Station North Arts & Entertainment District—just north of Penn Station, Jones Falls Expressway (Route 83), and the Amtrak railroad tracks—includes the neighborhoods of Charles North, Greenmount West, and parts of Barclay and Old Goucher. South of the highway and tracks, besides Penn Station are Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA), the University of Baltimore (UB), Mt Royal Station, as well as several established cultural institutions—including the Lyric Opera House, Baltimore Symphony Orchestra and Meyerhoff Hall, and the Baltimore Theater Project—that transition to the Mount Vernon Cultural District. To the north, up from 26th Street, are the mostly middle-class neighborhood of Charles Village and the Johns Hopkins University Homewood campus.

Although Station North (relative to Highlandtown) is a small arts district, it has distinct nodes of cultural activity and associated neighborhood effects. In this section we look at clusters of cultural activity in Station North against the backdrop of the neighborhood vision plans. The vision plans, the result of community-driven processes with support and technical assistance by Central Baltimore Partnership, provide the official framework for development in Station North. 31

Charles North

Charles North is a largely commercial and institutional neighborhood, extending west of St Paul Street and north to 22nd St. The Charles North Vision Plan, completed in November 2008, describes a 30-year, multi-phase initiative developed around four anchor locations:

- Creative/Design Zone—with MICA Studio Center, a design center, and live/work/study center on North Avenue, west of Maryland Avenue;
- Charles and North Corners—the intersection of North Avenue and Charles Street, geographically the 100% location and centerpiece of the district;
- North Charles Street at Penn Station—the district’s south gateway; and
- Asia Town—a new garden court residential area north of North Avenue to 22nd Street.

Below we describe actual nodes of cultural activity in the Charles North neighborhood: west North Avenue (west gate), North Avenue and Charles Street intersection (north gate), Charles Street corridor, and North Charles Street at Penn Station (south gate).

North Avenue, West Gate

Historically, there has been a large Korean presence along North Ave and north to 24th St. The area has also been a location for homeless, addiction, and other social services. The Man Alive program at 2117 Maryland Ave, for example, has provided addiction

31 See the Central Baltimore Partnership website for: (1) a description of Charles North and links to its Vision Plan; (2) a description of Greenmount West and links to its Vision Plan; and (3) descriptions of Barclay and Old Goucher and a link to the Telesis redevelopment plan. http://www.centralbaltimore.org/central_baltimore_neighborhoods/.
recovery and mental health services in the community since 1967. The motel near the west end of North Avenue is associated with transgender prostitution.

In 2000 MICA decided to expand its campus into Station North with the purchase of the JoS A Bank sewing factory building at 131 W North Avenue for conversion to its Graduate Studio Center. In 2011 MICA completed the lobby, façade renovation, and installation of sidewalk plantings. In fall 2012 MICA Studio Center completed its last phase of renovation, which includes galleries, an auditorium, a terrace, and a café as well as graduate studios, classrooms, conference rooms, and offices.

Two sites in the west North Avenue cluster stand out for their persistence:

- **Hour Haus, 135 West North Avenue at Howard St (1980s)**—a recording studio and rehearsal room for musicians, music and art space for over 25 years, at the one time headquarters of the Ma & Pa Railroad.
- **Westnorth Studio (2002), 106 West North Avenue**, rowhouse and gallery owned by artist Roy Crosse. “Crosse epitomizes the type of person this district says it wants to attract—a talented, seasoned artist and curator who is willing to invest both in property and community relations.” Along North Avenue, see also “Homage to the Ancestors: A public installation by roycrosse.”

The former Lombard Office Furniture store at 120 W North Ave is now LO__A_D OF_____ FU_N__ Arts, gallery and performance space and artist studios. In 2005 owner Sherwin Mark bought the building with his personal capital. Load of Fun is a for-profit incubator for small arts-related businesses and performance groups as well as arts and craft practitioners. “We’re not a not-for-profit.” The site has high visibility in that an estimated 20-30,000 cars drive by daily along North Avenue. LOF Studios supports 20-30 working artists at a time; multiple theater companies have come through, as do a variety of arts, cultural, and community groups. Low rent is surely a draw.

The versatility of the [multi-use space] might also have something to do with its success. The LOF/t has enough space, at 40-by-60 feet, to fit 200 people standing, or 150 sitting, and it can be reconfigured to host various types of events. It has, in fact, accommodated aerial artists, burlesque shows, dance troupes, large-format puppet shows, literary events, and experimental theater.\(^{32}\)

Single Carrot Theatre, based at Load of Fun from 2007 to 2012, is the story of an emerging theater company who relocated from Boulder, Colorado to Baltimore, having decided that in all of the USA, Baltimore City was the best fit. Baltimore welcomed the new theater graduates: “Bring your art, bring your energy.” The ensemble arrived in 2006 with $4,000 of working capital and a list of plays—self-described as “a troupe of young idealists who want to change the world with art.” About a year later, Single Carrot found their way to the new Load of Fun building at 120 W North Avenue in Station North and rented their first studio space. “The landlord, Sherwin Mark, lets us do whatever we want to do—with water, candles, with our scripts, with nudity—whatever. He lets us make the art we want to make.”

Single Carrot perceives that they have been part of “the North Avenue renaissance” that has taken place over the past five years. They attribute the theater company’s success largely to its symbiotic partnership with Joe Squared Pizza—bar and pizza, nightly live music, art exhibits—opened by in 2006 by Joe Shepherd.

Bars are opening up and theaters. They want to come to Station North because the audiences are here. It’s a destination—for diverse audiences, ranging from the Roland Park retirement community (coming for Sunday matinees) to people coming to the Copy Cat warehouse.

The former block-long North Avenue Market is undergoing a $1 million renovation by owner Mike Shecter. Several enterprises are already activating the space:

- **Wind-up Space Art Café**, 12 West North Ave—bar-café art space with music, film screenings, and events;
- **D center Baltimore**, 16 West North Ave—cross-disciplinary voluntary group devoted to advancing the role of design in the city and region;
- **Liam Flynn’s Ale House**, 22 West North Ave—bar, live traditional music, karaoke;
- **Cyclops**, 30 West North Ave—art gallery, bookstore, and concert venue.

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*Wind-up Space Art Café, 12 W North Ave, Station North*

D center holds monthly design conversations at Wind-up Space.

*Photo: SIAP 2012*
Behind the Load of Fun building at 120 West North Ave is an artists’ alley called Graffiti Wall. In fact, it’s a legal graffiti wall, the result of Sherwin Mark’s willingness to negotiate with the City (Department of Housing, Code Enforcement Division “to facilitate a forum for graffiti writers.”

I managed to establish a very productive dialogue with the department and particularly with the area Inspector, Mr. Norris Turnipseed, that allowed the graffiti practice in the alley. In return I agreed to erase any graffiti that extended beyond the alley in the 100 block of W. North Ave.

The images and the artists who work on the vibrantly colored graffiti wall—“one of Baltimore’s jewels”—change on a daily basis.

Graffiti Wall, behind Load of Fun Arts, Station North
Photo: stationnorth.org/photos/

North Avenue and Charles Street
The intersection of North Avenue and Charles Street, the site of Baltimore’s first traffic light, provokes descriptions among Baltimoreans such as “the geographic center of the city” or as “the cultural crossroads of the city.” During the early 20th century, at one time, four theaters were active here: the Aurora, the Peabody, the Parkway, and the Centre.33 Ironically, given its historic and long-standing symbolic importance, redevelopment at this key intersection has lagged behind activity elsewhere in Station North. Redevelopment is anticipated at several key sites.

- Centre Theater, 10 East North Avenue—Art moderne structure built in 1939 for Morris Mechanic, the first Baltimore movie theater to be completely equipped for radio broadcasting; the WBFR studios were located on the upper level. Purchased by Jubilee Baltimore in 2012 for $93,000 for redevelopment as a multi-tenant arts

facility including studios, galleries, theatres and/or venues. In December 2012 the project was awarded $3 million in state historic tax credits.

- **Parkway Theatre, 3 West North Ave**, a city-owned property, vacant since 1998. The centerpiece of the Charles North Vision Plan was rehab of this “architectural jewel” inspired London’s West End Theatre. Next door is a McDonald’s drive-through restaurant. In December 2012, Johns Hopkins and MICA announced a plan to partner with the Maryland Film Festival to redevelop the Parkway as its new home and make room for Station North Inc as well.

- **1820 N Charles Street**, to be redeveloped with the Parkway Theater—a castle like rowhouse built c 1885, in worse condition than the Parkway.

**Charles Street corridor, north of Penn Station**

Unlike North Avenue, Charles Street has always been okay in the eyes of native Baltimoreans. Public transit is poor. Accessible parking is said to be the key to success. A bike community has developed. Light rail is planned.

The several blocks on and off North Charles Street, from Penn Station to North Avenue, have attracted a critical mass of eating, drinking, and entertainment establishments interspersed with artist-run spaces and institutions. The Depot at 1728 N Charles St, which provides live music and a dance floor, is the favorite club of Baltimore music scene experts, Roy Retrofit and DJ Neska Lapicki. “It’s a small, grungy, totally unpretentious place with great music. It doesn’t matter what you look like here. You just come to have a good time!”

My perfect night out when I’m not working is hitting the Station North Arts District. The Depot, Liam’s Ale House, The Club Charles, The Charles Theater, Lost City Diner, The Windup Space, Sofi’s Crepes, and so much more all within a

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few blocks of each other, and from Penn Station. You can plan a perfect date night, or just go bar-crawling with your friends.

Of course, there are Charles Street establishments that Roy didn’t mention, such as Caribbean Paradise and Tapas Teatro. A variety of resources contribute to Station North’s character as a cultural district:

- **Strand Theater (1823 N Charles St)** — 55-seat storefront space for women artists, writers, and directors since 2009 (on hiatus in 2012);
- **Club Choices (1815 N Charles St)** — late night dance spot known for hip hop jams and DJs from 92Q;
- **Metro Gallery (1700 N Charles St)** — multi-purpose performance space, art gallery, and bar, home of Videopolis film festival, opened in 2007;
- **Charm City Art Space (1731 Maryland Ave)** — collectively run music venue and art gallery since 2002. Houses other groups: Velocipede Bike Project (4 W Lanvale St) and the Jerk Store, a DIY space;
- **Baltimore Bicycle Works (1813 Falls Rd)** — worker-owned and operated bike shop;
- **Baltimore Streetcar Museum (1901 Falls Rd)** — nonprofit museum since 1966;
- **Schuler School of Fine Arts (9 East Lafayette Ave)** — four-year non-accredited atelier school since 1959, located in the historic studio building built in 1906 by Hans Schuler, Sr.

A prominent and popular local institution, Station North Arts Café Gallery at 1816 N Charles St, opened in 2006. Co-owner and manager “Downtown Kevin Brown” — former public servant, Baltimore Sun reporter, and corporate communications generalist — knows everybody. The City gave him the building. Kevin Brown welcomes folks to the district and facilitates the networking everybody needs or wants. “From the day we opened our doors, we sought to provide a cultural canopy for this community and its visitors. We recognize the value in unifying creativity across art, music, food, film, and design.” The café is open 8 AM – 3 PM Monday to Saturday. Kevin Brown is currently developing SNAC-TV.com, a creative arts and community-focused online video channel.

Charles Street enterprises come and go. Closed are Hexagon Space (at 1825), a volunteer-run gallery and performance space. In December 2012 Everyman Theater (at 1827) relocated out of Station North to a new facility in Arts West. Redevelopment is underway of the Chesapeake Restaurant at 1707-09 North Charles St, closed since 1987, and reopening anticipated in spring 2013.
Penn Station at Charles Street, gateway to Station North

On the parking lot across the tracks from Penn Station, on East Lanvale between Charles and St Paul Streets, Amtrak plans a new mixed-used development. Amtrak intends to retain ownership and lease the site to a developer. “This site represents the best opportunity Baltimore has for an intense mixed-use, transit-oriented residential development”—in other words, luxury apartments for Baltimore commuters who work in Washington D. C.35

Other major construction projects within two blocks of Penn Station are:

- Railway Express Lofts at 1501 St Paul St—Development Partners’ $19 million conversion of a 1929 Railway Express Building, an historic post office structure, into lofts and commercial space, completed in 2008;
- Fitzgerald Apartments at 1201 West Mt Royal Ave, next to MICA, Bozzuto’s $77 million construction completed in 2010; and
- University of Baltimore, Angelos Law Center at 1420 North Charles Street—UB’s $107 million project under construction, completion expected in 2013.

Greenmount West

Greenmount West is the largely residential and former industrial neighborhood, extending east of Calvert Street to the historic Green Mount Cemetery and north to North Avenue. The Greenmount West Master Plan, completed in December 2010 by the Baltimore Department of Planning with the New Greenmount West Community Association (NGWCA), documents the neighborhood’s Community Vision Statement.

Our vision for Greenmount West is that our community continues to be welcoming to emerging and successful working people, professionals, as well as artists and artisans. We believe the neighborhood population will grow substantially and become a more diverse community, in both age and income, while maintaining our ethnic, racial, and lifestyle diversity. We also envision that Greenmount West will be an attractive low- to medium-density housing alternative situated next to the higher-density residential and entertainment development envisioned for Charles North, encouraging more family oriented and long-term residential households.36

The Greenmount West Vision Plan, completed in March 2011, outlines a multi-pronged redevelopment approach: increased homeownership rate to at least 55% (the City’s rate); new construction a mix of multi-family and single family units; vacant property inventory and disposition plan; commercial development and light industry opportunities; multi-modal transportation plan; open space plan, including community


36 New Greenmount West Community Association, Greenmount West Master Plan (7) and Greenmount West Vision Plan (10): greenmountwest.org/ Resources.
managed open space; community engagement plan, including university partnerships; and mutually beneficial development. “The master plan permits NGWCA to negotiate with interested developers to establish contributions from development project(s) toward community and public space improvements and activities that enhance both the project site and the community.”

Greenmount West, adjacent to the historic Greenmount Cemetery, is a neighborhood with a mixed legacy: row housing with high vacancy, which attracted drugs and prostitution; and industrial warehouses with high vacancy, which attracted students and artists. On the eastern and northern edges of the neighborhood, many properties are city-owned, and residents continue to cope with poverty and undesirable businesses. In 2007, several blocks to the west, on the 1700 block of North Calvert Street, Station North Townhomes were completed—32 new garage houses priced from $300,000 up.

The industrial buildings that first attracted studio artists regularly open up their “DIY performance and exhibit spaces” and invite other artists and the public to converge. Copy Cat Theatre in Copy Cat warehouse at 1511 Guilford Avenue does DIY experimental theatre with a focus on “building community and dialogue through theater and performance.” Copy Cat Annex at 419 E Oliver Street has small arts spaces used for shows and performances. Area 405 at 405 East Oliver Street is an artist coop and nonprofit exhibition space. Cork Factory Building, 302 East Federal Street at Guilford, is an artists’ cooperative.

City Arts Apartments and Gallery at 440 East Oliver St, across from Green Mount Cemetery, opened in December 2010. Jubilee Baltimore constructed the Baltimore’s first affordable housing project for artists. The 69-unit building has live-work studios and one- and two-bedroom apartments as well as gallery, studio and other common space. Jubilee Baltimore, with TRF Development Partners Baltimore and Homes for America, were awarded $10 million in low-income housing tax credits for the project, which means that tenants must meet income-eligibility standards and that rent levels are controlled for the next 50 years.
Long-term Greenmount West residents are mostly African American. More recent residents tend to be professionals, black and white, working in Washington DC, and artists. City Arts management hired a MICA graduate and community-trained artist as resident liaison, in part, to build community—both within the building among its diverse tenants and within the neighborhood between City Arts artists and other Greenmount West residents.

In fall 2011 City Arts hosted a harvest dinner for local residents. In the lobby they set up a huge table with 75 chairs and hosted a feast. In March 2012 City Arts hosted Station North’s Final Friday and gave open studio tours. The event attracted a non-arts crowd who had no idea about what artists do. In April 2012 City Arts organized a Whoop Dee Doo event, which involved 15 artists working with local groups over two weeks to build a stage and TV set in the City Arts gallery.37 Neighbors and guests were invited to come dressed in costumes, witness an exploding lava cake, and join in the culminating dance party.

Recent development in Greenmount West includes construction of community facilities that serve the neighborhood as well as Baltimore city. Baltimore Montessori School opened in 2008 at Guilford St, north of Federal. A public charter school, started-up by Allison Shecter, wife of developer Michael Shecter, has 400 children on the waiting list. In May 2012 was the ribbon-cutting for the Montessori Middle School and Greenmount West Community Center at 1642 Guilford Ave. The community center will be the new meeting location for the community association.

Also in May 2012 was the groundbreaking for the Baltimore Design School, redevelopment of the former Lebow Clothing Factory, a $26.5 million project by Seawall Development Corp. The new public design school for middle and high school students offers a curriculum geared to fashion, architecture, and graphic design. The school opened off-site at 1101 Winston Ave in the fall of 2011 and hopes to move into its permanent home in the fall of 2013.

37 Whoop Dee Doo is a nonprofit faux public access television show based in Kansas City, MO led by about 20 artists and volunteers. Their mission is to provide “unique, inclusive, accessible, non-conventional programming that invites a cross-generational and cross-cultural dialogue.”
Barclay and Old Goucher

The two neighborhoods north of North Avenue are Barclay (east of St Paul St to Greenmount Ave and north to 25th St) and Old Goucher (west of Guilford Ave from 20th to 27th Streets), at the southern end of Charles Village. The Housing Authority of Baltimore City selected Telesis Corporation to lead revitalization of these distressed neighborhoods. The Telesis 2007 redevelopment plan calls for expanding housing opportunities (market-rate and affordable homeownership opportunities and replacement public housing units); and enhancing neighborhood amenities (including community and retail space, improving an existing park and building a new one, and streetscape improvements).

During the fall of 2009, MICA professor Sarah Doherty orchestrated the use of 23 vacant properties in Old Goucher—2012-2214 North Calvert St, between 21st & 22nd Streets on Hargrove—for site-specific artwork called Axis Alley. The project was undertaken in coordination with the Old Goucher Community Coalition, the BMOG Coalition, the Housing Authority, and City Council. In all 22 pieces of artwork were created and showcased on the back of vacant buildings that have since been rehabilitated by homeowners.

During our fieldwork in Station North, no one mentioned the Asia Plan concept referenced in the 2008 Charles North Vision Plan.
Space and Place in Station North, Baltimore’s “Cultural Crossroads”

In his announcement of the 2008 Charles North Vision Plan, Joe McNeely articulated a complex challenge and vision to transform Station North:

> Can we cast aside decades of disparagement and disinvestment and make the very center of this city a vibrant, genuine cultural crossroads and high point of commercial and entertainment venues?38

To build Baltimore’s cultural crossroads will require “a substantial increase in the population and parking in the area immediately north of Penn Station through major, mixed-use, high density, transit oriented development projects.” The ideal is to create a regional commercial and entertainment destination that retains the “organic” character of Station North—that is, “to build on the diversity and artistic and entrepreneurial energy currently flourishing in the community.”

Baltimore is known for spawning cross-disciplinary, collaborative art, including “a dynamic, nationally recognized DIY art and music scene.” The evolution of the Station North cluster is both a product of and a contributor to this feature of Baltimore’s arts scene. “We need to be careful that it doesn’t become so institutional that we push out the kids with the blue hair.” The question is “how not to destroy the organic nature of what’s happening.” Addressing cultural space needs is high on the list of how to sustain an arts production community.

**Artists’ living and workspace**

An early goal for Station North was “to create a durable district of working artists,” which typically requires a stock of affordable housing and workspace. However, artists’ needs changes over time, depending on their career and lifecycle stage. Artists’ discipline(s) affect studio needs as well as the suitability of live/work space. Large, cheap rental space is conducive to collective production and high experimentation and suit the short-term studio needs of DIY and emerging artists and singles. Mid-career and established artists, especially those with families, need a neighborhood as well as spaces to live and work.

Provision of affordable live-in studio space is more complicated than it first appears. Legal use of an industrial building for residential purposes is the easy part. Conversion of factory and warehouse structures to comply with residential building codes is extensive and expensive. Lankford was one of the first property owners to do so, in the first years after district designation.

At the Copy Cat building this has meant replacing some 5,000 sprinkler heads, updating the fire-alarm system, installing new fire doors, venting all interior bathrooms, and other improvements. Lankford … says he has already spent

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more than $750,000 upgrading his [two] properties, and the mandated improvements continue. His artist tenants will be safer—but also poorer—as a result.

"Rents are going up because we have to recoup the money we've spent," Lankford says. "But we're not going to change our tenant base. We still want to cater to the artist crowd, and that ranges from students—where two to three people share a space—to recent graduates to art-school teachers."39

Still, many artists in the area fear that affordable live/work studios will disappear once Baltimore has weathered the recession. They express concern that the Copy Cat and Annex buildings “could be closed down at any point. If the economy picks up, and the owner-developer sees the potential for condos, up to 200 artists could be displaced out of Station North.”

Cultural and entertainment venues

To sustain the district’s artistic and entrepreneurial energy, “it’s important to have a lot of venues.” The Partnership has learned that a major obstacle to conversion of vacant structures to venues, besides the overall slow-down of the economy, is the need for development capital. The shortage of development capital ranges from loans for small ventures to attracting national development interests.

Suitability of venues is as important as availability to sustaining the arts district. A major challenge in Station North is that even available buildings and spaces are not designed—or readily adaptable—for arts uses. The Load of Fun building, which sits on top of an automobile loading dock, has a waiting list. There is an unmet need not only for artists' studio space but also for film, music, theater, and dance venues. In 2009 Baltimore City Paper named Load of Fun “Best New Theater.”

The Load of Fun Theatre—LOF/t, for short—is exactly what Baltimore needed. This multi-use but technically equipped small black-box theater can accommodate just about any type of performance—from small local or traveling theater companies to mixed-media performances, from poetry readings to very rare intimate music shows, from installation art to performance art.

In August 2012 city citation of zoning and code violations forced the

unexpected closure of Load of Fun Arts, in operation for eight years, and the displacement of over 40 tenants.

Load of Fun Gallery, a linchpin in the Station North District and a center for visual artists and theater companies, has shut down temporarily after being notified by the city of a zoning violation involving "land use and occupancy." Owner Sherwin Mark closed the building voluntarily to develop a renovation plan. In November 2012 the state Community Legacy program awarded $100,000 to Central Baltimore Partnership to upgrade the Load of Fun building to meet zoning and code enforcement requirements. 40

The relocation of Everyman Theatre, an established company with over a one-million dollar budget, to Baltimore’s west side is “a big loss” for Station North. Everyman had outgrown its site on Charles Street, had been operating at 98 percent capacity, and renting additional space in Highlandtown for rehearsals and storage. In fact, due to low ceiling height and other constraints, the building had never been a good venue for theatre. Structural limits (balcony construction was impossible, for example) had affected season planning as well as artistic and technical decisions. Critics call the loss of the Everyman to Station North “a failure of City government”—that the city could not identify appropriate space for this anchor institution.

Likewise, the success of Single Carrot Theatre, also a 501c3 nonprofit organization, meant that the company had been scanning Baltimore City for a new permanent home. They had outgrown their 55-seat theater and, due to structural constraints of the former automotive center, could not expand on site.

Load of Fun is great, but we need twice the space ... For our last show, we did not meet demand. For the last two weekends, we were sold out by Wednesday. How many people missed the opportunity?

Single Carrot needs more seats to increase their audience without increasing ticket price and remain true to mission. Ideally, they would stay at North and Howard, because of the cluster generated there and anchored by Joe Squared, in particular, along with Load of Fun and MICA Studios. Moreover, “the Single Carrot brand is linked with Station North.” However, they had not been able to identify a suitable space in the neighborhood. So their options were open. Single Carrot is seeking “a committed arts space” and location that is “good for the long term.” The plan was to run their 2012-13 season at Load of Fun but find a new site for a permanent home and be ready to relocate the following summer.

“Single Carrot on Charles,” 2012-13 season

Displaced due to Load of Fun’s “surprise closing” in August 2012, Single Carrot Theatre has been able to produce its 2012-13 season in Station North. MICA provided facilities for the season opener in October (Caryl Churchill’s "Drunk Enough to Say I Love You?"). For the rest of the season, the company has moved into the space at 1727 N Charles St recently vacated by Everyman Theatre.

Meanwhile, Single Carrot Theatre has found a permanent home in the building at 2600 N Howard St, which now houses an automotive and tire shop. It’s about half a mile north on Howard at 26th St in Remington, just west of Old Goucher. Under renovation by Seawall Development, the plan calls for a 100-seat theater along with rehearsal, storage, and office space. Single Carrot, the building’s first tenant, expects to open in 2014. 42

Location, location, location

The Single Carrot story raises a number of issues critical to sustaining artistic enterprises and cultural institutions—and arts districts. The company—strong but small with a $200,000 budget—is considering the merits of ownership. Property ownership is an appealing as a way to increase security over the long-term, but the downside is day-to-day responsibility for management and improvements. “We are not commercial real estate people, we are not landlords—we are theater producers. But how do we get a sense of security and make sure no one gets forced out?”

Space security—regardless of ownership or lease model—is tied to location investment and decisions as well as neighborhood effects. Single Carrot’s first choice location of North Avenue and Howard is tied to its founding and roots, five years of building relationships with other artists and enterprises, as well as its commitment to the neighborhood.

We take a lot of pride on the block. Even the board president will come one hour before the show to pick up litter and volunteer usher. ... Litter depends on volunteers—it’s about ‘the tipping point.’ Only when there is an expectation of a clean street will there be a clean street.

Single Carrot managing director Elliott Rauh is active with the Station North Safety Committee, the Charles North Community Association, and is a local contact for *Baltimore Sun* reporters. “We are a stakeholder. We have lots of pride. The *Sun* runs Station North news items by me to get the Single Carrot response.”

The Everyman Theatre experience raises concern that one cultural district’s gain may be another district’s loss. In this sense, Single Carrot sees a parallel with Everyman. “People see the cultural capital that Single Carrot can bring to their neighborhood corner. Single Carrot would have a ripple effect ...” For long-term sustainability, a cultural district needs the capacity to recruit and retain committed venues.

Glass Mind Theatre, a younger resident company also displaced by Load of Fun closure, likewise values its Station North location. According to its marketing director, “We are an advocate of Station North’s progress and have found it to be a home for our growth, and we are holding those interests in mind as we communicate with local groups and officials.” However, Glass Mind’s spring 2013 production (“A House, A Home,” Chekhov adaptation by Ben Hoover) will show at EMP Collective’s venue on Baltimore’s west side (307 W Baltimore St).

Development at the North Ave and Charles Street intersection would dramatize the location value added of cultural venues—or vice versa. Jubilee Baltimore’s purchase of 10 E North Avenue has made the potential of that site as a flexible venue a real possibility. The Parkway site on the southwest corner of North and Charles has greater potential as a single-use venue—for example, the home of the Maryland Film Festival “with a big marquis on the corner” or a big band music venue—“for down-scale and up-scale residents, for east and west Baltimore, and a place where DC musicians could train.” However, despite the Commissioner’s position on Central Baltimore Partnership, the City has not yet taken condemnation action as planned.

**Property owners and developers**

The Station North Arts and Entertainment District needs to involve every major property owner. District designation is commonly described as “an empty designation, just a label with some incentives” that has had no impact on arts-driven revitalization. According to Jubilee Baltimore’s Charlie Duff, the tax benefits for arts and entertainment are virtually never used. The one exception is the Charles Theatre, a for-profit cinema that has benefited from the amusement tax provisions.

That’s the same response I got five years ago [2005] when I asked the Provost at RISD [Rhode Island School of Design] whether the same tax credit system worked in Providence. He said: “We have a lot of downtown renovation because we have a kick-ass mayor who makes it a priority, and it all has an arts flavor because RISD is a big fish in a small pond. The tax incentives have no effect.”

Even an experienced nonprofit developer like Jubilee Baltimore has been unable to tap arts district incentives. They “might be useful” in the unlikely case that a Jubilee

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project cannot qualify for historic tax credits—which are better, but mutually exclusive. “Maryland tax credits are the best in USA.” In Station North, after ten years, tax benefits have led to no full-scale rehabilitation for artists. In Highlandtown the Creative Alliance has done extensive rehabilitation of the former Patterson Theater, but as a nonprofit—and therefore tax-exempt—corporation, it has no use for tax benefits.

Some observe that district designation has actually “stunted growth” in Station North by triggering speculation. People express frustration with major private property owners “who sit on properties and wait.”

The block [on North Ave] with the Parkway and McDonald’s has not taken off yet. Is the landlord sitting on the properties waiting for prospects? There is no visibility. There are vacant properties, but no rehabilitation. This is the downside of designation.

Another owner has acquired many properties along North Avenue—east to St Paul St and north to 22nd Street—but does nothing. “His purpose is acquisition—buy it, hold it, make money. He believes that if that neighborhood gets hot, the money will pour in.” Over the years, the City has targeted the anomic blocks north of North Avenue for redevelopment as “Chinatown” and, most recently, “Asiatown.” Central Baltimore Partnership is now looking to engage Johns Hopkins University’s interests as community developer to encompass these neighborhoods—Old Goucher and Barclay—and to reach as far south as North Avenue.

The Station North Arts District also needs to support its local business and small-scale property owners. “Lots are mom-and-dad, cash-business types. They are owners, not developers.” In particular, owner-occupants—especially those with ties to the neighborhood and/or the arts and entertainment—are making considerable “sweat equity” investment in the revitalization of Station North. A number of Station North property owners are in effect subsidizing arts, cultural, and entertainment venues (Metro Gallery, for example) in the form of flexible and affordable lease agreements. Load of Fun owner Sherwin Mark is a notable example.

When Mark meets a potential tenant who could add value to Station North, he goes out of his way to negotiate favorable terms. For instance, he was eager to provide Single Carrot Theatre, a group of twenty-something performers, with their first permanent venue. Mark reasoned that a theater company was more likely than visual artists to increase foot traffic in the neighborhood at night.

Anchor tenant Single Carrot Theatre recounts:

“We moved in in January 2007, and Sherwin gave us the space at an extremely affordable rate ... That was a huge step forward for us. Sherwin essentially subsidizes artists to work in his space. He could make a lot more money than he does. He intentionally charges less than the market rate.”

Station North owner-developer Michael Shecter has watched real estate development trends change over the past decade or so. He describes a movement from the

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traditional landlord-developer model to a more fine-grained model—that is to say, more small-scale development, small entrepreneurs, small venues, and joint ventures. If a property owner has a decent bottom line, he/she is willing to reinvest. Private partners in Station North have set up an incubator and became venture capitalists through real estate. In only a few years, Station North has increased from four to 14 venues. These kinds of cultural mixed-use, owner-investor arrangements appear to be the lifeblood of Station North as an arts district. “The difference is developers who want artists to succeed.”

**Artists and economic opportunity**

Arts district designation provides few benefits to working artists and has fostered “the sentiment that the city has been exploiting the cachet of the artists in Station North, while rarely working with them in any meaningful way.” Station North artists are taking initiative on two types of economic opportunity—property ownership and workforce development.

While affordable rents are essential for emerging artists and organizations, property ownership by artists is important for long-term affordability and stability. Sherwin Mark was an established artist and audio-visual consultant and producer when he took the risk in 2005 of purchasing a property on North Avenue (built for auto sales and service) and trying to create a space where experimental arts and theater could flourish. Mark encourages fellow artists to consider ownership of both residential and commercial properties as well as ownership participation in area businesses.

Station North is at a very precarious point. ... It could totally flourish and be wonderful. But for that to happen, it can't be all about developers and city planners and arts administrators. Artists have to have a stake in it.

Greenmount West artists, based at City Arts, are forming a homebuyers club to teach one another about how to purchase a row house through the city’s Vacants to Value initiative, which encourages the purchase of vacant city-owned properties. Vacant row houses in Greenmount West with a sales price of $5,000 are being snatched up by local developers. The homebuyers club would like to develop a vehicle similar to the sweat equity model developed by Dennis Livingston. Ideally, artists could buy a shell that they can restore with artisan quality work but still book contractors for the plumbing, electrical, and HVAC work. Most contractors refuse to do unfinished work because they consider it bad for business. Another barrier is that artists are self-employed and cannot get approved for a mortgage. The group is currently working with PNC Bank to lobby the legislature to get city/state funds for artists “to help them live here and own what they have. This is necessary if Station North is going to stay an artists’ district.”

Another piece to the sustainability puzzle is the integration of artists into the creative economy—in other words, how to make a living with art. “Artists stay in Baltimore because they can find cheap space, not because they can find jobs.” Baltimore is full of creatives (groups like CreateBaltimore, Ignite Baltimore, Baltimore Innovators) with a shortage of employment opportunities. Sherwin Mark is exploring workforce development strategies that tie artists and designers back to commodity production.
(and away from a narrow focus on creative expression) via the technology sector. He believes that Station North’s location advantage with respect to the region’s college and universities—which are at the center of the technology and innovation economy—has the potential to attract and retain artists who can make a living wage.

**Station North’s Fit as a “Natural” Cultural District**

The spring 2012 Open Walls Baltimore project raised the visibility of Station North Arts and Entertainment District and stirred the debate about the relationship of the arts to revitalization.\(^{45}\) Will Backstrom of PNC Bank Community Development, which contributed $60,000 to Open Walls, reinforced the broader vision for the role of the arts in redevelopment of Station North.

> It’s a revitalization strategy but by no means is it a gentrification strategy. It’s to bring new people, new investors, to a place . . . with the long-term goal of making it a functioning, normal, multicultural, diverse-from-an-income-point-of-view neighborhood.

Lead artist-curateur Gaia’s concerns about the Open Walls project echo local artists’ sentiments about Station North since designation. “If any displacement occurs, I’m absolutely complicit,” but he also welcomes the opportunity to engage in a “creative means to deal with the dereliction” in the city. A decade ago, from the roof of the Cork Factory looking out over the neighborhoods encompassed by the Station North Arts and Entertainment District, Dennis Livingston predicted: "It’s kind of like Pandora’s box ... Once you open it, redevelopment is going to start happening." \(^{46}\)

**Community and economic development, finding a balance**

Among the audacious ideas in the 2008 Charles North Vision Plan, according to Joe McNeely, is a vision of integration: “Surely we can embrace the diversity of uses and population being brought back to the area by a young generation that ignores the old boundaries, East versus West; North versus South; black, divided from white divided from Asian divided from Hispanic; gallery versus restaurant.”\(^{47}\)

The Central Baltimore Partnership, with participating community associations and neighborhood organizations, has developed three sets of guidelines to assure the equitable distribution of the benefits of redevelopment: density without displacement, mutually beneficial development, and economic inclusion.

**Density without displacement**

In “low market” cities like Baltimore, displacement is not considered a hot issue. Still, in the wake of Station North arts district designation, Greenmount West residents reported “a curious upturn in unsolicited offers to buy their homes.” An early and

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\(^{45}\) Appleton, “Wall-to-Wall.”

\(^{46}\) Jensen, “Your Art Here.”

\(^{47}\) McNeely, “Charles North Vision Plan.”
sustained commitment of the Central Baltimore Partnership has been the entitlement of Station North’s “legacy residents” to stay in the neighborhood. “If you live here and want to stay, you can stay.”

The Partnership consensus is that, because neighborhood density is so low and vacancy so high, a great many newcomers can able to move into the area without triggering involuntary relocation.

Greenmount West was so depopulated that displacement was, in fact, an abstract discussion. There were 70 households with people living in crappy, cheap housing. How not to displace people? Count them and help them. We counted 12 households where people needed help, so we helped them.

Affordable and livable rental housing is the cornerstone of stability for low- and moderate-income residents in the Station North neighborhoods—Greenmount West, Charles North, Barclay, and Old Goucher. Homeownership opportunities are important to enhancing the stability and prosperity of neighborhood residents as well as to attract newcomers.

The city’s new Vacants to Value Homebuyer Program might be a vehicle to home ownership for moderate-income residents and first-time homebuyers, depending on availability of financial and technical assistance. An earlier city program called SCOPE, created to offload vacant city-owned property, offered dilapidated homes in the area at extremely low prices. To qualify, however, buyers had to be pre-approved not just for the sale price but also for the hundreds of thousands of dollars that the city estimated would be required for renovations.

**Mutually beneficial development**

The concept of mutually beneficial development means pursuing balanced development that protects the interests of existing residents and opens the door for new ones. The Greenmount West Master Plan and Vision Plan include a provision regarding “mutually beneficial development” that allows the community to negotiate with real estate developers regarding neighborhood amenities. Greenmount West negotiations with Jubilee Baltimore in conjunction with the City Arts development resulted in construction of a new community center on the grounds of the Montessori School.

**Economic inclusion**

Artist and activist Dennis Livingston talked about two ways to go about changing a poor community. “One way is to get rid of the poverty. The other is to get rid of the people.” The Partnership identifies economic inclusion as a high priority. However, it has been a challenge to link residents of Station North’s poorer neighborhoods with job opportunities created by its institutional and commercial development, such as the City Arts and the Design School. To date “nothing has translated into anything with jobs.”
Arts district as “vulnerable habitat”

Station North exemplifies the inherent contradictions of a “natural” cultural district and its urban revitalization potential. Location and socio-economic advantages tend to threaten the benefits of marginality and obsolete sites for spawning artists networks and cultural production clusters. From the point of view of cultural ecology, Station North is a good fit with the Baltimore arts scene and plays to its strengths. As Charlie Duff observes:

[Baltimore’s arts scene] is a young thing, driven by art schools and cheap real estate. It’s not market driven, but beginning to acquire a market dimension, especially in music, not painting or sculpture. Patrons are local; the market is self-contained. … It’s not New York. New York has a big market for the arts, so it doesn’t matter where the arts scene is. In Baltimore (and probably Philadelphia), it does matter.

Station North has abundant location advantage. Besides access to downtown and inter-city transit, MICA is there. For the art world, MICA is Baltimore’s “most important cultural attraction and No. 1 asset.” Station North hosts ArtScape, the city’s annual free “trans-modern, artist-run” festival, which expanded in 2012 to include North Avenue. Monthly Final Fridays are bringing in Baltimore County patrons “willing to risk an encounter with the unexpected.”

The city is enjoying an influx of artists, and more and more want to stay—especially DIY and emerging artists. “In Baltimore if you have an idea, you can do it.” People say Baltimore’s DIY movement was launched in Station North—specifically, in the Copy Cat building in 2004 with the start of Wham City, an arts and music collective and ongoing independent artists collaborative. In any case, Wham City represents the DIY spirit—“collective creativity, trans-disciplinary and cross-disciplinary work, members working together to create fantastic things out of nothing and showing off.”

Former Cultural Alliance director Buck Jabailey distinguishes DIY from emerging artists. “DIY artists—underground, just-do-it types—do art for the fun, the collective, the outrageous. Just doing it.” Unlike DIYs, emerging artists are “enterprising”—they want recognition, they want money, they want to make a living from their work. “But for artists who want to become established, it’s hard. Mid-sized institutions are missing. There is no Pew.” To succeed, artists need greater patronage to show or sell their work. While some groups just want DIYs to be recognized, others are eager to become formal and learn how to connect people with resources.

Can Station North’s location advantage as potential regional market coexist with its niche in Baltimore’s cultural production, a quintessential urban cluster of DIYs, artists, and creatives? Many of those active in the district’s development remain optimistic. Charlie Duff cites the example of Saturday Night Live. “Those guys weren’t together because they were brilliant. They were brilliant because they were together.”
Highlandtown-Patterson Park’s Evolution as a “Natural” Cultural District

Highlandtown-Patterson Park is located in East Baltimore about two miles east of downtown and north of the neighborhoods of Fells Point and Canton. Once of the area’s most significant cultural resources is also the oldest. Patterson Park, now a 155-acre urban green space, began in 1827 with six acres of land donated to Baltimore Town by Irish immigrant and shipping magnate William Patterson for use as a Public Walk. The evolution of Patterson Park over the next two centuries marked it as a place of cultural and historical significance to the city of Baltimore.

Patterson Park is culturally significant within the context of ‘19th and 20th Century Park Planning in Baltimore.’ Patterson witnessed three major stages of growth, each of which is integral to an understanding of American social history and landscape architecture. Form its origins as a formal “Public Walk” in 1927, to its romantic development as a ‘country park’ between the 1860s and 1900s, to its early 20th century conversion and expansion into the city’s most comprehensive athletic center, Patterson Park is a unique reflection of the changing ideals of American leisure over the course of 100 years ... (Lampi Associates, NRHP Report).

Patterson’s public walk dedicated to enjoyment by the citizens of Baltimore was still the countryside, “a high knoll with dramatic views overlooking the harbor.” The village of Highlandtown, originally known as Snake Hill, was settled in 1866 primarily by German Americans. Subsequent waves of European immigrants—including Polish, Czech, Italian, Irish, and Greek populations—began to arrive after the Civil War and continued till the 1950s. Patterson Park and Highlandtown, like much of what is now Southeast Baltimore, developed as working class communities tied to the manufacturing industries associated with the waterfront. Baltimore City annexed these settlements in 1919.

The Patterson Park and Highlandtown neighborhoods together have been designated a city of Baltimore historic district. In 2002 the Patterson Park/Highlandtown Historic District—“a remarkably large material representation of Baltimore’s settlement patterns created by waves of European immigration”—was added to the National Register of Historic Places.

These immigrants, who established ethnically heterogeneous neighborhoods within this district, provided the labor essential for the growth of Baltimore’s industrial base. ... [The district] illustrates the role city annexation, industrial development, and home ownership played in shaping land use patterns of the city.

The area is a surviving example of the unbroken streetscapes of modest row houses that once characterized middle class housing in Baltimore. While many of the row houses have been altered over time, these alterations are

inextricably linked to the persistence of home ownership that characterizes the neighborhood and the democratic ideals of urban row house living. Changes such as the application of Formstone \(^{49}\) and the installation of first floor picture windows testify to the owner’s continuing commitment to their neighborhood, a neighborhood still knit together by public transportation and pedestrian traffic. \(^{50}\)

Over the past five decades in Patterson Park/Highlandtown, even as the population changed radically, the residential infrastructure remained fairly stable relative to other Baltimore neighborhoods. Despite the decline of manufacturing and closure of department stores and many retail merchants, less than one percent of district’s structures built before 1952 have been lost.

As one of two state designated arts and entertainment districts in Baltimore, Highlandtown-Patterson Park has gained visibility in the hopes that it would generate economic development for the city. Indeed, during the early 2000s, Mayor O’Malley voiced the hope that the districts could turn Baltimore into magnet for the “creative class.” By this standard, Highlandtown has fallen short. In a regional discussion of cultural policy, many don’t see Highlandtown as a “real” arts district. Its working artists and studios seem to be too few and dispersed to generate critical mass. School 33 Art Center Open Studio Tours could not get a foothold in the district. Although people have heard of or attended the annual Halloween Lantern Parade in Patterson Park or events at the Creative Alliance at the Patterson, the neighborhood is viewed as lacking in the amenities that one expects from a cultural district.

Based on our three-city study of “natural” cultural districts, we suggest that that this characterization misses the embedded character and diversity of artists, artisans, and

\(^{49}\) Formstone (also a brand name) is simulated masonry applied like stucco to a brick rowhouse, described by Baltimore native son and avant-garde film director John Waters as “the polyester of brick.” For story and photos, see: “The Story of Formstone,” by Paul K. Williams, Sept 23, 2009. Source: http://welcometobaltimorehon.com/the-story-behind-formstone

cultural resources of Highlandtown-Patterson Park. The district has a rich cultural history, much of which is apparent to an insider or careful observer of the neighborhood. This layering of different traditions and activities is the essence of the district’s cultural identity.

In part, the state’s definition of an arts and entertainment district appears to foster an under-appreciation of different kinds of districts and their relative value to a region’s cultural ecology. According to the Maryland State Arts Council guidelines:

An Arts and Entertainment District has been defined by Americans for the Arts as a “well recognized, labeled, mixed use area of the city in which a high concentration of arts and cultural facilities serve as the anchor attraction.”

Thus the official definition is biased toward the planned downtown entertainment destination that draws arts and cultural patrons as consumers. The definition does not mention artist-based producer districts or residential-based cultural districts. Certainly it does not anticipate the types of “natural” cultural districts generated by urban neighborhoods with a history of ethnic and/or economic diversity and resilience.

We propose two lenses through which to understand Highlandtown-Patterson Park. First, we examine sociologist Howard Becker’s distinction among different types of artists and how that model helps us understand the district. Second, we propose that the district is best understood as an historical layering of different cultural forms. We then use these lenses to look at the district’s cultural development through four distinct phases.

We conclude that Highlandtown-Patterson Park is indeed a grassroots cultural district for which it has been able to secure support from a variety of funders, but not one that fits the mold of the conventional arts and entertainment district. Rather, it is a neighborhood in which culture, entertainment, and the arts play a central role in local identity and in the engagement of residents in the civic life of their community.

Integrated, maverick, and folk arts districts

In his pioneering work, Art Worlds, Howard Becker contrasts “integrated artists” with groups that are more marginal to the world of art, like mavericks and folk artists. Becker argues that these distinctions are relational. An integrated artist is one who fits into the rest of the world’s image of what an artist does and how he does it. A maverick or folk artist is someone who anchors her/his work outside of those expectations.

Becker points out that one of the great benefits of being an integrated professional is that the rest of the world is ready to make sense of you. If you compose music that musicians are trained to play, you’re more likely to find musicians willing and able to play it. Supply stores will carry the materials you need for your work. Galleries or music sites have distributed works like yours before, so they are willing to do so again. In contrast, for mavericks and folk artists, all of these routine activities are problematic.

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51 Maryland State Arts Council, Arts and Entertainment Districts Guidelines and Application, 2012.
If you use a tonal scale that musicians aren’t trained in, you’ll have to teach them how to play their instruments before they can perform your work. If you use exotic materials, you’ll have to seek out sources and put up with the delays and frustrations involved in obtaining them. “The difficulties mavericks and naïve artists have making their works and getting them distributed,” Becker notes, “their difficulties with audiences and authorities, indicate the troubles integrated professionals are spared by participating in art worlds recognized as legitimate parts of society.”

In many ways, the study of Highlandtown-Patterson Park has taught us that this set of distinctions is relevant for “natural” cultural districts as well as individual artists. Different groups relevant to cultural district development—arts institutions, artists, consumers, and investors—are all familiar with the mainstream idea of a cultural district. Districts that conform to this image—like many of those we study in this report—have an easier time explaining themselves to these constituencies. Life is never easy for cultural districts, but “integrated professional” districts have an easier time than maverick and folk districts.

In this section, we argue that Highlandtown-Patterson Park has gone through a set of transformations in its development as a cultural district. It began essentially as a folk district, with cultural expression anchored in the ethnic and religious traditions of its long-time residents. During the 1990s and early years of this century, Highlandtown and Patterson Park experienced an influx of people interested in the arts, but they tended to be more mavericks than integrated professionals. Only in the past decade has a more conventional art world become prominent in the district. In recent years, as its image as a “creative class” magnet has faded, the district has sought to reassert its social mission, especially in collaborations focused on the district’s new residents.

Yet, because of the late development of more mainstream arts institutions, the district’s regional reputation suffers. Just as the maverick and folk artists described by Becker have a hard time doing their work and explaining themselves to the world, the Highlandtown-Patterson Park district struggles to both cultivate its independent character and shine through the lens of a conventional arts district.

**Highlandtown-Patterson Park Geography and Archaeology**

“Natural” cultural districts are located in time and space, and understanding these dimensions has been a major concern of the three-city study. Highlandtown-Patterson Park is distinctive in its relationship to these qualities. Our classic image of cultural district development assumes that the arts are replacing some prior use. An obsolete industrial and warehouse district or a neighborhood that has “hit bottom” is the typical prehistory of these districts.

In Baltimore, as in many U.S. cities, the nature of racial dynamics has been part of this obliteration of the past. During the post-World War II era, white ethnic neighborhoods

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across the city became segregated African American neighborhoods in a matter of months or years. Similarly, in the more recent past, many black neighborhoods have experienced rates of abandonment that leave little room for community institutions to survive. Highlandtown-Patterson Park experienced neither rapid racial change and re-segregation nor profound rates of abandonment. Although the ethnic balance of the district has shifted recently with the increased Latino presence, older ethnic groups and their traditions persist.

As a result, understanding the cultural life of the district requires an *archaeological* perspective, in which we see the present as the layering of the different epochs in the district’s cultural history, with older traditions persisting as they are joined by new ones. A signature contemporary event, like the Lantern Parade in October, incorporates older traditions of parades and processions with a more modern ecological sensibility (by recycling plastic bottles as “lanterns”). Meanwhile, the Creative Alliance self-consciously incorporates older popular cultural forms (like burlesque) into its multi-faceted programming.

This layering of cultural eras, however, takes on a unique geography in Highlandtown-Patterson Park. The district is so large that as new forms emerge, they rarely come into conflict with the old. Rather, each form occupies its own ecological niche. After a decade in which much of the cultural innovation occurred in the western part of the district—in Patterson Park and to its north, more recent activity has focused on the axis of Eastern Avenue between the Creative Alliance and the new area library.

None of these streams are totally discrete. One of the founders of the Creative Alliance at the Patterson, for example, is also a choirmaster at the local parish and a sponsor of Highlandtown Wine Festival. However, to help us make sense of the district’s ebb and flow, we break its cultural history into four parts:

- folk traditions—woodturning, religious life, wine making, and screen painting;
- Patterson Park community mobilization and institutionalization;
- toward an integrated professional arts scene; and
- toward community integration through the arts.

**Folk traditions**

The distinctiveness and persistence of folk traditions in Highlandtown-Patterson Park is related to its history as an ethnically diverse, blue collar community. The area is listed on the National Register of Historic Places because of its connection to Baltimore’s working class settlement patterns and the “folkways” spawned by those communities.

[The] area retains elements such as painted screens, window displays, planters, and decorative seating areas characteristic of Baltimore’s row house-based residential folkways. Churches, schools, corner stores, and scattered small-scale industrial buildings are interspersed among the row houses in a manner characteristic of communities knit together by foot and streetcar transportation.

Folk traditions focus on the incorporation of aesthetic elements and ritualization into everyday life. In Highlandtown-Patterson Park, some of these older cultural forms—like
craft and religious traditions—are virtually universal, while others—like screen-painting—seem to be restricted to a few neighborhoods in East Baltimore. The availability of small-scale buildings and storefronts integrated into the fabric of the neighborhood has accommodated a variety of community cultural uses over the years.

**Woodturning**

Woodturning refers to woodworking that uses a lathe so that the wood turns while the woodworking tools are held steady. The technique can be used to produce mass-market items like furniture parts or pieces of fine art. In contemporary America, woodturners are often organized into guilds that work to sustain the craft traditions and encourage innovation.

The outstanding example of the method in Highlandtown is Mark Supik & Company, owned by Mark Supik and his wife Nancy. Supik learned woodturning as a sculpture student at Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA), worked in woodworking for a while, and then decided to set up shop in the old industrial neighborhood of Highlandtown.

As with earlier generations of craftsmen, Supik combines the production of useful items with more artistic uses of the techniques. At first his business was connected primarily to architectural restoration projects and involved custom production of items such as curved mouldings, balusters, columns, and furniture parts. Nowadays, with the rise of microbreweries, his most useful item is beer taps, which he produces in both stock and custom forms.  

As time permits, Supik creates a variety of pure craft items, such as bowls and spindles. But his own turning dovetails with the woodturning school he started at his shop on weekends. From 2010 to 2011, for example, he directed “a community woodturning project” entitled One Tree: One Hundred Bowls, in which he and his students created

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53 For photos of Supik’s shop, see Joseph E Nash: sprayedink.squarespace.com/gallery/mark-supik-co.
(yes) 100 bowls from a single fallen pine tree from his brother’s yard. Over the years, Mark notes, he has felt “a fuzzier line between arts and life.”

Supik’s shop is located on the northern boundary of the Highlandtown district, just north of Baltimore Street on Haven. He thinks that the perception of East Baltimore may hurt his overall business. Customers are often afraid to get out of their cars because of the stark industrial surroundings and the neighborhood’s reputation. Still, he maintains that the neighborhood is a good place for his business, because he is able to secure no-frills industrial space as well as operate in a cultural district.

**Religious and associational life**

As is common in older white ethnic neighborhoods, Highlandtown-Patterson Park has an active religious and associational life, with roughly twenty religious congregations in the district. Many of the churches have taken on a role in community life. Some residents credit the pastor of Our Lady of Pompei Church, Luigi Esposito, for advocating the reinvention of Eastern Avenue as a cultural cluster. Noting that the commercial district—with its many former department stores—could no longer compete in ordinary retail, Esposito suggested that redefining the district as a cultural destination would allow it to regenerate.54

Dan Schiavone, one of the founders of the Creative Alliance, is active at Our Lady of Pompei, where he is organist and music director. He believes that strong religious traditions, especially among Italian Americans, are one reason why Highlandtown has attracted recent Latino immigrants. Schiavone is, in fact, engaged in a variety of older

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cultural forms as well as the newer creative economy. In addition to his church activity, he runs a software business (Snake Hill: Practical Technology Solutions) and a gallery (Schiavone Fine Art) out of the old Moose Lodge on Highlandtown Ave (at Claremont). Meanwhile, he’s an active supporter of the remaining fraternal organizations in the neighborhood, including the Odd Fellows Hall, the Masonic Temple and the Umberto Nagli Lodge, named after a World War I flying hero.

Schiavone collaborates with Di Pasquale’s Italian Marketplace and the Highlandtown Community Association to mount an annual spring wine festival. The Highlandtown Wine Festival grows out of traditions in the Italian community around the cultivation of grapes and home winemaking. Held in Our Lady of Pompei Convent Garden, the event features a homemade wine competition, wine tasting, gourmet food, art and craft vendors, and live music. To qualify as an art and craft merchant, “all items must be hand-made by the seller.” Since 2004 the festival has raised $25,000 for Highlandtown Community Association initiatives, including neighborhood greening and street improvements, Highlandtown arts district activities, grants for sculptures in Patterson Park, Movies in the Park, and repair projects at Our Lady of Pompei.

Several churches in the district have incorporated arts instruction as part of their program. For example, the Abbott Center for the Arts at the Abbot Memorial Church in Highlandtown offers music and dance instruction to both children and adults. Sacred Heart of Jesus Church, which recently added Sagrado Corazon de Jesus to its name, now offers masses in Spanish and sponsors the annual Our Lady of Guadalupe celebration in December. Of course, sometimes the expression of the Spirit can get out of hand. In 2010, the Baltimore Sun reported that neighbors objected to the loud music emanating from the Holy Truth Temple of Deliverance House of Praise in the neighborhood.55

**Screen painting**

While fraternal organizations and religious congregations can be found in cities and neighborhoods everywhere, screen painting seems to be a very, very local taste. As the name implies, this vernacular art form uses the screen doors of ordinary row houses as canvases. The Painted Screen Society of Baltimore was founded in 1985 by folklorist Elaine Eff and screen painter Dee Herget as a guild for practicing painters. It soon became a membership organization of artists and aficionados “to preserve screen painting”.

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painting and rowhouse arts in Baltimore neighborhoods.” Although the Society is based in neighboring Canton, Highlandtown boasts many examples of the art form.

Elaine Eff traces the form back to William Oktovec, a Czech immigrant and grocer who covered his shop in depictions of fresh produce and meat. Oktovec’s grandson, John, still practices the craft. Although the form’s popularity reached its zenith in the 1930s, it has recently crossed over into the “high” art world—or at least the self-taught corner of the art world. In 2008 Baltimore’s American Visionary Art Museum mounted an exhibition of surviving examples. Artist Jenny Campbell has pushed the form in a new
direction with versions of the Mona Lisa on her screen door and screens mounted on
dresses and corsets featuring versions of Andrew Wyeth’s “Christina’s World” and a
portrait of 1950s stripper Blaze Starr. More conventional examples “depict the same
quaint country scene of a bungalow, trees, mountains and swans.”

Highlandtown studio artist and educator, Monica Broere, practices screen painting as
one of the functional and decorative arts she pursues—including pottery, jewelry, and
fabrics—when not at her post as teacher at Patterson High School. In 2009, with a
Maryland Historic Trust grant, she apprenticed to third-generation screen painter, John
Oktavec. As described in a HA! Artist Spotlight, Broere “continues to celebrate South
East Baltimore’s unique traditions and progressions as she explores her own artistic
inclinations.”

Patterson Park community mobilization

As many community activists know, neighborhood parks and playgrounds tend toward extremes. Either they serve as a commons that is the focus of recreational activity and
community engagement or they function as a blighted “empty” space that attracts
undesirable activities and populations. Patterson Park successfully made the transition
from the latter to the former during the 1990s and 2000s. Although the arts were not
part of the original strategy used by community activists, it eventually became an
important element of the revitalization of this civic space.

From the streets to the Park

The actions that led to Patterson Park’s revival started in the streets surrounding the
park, particularly in Patterson Place at its northwest corner. During the early 1990s,
the area faced three distinct challenges. First, its racial composition changed as a
number of Latinos moved into the neighborhood and neighboring Baltimore-Linwood.
Second, and to some extent associated with the first, was a proliferation of Section 8
vouchers in the neighborhood, often associated with property owners who did little to
maintain or improve their properties. Finally, the park itself had become a center for
drug dealing and prostitution. In 1992, for example, there were over three-hundred
arrests for prostitution in the park vicinity. The intersection of racial tensions and the
dangers of the park crystallized in May 1991 when a Latino youth suffered a fractured
skull after having been beaten with a baseball bat in the park by three youths.

A number of community activists organized in an attempt to stem neighborhood
decline. Putting more eyes on the streets—including neighborhood watches,
coordinated dog walking, even “midnight” barbecues—were part of the grassroots
effort. In a 1993 Baltimore Sun article, long-time neighborhood activists, discussed the
broader strategy:

The initiative is the sound strategy for holding the committed we have, and
attracting new ones. It has four parts: a block-by-block rescue to take back

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(May 1, 2008).
neighborhoods that have weakened, a plan to upgrade the quality of rental units and their tenants, a comprehensive home-ownership plan and a marketing strategy that focuses on potential homebuyers and renters (as well as current residents).

The block-by-block rescue and scheme for improving rental properties attack problems associated with absentee landlords, drug dealers and sanitation and housing code violators. We organize people on those blocks and assist them in dealing with their problem landlords and tenants, and in working with the service and enforcement arms of the city.

The comprehensive home-ownership plan increases the number of homeowners by a variety of means. We work with financial institutions to provide a ready source of first and second mortgages and rehabilitation loans for qualified buyers. We even intervene directly and buy homes that would otherwise sell below market value to absentee investors and speculators. We then sell those houses to homeowners. Because many of today's prospective buyers have a poor credit history, we establish lease/purchase programs and homebuyers' clubs to help people establish credit before buying. We work with area employers, particularly Johns Hopkins, to establish incentives for their employees to live in the area.

Everything else works only if people know that the Patterson Park area remains a good place to live, that houses and rentals are affordable. The area is convenient to many shopping areas and to downtown. It's a place where people of many cultures live together peacefully. It's a place where people still care about each other. 58

In 1996, to implement the policy, engineer-turned-activist Ed Rutkowski led the establishment of the Patterson Park Community Development Corporation (PPCDC). The organization immediately took an aggressive approach to landownership issues in the area. “I came to the conclusion,” Rutkowski noted, “that the only way to save the neighborhood was to control the real estate.” PPCDC began buying up properties, using 13 million dollars in private loans and seven million dollars in government aid. By 2001, the CDC had acquired 270 row houses. Some were sold, while others were rented, including a large number to refugees from Africa and Bosnia.59

The aggressive property acquisition by the PPCDC also opened a door for an increase in the artist population of the area. In 1997, while it was still located in Fells Point, the Creative Alliance sponsored an Artist Housing and Studio Fair “to introduce low- and moderate-income people to organizations that can help them buy houses and studio space in Southeast Baltimore.”60 According to Dan Schiavone, the CDC began to see artists as a potential source of new homeowners for the neighborhood. They would design and rehabilitate the houses to artists’ specifications. Local activists credit the

59 Eric Siegel, “Turning back blight—Improvement: Patterson Park is drawing the attention of young couples, families, and developers,” Baltimore Sun (November 12, 2001).
60 “Alliance holding fair for seekers of homes, studios,” Baltimore Sun (November 9, 1997).
CDC’s policy for attracting a core of artists to the neighborhood in the late 1990s.

Yet, the artists who would locate to an out-of-the-way neighborhood—surrounded by Section 8 housing, foreign-born refugees, and a (not fully domesticated) park—were not artist-oriented artists but rather artists as urban pioneers. The area tended to attract independent artists, often artists who work in unusual media—in other words, what Becker might call mavericks. As Mark Supik notes, the individualistic character of the district’s artists makes the notion of “organizing artists” an oxymoron. “It’s like herding cats.” The artists who settled in Patterson Park and Highlandtown did so, he suggests, because they “want to be alone” to pursue their own idiosyncratic view of the world.

The influx of maverick artists in the late 1990s and early 2000s had a secondary effect. As the housing situation stabilized, neighborhood activists moved from the defense to the offense. Rather than rely on town watch and stepped-up policing to control drug dealing and prostitution in the park, they moved toward re-creating the park as an asset for the neighborhood. As they did so, the arts became an important element of that strategy.

A significant outcome of mobilization was resident activists’ decision to form a nonprofit organization called the Friends of Patterson Park (FOPP). The founders saw community programming as a critical strategy for populating the park and driving out undesirable activities. They decided that FOPP should be a membership organization in order to generate participation, but that dues should be kept low ($10). The group’s success in recruiting members and volunteers is credited with building the organization’s strong participatory culture.

In 1998 Friends of Patterson Park was formally established, with Nancy Supik as president, and the City of Baltimore Department of Recreation and Parks completed a master plan for Patterson Park. Dozens of community resident volunteers had participated in all phases of the planning process, including field inventory and analyses as well as synthesis and recommendations. Once established, FOPP took the lead in attracting philanthropic support for Park projects and to maintain pressure on the City to invest in the Park, including the pagoda and central fountain. By 2001 the city had begun to undertake restoration projects, beginning with park entrances and lighting; and the Audubon Society was looking to turn the park’s field house, near the boat lake, into its site for a year-round nature center. 61

61 “Patterson Park enjoys a rebirth. Park attracting wildlife, plans for renovations. With the return of vegetation and wildlife to the boat lake, a variety of park improvements have been planned,” by James Giza, Baltimore Sun (June 27, 2001). Note: FOPP logo image is from 1998 Patterson Park Master Plan.
The Pagoda in Patterson Park, originally known as the Observation Tower, designed in 1890 by Superintendent of Parks Charles Latrobe. From 1905 to 1915 Baltimore commissioned the Olmsted brothers to do a recreational design for the eastern part of the park.

As cultural and community events became a central strategy for neighborhood revitalization, Highlandtown-Patterson Park artists were uniquely suited to developing an arts-based engagement strategy that was decidedly out of the ordinary but consistent with a tradition of folk arts. Two examples of its character are the Fluid Movement performances and the Halloween Lantern Parade.

**Fluid Movement**

Fluid Movement describes itself as “a Baltimore-based performance art group that juxtaposes complex subject matter with delightful and unexpected mediums.” Beginning in 1999, the group staged several water ballets and skating performances in Patterson Park. The first water ballet, “Water Shorts”, included eight men, six women, and a dozen neighborhood kids and struck a decidedly populist tone. The ballet “evolved into a suite of eight movements dealing with life’s passages from play, work, union and family to celebration, conflict, death and regeneration.” The group has returned to the Park regularly . . . or irregularly . . . since 1999, alternating water ballets with roller-blade performances with titles like “Frankenstein on Wheels” (based loosely on the Mary Shelley classic).

Whatever their artistic merits, the performances are credited with helping to turn around the Park, both by expanding activity and by advertising the neighborhood to the rest of the city. As Ed Rutkowski noted, “We needed people to say, ‘Patterson Park is a cool place’ and they did.” Although Fluid Movement has branched out into other parts of the region, they still return to the Park, as they did in 2011 to perform “Mobtown Murder Mystery.”

**Halloween Lantern Parade and Festival**

The theme of original, non-scripted participatory arts events in the Park was reinforced in 1999 with the first Lantern Parade, a massive procession through the neighborhood followed by a shadow puppet show. The “lanterns” are handmade by participants.

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primarily of renewable matter (bamboo) or recycled materials (plastic bottles) with LEDs inserted. As with Fluid Movement, Creative Alliance was an important partner. Indeed, the organizer of the parade for its first decade was Molly Ross, whose husband, Jed Dodds, was artistic director at the Alliance. Dodds described Ross’ unique attributes as a parade and puppetry artist.

Her work presents an interesting conundrum because people don’t think of it as being produced by an artist. Beyond puppet work and lanterns and organizing, she’s crafting a mood. She’s really finely tuned to a sense of atmosphere and wonder where people will suspend their cynicism or day-to-day lives and allow themselves to be taken up in a magical experience. That’s her artistry, working with the imaginations of communities. 63

Great Halloween Lantern Parade by Molly Ross (Nana Projects) with Creative Alliance at the Patterson, Friends of Patterson Park, and Patterson Park CDC. Photo: Mitro Hood

Source: Community Arts at Work Across the U.S. by Linda Frye Burnham (Animating Democracy/Americans for the Arts, 2011).

Ross stepped aside after the 2010 parade, which is now co-sponsored by FOPP and the Creative Alliance. In 2011 “zany visionary” Laure Drogoul took over as artistic director. Drogoul, performance-artist-sculptor with a studio at Crown Cork & Seal, also collaborates with Fluid Movement on its Transmodern Festival.

Since its founding, Friends of Patterson Park has focused on mobilizing volunteers, now over 600 in number, to “pick up where Parks and Recreation stops.” In recent years, FOPP was successful in winning one of four new recreation centers that the City is planning to construct. FOPP hopes that the new building can be managed to make it more accessible to the community, especially during the evenings. In 2011, with the support of philanthropy, the organization was able to hire an executive director.

FOPP’s new executive director, who lives outside the neighborhood, has shifted the culture of the organization. Where FOPP grew out of the efforts of local residents to address a neighborhood in distress, its new leadership has brought a sense of institutionalization. When the director speaks of community engagement, she mentions the sixty-plus corporate sponsors who provide teams of volunteers.

The history of Patterson Park as a cultural district has passed through a great arch.

63 Alex Ball, “Let There Be Light,” Baltimore Magazine (October 2007).
Initial community mobilization—sparked by the problems of crime, ethnic tension, and real estate decline—focused on putting “eyes on the street” and controlling the real estate market as key strategies. As artists were able to take advantage of housing opportunities in the neighborhood, they brought their innovative creative sensibilities to the neighborhood and to the Park. As conditions improved, participatory cultural expression as a way to animate this classic urban public square became an important vehicle for consolidating the neighborhood’s successes.

As Patterson Park stabilized, the urgency behind the original mobilization gave way to a quiet confidence that the neighborhood was trending in the right direction. The PPCDC that was so central to all facets of the revitalization of the neighborhood went bankrupt in the wake of the 2007-09 recession. Its founder, Ed Rutkowski, has moved on to run the Patterson Park Public Charter School.

In 2011, despite the future of the neighborhood far from guaranteed, The Reinvestment Fund’s Market Value Analysis estimated that Patterson Park was among the most stable housing markets in the city. The maverick professionals that drove so much activity in the area a decade earlier had given way to more confident sense of place.

**Toward an integrated professional arts scene**

In the meantime, attention in the district has increasingly shifted to the east. Highlandtown and the Creative Alliance at the Patterson at 3134 Eastern Avenue (at S East Ave) gained attention in 2002 when Highlandtown became the Baltimore’s second designated arts and entertainment district. Whether Highlandtown could live up to the state’s designation—or whether it should try—became a pressing question.

**Creative Alliance at the Patterson**

The relocation of the Fells Point Creative Alliance (CA) to Highlandtown and the rehabilitation of the old Patterson Theatre as its home marked the beginning of a new cycle in the life of Highlandtown-Patterson Park as a cultural district. While its earlier history had been about reclaiming the Park and engaging the community to address neighborhood ills, the new phase departed from these goals in two ways. First, the focus would no longer be simply on mobilizing the community; Highlandtown was now to become a regional cultural destination. Second, the arts would be leveraged as an economic development engine. As local, state, and federal money flowed into a number of redevelopment projects along Eastern Avenue, the Creative Alliance and other players made the case that the arts could not only improve the climate of the neighborhood or animate the Park. They could also transform the neighborhood’s economic fortunes.

The Creative Alliance was founded in 1995 as an informal arts space. Occupying a row house in Fells Point, the original CA consisted of a restaurant below and a gallery above. The three founders—Margaret Footner, Megan Hamilton, and Dan Schiavone—had ambitions to expand the offerings of the Alliance and became a nonprofit. The CA
led a relatively nomadic life during the 1990s. After leaving the Fells Point row house, it moved first to a former Moose Lodge in Highlandtown owned by Schiavone, then to a former trolley barn in Fells Point, and then to a former Pep Boys storefront in Highlandtown.

In 1998 a local politician, Perry Sfikas, took the lead in introducing the CA leaders to members of the Eastern Avenue Partnership, a coalition of nonprofit and commercial interests. In March of that year, Sfikas announced that he had secured 1.3 million dollars in state funding to acquire five properties along Eastern Avenue, including two closed theaters, the Grand and the Patterson. The Grand would eventually be demolished to make room for the new area library. The Patterson was designated as the new home for the Creative Alliance.

During its early years, CA was run much like an artist cooperative. Artists became members so they could show their work and participate. As noted above, the CA was involved in the Fluid Movement productions and the Great Halloween Lantern Parade in Patterson Park. CA’s shift from a funky arts program providing artists with a place to show their work to an economic development project was accompanied by a shift in the rationale for this investment. As Sfikas explained: “I see the new residents these attractions will draw will help anchor the existing people here.”

Footner, CA executive director, credits Richard Florida’s “creative class” theories with providing a rationale for the new investment. Indeed, Florida’s ideas—that creating a cool climate to attract creative people was the key to economic development—gained increasing attention during these years. By 2004, inspired by a meeting between Mayor Martin O’Malley and Florida, the City had tasked the Office of Community Investment to develop a plan for using the arts as an urban development strategy. By the time the Patterson opened in 2003, even long-time community activist Father Esposito was reciting Florida’s mantra: “They’ll be bringing in more professionals, more artists, more intellectuals—bringing back to Highlandtown what we thought was a lost identity altogether.”

The original investment secured by Sfikas laid the foundation for an ambitious development effort to rehabilitate the Patterson. The Creative Alliance entered into a partnership with the Southeast Community Development Corporation, which had more experience in capital campaigns. US Senator Barbara Milkulski—who grew up in Highlandtown—brought a Department of Housing and Urban Development grant for $750,000 in 2001 to further the project. A number of philanthropies also made significant investments. After the campaign successfully closed, differences between the CDC and the CA about the structure of their relationship led them to split.

The new facility greatly expanded the variety of programs and activities offered by the Creative Alliance. In addition to exhibition spaces and a theater, it includes a media lab and eight artists’ apartments. Regionally, the CA is best known for the range and diversity of its performance offerings, running the gamut from hip-hop to burlesque, from the SalsaPolkaLoosa dance festival to Globe Poster dance parties. In one week during June 2012, for example, their program included the Urbanite Project Health Food Challenge; the screening of a documentary on the declining fortune of skilled craftsmen; a rock concert; and The Big Show, “a jaw dropping, life affirming, once-a-year chance to celebrate the wealth of creativity the members of the Creative Alliance have to offer.” In recent years, CA has worked to stage programs that appeal to the expanding Latino population in the neighborhood.

**Artist and artisan studios and showrooms**

Highlandtown is a flourishing neighborhood with a mesh of different ethnicities and cultures. But as an arts district, it is a landscape of hidden assets and opportunities. In a letter to the *Baltimore Sun*, on behalf of the Highlandtown Arts District Steering Committee, Dan Schiavone highlighted Highlandtown’s assets and promise as a vital arts district.

Our district has plenty of warehouse spaces, and we have a wealth of residents. Numerous department stores closed in the 1970s left behind a large stock of warehouses scattered within the neighborhood and along the future route of the Red Line. Our district is large, including close to 10,000 families and the Avenue, the original one that stretches from the Patterson to Greektown. Dozens of artists in Crown Cork & Seal and the many artisans sprinkled in shops and warehouses throughout the neighborhood make Highlandtown a rich environment to grow a vital arts district.66

Chapter 3

The Crown Cork & Seal Studios that anchor the east end of Highlandtown Arts and Entertainment District are actually located on the other side of the tracks in Greektown. Also at this site will be a light rail station (called Highlandtown/Greektown) on the planned Red Line route. The proposed east-west transit line will connect the Inner Harbor with Fell’s Point, Canton and Brewer’s Hill—bypassing Patterson Park and Highlandtown—then turn north to Greektown and Johns Hopkins’ Bayview campus (projected operation 2021).

Crown Cork & Seal is a massive industrial complex with 27 buildings, some dating to 1906, that once employed thousands of Crown employees who made food and beverage packaging machines. The barricaded property reads as an abandoned zone that no one would rent or visit. Apparently, however, the place is a beehive of post-industrial activity. Beginning in the 1980s, with no more demand for industrial warehouse space, the owners began to break up the big spaces into “smaller spaces at smaller rentals.” “[A]rtists, photographers and film industry people began arriving to set up shop in spaces that had been carved out of the cavernous rooms where the bottling and packaging machinery had once been made.”

Now there’s an eclectic mix of artists and crafters—including woodworkers, furniture restorers, musicians, painters, sculptors, jewelry makers, screen printers, set designers (The Wire, Homicide), and a craft brewer. Owner/manager Eric Spindler is making investments to upgrade Building 45, which he would like to open as a weekend gallery called “Afternoon at the Crown.”

Ed Gross is a retired meteorologist and self-taught artist who rents a shared studio in Crown Cork & Seal Building 45. As described by *What Weekly* reporter David London:

“To this day, Gross continues to search junk yards, ‘the goldmines for the objects that become my art.’ Like an alchemist in his laboratory, he transports his finds to his Highlandtown cave and explores new ways to make them come alive. Ed Gross is a creative spirit who should be celebrated for his unique aesthetic, and his equally unique path to being an artist.”

In stark contrast to Crown Cork & Seal is Skylofts Gallery and Lofts, a mid-block structure centrally located at 3701 Bank St, near Conkling St and Eastern Avenue. The 19th century factory building has been renovated intentionally as artist work lofts and gallery space. Skylofts’ gallery is available for lease by the day, week, or month commission-free—that is, all proceeds from sale of artwork go to the artist. Skylofts’ owner, Eric Fondersmith, is also president of Serigraphics, a custom printing and graphics firm located next door at 3103 Bank Street.

**SkyLofts Studio & Gallery**

SkyLofts is not your ordinary building. SkyLofts is a living, breathing part of our community. We are committed to evolving and growing with the emerging artistic culture in Highlandtown. Our building is very versatile. We host events of many types, art shows and benefits. We lease Lofts and space for photographers, graphic artists, community organizations, and large businesses.

Source: www.skylofts.net

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As both an artistic and community venue, Skylofts is open to meet the space needs of a variety of individuals, enterprises, and organizations. During 2011, for example, Skylofts leased a loft space to a new nonprofit organization called the Veteran Artists Program (VAP), its first dedicated physical space for use as an office, workspace, and gallery. Brian McDonald—an artist, musician, veteran, and resident of Highlandtown—founded VAP in 2010 to help artists who are veterans propel their careers into the “mainstream creative arts community.” At Skylofts VAP was able to do film screenings and community service events as well as mount the group’s own art show called “Remembering: An Art Exhibit.” When there is insufficient demand for the gallery by artists or creative enterprises, Skylofts books social, community, and business events.

In 2012 a new gallery and studio center, Pine Box Art Center, opened in the renovated King Cork and Seal building on a “desolate stretch of North Haven St” in the northeast corner of Highlandtown. The structure at 101 N Haven St once housed a coffin-making facility. Pinebox seeks to provide affordable space to local artists and educational programming for the community. Founder Vincent Valerio has two ambitions—“making art and flipping real estate.”

The Creative Alliance Residency Program provides live/work studios that can accommodate eight resident artists—one per studio—for a term of one to three years. Otherwise, adaptive reuse for artist live/work space in Highlandtown-Patterson Park is largely the initiative of individuals. Artist Daniel Schiavone and his wife Elizabeth have converted Highlandtown’s former Moose Hall (244 S Highland Ave) run a Schiavone Fine Art Gallery on the first floor, as studio and business workspace, and the residence for their family upstairs. Artist/educator Monica Broere has renovated a stationary store building, with full storefront windows, at 422 S Highland as her studio and show room with residence upstairs. Despite interest in Eastern Avenue—given the number of young veterans in the community, VAP would like to open a storefront on the avenue—but to date “there is nothing on Eastern Avenue for artists.” Some worry that “the arts and entertainment district is disconnected from the arts in Highlandtown.”

HA!—Highlandtown Arts

The completion of the Patterson redevelopment in 2003 coincided with the successful application to designate Highlandtown as an arts and entertainment district. In the case of Highlandtown, the implementation of the district’s agenda has been a challenge. The Eastern Avenue Partnership that originally attracted government funding no longer existed, and Sfikas left the legislature in 2002, the victim of a redistricting battle. Although the Southeast CDC is still committed to the arts district, there is no entity to translate the ambitions of the district into reality. Highlandtown Arts (HA!) is the most visible presence of the district, but it is not an organization and has no staff or offices. Southeast CDC and the Highlandtown Community Association administer its financial affairs. HA! Steering Committee chair Dan Schiavone explained
the rationale: “We chose not to form a non-profit to avoid overhead and to leverage existing community partners. You can't get any more grass roots than that.”

The section of Eastern Avenue between the Patterson at East Avenue and the new Enoch Pratt Southeast Anchor Library (SEAL) and Conkling St have been a focus for HA!’s activity. Sandra Abbott—Highlandtown resident and curator of collections and outreach at Center for Art, Design and Visual Culture (CADVC) at University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC)—has personally helped orchestrate arts district projects. For example, she developed the Trashy Art Project, a functional public artwork whereby artists design and paint and distribute trash cans at selected sites throughout the neighborhood. One of HA!’s most visible projects—a Pop-Up Gallery Series—was a partnership with UMBC arranged by Abbott. CADVC graduate student-artists worked with local residents, retailers, and school children to curate vacant storefronts in the retail district on and off Eastern Avenue. Southeast CDC, which runs Highlandtown Main Street and its pop-up shops program and supports the Highlandtown Merchants Association, has been a key local partner for Pop-Up and other HA! initiatives.

One of last winter’s Pop-Up Gallery project—“Wish You Were Here”—artists worked with school kids to use found objects as images of “a landscape of fragmented potential.” They mailed out Wish You Were Here postcards to tell people about the pop-up gallery installation and opening events. In the words of its press release, the show “recontextualizes the relationship of one leftover object to another, transforming and distorting the feeling of occupation, potential, and space.”

Yet the transformation of the neighborhood promised in the heady days of the early 2000s simply has not arrived. A 2010 article in the Sun contrasted the Station North district, which it claimed was “booming”, with Highlandtown, which it noted was still waiting for the arts to make an impact. Renewed attention to Highlandtown was sparked by a proposal to create a district on Baltimore’s west side. As Southeast CDC director Chris Ryer noted:

There’s . . . no structure within the city to administer [the district]. It’s pretty hard to run a program with literally no budget at all and no support. So, creating another arts district—especially one downtown that might have much greater resources—would be threatening.

By 2010 even its participants had begun to question the original rationale of the district. “From the beginning, we were wrongly conceived,” says Ryer. “Arts districts were originally thought of as being devices to revitalize old, industrial areas, not a residential neighborhood with 3,000 row houses.”

Crown Cork artist Ed Gross notes


70 The newest branch (by 30 years) of the Enoch Pratt Free Library opened in May 2007. The anchor library is a modern glass and brick structure, with a street front David & Dad’s Café and a spacious children’s section, that is designed to be a community hub as well as research center.

71 Mary Carole McCauley, “Rethinking Arts Districts,” Baltimore Sun (May 16, 2010).
that, unlike Station North with its Station North Inc, “we have no Ben Stone here, no one lobbying for what’s important.”

We might ask whether the problem is the district itself or rather the way it has been conceptualized. As we’ve seen, the Highlandtown-Patterson Park arts district had its origins in efforts by local residents to stabilize their neighborhood and animate the Park, not to create a “creative class” economic engine. Highlandtown possesses socio-economic and location disadvantages that serve as a barrier to its emergence as a market-based arts district. Yet, the area possesses a critical mass of cultural and creative assets that can reinforce and strengthen community life. Activists in the neighborhood and in the city as a whole may have drunk Richard Florida’s Kool-Aid in believing that the neighborhood could quickly become a creative class magnet. The problem is that by focusing on that unrealistic goal, advocates may have ignored the more modest but grounded ways that the arts can influence community life in neighborhoods like Highlandtown and Patterson Park.

The Creative Alliance appears to recognize the need for a shift in strategy and purpose and has expanded its focus on how the arts can support neighborhood and community building. “We’re trying to rebuild the neighborhood, to experiment with how the arts can help with that. How to get to know the neighborhood through arts projects, by working together … The idea is to get out and create programs with the neighborhood.”

**Toward community integration through the arts**

Indeed, rather than emerging as a “creative class” neighborhood, Highlandtown in the early years of the 21st century was undergoing a different type of demographic change. Instead of an infusion of hip artists and creative professionals, increasing numbers of Latinos, immigrants, and refugees began to make their homes in the neighborhood. As we have found in previous research, clusters of cultural assets are often associated with ethnic diversity. In this respect, although the old Highlandtown had a rich European ethnic mix (Polish, Czech, Italian, Irish, Greek), it was disadvantaged as an essentially homogeneous white community. After 2000 this profile began to change rapidly. As described in our discussion with the Southeast CDC director:

Starting in 2000, there was a big demographic change in Highlandtown that basically “revitalized the neighborhood.” The Hispanic community began to move in, and although this community is very visible, its visibility makes it seem more “monolithic than it actually is.” The Hispanic community is 50 percent from Mexico, followed by Honduras and El Salvador. There are many, many languages. It is a very different community from 1992 to 2012. Churches and schools are full again.

Indeed, by the 2010 census, a third of the population of Highlandtown’s census tracts were Hispanic with the largest representation being Mexican (13.4 percent of total population), Honduran (6 percent) and Salvadorans (5 percent). Much of the Hispanic population was foreign-born.
Several groups in the area—including Banner Neighborhoods, Southeast CDC, and Creative Alliance at the Patterson—have responded to the changing demographics of Highlandtown and Patterson Park through a concerted effort to engage community youths. (Sponsors include the Baltimore Community Foundation, UB’s Neighbors In Deed, and Communities for All Ages, a program housed at Temple University in Philadelphia.) Greater Highlandtown’s Communities for All Ages (CFAA) is an intergenerational initiative with a charge “to provide the tools, networks and resources to build a trusting and vibrant community for growing up and growing older.” A key strategy is use of the arts, culture, and creative thinking to build bridges between people of different backgrounds and generations.

As part of its engagement with the changing community, the Creative Alliance has funded an outreach coordinator to work with CFAA partners and other groups in the neighborhood. The current coordinator (a MICA graduate) works closely with community organizers at Banner Neighborhoods and Southeast CDC to infuse the arts into the program. All are trained artists with experience in community engagement. “[Our role is] bridging the gaps and leveling the playing field through cultural expression and celebration. Everyone has a story to tell through performance or artistic expression.”

Together they have worked with Banner Neighborhood to expand the role of the arts in its after school program. They have also sponsored a variety of special projects, including a Social Cookie event (for a FOPP fundraiser), an All Ages Art Cart Derby, and—working with Black Cherry Puppet Theater—a bus stop parade and street performance. Creative Alliance has an ongoing relationship with the Baltimore Resettlement Center (at 3516 Eastern Ave) to hold major events like International Women’s Day and World Refugee Day. CA also collaborates with groups like CityLit, a citywide literary arts project based in Highlandtown, on programs—such as reading parties and writing workshops—that bring together people of all ages.
Each art cart had to be gravity-powered with working brake and steering capabilities. Laughing Pint (bar and restaurant) exhibited over 50 works of art by local artists and work by neighborhood youths.

Shannon Cassidy, Laughing Pint owner for six years, features one artist per month. All proceeds from sales go directly to the artists.

Highlandtown-Patterson Park’s Fit as a “Natural” Cultural District

Though Highlandtown-Patterson Park clearly works as a “natural” cultural district, it does not fit the conventional model of an arts and entertainment district. It lacks many of the economic and geographic features of a destination district because of its geographical size and distance from downtown. It has a significant artist and artisan population, but because they tend to be scattered as resident households or independent establishments, artists are a less visible presence in the neighborhood than in other cultural districts. Although the district flirted during the early 2000s with the notion of becoming an economic engine that would transform the neighborhood, for most of its evolution, local activists and leaders have understood the arts and culture to function less as an economic engine and more as a means to build community and stabilize the neighborhood. Still, with respect to community vitality, looking backward and forward, “the designation is important to Highlandtown, where culture has had significant impact.”

We have suggested that Highlandtown-Patterson Park is best understood as a layering of different cultural eras. Because the neighborhood did not experience white flight, it has maintained its traditional religious and associational cultural forms. During the 1990s, those traditions were augmented by mobilization to reanimate Patterson Park. The combination of Patterson Park CDC’s artist homeownership initiative and Friends of Patterson Park’s movement to bring people back to the public square led to what we have characterized as a “maverick” arts culture centered on festivals, participatory performance (synchronized swimming), and parades.

Then in the early 2000s, as part of the effort to rehabilitate the Eastern Avenue corridor, local leaders and the Creative Alliance embraced a more mainstream cultural identity. The Creative Alliance was to be established as a significant cultural venue in the region, which would generate a windfall of economic development. Part of that vision came to fruition; the Creative Alliance has certainly emerged as a major cultural and entertainment destination for the city and region.

But the promised economic transformation has not yet materialized. Instead, over the past decade, a significant Latin American population has reconfigured the neighborhood. The more robust but more diverse community has pushed activists to develop cross-generational arts programming, with a focus on youth and children, as a way to address the inevitable tensions experienced among new and old residents.

Although we talk about these different eras in Highlandtown-Patterson Park’s cultural development as sequential, they are in fact simultaneous. The Wine Festival, church arts classes and choirs, and screen painting are still active in the neighborhood. Fluid Movement still turns up in swimming suits or on roller-blades to mount a program—now part of year round park activities that include a summer concert series, bilingual knitting, and zumba class. Every year in late October residents start making some 1,000 lanterns with plastic bottles and LEDs and, the Saturday evening before Halloween, assemble to light up the Park with a parade and festival. During all seasons, evening or day, one can still show up at the Patterson to rub shoulders with a suburban art aficionado, an African American filmmaker, a Mexican yarn artist—or poke in a pop-up gallery along the Avenue.

From outside the neighborhood, Highlandtown-Patterson Park is assessed against State of Maryland arts and entertainment economic development goals. The reality is that this is not and really never has been the right yardstick for judging places like Highlandtown-Patterson Park. Rather, as we argue elsewhere in this three-city study, it represents a type of cultural district—usually a historically residential neighborhood—that is focused on social development as the foundation for economic regeneration. By using that standard, we can better judge both its accomplishments and its challenges.
Implications of the Baltimore Study

Station North and Highlandtown-Patterson Park face very different challenges as they move ahead with respect to sustainability as a cultural district. The risk for Station North is that “success” for the district’s regional agenda would consist of increasing property values, more rapid development, and becoming a full-fledged entertainment district and regional destination. This success, however, would likely squeeze out the low-cost work and living space that has made the district appeal to artists and entrepreneurs.

Highlandtown-Patterson Park does not appear to be at risk of suffering from over-rapid development. Indeed, there is a palpable concern in the district that the undertow of disinvestment has not been fully staunched. Vacancy rates in the area are still high, and the recession’s impact is still obvious as one walks along Eastern Avenue and the residential streets of the district. On the other hand, culture and artisanal activity are embedded in social history, and many independent artists attracted to the neighborhood engage actively with the evolving new community. Given a stock of affordable warehouse and residential properties, and the planned Greektown light rail connection to mitigate location disadvantage, the district could be positioned to attract an influx of working artists—especially as Station North values take off.

Maryland State Arts Council, though it references a narrow definition of Arts and Entertainment District, in implementation has been responsive to grassroots initiatives and the necessity of each place “uniquely reflecting a local mission, history, and cultural development.” Thus, despite state designation, Station North and Highlandtown have been fruitful for our study of “natural” cultural districts. None of Baltimore City’s now three designated arts districts—Station North (2002, redesignated 2012), Highlandtown (2003), and Bromo Tower (2012)—really conform to the ideal of an arts-based entertainment destination functioning as a regional economic driver. The state’s arts district goals are “to stimulate the economy and improve quality of life.” SIAP research demonstrates that community building via cultural expression and creative production are preconditions for meeting both these goals—and are essential elements of a regenerative and sustainable cultural district.

The Baltimore study has contributed substantially to our development of a typology of “natural” cultural districts. In particular, we have been inspired to adopt Howard Becker’s sociology of different types of artists—in particular, integrated professionals, mavericks, folk artists, and naïve artists—as a way to understand the character and evolution of different types of “natural” cultural districts. Baltimore may be fortunate to have three designated arts districts (especially if the state fixes financial incentives and the city enables district management). It is the differences and their synergy that promise to build for Baltimore a healthy cultural ecology and creative economy “rooted in a sense of place.”

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73 Reference to the mission statement of the Creative Alliance at the Patterson as an “advocate for cultural expression rooted in a sense of place.”
As we shall discuss in Chapter 8, the policy implications of “natural” cultural districts confront us with a Goldilocks conundrum. Cultural districts always seem to be too hot or too cold, never just right. The larger point, however, is that to make sense of a particular “natural” cultural district—and therefore to intervene effectively—we need to understand the complex interactions between cultural ecology, social geography, and the individual peculiarities of its history.
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Chapter 4. Philadelphia’s Callowhill/Chinatown North

Contested terrain was an important theme throughout the three-city study. It manifests itself in a number of ways. Sometimes it refers to two or more social groupings that want to claim a space as their own. Other times, it suggests different visions for the future of a particular space. Other times, it simply is a manifestation of incompatible uses occupying a particular space.

Callowhill/Chinatown North represents a perfect storm of contested terrain. During our fieldwork, we discovered that a variety of different social groups want to see the neighborhood as “theirs.” Indeed, the peculiar “slash” name we use for the neighborhood is an indication that using one or the other names for the neighborhood is seen as taking sides in a long-running dispute. There are certainly a number of visions for the neighborhood that are in conflict both with one another and with the gritty current reality. Finally, the neighborhood is quite simply a patchwork of incompatible uses, with electrical substations across the street from high-end condos, warehouses and bars across the street from charter schools, and train trestles and highway ramps towering over a variety of work and living spaces.

One thing all of these different groups and uses see in common, however, is the neighborhood’s location. In ten minutes one can be at City Hall or the Independence National Historical Park. In five minutes, one can be in Chinatown, at the Reading Terminal Market, or (perhaps) at the proposed casino in the old Philadelphia Inquirer building. “It’s convenient to everywhere—that’s one of the beauties of the location. It’s not very pretty, but it is amazingly convenient.” Everyone, it seems, wants to be in Callowhill/Chinatown North.

Its location also explains to some extent why Callowhill/Chinatown North is a “natural” cultural district. As we have noted, three conditions characterize “natural” cultural districts. Cultural clusters emerge close to, but not within, the downtown. They have an available stock of rental properties. Finally, they are socially diverse. The Callowhill/Chinatown North neighborhoods meet all of these conditions.

In this chapter, we use data and interviews to examine the current character of the district and challenges it faces and broadly to understand its life cycle and type as a “natural” cultural district. We begin by returning to the theme of cultural ecology.

**What do we mean by cultural ecology?**

The role of the arts and culture in urban neighborhoods is best understood as a network phenomenon. People, institutions, and businesses involved in the arts are connected in a variety of ways. Performers and audiences, artists and suppliers, organizations and funders—these are just a few of the connections that bind the arts world as a series of social networks. Many of these networks are not place-based. A collector in New York may purchase artworks produced anywhere in the world; a writer in Philadelphia may publish her work in Europe or Asia. But many of these networks are anchored in space. While many who attend performances may come from a great distance, there are limits on how far patrons will travel. Artists may be dependent upon a variety of suppliers and distributors to fabricate and sell their work. Dancers typically rely on other dancers and choreographers to create and perform a piece.

*Cultural ecology*, as we discuss in Chapter 2, refers to the set of cultural assets that locate in a particular place. It provides a means of assessing the characteristics of these assets, their relationship to one another, and how any particular individual or organization might fit into that context. SIAP has suggested that some neighborhoods attract a particularly high density of cultural assets—which we call “natural” cultural *districts*—and that these places are often important drivers for development of the regional cultural sector as well as other dimensions of community building.
To understand the cultural ecology of Callowhill/Chinatown North, we take a look first at the district’s social geography and then its relationship to Philadelphia’s citywide cultural sector. The neighborhood is bounded roughly by Vine Street to the south, Broad Street to the west, Spring Garden Street to the north, and 8th Street to the east. For our analysis, we have identified a somewhat smaller area, the five census block groups\(^1\) bounded by Vine, Broad, Green, and 10th Streets. Philadelphia’s historic Chinatown neighborhood to the south, identified in several figures, extends from Vine Street Expressway south to Filbert Street.

\(^{1}\) A census block group, the smallest geographic unit for which the U.S. Census Bureau publishes data, comprises approximately six to eight city blocks.

Figure 4-1. Philadelphia, Chinatown/Callowhill North
Social Geography of Callowhill/Chinatown North

Callowhill/Chinatown North is located to the northeast of Philadelphia’s downtown core and, although adjacent to Chinatown, is largely cut-off from this neighborhood by the Vine Street Expressway. The neighborhood’s built environment is the legacy of its historic role as manufacturing district served by the Reading and Pennsylvania Railroads. In addition to its current stock of abandoned and underused factory buildings and warehouses are scattered row housing structures, dating from pre-industrial years, and street-level parking lots.

The district has a distinctive social structure. In 2005-09, the population of the area was recorded as 70 percent male, perhaps as a result of the several homeless shelters in the area. Very few children or older persons lived in the area at that point; only 10 percent of the population was under 18 years of age and three percent were over the age of 65 (compared to 24 and 13 percent respectively for the city as a whole). As these data suggest, the district included relatively few families—63 percent of the households were non-families—and only 18 percent married-couple family households. Sixteen percent of the district’s households included unmarried partners, of which six percent were same-sex couples and 10 percent opposite-sex couples.

The district was diverse, as well, in the economic status of its residents. They were predominantly professionals and managers (68 percent of labor force) and more likely to be self-employed (12 percent) or work for nonprofits (20 percent) than the city’s entire labor force. About 12 percent of the labor force was employed in arts and entertainment industries, about 50 percent above the citywide figure. Given the prominence of professionals, the poverty rate of the area—38 percent in 2005-09—was striking. Although the homeless population contributed to the high poverty rate, at least a portion of residents listing a professional or managerial occupation must have also had incomes below the poverty line. The image of a district of contrasts was underlined by the data on per capita income. The residents of the district had both an above average poverty rate and a per capita income nearly 50 percent above the citywide average ($26,957).

The district had a relatively mobile population. Only 68 percent of its residents had lived in the same house a year earlier, compared to a figure of 86 percent for the entire city. Five percent had lived in a different state or country the previous year, compared to a figure of 2.8 percent for the entire city. Eighteen percent of the residents were foreign-born, the largest share of which were born in Latin America (9 percent).

For the past three decades, the neighborhood north of Vine Street and east of Broad Street has been designated for the future growth of Chinatown. The Philadelphia City Planning Commission’s 1988 Plan for Center City noted that in the past “Chinatown has been hemmed in by physical barriers and public construction projects,” but that in the future “the neighborhood will have an opportunity to expand.” The Plan went on to note:

Chinatown’s most dramatic opportunity for expansion lies north of the Vine Street Expressway to Spring Garden Street. This area contains a number of
vacant and under-used sites that are available for commercial and residential development. Supportive zoning controls and financial incentives for housing and economic development would stimulate growth in this neighborhood.

In some ways, the designation of the area north of Vine for the future expansion of Chinatown was surprising. According to the 1980 census, the census tract (126) was home to 430 residents, of whom 250 were white, 157 were black, 120 were Puerto Rican, but none were Asian. Over the next 20 years, the area enjoyed, at best, modest population growth. By 2000 the total population had risen to 835 residents, of whom 43 percent were white, 37 percent were black, and 4 percent were Puerto Rican. The Asian population in 2000 was 127, of whom 84 were Chinese, about 10 percent of all residents. According to the 2005-09 American Community Survey summary file, the Asian Pacific Islanders constituted 11 percent of the neighborhood’s population.² Yet, if

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² For the 2010 Census, the block group boundaries of the area were changed. Instead of five block groups, as in earlier files, four of the old block groups were consolidated into one and the remaining block group was combined with the area to the east. For this report, we used the 2005-09 data, which were the last based on the older boundaries. According to the census, Hispanics (including Puerto Ricans) can be of Chapter 4.
the American Community Survey is to be believed, the largest Asian group in the district was Indians, who made up 7.7 percent of the population. By the 2010 decennial census, however, the Asian population had expanded; 20 percent of the population of the tract that includes the district was Asian in that year.

The Chinatown North designation was recognition by the City of the steady loss since the 1960s to historic Chinatown of land, businesses, and residences as the result of urban renewal and redevelopment projects—including the Vine Street Expressway, Market East Station, the Gallery shopping mall, the 9th Street expressway ramp, and the Convention Center. During the past two decades, the neighborhood’s designation as a future growth zone for Chinatown combined with the slow pace of development has made the area an inviting target for alternative development plans: a federal prison at 8th and Callowhill, a baseball stadium at 12th and Vine, and—most recently—a casino.3 Notably, community mobilization in opposition was successful in defeating all three projects. As a means of reinforcing Chinatown’s claim to the area, the Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation (PCDC) relocated its headquarters to the north side of Vine at 9th Street, next to Holy Redeemer Church, and has focused part of its housing development efforts in the area.

In association with the Street administration’s Neighborhood Transformation Initiative (NTI), a local planning firm prepared a major neighborhood plan for Chinatown in 2004. Significantly, the plan incorporated the area from Vine to Spring Garden Streets and from Eighth to Broad Streets into its definition of Chinatown. The plan acknowledged the emergence of a “Callowhill loft district” in the west part of the area but was equivocal about its importance. Although the development of new residential buildings was seen as positive, a number of community residents voiced concern that condominium conversions were threatening the availability of affordable housing in Chinatown. Yet, except for PCDC’s efforts, the Chinatown presence north of Vine was confined to auto-body and metal-working businesses along with a few suppliers and warehouses in the southeast corner of the neighborhood.

The 2004 plan largely ignored the sprouting of new arts and cultural uses in the area. Yet, the gap between the aspiration to turn the neighborhood into an expanded Chinatown and the modest level of actual Chinatown-related development created an opportunity that invited the emergence of a “natural” cultural district.

In 2008 the Philadelphia City Planning Commission released a study of current conditions in the neighborhood that acknowledged its previous identity as Chinatown

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3 After South Philadelphia residents were successful in preventing the construction of a second casino on Delaware Avenue, the Foxwood organization and the City announced a plan to install the casino near the Gallery just south of Chinatown. Thanks to opposition from Chinatown, Casino-Free Philadelphia, and other constituencies, that plan was defeated in 2009. However, in the spring of 2012, developer Bart Blatstein announced a plan to build a casino centered in the Philadelphia Inquirer building at North Broad and Callowhill Streets, along the western boundary of Callowhill/Chinatown North.
North and an influx of residential and commercial uses. That document divided the broader Callowhill district—which stretched from the Delaware Expressway (I-95) to Broad Street—into three sub-sections: an industrial district to the east, Chinatown North between 8th and 10th Streets, and a “loft district” from 10th to Broad Street. The document mentioned the presence of artists but focused more on the redevelopment of a number of former industrial buildings as condominiums.

In fact, during the 2000s, while development lagged in Callowhill/Chinatown North, other neighborhoods adjacent to Center City were experiencing rapid change. In its 2001 assessment of housing markets throughout Philadelphia, for example, The Reinvestment Fund (TRF) found that many neighborhoods near Center City were steady or transitional in character, suggesting that their housing markets still had significant weaknesses. By 2008, the situation had changed markedly. Whereas in 2001 many neighborhoods around Center City had spotty housing markets, by 2008 many—notably, Northern Liberties, Fairmount, South of South, and University City—were now characterized as regional choice or high value neighborhoods. Callowhill/Chinatown North was virtually alone among neighborhoods immediately adjacent to Center City without a robust housing market.

It is hardly surprising that such a neighborhood would attract artists. As Richard Lloyd has noted, artists have long been attracted by the image of bohemia—quarters that combine cheap rents, access to urban amenities, and an urban aesthetic that integrates conventional standards of beauty and grunge. Indeed, our fieldwork discovered that in recent years Callowhill/Chinatown North has attracted a significant number of emerging artists and arts organizations, which have become one of the defining features of its cultural ecology.
Cultural Ecology of Callowhill/Chinatown North

The development history of Callowhill/Chinatown North has given it a unique niche in the region. The area has direct access to Center City’s commercial core, good transit and highway access, relatively reasonable rents, and a number of vacant and underutilized buildings, including an attractive variety of industrial and commercial spaces. At the same time, the district shares a number of characteristics with other cultural clusters around the city.

Cultural asset analysis

Here we use SIAP’s previous research on metropolitan Philadelphia to locate Callowhill/Chinatown North within the region and examine recent changes in the area’s cultural ecology. This analysis confirms that Callowhill/Chinatown North has a high density of cultural assets that is characteristic of “natural” cultural districts.

SIAP has developed a cultural asset index (CAI) as a means of tracking the concentration of different types of cultural assets across metropolitan Philadelphia. Here we examine the density of the four sub-indexes of the CAI—nonprofit cultural organizations, commercial cultural firms, cultural participants, and resident artists.

Nonprofit cultural organizations

In 2004 Callowhill/Chinatown North had few nonprofit cultural organizations located within its boundaries. As with many spheres, the Vine Street Expressway functions as a barrier to development and relocation north of the downtown core. To the south of the Expressway, we find highest densities of cultural organizations in the city. However, once we cross the boundary, the number drops sharply. Indeed, of the four block groups that comprise the neighborhood, the southwest corner of the district is the only one with more than one nonprofit organization.

By 2010, the number of nonprofit cultural organizations had increased to 11. If we express the density as groups per 1,000 residents, the figure for the neighborhood was 5.8 per thousand, well above the citywide average.

Because block groups are so small, we also calculated the number of cultural organizations within one-quarter mile of each block group in 2010. As the map on Figure 4-3 makes clear, Callowhill/Chinatown North represents a boundary zone. To the south, Center City has the region’s highest concentration of cultural organizations. To the north, the number of organizations drops off sharply. The neighborhood itself has a high number of nonprofits within a quarter mile, although not as high as Center City.
Commercial cultural firms

In contrast to the relatively sparse number of nonprofits actually located within Callowhill/Chinatown North, the neighborhood is home to a significant number of commercial cultural firms. Indeed, the density of commercial culture is comparable to that of Center City. As a consequence, the number of cultural businesses “in or near” the neighborhood in 2004 was among the highest in the city.

The commercial cultural sector continued to be one of the strengths of the neighborhood’s cultural ecology in 2010. Overall, the research team identified 21 for-profit cultural firms in the neighborhood.
Chapter 4

183

Figure 4-4. Commercial cultural firms located within one-quarter mile of block group, Philadelphia, 2010
Source: SIAP

Cultural participation rates

In order to estimate the distribution of cultural participants across Philadelphia, SIAP worked with the Cultural List Cooperative of the Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance and a number of other organizations to geo-code the addresses of individual participants in over 75 different cultural organizations. These data give us the most comprehensive view available of the neighborhoods where people live who tend to participate in arts and cultural programming of all kinds.

Chinatown North has a distinctive cultural participation profile. Like most of Center City, levels of cultural participation in Callowhill/Chinatown North are among the highest in the city. In this respect, however, Callowhill/Chinatown North is unlike Chinatown proper, which has relatively low cultural participation rates.

In 2010, the cultural participation rate in Callowhill/Chinatown North was 63 per thousand residents, approximately twice the citywide average. Although relatively sparsely populated, the northern part of the neighborhood, approximately above Noble Street, has the highest rates of cultural participation.
Figure 4-5. Cultural participants per 1,000 residents, Philadelphia block groups, 2010
Source: SIAP

Resident artists

The final index of cultural engagement is an estimate of resident artists, that is, the relative concentration of artists living in a neighborhood. Resident artist data were based on applicants to the Pew Fellowships in the Arts, which (through 2009) were self-nominated artists of all disciplines.

These data suggest that in 2004 Callowhill/Chinatown North had relatively few resident artists compared to the significant concentrations in similar neighborhoods—like Northern Liberties, Fairmount, and South of South. By 2010 more artists were identified in the area. Seventeen artists were identified who lived in the area, or 8.9 per thousand residents, more than in any of the South Philadelphia neighborhoods and six times the citywide average of 1.4 per thousand.

Although it has fewer artists than several neighborhoods to its east and west, Chinatown North is on the very edge of the large aggregation of Philadelphia artists that stretches from West Philadelphia through lower Kensington. As one heads north from the district, however, the number of artists drops off precipitously. This underlines a significant feature of Callowhill/Chinatown North. Its location represents a location that is “central enough” in that Center City and a number of other
centers of cultural activity are convenient but “far enough” from these areas to enjoy available space and cheaper prices.

Figure 4-6. Artists living within one-quarter mile of block group (dots represent individual artists), Philadelphia, 2010
Source: SIAP

**Cultural asset index**

We can compile the four sub-indexes into a single cultural asset index (CAI) that provides the best measure of the density of cultural assets in the city’s neighborhoods. Overall, the CAI shows that Callowhill/Chinatown North is among the sections of Philadelphia with the highest concentration of cultural assets.

In 2010 the neighborhood consolidated its position as a cultural cluster. Its cultural asset score in that year stood at 289, nearly three times the citywide average. As with several of the indexes presented, the Callowhill/Chinatown North district is at the very edge of the highest concentration of cultural assets in the city.
Figure 4-7. Cultural asset index (100=citywide average), Philadelphia block groups, 2010
Source: SIAP
Current dynamics of Callowhill/Chinatown North’s cultural ecology

As we have suggested, Callowhill/Chinatown North is an anomalous neighborhood. Officially, for the past three decades, it has been designated as a path for the expansion of Chinatown; yet in many ways its profile looks more like that of other neighborhoods surrounding Center City than like Chinatown itself. At the same time, although a number of Chinatown-related organizations and businesses have relocated in the neighborhood, the expansion of Callowhill as a “loft district” appears to have outpaced the expansion of Chinatown.

SIAP used several methods to explore the changing cultural ecology of this district. During the summer of 2010, the team conducted a street survey to document the presence of arts and cultural firms in the area and to update a ten-year listing of cultural organizations compiled from on-line sources. In addition to formal interviews, the team participated in and undertook field observations at a number of cultural programs, including the Asian Arts Initiative, First Friday at Vox Populi and artists’ studios, the Khmer Art Gallery, and the Migrant Education Summer Program at Folk Arts and Cultural Treasures Charter School (FACTS). Finally, we scanned news archives (Philadelphia Inquirer, Daily News, City Paper, and Philadelphia Weekly) over the decade for articles about the arts and culture, community activism, and development in the Callowhill and Chinatown North neighborhoods.

Changing composition of the cultural sector

In 2010 the research team identified 57 cultural organizations and firms in the Callowhill/Chinatown North study area that were present at one time or another during the previous decade. Although characterized by great diversity, there were several clear concentrations. The three most numerous types of enterprises were: graphic design, galleries, and commercial printing. The commercial printing firms appear to have been in the neighborhood the longest, followed by the design firms. Printing and related industries had clustered here for many years due to the proximity of the Philadelphia Inquirer newspaper publishing company on North Broad. The gallery and visual arts venues were the most recent addition to Callowhill/Chinatown North’s cultural scene. The performing arts, media, and photography were also present in the area in significant numbers.

For ease of analysis, we reduced all types of organizations and firms to six categories: graphic design; galleries and visual arts; printing; film, video, and audio; theater and performing arts; and photography.

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4 The Philadelphia Inquirer was housed in The Tower at 401 North Broad Street (at Callowhill) from 1925 to July 2012, when it relocated to the Strawbridge and Clothier Building at 8th and Market Streets. Source: philly.com/philly/gallery/Goodbye_to_Broad_Street.
Cultural organizations and firms, total by category, Callowhill/Chinatown North, 2001-2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number</th>
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<td>Other</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graphic design</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gallery, visual arts</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Printing</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Film, video, audio</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theatre</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photography</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>57</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

As a profile of the 2010 landscape, the above counts are a bit misleading. Our dataset includes information on firms that had ever existed since 2001, many of which had gone out of business by 2010. In fact, of the 57 firms that existed at some point since 2001, only 38 (65 percent) were still operating in 2010. Of the three major categories, the commercial printing sector had been particularly hard hit; only three of the seven firms were still in operation at the end of the decade. Galleries, on the other hand, appeared to be increasing as a share of the cultural sector; according to our data, only one had closed or relocated between 2001 and 2010. Callowhill/Chinatown North’s theater sector almost disappeared during the decade. Of six firms, only one was still operating in the neighborhood in 2010.

The categories of firms vary by size. The commercial printing businesses generally had revenues of more than one million dollars, while the galleries tended to be quite small. The graphic design firms were somewhere in the middle; four of eight had total sales in 2008 of between two and five hundred thousand dollars.

In 2010 the overwhelming number (31 of 38) of cultural firms in the neighborhood were commercial or cooperative enterprises rather than nonprofits. Of the six official nonprofit organizations, two were galleries, and one was a theater.

Since 2010, all theater companies have gone, but performing arts venues have emerged. The last theater company (Pig Iron) relocated out of Callowhill to South Kensington (Crane Arts), where it started a school for advanced performance training. The two nonprofit galleries, Asian Arts Initiative and Vox Populi, had both relocated into Chinatown North from the Gilbert Building, which was demolished to expand the Convention Center. Both have since developed as multi-disciplinary spaces with performance and screening as well as exhibition facilities. In the spring of 2012, the Wolf Building owner opened Underground Arts, a basement venue supported by an eating and drinking establishment.
Ethnic-specific enterprises are uncommon, except in the gallery sector. The Asian Arts Initiative (AAI) stands out both as a non-profit gallery and because of its pan-Asian ethnic identity. “We are grounded in the belief that the arts can provide an important political and cultural voice for the Asian American community in Philadelphia”—a good fit for the diversifying language and ethnic groups represented by Chinatown and Chinatown North.

The emergence of a relatively new gallery scene provides both opportunities and challenges for the district. Fieldwork confirmed that this sector demonstrates a high degree of vitality. A number of small artists’ collectives rent space in the former loft buildings in the area. They hold their own “First Friday” events monthly—typically later than First Fridays in downtown Old City. Many art students and recent graduates of Philadelphia art schools show their work or attend events at these venues. Several cafes and bars—including Café Lift and Prohibition Taproom, the reopened Trestle Inn, and the new Art Bar—also play an important role in this scene.

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**MARVELS & MONSTERS:**
Asian Arts Initiative with NYU’s Asian/Pacific/American Institute at AAI, Feb 3 – Mar 23, 2012

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5 Asian Arts Initiative website: asianartsinitiative.org.
Conversations with people who attend events at these newer galleries suggest that young adults and emerging artists are largely unaware of the Asian identity associated with the neighborhood and of the Asian Arts Initiative in particular. Indeed, some patrons at these alternative gallery scenes expressed a level of suspicion about why there would be a need for an Asian arts organization. At the same time, we found that the artists frequenting these venues shared the same problems as many AAI artists—irregular employment, low arts-based income, and a need to develop wider connections with the broader arts world.

Generally, artists and patrons of the Callowhill/Chinatown North gallery scene stood in marked contrast to artists and patrons of events at the Asian Arts Initiative. AAI participants tend to be younger, are less likely to be white, and are more likely to express interest in social issues or political views than those attending First Fridays.

The Vox Populi director ponders the relationship of the arts to diversity. He notes that First Friday patrons—who tend to be early 30s, young professionals, mostly white, some Chinese and Latinos, and few African Americans—“reflect the profile of MFA programs in Philadelphia.” Vox has no relationship with Chinatown, for example, except for food and restaurants. But if cultural projects can change the nature of cities, how can artists change the gentrification narrative? Vox has a new black box called Aux, “an edgy, peripheral, queer activity space” that attracts a diversity of programming. They believe that Aux is a way to change the dialogue, at least within the art world. Looking forward, Vox would like to draw a broad cross-section of people interested in the arts.

The Asian Arts Initiative, in turn, would like to see AAI as part of a contemporary arts community. “One thing that we definitely do is bring a lot more diversity—in terms of audiences and hands-on participants and even, to a large extent, artists—to this neighborhood.”
Clusters of Arts-related Activity

Given its cultural ecology and central location, Callowhill/Chinatown North has fostered surprisingly little identity as an arts or cultural district. The juxtaposition of modest row houses and grand factory buildings reflects its history as a mixed industrial and residential district, when workers and families resided near their workplace, common during the 19th and early 20th centuries when the economy was dominated by Reading Railroad and nearby Baldwin Locomotive Works. During the latter half of the 20th century, the district’s loss of manufacturing and failure to attract modern industry produced a stock of primely located, low-value structures that caught the eye of artists and artisans and, more recently, property owners and developers with a hand in the arts. Philadelphia art and design schools have been generators not only of studio tenants but also niche developers who see the arts as an opportunistic land use.

Three nodes of arts-related activity, which have evolved over the past two decades, illustrate the character of this “natural” cultural district. Reflecting the district’s multiple identities, we refer to these clusters as Callowhill West, Trestle Town East, and Vine Street-Chinatown North.


1 Baldwin Locomotive Works, located west of North Broad Street, operated continuously for 125 years from 1831 to 1956. The company closed permanently in 1972. Source: explorepahistory.com.
Callowhill West

Located on North Broad Street just southwest of Callowhill/Chinatown North, the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (PAFA) has played a role in the evolution of the district. The country’s first fine arts school and museum, PAFA’s degree and continuing education programs have for years attracted students with a wide range of age and experience, from high school graduates to retirees. Already during the 1980s, PAFA students were living in Callowhill and Chinatown, low-rent districts within walking distance of the school. “People at the Academy were having a survival experience,” not like the typical undergraduate, “at least when I started all those years ago. It was a startlingly diverse group.”

My Neighborhood by Lesley Mitchell. Oil on panel. Courtesy of the artist, 2012

Painting, printmaking & book arts studio at 1315 Buttonwood Street.

In the early 1990s, a PAFA graduate and her spouse bought several properties in the northwest corner of the district—along Nectarine and Buttonwood Streets—to renovate for their own residence and for rental. Renovations were challenging in that many were 19th century structures built as housing or warehouses that had been converted to accommodate industrial uses and machinery. But the couple had already had a foothold in the neighborhood. As a young man with historical sensibility, the spouse had first bought property on Nectarine Street in the 1970s, on the same block as the photographic studio owned by his parents, originally built as a carriage house. (See textbox below, “Finding Nectarine,” from Callowhill News, Winter/Spring 2006.)
Finding Nectarine

A Short Story of One Callowhill Settler

By C’Anne Anderson

Place draws us. Its power and its personality are laid down in layers like sedimentary rock. It is the magical sum of all that came before—soul leavings: the spirit of their work and times. Energies infect a place. Attitudes like co-operation and can do leave traces that make that place what it is, and we are beneficiaries. Sometimes we are quiet enough to sense a place ... sometimes we begin to understand only after we’ve left, but place exerts a force on us, as powerful as ours on it. We are of a place.

Michael Condax was born in 1948, and I have always felt that he landed reaching for the magic of that Age of Steam ... even as it faded. He understood its spirit. So, perhaps his internal magnetic needle pointed to Nectarine Street from the beginning.

For nearly 100 years (beginning in 1832) Baldwin Locomotive Works occupied the whole block of Broad Street from Callowhill to Spring Garden. The neighborhood was bustling then—full of workshops building and supplying components to Baldwin. In 1964 when Michael was building his first steam locomotive and needed leaf springs, the yellow pages lead to 13th & Nectarine where John Evans’ Sons had been operating since 1870. (On the Philadelphia Carriage Company building you can still read the Evans logo.) The company moved to Lansdale in 1967.

By 1969 Michael’s parents were moving their photographic studio, and saw a carriage house listed in the Inquirer. Charmed by the name Nectarine, they bought 1320 and worked here for 25 years. Michael was just out of college when 1312 became available, and urged his father, John, to buy it ... “It’s a good location—close to town, and full of history.” John wasn’t interested at the time, so a young Michael acted on place and place on him. The owner took back a mortgage and Michael became of Nectarine Street.

He also became of this neighborhood we now call Callowhill, where the spirit of the Age of Steam still percolates—drawing to itself the stuff of community—the creative, cooperative, can do energy that is and always has been reinventing itself.

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In 1992 a fellow PAFA alumna and spouse, Lesley Mitchell and Kelly Ray, rented two of these properties, joining row houses at 1315 and 1317 Buttonwood St, which they have continued to use as living quarters, art studio, and dance studio. “[The owner’s] ideal was to populate the spaces as much as possible by other [visual] artists. She was looking for people that she could feel comfortable with.” Over the years, the Buttonwood Street Studio has integrated dance instruction and weekly milongas—Argentine tango parties—that draw dancers from around the region. Happily, in the summer of 2012—after twenty years of renting, improving, and animating the property—Lesley Mitchell and Kelly Ray were finally able to purchase as a single-deeded property their studios at 1315-17 Buttonwood Street.

Romance de Barrio by Lesley Mitchell. Oil on panel.
Courtesy of the artist, 2012
In the 1990s a few pioneer developers took note of the declining industrial district within walking district of City Hall and began to renovate neglected multi-story factories into “loft-style” spaces. Residential conversion started with the Beaux Arts building at 13th and Callowhill, a landmark 1909 structure built for a dress trimmings manufacturer and later owned by a lithographic printing business. In 1995 Beaux Arts Lofts became a condominium with a mix of 64 owner and renter units.

Meanwhile, an artist-partnership, Tom Miles and Alex Generalis, had dovetailed an arts service business into a development company geared to “the new urban lifestyle and the new work force.” The business took root in 1979 in South Philadelphia where, to resolve their own space needs as artists (sculptor and industrial designer respectively), they purchased and converted the old Phillies cigar factory at 700 S 10th St into 12 live-work spaces. Their success with adaptive reuse convinced Miles & Generalis that real estate was more lucrative than the arts, especially during growth cycles. In 1999 they undertook their first project in Callowhill/Chinatown North, a five-story factory building at 429 N 13th St, and branded the neighborhood as “The Loft District.” As they recount:

This was the first building in the New Center City Loft District started in 1999, and it set the new standard for live/work lofts. ... In the 1980s the City Planning Commission thought it best that this area be left for future industrial use. Miles & Generalis thought different. Today it is the NEW LOFT DISTRICT.³

³ Source: Miles+Generalis Developers at milesandgeneralis.com.
Across the street at 428 N 13th St, Miles & Generalis converted a six-story former garment factory into condominium units. At 1234 Hamilton they converted the three-story former Ottens Flavor Factory for mixed use, including “film-set quality” industrial lofts, small business office and studio space, a freight elevator, and indoor parking.

In west Callowhill the most visible node of arts-related activity over the past decade has been the Wolf Building at 12th and Callowhill Streets (340 N 12th St). Architect-developer Gary Reuben and partner Gary Reisner purchased the building in 1997 with a vision of mixed-used development, residential and commercial. “As an architect, I’m a visionary, a tremendous optimist. I create value, added value, from my imagination.” However, in 1998 the mayor’s proposal to build a baseball stadium for the Phillies at 12th and Vine had a dampening effect. “The infield would be this building. It kept us dead in the water.” The downtown ballpark proposal was defeated in 2000. Soon thereafter was conversion of the Old Shoe Factory at 12th and Wood (314 N 12th St) to 63 condo units in a 10-story building, completed in 2002.

Reuben and Reisner are the third owners of the Wolf Building, which had been vacant since 1979. The building was constructed c 1926 for the Wolf Brothers, a paper converting business. From the 1950s to 1980s, it was owned by the Laramie Toy Company, manufacturer of the super soaker water pistol with China and Hong Kong connections. At the close of the century, Reuben & Reisner leased space to sweat shops in the needle trades associated with Chinatown North and commercial sewing shops like the USA company, Mother’s Work Inc. The lofts were lined with banks of cutting tables and sewing machines, and lunchrooms were stocked with rice steamers. During the early 2000s, the Wolf Building transitioned to raw studio rentals, as-is with two toilet rooms per floor. The industrially-zoned spaces attracted artists of all types—painters, sculptors, jewelers, glassblowers, and ceramicists—about 40 artists in all, mostly in the fine arts and mostly referred by word of mouth. “Artists love this kind of space,” and they “kept us afloat.” In 2003-04 the owners constructed apartments on the 6th and 7th floors—rentals at the low end of market, affordable lofts for 20s and 30s—and began the gradual integration of residents.

Thus, through phased renovation for a mixed-use, the Wolf Building has evolved as an “accidental arts’ space.” Affordable rents have made it possible for different kinds of nonprofits and businesses and some artists to move in and operate. While nonprofit artist-based groups have moved out (e.g., Azuka and Pig Iron theater companies), design firms have moved in that offer a range of urban planning, architecture, landscape architecture, graphic design, and web software services. Oasis, Resources for Human Development, runs an in-house studio and gallery to support its visual arts and education program geared to individuals with mental health disabilities. Other nonprofit tenants include a range of social entrepreneurs that offer services such as family therapy, substance abuse counseling, HIV testing, disability consulting, and technology services. Wolf Building’s current mix is 40 percent residential and 60 percent commercial and nonprofit tenants, but the plan is to continue to convert more of the building to residential use.
The Wolf Building houses an art institution unique to Philadelphia, Studio Incamminati School for Contemporary Realist Art, founded by painter and portrait artist Nelson Shanks. In October 2001 Shanks relocated his atelier and apprenticeship program from his Bucks County residence to Callowhill/Chinatown North. The Wolf Building offered the expanding program two floors of affordable studio space in a central location and bathed in unobstructed north light. The Shanks-designed curriculum is based on mastery of Renaissance principles and techniques of humanist realism. The program also offers essentials of career development, that is, how to earn a living as an artist. Studio facilities are open seven days a week and programs offered year-round—full- and part-time professional programs, continuing education evening and day classes, as well as winter and summer workshop programs. Though a small school, serving about 300 students a year, Incamminati draws artists and students from all over the US and abroad.

Despite its longevity, Studio Incamminati notes that it is anonymous in the Wolf Building, invisible on the street, and without connections to community organizations or business leadership. However, what they miss most is street life.

What happens is there is a lot of street traffic during the day, but if you come here at night, it’s dead. Even on weekends, there is no real commercial activity, no critical mass of people. ... At night the neighborhood looks desolate. If you’re not informed, it looks on the scary side. I think it’s more perception than reality.

The Studio sees North Broad Street—Avenue of the Arts with the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and the planned new facility for the Pennsylvania Ballet and School—as a better fit. “The difference is that there’s traffic on North Broad, and hopefully there will be more traffic.” An ideal site would include gallery space at street level and north-lit studios and classrooms on the upper floors.

Still, west Callowhill has been gradually generating commercial life and a street presence. In 2005 a Japanese artist-couple started Morihata, a Japanese design company, first as a wholesale business and later as a retail shop, at 428 N 13th St. The family lives upstairs. In 2003 a local couple opened Café Lift—“brunch all day everyday”—on the ground floor of 428 N 13th. In 2008, one block north at 501 N 13th, they opened the Prohibition Taproom. Prohibition gets crowded on weekends but on Sunday nights features BYOV—Bring Your Own Vinyl—and get 20 percent off your tab. Café Lift and Prohibition—“those are two important parts of the community feeling like a community because it has a place to go.” Early in 2013, on the southeast corner of 13th and Spring Garden Streets, the couple opened their third establishment in the neighborhood, an artisan pizzeria called Bufad.
A new venue at 1200 Callowhill Street, Underground Arts, represents a shift from accidental to intentional arts space at the Wolf Building. Owner Gary Reuben has developed the basement as a performance venue with a black box, recording studio, backstage facilities, as well as full bar and kitchen. Reuben designed the space with the artist in mind. “Everything a performance artist needs is there.” The program is “driven by artists so that people who want to be with artists will come.” The idea is that different kinds of artists meet each other and bring their audiences who meet each other. Of course, food and alcohol are necessary to broaden the audience and make money. Its Arts Bar was the official bar for the 2012 Live Arts and Philly Fringe Festival in September.

**Arts underground at the Wolf Building, 12th & Callowhill**

*Apparently, the basement of the Wolf Building has been an arts space since the late 1990s.*

Please Take Materials Exchange, “a joint effort by the Creative Artists' Resource Project and the Dumpster Divers, a group of artists with a passion for trash-picking, set up shop there and took in donations that ranged from boxes of doorknobs to bins of crutches, from industrial-size spools of thread to discarded electronic equipment.” In April 2000 the Exchange closed its doors “done in by rising rents and a fruitless search for a permanent home.” *From The Philadelphia Inquirer, Thursday, April 27, 2000*

During the 2010 Philly Fringe Festival, “many Fringe actors and designers fan out to local stages or to cabarets or improv and comedy clubs. And I can tell you where a few of them are these days: in the basement of the Wolf Building at the northern reach of Center City, on 12th Street near Callowhill.” *From The Philadelphia Inquirer, June 8, 2010*

“At his Underground Arts space, in the basement of the Wolf building, located at 12th and Callowhill, ... Gary Reuben is developing a venue unlike any other in Philadelphia. ... A month or two after its opening, Reuben said he plans for the venue to host shows from cabaret to comedy, music, poetry, spoken word, theater, dance, storytelling and other performances-based arts every night of the week–something that’s sorely needed in Philly, with its scores of talented artists.”

*From Philadelphia.foobooz.com blog, posted on September 22, 2011*

“Even before becoming Underground Arts, the space already had a somewhat rich and colorful history. It had previously been used as a storage space for the Convention Center and at one point, the room was used to film videos verging on S&M material.”

*From JUMP The Philly Music Project, Fall 2012, posted on October 23, 2012.*
Trestle Town East

Trestle Town, the district’s most whimsical name, “captures the architecture and history of the neighborhood.” It’s a favorite among those who embrace its gritty character and utilitarian features like abandoned railroad viaducts and active power grids. In the eastern part of Trestle Town especially, the physical landscape encourages social isolation. Still there are interesting pockets of activity that reflect the district’s peculiar diversity. Of particular note are the artists coming and going along North 11th Street.

The factory building at 310 N 11th St (Pearl St) overlooking the Reading Railroad viaduct houses two businesses—John Struble Fine Furniture and Liao Collection Asian Antiques—and their owners. John Struble is a woodworker and furniture-maker inspired by Japanese and Chinese design traditions. In 1997 when he set up shop at this site, “there was not much here at that point.” The floors were strewn with brass shavings, left behind by a printing shop that relocated to New Jersey. In 2002 dealer Michelle Liao relocated her 25-year collection of antique Chinese and Japanese furniture, art, and textiles to North 11th St from its original South Street storefront at 529 Bainbridge. The four-story structure has ample space for Liao’s showroom, gallery, and warehouse; Struble’s workshop; and joint living quarters.

Liao Collection Asian Antiques at 310 N 11th St, Philadelphia. The custom-designed buffet shown at center is a John Stuble/Bill Curran collaboration. John Stuble woodworker (310 N 11th St) and Bill Curran metalworker (1231 Wood St) each have studios in the neighborhood and often work together on design and fabrication. Photo: SIAP 2012
Struble, self-described neighborhood advocate, first met his neighbors in the context of the baseball stadium proposal. He is a founding member of the Callowhill Neighborhood Association and the Reading Viaduct Project. Liao, with an interest in contemporary art as well as the neighborhood, connects with Vox Populi and the Asian Arts Initiative. The 2007 relocation of Vox Populi, an established collective, to 319 N 11th St (at Wood St) sparked artists’ awareness of the site and its evolution as an arts space. However, owners Bob and Bonna Neang Weinstein had made the initial investment in the arts with the opening of the Khmer Art Gallery LLC, which occupies the first floor and basement and has its own legible entry off Wood St. The Khmer gallery and museum show a collection of Cambodian art, from traditional to contemporary works, and dedicate a room to the memory of the Killing Fields of the Khmer Rouge regime (1975-79). For a number of years, except for the Khmer gallery and the Laborers’ District Council\(^4\) at street level, the building was leased by “sweatshops” and—rumor has it—“some kind of sex dungeon” on the fourth floor.

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**Collective spaces at 319 N 11th St**

“...The coming together of Vox, Copy and Screening at 319A N 11th St makes that building the new locus of First Friday calisthenics. What you see doesn’t always please the eye, but it almost always provokes. All three venues have strong programs with cutting-edge video, audio and installation works. And Vox, a nonprofit cooperative, takes its mission to educate seriously. If you can’t make the opening, or if what you see puzzles you, check out the gallery’s monthly curatorial walkthrough.”

*From Philadelphia Weekly, December 19-25, 2007*

The Collective Spaces at 319 N 11th St were teeming with activity last Friday night—openings at Vox, Copy Gallery, Tiger Strikes Asteroid, and a new space called ‘Progressive Sharing’ that just opened on the 6th floor of the building. ... 

[Downstairs] was another eerie choreographed experience; descend the stairs, migrate across the street towards the light emanating from yellow bulbs suspended at the tunnel’s ceiling under the tracks ... an installation piece titled ‘The Little Red String’ which is part of ’Chinatown In/Flux’. The installation really helped to set the stage for a beautiful performance. ... 

*From theartblog.org, posted May 6, 2009*

In 2005 the only artists in the building were called Black Floor Gallery, an experimental group from Cincinnati. Black Floor’s presence—and loft space for rent in a building with interesting potential—persuaded Vox Populi to move into 319 N 11th St. Given its involuntary relocation, necessitated by Convention Center expansion, Vox had decided

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\(^4\) The Laborers-Employers Cooperation and Education Trust (LECET Philadelphia) is associated with the Laborers’ International Union of North America.
to remain in Center City within walking distance of studio clusters south of Vine St.\(^5\)

They rented half of the third floor and undertook a largely sweat equity renovation. In 2008 Vox signed a long-term lease for 15 years, which affords a sense of security. But they are aware that although the building owner likes artists, he is not dedicated to the arts. He is committed to rentals, and he could sell. “This is great, but it may not last forever.”

Black Floor soon evolved out, but others moved in. On the fourth floor, photographer Jeffrey Stockbridge renovated space for first for live/work and currently as a work studio. Factory uses are ongoing, such as a Chinese clothing manufacturer on the second floor, but the last two years have seen swift turnover. “As the building changes, it has become increasingly a locus of artistic activity.” Finished studio workspace is affordable “but not for new grads.” Young professionals (such as Becky Suss and Isaac Lin) have moved out of Space 1026 (1026 Arch St) to 319 N 11\(^{th}\) for the opportunity to rent a larger studio and join a collective (Vox) but stay in the neighborhood. Younger artists note that Callowhill is cheap, convenient, safe, and walkable, but except for the shelters, short on residents. “It’s a good neighborhood for working, but not for living.”

The “Vox building” now has eight spaces with artist-run galleries, generating a node of arts activity that connects Callowhill/Chinatown North with Chinatown-based studios via First Friday events. In fact, four sites open on First Fridays as an alternative to Old City galleries—Space 1026 at 1026 Arch Street, the Fabric Workshop and Museum at 1214 Arch St, the Vox Building at 319 N 11\(^{th}\), and the Asian Arts Initiative at 1219 Vine St. Is Vox good for the neighborhood? “It’s not harmful and contributes to revitalization. The place is less like an empty zone from Eraserhead. Now the sign says: DON’T PARK UNDER THE TRESTLE. It used to say: DON’T PARK.”

The Trestle Inn at 339 N 11\(^{th}\) Street, at Callowhill St beneath the Reading Railroad viaduct, is one of the longest (nearly) continuously operating establishments in the district. J&J Trestle Inn, a small African American owned strip club that once served black textile workers, operated for decades until it closed in November 2009. Vox Populi

\(^5\) Vox Populi has had four locations since its founding in 1988: first on 4\(^{th}\) Street, just south of South St; in 1991 a move to 2\(^{nd}\) and Church Streets; in 2001 a move to 1315 Cherry St (Gilbert Building); and in 2007 a move to its current location at 319 N 11\(^{th}\) St.
artists dropped in reluctantly to buy beer to go. A patron wrote a review a couple of months before it closed.

Pretty intimidating from the outside. Pretty intimidating from the inside too. Give it a try though. Its kind of like going to your black friend's uncle's basement to play pool, drink and pay go-go dancers. It's not really a strip club. ... It's a very fun place. Try not to be intimidated and go with an open mind.6

Old City-based “artsy entrepreneurs,” Josette Bonafino and Ian Cross, bought the building in 2003—“a diamond in the rough”—and retained J&J's management as a tenant until closure. (The couple has also founded a nonprofit, Multicultural Youth Exchange, run by Bonafino; Cross runs a Web design-marketing firm, I-SITE Inc.) They took two years to renovate the bar and reassure the neighbors that it would not be an adult cabaret. It reopened in October 2011 as The Trestle Inn—A Whiskey and Go Go bar, a reference to the 1960s-established Los Angeles discotheque featuring rock music and go-go dancers. The concept is to evoke retro-seediness but make a clean and safe place that offers a unique Philadelphia experience. “They have 25 kinds of whiskies, gourmet pickles, burlesque dancers, DJ nights, and videos.” People come from all around, but the owners are disappointed that it’s not yet a destination. Plans include renovation of the upstairs as an artist co-op space and community center. A flat roof looks right over the viaduct, inspiring even grander ambitions for the building. Bonafino and Cross are optimistic about the district’s prospects as an up-and-coming neighborhood and, though it’s still a fringe destination, that’s what attracted them in the first place.

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Chapter 4 202
Since 1979 the former carriage house at 1115 Hamilton Street has been renovated as the residence and studio of artist Sarah McEneaney. In 1973 McEneaney arrived in Philadelphia to study the fine arts, first at the Philadelphia College of the Arts (now University of the Arts) and later at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. At age 24 she decided to make the city her home and purchased the rambling one-story structure across from a massive PECO substation in a neighborhood without a name. From here she has generated a 30-year practice with paintings that belie her formal training and echo cross-cultural traditions of the outsider or folk artist. McEneaney constructs her paintings as “autobiographical narratives” that depict her life stories, the studio, the neighborhood, activism, and travel. Her work has been exhibited widely—in solo as well as group shows—in New York and Philadelphia, elsewhere in the US, and Europe. In 2012 the City of Philadelphia has commissioned McEneaney to create a painting for the new Youth Study Center in West Philadelphia, which she has designed as a composite landscape of Philadelphia’s parks.

Sarah McEnaney, Callowhill/Chinatown North resident, excerpts from an artist statement, March 2012

My paintings are autobiographical narratives. They retell life experiences both physical and emotional, looking out from within and back inside from my own particular place in the world. I work from drawings, memory, imagination and photographs. Though very direct, even factual, the paintings read less as memoir and more like creative non-fiction. ...

Drawing from daily life my solitary studio practice and busy urban life have become interwoven in my paintings. ...

For 33 years I have lived and worked in the same building in a now formerly industrial neighborhood in Philadelphia. Not only did I renovate the building, but I transformed the weedy trash filled yard into a garden. Over the years I have chronicled the neighborhood and my life in it. In 2000 my neighborhood was threatened with demolition for the construction of a major-league baseball stadium. Working with neighbors, my life became consumed with meetings, signature petitions, fundraising and demonstrations.

The fight (which we won) was reflected in my work in both studio paintings and the 1,850 sq ft public mural I painted on a building on my block during that summer. The mural, Inside Outside, depicted my studio and on the walls were paintings of the neighborhood I had done over the years. In 2004 the building with the mural on it was demolished to make way for new homes. While it was a little sad, now I have neighbors and life on the street before and after business hours.

The following summer we created a community garden on a trash filled vacant lot at the other end of the block. For 5 years the garden was a vibrant green space, a source of homegrown food and a gathering place for the community. I painted the garden, before and after. Unfortunately the land was sold to a developer/speculator and is now a paved parking lot.

The current community project I am deeply involved in is the preservation and reuse of an abandoned elevated railroad as public open green space. The mile long Reading Viaduct and the work towards making it a new city park has become an important subject in the ongoing pictorial history of my life in Philadelphia. The adage, “Think globally, act locally” is my mantra. Everyday I walk out my door, through my garden and into a vibrant, changing urban environment. I am working with my neighbors to clean, green and improve the quality of life in our community. My paintings reflect that work.
**Lucky Garden, 1104 Buttonwood St.** At the north end of this cluster is Lucky Garden, a condominium complex constructed in 2007 by a local company. The four-story development—20 townhouses with retail and professional offices on the ground floor—wraps around the block bounded by Buttonwood St, N 12th St, Hamilton St, and Ridge Avenue. Lucky Garden represents another type of stakeholder in Callowhill/Chinatown North—Mandarin-speaking business owners and professionals, investors and developers, who have migrated to Philadelphia during the past four decades.

At the eastern end of the district is Hing Wah Yuen, a residential complex for low- and moderate-income immigrants, constructed in 1997 by Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation. The development—which extends from Vine to Callowhill Streets, and from 9th to 8th Streets—consists of 51 units of affordable housing for first-time home-buyers. Architectural details, central courtyard and garden, and other elements of the public environment take cues from Chinatown in order to express “a sense of place inspired by the heritage of the residents.”

A unique resource is the Folk Arts-Cultural Treasures School (FACTS), a public charter school founded in 2005 and relocated in September 2006 to its permanent site in at 1023 Callowhill. Curricula include traditional arts, cultural heritage, and languages as a way “to help youngsters discover the value of their own and other cultures.” FACTS serves about 400 children from across the city, many of whom are of Chinese, Indonesian, Vietnamese or Cambodian descent. During 2010 and 2011, FACTS ran an arts-based summer program, sponsored by the Pennsylvania Department of Education, for migrant and refugee children living in Philadelphia.

What Chinatown North offers working-class Chinese immigrants and families, predominantly Mandarin-speaking or Fujianese peoples, are two schools that provide “safe space” for children of Chinese and other ethnic Asian immigrants: Holy Redeemer Chinese Catholic Church and School, historically Chinatown’s neighborhood school, and Folk Arts and Cultural Treasures charter school (FACTS). However, although Chinatown continues to serve as the first point of entry for new immigrants, over-crowding encourages workers and laborers to resettle in South Philadelphia or the Northeast where they can find affordable rentals and mature neighborhoods.

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7 FACTS was started by community and education activists, led by Asian Americans United and the Philadelphia Folklore Project, which have worked with Philadelphia immigrant communities for over two decades. (See J&J Trestle Inn photo above. FACTS occupies the upper floors of D&H Hardware store pictured one block east.)
Vine Street Corridor and Chinatown North

The Vine Street corridor represents both a barrier and a bridge among three intersecting neighborhoods—Chinatown, Chinatown North, and Callowhill. The Asian Arts Initiative, nonprofit owner of a multi-tenant arts facility at 12th and Vine, is thoughtfully positioned at this juncture and has made a commitment to support positive community development. Ideally, the facility would become an asset or even an anchor for physical development of the Vine St Corridor or the broader Chinatown North neighborhood. AAI has a three-pronged approach to its community mission—through neighborhood networks, cultural programming, and its physical presence as a community-based arts center.

Relocation from the commercial core to Chinatown North thrust AAI quickly into its neighborhood role. Formerly on the second floor of the Gilbert Building, Its gallery at 1219 Vine St is now visible and accessible at street level in a marginal neighborhood where the homeless are among the resident population. AAI has developed partnerships with local shelters, notably, Sunday Breakfast Mission, an independent nonprofit, church-affiliated center on 13th Street. The City’s largest shelter, nearby on Ridge Ave, closed down in December 2011. (Another shelter south of Spring Garden has no connection with AAI.) AAI staff has been able to build relationships with homeless men who visit the gallery, but it is difficult with strangers or others who do not appear to be emotionally stable or drug-free when they visit. “AAI as an organization has been able to embrace a fairly diverse set of constituents and is happy to have people in the homeless community as part of our community.” Part of the long-term site plan is to engage Sunday Breakfast and homeless residents in the transformation of the Pearl Street alley behind AAI into a public space with a garden and outdoor gallery.

Reinventing the Asian Arts Initiative as a multi-tenant arts facility has been “a six-year journey.” AAI acquired the property—a three-story, 24,000 square foot loft building, once a Warner Brothers screening house—in August 2008. The ground floor has been renovated to house a gallery and exhibition areas, black-box style theater (with projection and audio equipment), meeting and workshop rooms, and AAI office space. Opening of the second floor was critical to becoming “a truly multi-tenant facility,” not just with hourly users for rehearsals or workshops but with rentals of discrete spaces to long-term tenants. By spring 2012 AAI was “in a good situation” with over 70 percent of the building leased out. Of seven units, the four largest were occupied; one was kept vacant intentionally for “the perfect tenant” or to experiment with hourly rentals; and two small studios (200 sq. ft. each) were available for individual artists (either as rentals

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8 The service area of the Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation extends from Filbert Street to Spring Garden and from 8th St to 12th St.
9 The Initiative began in 1993 as an Asian American arts festival launched by the Painted Bride Art Center in Old City. In 1996 the AAI moved out of the Painted Bride, became an independent nonprofit and community-based arts center at 1315 Cherry St downtown near Chinatown. In 2008, with the purchase of 1219 Vine St, AAI for the first time became a property owner and landlord.
or subsidized artists-in-residence). AAI is seeking additional funding for construction of the third floor, currently leased by three storage tenants and providing a good income. AAI’s vision for the building is to become “a center for community engagement with the arts” and for its residents to reflect the diversity of the city of Philadelphia. The long-term tenants to varying degrees fit this mission. Current tenants are the following:

- **Action Mill LLC**—strategic design studio that develops tools for community-based organizations that help people forge their own solutions to the problems they face.
- **Art In Motion Latin Dancers, Art in Motion Dance Academy**—new school (2011) for Latin dance started by a world salsa championship dancer and his Latin dance company.
- **City of Philadelphia Mural Arts Program**—MAP’s satellite studio for Mural Corps, an art education program serving young people from ages 14 to 21.
- **EgoPo Classic Theatre**—office of nonprofit repertory theater company that revitalizes the classics; classes and workshops are held 531 N 7th St (Spring Garden).
- **Philadelphia Suns**—Chinatown-based volunteer sports membership organization and performing group, Lion Dance troupe, which supports a traveling youth basketball team.
- **Philadelphia Taiko Center**—new center (2010) that offers quality Taiko and Japanese arts-related classes, workshops with professional artists, and performances.
- **Philippine Folk Arts Society Inc (PFASI)**—group that promotes Philippine culture through dance, crafts, education and its signature Rondalla string ensemble.

AAI’s director notes that they occupy “an interstitial space” that is part of both the contemporary arts community and the Asian American community; that sometimes they can be a bridge between the two, and at other times they can work with one or the other. Given the growing pan-Asian communities in South Philadelphia, AAI offers after school programs at South Philadelphia High and Taggart middle school as well as youth arts workshops on site at 1219 Vine. At the same time, AAI contributes to building Callowhill/Chinatown North as an arts destination—with gallery and theater evening programs, including First Friday open house, third Friday Family Style open mic series, and second Tuesday documentary film screenings. During May-June 2012 Latina artist collective Las Gallas ran multi-disciplinary workshops for Asian and Latino teens through which participants shared personal histories about the migration experience. The project culminated with an AAI exhibition of lanterns created by workshop participants alongside new mixed-media artwork by Las Gallas artists.
**Illuminate Me**, multi-media exhibition by Las Gallas artists—Julia Lopez, Magda Martinez, and Michelle Angela Ortiz—in collaboration with Alex Shaw, at Asian Arts Initiative, Fall 2012. Images are lanterns created by workshop participants Linda Fernandez and Mary Seng. Photo: Asian Arts Initiative, 2012 [www.asianartsinitiative.org]

AAI has developed relationships with community organizations along the Vine Street corridor to upgrade the public environment and engage Chinatown communities in documenting their past and envisioning their future. Partnership with Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation (PCDC) has involved support for projects such as the 10th Street Plaza, a pedestrian retreat over the Vine St Expressway, and work with the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society on a Chinatown greening program. Partnership with the Chinese Christian Church and Center (CCCNC) during the summer of 2011 involved commission of a mural for the Center’s playground and basketball court at 10th and Spring Streets, designed by teaching artist Isaac Lin and created with youth art students. For its Chinatown In/flux: Future Landscapes series, AAI commissioned artists to develop site-specific installations that “engage residents and visitors alike to shift their perceptions of art and definitions of community.” The exhibition on view from April to August of 2009 was the culmination of a two-year process of planning with community partners, including PCDC, CCCNC, Chinatown Learning Center, Holy Redeemer Church, Chinatown Learning Center, and On Lok House senior center.
Chinatown North, as we know it, is a no-man's-land of old factory buildings, sparse strips of row houses and streets overwhelmed by tall weeds and trash. But thanks to the Asian Arts Initiative's 2009 "Chinatown In/flux: Future Landscapes" project, revitalization may not be out of reach.

Participating artists Jonathan and Kimberly Stemler use paper lanterns to illuminate the Reading Railroad viaduct's archway over Carlton Street between 11th and 12th in The Little Red String. The lanterns, inscribed with stories written by Chinatown community members, hang from the archway ceiling, brightening up an otherwise dreary passageway.

So far the reaction has been positive, but the Stemlers know some people may view their project as intrusive - it's clear that homeless people live below the viaduct, and the Stemlers didn't want to overstep their boundaries. "We felt like we needed to protect them," said Kimberly.

Rebecca Hackemann's exhibit, Visionary Sightseeing Binoculars, juxtaposes Philadelphia's reality with its potential. The binoculars, the type you'd put a quarter into to peep panoramas or animals at the zoo, are mounted on the sidewalk over the Vine Street Expressway, facing the skyline. The idea is that after gazing, binocular-free, at the scene that lies ahead, viewers can flip through more than 30 stereoscopic binocular images - all renderings of historical or altered Philadelphia, brought to life by students and artists in the Chinatown community.

Film and video artist Nadia Hironaka turns the Asian Arts Initiative's front window near 11th and Vine into a canvas to show her short animated film, Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio. Its title taken from ancient Chinese author Pu Songling, the project is a compilation of oral histories and mythology. Hironaka hopes to create a sense of cultural pride for younger Chinese-Americans who struggle to create their own identity.

Finally, Kikuchi + Liu's Chinatown TM has drawn the most controversy. The artists initially wanted to paint a row house at 1011 Vine St. "Chinatown orange" as a symbol of change, but the Redevelopment Authority, which owns the house, did not give permission. Instead, PennDOT has allowed the team to paint a parking lot at 10th and Vine.

AAI recently lost its Chinatown-proper digs to the Convention Center's expansion, and has now relocated to Chinatown North along Vine Street, so rebuilding this neighborhood is much more personal. The goal of these projects, most literally with The Little Red String, is to "light" the way to redevelopment. Each project has its own individual significance, but collectively they serve as a means to reclaim this blighted section by empowering artists and residents alike to change the world around them.

Photo courtesy of John Struble.
Callowhill/Chinatown North’s Fit as a “Natural” Cultural District

Callowhill/Chinatown North’s post-industrial landscape attracts artists and cultural enterprises that do not seek the conventional vis-à-vis the professional art world or urban social life. “It’s a blighted, derelict area that attracts not especially artists but daring, adventurous people who don’t mind living on the edge.”

What attracts people here? It attracts funky people because it’s a funky place. Some people fall in love with it. Funky, adventurous, daring, think-outside-the-box people. People who could live anywhere, who like to swim in strange waters.

Space and place are both important. What drew artists to the district were location (including transit), affordability (including rent), and versatile space (large, open, and bright). Long-time resident artists are sole practitioners who value Callowhill/Chinatown North not as an arts community but as a congenial place to live and do business. These art world “mavericks” don’t look to neighbors for creative interaction or collaborative opportunities but value instead the independence and tolerance afforded by the relatively anomic neighborhood.

It’s been nice to have people around—in involved in the arts, yes—but who are relaxed in a certain sort of way. People who live right around us, who manage to live alongside a dance studio with dance parties. Frequently we have people here till 2 in the morning. They are not rowdy but those are the people we have here. We’ve always had a series of neighbors whose notions of what is appropriate in a neighborhood were pretty broad. Since we do mix business and normal life in one place—that could be pretty difficult.

Many younger professional artists, even in Callowhill/Chinatown North, seek the community of an art world, albeit an alternative art world.

People flocked to here [Vox building] because of architecture and cost, large cheap spaces—it’s not a South Philadelphia row house. The warehouse space, with multiple-floors, allows a community to evolve. People can go to 8 to 9 floors and see shows, and the neighborhood knows each other.

In the context of blight, the loft district has been described as “neat.” Generally, the loft renovations, mostly market-rate condos and apartments, attract fewer artists and more “arty people”—e.g., graphic designers and software developers—and other young professionals.

Community identity has evolved slowly, spurred by external and local development interests and reinforced by basic needs for community safety and services. In the late 1990s, community connections were an unanticipated outcome of a Chinatown North coalition with Chinatown in opposition to the Mayor’s proposal to build a new Phillies

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Callowhill ballpark at 12th and Vine, north of the expressway. “The neighbors started to meet each other purposefully, not just informally, at a candy factory.”

In 2000 after the downtown stadium defeat, residents and property owners, including Miles & Generalis, decided to organize as a civic association “to assist with neighborhood development.” The founding members needed to agree on a name for the neighborhood. They settled on Callowhill, the name of the district’s main east-west street and of William Penn’s second wife, Hannah Callowhill. Callowhill Neighborhood Association—serving the area from the north side of Vine to the north side of Spring Garden, and from the east side of Broad to west side of 8th Street—focuses on security and town watch, community clean-ups and greening, and zoning issues. A vision to reuse the Reading Railroad viaduct as public open space—“work from underneath” since the mid-2000s—has helped foster pride in the neighborhood. “Neighbors are curious about the Trestle Project and want to meet people.”

Efforts to cultivate an arts identity for Callowhill/Chinatown North have been sporadic and largely connected to city arts initiatives—Philadelphia Open Studio Tours (POST), Philadelphia Live Arts Festival and Philly Fringe, and First Fridays. Despite clusters in the Wolf Building, the Vox building, and at 915 Spring Garden, the neighborhood has had weak representation in the annual POST tours. Studio Incamminati (Wolf Building) had been a regular participant in POST for much of the decade but dropped out in 2011.

For a few years there was a lot of traffic coming to the Studio over the weekend. [In 2007] POST in this neighborhood seemed fairly strong, but it seems to have waned each year. It didn’t seem like a critical mass of people were coming in. So we dropped out last year.

... It’s difficult, even in this building. We’re very anonymous-looking in here. We’re in here with residents. It’s mixed-use, not welcoming, and you need a code to get in. It’s not visitor friendly. That’s part of the issue.

Independent artists who want to participate in POST have found it difficult to connect with other studios. “I’ve felt surprisingly isolated, given how close things are.”

The Asian Arts Initiative director characterizes Callowhill/Chinatown North as “an emerging cultural district.” Overall, people in the arts community are still fairly unaware

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11 The Center for Emerging Visual Artists runs neighborhood open studio tours on two weekends a year during October. The annual Philadelphia Live Arts and Philly Fringe Festival runs two weeks in September.

Chapter 4
not only of AAI “but of all these other groups that I personally think of as very established, but understandably on the fringier side of established.” Despite Chinatown and FACTS connections, the neighborhood is not distinguished by folk arts or ethnic cultural practice. In fact, there are more folk and traditional artists based in South Philadelphia or even North Philadelphia. Callowhill is more a self-defined arts community than a cultural community in the broader sense. “It’s still the seedier side of the formal arts scene that characterizes this neighborhood.”

The neighborhood is changing gradually but still has a reputation as “a marginal peripheral neighborhood.” Since 2008, having incidents of crime and vandalism and theft in the studio, Vox Populi installed security windows and doors and holds safety discussions with staff. During the past two years, with an increase in working artists as well as loft residents, the neighborhood is changing perceptibly. “The area is way more popular than it used to be. And the drug dealers and prostitutes are not so obvious anymore. They are still around, but they’re not so obvious.”

The opening of Café Lift and Prohibition and reopening of the Trestle Inn are frequently cited as neighborhood improvements and important gathering places. As one artist noted approvingly, “These are big pieces of gentrification.” Development of Underground Arts as a performance venue has helped put the Wolf Building on the map for the arts community. In contrast to the arts-related spaces upstairs, the renovated basement is “a formally declared performance venue. It’s a place where the public is actually invited to come. That does make a difference.”

The owner-operator of Underground Arts, along with other neighborhood business owners and arts producers, have begun to explore the possibility of promoting the neighborhood as an arts district. The challenge is how to build it out as an arts district rather than simply as a real estate opportunity. “The time to do it is now—buildings are available, rents are low, and artists have a foothold in the neighborhood.” “We’ve got the bones” for a cultural district in the making—architectural integrity, authenticity over time, building stock, spaces to support art, gathering places and open space, and a critical mass of people coming on a regular basis.

We need more people like us to buy real estate and keep it as is. Success in real estate takes a long time. Artists in their 20s and 30s should buy property now and sell out in their 50s and 60s. Thirty years from now, Callowhill will cash out. We can enjoy an upswing for 15 to 20 years, then Starbucks and other chains will start to buy up property, and ultimately the neighborhood will cash out. Soho is now for tourists.

The arts district concept, therefore, is proposed as a way to slow down and mix up an inevitable path of development and displacement. “Progressive stakeholders” are concerned about the pace of change—how to foster development slowly and organically—and with how to preserve diversity. Conventional developers have as their priority to make money—they care less about character and more about return on
investment. “Callowhill should not become just a bedroom community. In the end, it would be a boring place to be and lose a big chunk of its vitality and uniqueness.”

Some cite the importance of market mix. Dwindling opportunities for affordable rental and ownership—for emerging artists, nonprofits, enterprises, as well as immigrants—will affect the potential of the area to evolve as an arts district. Some envision alternative models of planning and development, design and build, or community investment and stewardship. Besides the railroad viaduct, the district has an abundance of vacant and abandoned properties. One idea is that the City acquire abandoned lots and lease them to the community on a ten-year basis in exchange for maintenance and management. Another is that the City lease vacant lots to “creative people”—artists, designers, and architects—for design and build projects to generate “random quirks” architecturally as well as affordable loft models. Lots near North Broad Street earmarked for high-rise construction could be available for a design competition. Inner lots could be designated as parkland with community stewardship, such as Liberty Lands Park, an industrial dead space converted by Northern Liberties residents to a neighborhood-owned park.

Others believe that the district’s character is best captured by the moniker “Eraserhood,” a reference to David Lynch’s 1976 surrealist film *Eraserhead*, shot in Callowhill where Lynch lived. In part, the name expresses nostalgia within the arts community that sees the neighborhood at a crossroads. In July 2012 the Philadelphia Mausoleum of Contemporary Art (PhilaMOCA), former headstone showroom at 12th and Ridge Ave, installed an Eraserhood mural as a kick-off to an exhibit called *Eraserhood Forever*. Yet another manifestation of Callowhill/Chinatown North as contested terrain.

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A Neighborhood In Flux

In 2009 the Asian Arts Initiative mounted an exhibit called Chinatown In/flux. While that description certainly fits Chinatown, it may fit Callowhill/Chinatown North even more. The direction of change of Callowhill/Chinatown North appears to be even less predictable than that of Chinatown proper.

Since the 1980s, as we have noted, official planning documents have identified Callowhill/Chinatown North for the future expansion of Chinatown. The pace of that expansion, however, has been quite modest. In the meantime, first, the conversion of lofts into condominiums and, recently, their use as artists’ spaces suggest that an alternative future for the neighborhood—a vision not tied to a particular ethnic identity—has become increasingly likely. Neighborhood and regional discussions of the future of the abandoned Reading Railroad viaduct that transects Callowhill/Chinatown North will likely figure in determining what path the neighborhood will take.

Callowhill/Chinatown North is likely to undergo significant change in the coming years. The Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation’s (PCDC) long-standing interest in developing the area drew impetus in the spring of 2010 with its announcement of the long-planned community center on Vine Street between 10th and 11th Streets. Project design now features a 23-story tower with 144 apartments, 22 percent subsidized for low-income residents; shops, offices, and social service agencies; and the new community center, with a combination basketball court and banquet hall, on the ground floors. The architects have designed the tower “as a jigsaw of interlocking glass boxes—some vertical, some horizontal—that evoke a Chinese puzzle box.” They want the tower to serve as a “skyline gateway to Chinatown, in much the same way that the traditional carved gate at 10th and Arch Streets does at ground level.”

The problem was how to convey its Chinese character without resorting to stereotypical motifs, such as pagoda tiers or dragons. [The architects] decided to accent the modern puzzle-box sections with wood eaves, suggesting the slatted underside of Chinese courtyard houses. ...

A busy highway may not sound like the most desirable location for an apartment house. But the architects think about the environment as a landscape, with the expressway as a fast-flowing river ... Feng shui, a Chinese practice historically used to orient buildings, favors locations facing water. In placing the community center in front of the tower, the architects also treated the high-rise like a mountain backdrop.\(^{13}\)

Ideally, the project will contribute to the social and economic integration of the Chinatown and Chinatown North communities as well as the restoration of street frontage along Vine Street and walkability along 10th Street (over the expressway). With the bulk of financing for the $70 million project in hand, a three-decade-long dream is taking shape in reality.

\(^{13}\) Inga Saffron (Inquirer Architecture Critic), “Changing Skyline: Planned tower may be a game-changer for Philadelphia’s Chinatown,” The Philadelphia Inquirer (October 13, 2012).
PCDC’s efforts were complemented by private residential construction east of 10th Street, which appeared to increase the Asian Pacific Islander presence in the neighborhood. As a result, the 2010 decennial census indicated that 30 percent of the residents in the easternmost section of the district were Asian. Although the western part was only 16 percent Asian, as a whole the district had become approximately 20 percent Asian. The continuing flow of immigrants into the city has provided an opportunity for Chinatown North to be transformed from an aspiration to a reality.

At the same time, the emergence of a loft district in the west end of the district has also progressed. “To the degree that the renovations are market-driven, whether condominium or rental units, there are no more artists. But there is an ongoing demand for lofts, open-space construction with a bedroom and closet.” The scene there seems to be maturing with several bars and restaurants serving as centers of activity. In addition to the cultural enterprises discussed earlier in the chapter, a variety of design firms now occupy space in the Wolf Building and other sites around the district.

The availability of affordable rentals will shape not only the economic diversity but also the cultural ecology of the district in the decades to come. The former Goldtex textile factory at 315 N 12th St (at Wood) is under redevelopment as 165 rental apartments. In 2000 the 11-story building was fully leased and occupied by artists and studios. “It was very basic space, cheap raw space, attractive to the young and the not-so-young. There was lots of energy.” In 2003, with the building fully occupied, everyone was evicted, the building was sold, and it has been vacant ever since. Reconstruction has been impeded by a contentious developer-trade union dispute, but once resolved the neighborhood anticipates an influx of new residents.

Developers may benefit from the approval by the National Park Service in June 2012 to list Callowhill Industrial Historic District on the National Register of Historic Places. Buildings located within the 14-block area—from North Broad east to 12th Street and the Reading Viaduct curve, and from Pearl Street north to Hamilton Street—will be eligible for investment tax credits. The Heid Building at 13th & Wood Streets is one of

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14 The Callowhill Industrial Historic District traces the evolution of Philadelphia’s industrial and commercial architecture and land use over the 129-year period from 1830 to 1959.
the last loft structures left. Many vacant properties, however, are available for new construction.

Competing development visions for Callowhill and Chinatown North have recently converged on the site of the Church of the Assumption at 12th and Spring Garden. Siloam, the social service agency that owned the property, had received approval from the Philadelphia Historical Commission to demolish the crumbling structure based on evidence that it is not financially feasible for renovation. Callowhill Neighborhood Association and the Preservation Alliance, committed to adaptive reuse of the historic property, were able to stop demolition temporarily. Meanwhile, Siloam sold the property to Chinatown developer John Wei, who has not made public his plans for the property. “I want to see what we can do and make the neighborhood happy.”

Reading Viaduct as contested terrain

Artists have often been, literally, caught between these two dynamic aspects of community life. The artists centered on 11th Street, for example, have been living and working in the neighborhood for more than a decade. For them, the recent activity in the neighborhood was seen in a positive light because it confirmed the optimism they showed in relocating to—and buying property in—the area.

One expression of this sense of the district’s destiny was the debate over the abandoned Reading Viaduct—or more accurately viaducts—that cut through the district. In December 2003 artist Sarah McEneaney and artisan John Struble, inspired by New York’s grassroots group Friends of the High Line, founded the Reading Viaduct Project. Beginning with a design charrette in 2004, members developed schemes for reuse of the viaduct as an elevated linear park along the lines of the High Line Park in New York or the Promenade Plantée in Paris.

The idea eventually attracted the attention of several important civic institutions, including the Philadelphia City Planning Commission, City Commerce Department, Parks and Recreation Department, Center City District, and the William Penn Foundation. In 2010 Center City District commissioned an environmental and feasibility analysis of the viaduct and in 2011 supported a City Council proposal to create a neighborhood improvement district (NID) in Callowhill. But the NID proposal also attracted the negative attention of several institutions, particularly the Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation (PCDC), which advocated tearing down part of the viaduct and using the land to develop affordable housing for Chinatown families and elderly. In spite of powerful support and positive media attention, the NID proposal was defeated.

At face value the concept affords common ground among the diverse communities of Callowhill, Chinatown North, and Chinatown. Residents and workers in these neighborhoods endure an acute shortage of green space and recreational opportunities. A long-time artist resident commented: “There really is no place to walk, and I like to walk. ... It would be stupendous, a real game-changer for the neighborhood.” PCDC advocates “green space at the ground level, where most residents live and move about, rather than 3 stories up,” which would also contribute to density and “eyes on the street.”  

16 In fact, the impacts on property values and city services of developing a large-scale, elevated public park in the last affordable district in central Philadelphia are still to be determined. The NID proposal—a tax levy on property owners to be used for neighborhood services and improvements—had merits on its own terms, if only to curb

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short-dumping, the illegal practice of dumping trash and debris on city streets and vacant lots, notably the poorly lit areas under the viaduct. However, NID advocates and opponents alike viewed the bill as a vote on the Reading Viaduct Project.17

That defeat appeared to leave the park advocates undeterred. In early 2012, a design firm commissioned by the Center City District released a conceptual design for a park along the three-block section of the viaduct between North Broad and 11th Streets that is controlled by SEPTA.18 Comparing these renderings with current realities (see figures below) suggests that the grunge and grittiness of the neighborhood as-is would give way to a more domesticated and perhaps domestic neighborhood in which cyclists and dog-walkers (and a new light rail line) would replace the prostitutes and homeless men who now frequent 13th Street. During the summer, the Callowhill Neighborhood Association announced a 60-day pilot cleaning program, to be administered by the Center City District, which included work on the SEPTA-owned spur of the Reading Viaduct.

The Reading Viaduct debate highlights Callowhill/Chinatown North’s character as contested terrain, a touchstone for competing interests and values, not only within its neighborhood communities but among citywide public and private development interests as well. A Callowhill artist with a studio rental expressed the ambiguity: “A viaduct garden would be amazing, but not if the entire neighborhood is yuppified.”

Rendering by Bryan Hanes. Source: Urban Engineers and Studio, 2012

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17 The bill as originally proposed was called Callowhill Reading Viaduct Neighborhood Improvement District. City Council later renamed the district dropping reference to the Reading Viaduct.

18 Southeastern Pennsylvania Transit Authority (SEPTA) serves a five-county Philadelphia region.
The arts and community renewal in Callowhill and Chinatown North

Because of the recent expansion of Philadelphia’s Convention Center, the Asian Arts Initiative has experienced first-hand the impact of displacement on organizational and community wellbeing. And given Chinatown’s historical experience, it is no surprise that AAI is sensitive to the potential harm that the gentrification of Callowhill/Chinatown North could have on the existing Chinatown neighborhood. In the early 2000s, AAI conducted an oral history project called Chinatown Live(s), which documented the stories of 17 people who live or work in Chinatown, to communicate to the wider community that Chinatown is a living neighborhood, not just a place to shop and dine. As AAI recounts:

This process revealed both fissures and connections within Chinatown. How can we begin to learn about a community without understanding that it is dynamic, often shifting its own sense of itself? Chinatown is not static, but fluid—a community rooted, but constantly changing.

Philadelphia’s Chinatown is over 140 years old and has witnessed three waves of immigration. Beginning in 1870 came Cantonese-speaking peoples, mostly men as workers and later families, from Hong Kong and the provinces. Since 1965 skilled immigrants have arrived from Fujian Province, speaking Fujianese and a thousand dialects, and from Mainland China and Taiwan, speaking Mandarin. Today, the region’s ethnic Chinese and Chinese-Americans represent a heterogeneous community with respect to history, language, education, occupation, and social class. “There are many layers of complexity and turmoil. That’s the nature of being Chinese.”

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19 The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 abolished the national origins quota system that had been the basis of U.S. immigration policy since 1924.
The Chinatown community is concerned with gentrification not just as an outcome but also as a process. The Chinese Christian Church + Center (CCCNC) contrasts gentrification with community renewal, a grassroots approach that is driven from the inside-out. With community development, “the starting point can’t be City Hall.” For outsiders the “Chinatown challenge” is protocol, how to navigate the community. From a community perspective, the question is how to undertake planning that is driven by “discovery, respect for culture, and listening.”

CCCNC views its role in the community as mediator—that is, where there is a clash of values, helping people move forward to a common vision. The NID tax proposal highlighted a clash of values. “Through that process we can see what bad planning looks like. The starting point was wrong. It was the wrong issue, the wrong start. There is a need for partners who value all sides and a process that is more inclusive.” With centers in both Chinatown and Chinatown North, CCCNC works in partnership with like-minded groups like Asian Arts Initiative and Sunday Breakfast Mission. Another potential collaborator is Action Mill, AAI’s tenant and design studio with experience in arts activism and community organizing, including founding of Casino-Free Philadelphia. The pastor of CCCNC’s English-speaking ministry, trained in urban planning and graphic design, suggests that urban planners and designers can facilitate community visioning and dialogue, citing as an example Re-Imagining I-95.20

A commitment to inclusion would highlight the distinction between neighborhood improvement and gentrification. In The Death and Life of Great American Cities, Jane Jacobs argues that processes of gradual improvement in neighborhoods as a result of the efforts of individuals and groups is a key force in the revival of cities. In Philadelphia, as in most American cities, widespread displacement is more likely to result from the decisions of major institutions—such as hospitals, universities, housing authorities, and convention centers—than the efforts of single developers or entrepreneurs. The recent recession and the slow “recovery” since 2009, too, are likely to inhibit rapid property and resident turnover in these neighborhoods.

The Asian Arts Initiative wants to be a player in the community mediation process. The plan is to develop 1219 Vine St as both a multi-tenant facility and “a space for arts-based civic dialogue.” In the fall of 2012 AAI launched its Social Practice Lab as an outgrowth and deepening of Chinatown In/flux. Seven artists-in-residence are commissioned to develop a network of year-round public art projects and initiatives, in conjunction with building neighborhood relationships, that engage and enliven the community. “That’s the kind of thing that has most impact on a neighborhood like this—that is, a neighborhood in transition.”

As a new landowner, AAI has an interest in the physical improvement of the Callowhill and Chinatown North neighborhoods. As the 2004 Chinatown plan noted, the district lacks even decent sidewalks and streetscapes. The Chinatown In/flux public art exhibit

20 In February 2012 the Academy of Natural Sciences Center for Environmental Policy, with Next American City, hosted a “Re-imagining Urban Highways” conference in Philadelphia.

Chapter 4
showed AAI’s potential to make a contribution to placemaking. AAI is now poised to build on its public art and participatory arts experience to make a long-term contribution to the civic culture of the neighborhood.

The time is now. For its new comprehensive plan Philadelphia2035, the Philadelphia City Planning Commission has identified a new planning area called Callowhill-Chinatown North. The district includes Callowhill industrial area, the northern part of Chinatown, Poplar, and a swath of super-blocks of low-density commercial space and surface parking lots between Old City and Northern Liberties. At its first public input session in the summer of 2012 at the FACTS school, Center City planner Laura Spina explained why the area has been designated as a single planning district.

Neighborhoods all around it have popped. ... [Callowhill-Chinatown North] has been called the hole in the donut because so much has happened in all the neighborhoods around it. ... This is one area that doesn't know where it's going.
The hope is this plan will create a path, so that it knows where it's going.

Other planners at the meeting noted that Callowhill-Chinatown North “covers a lot of territory with plenty of ethnic, economic and land use diversity,” and that the area’s diversity is a significant strength that should be protected.\(^{21}\)

Philadelphia’s Callowhill/Chinatown North Contributors

Josette Bonafino, The Trestle Inn, Multicultural Youth eXchange
Ian Cross, The Trestle Inn, I-SITE Inc
Jethro Heiko, The Action Mill
Gayle Isa, Asian Arts Initiative
Michelle Liao, Liao Collection Asian Antiques
Sarah McEneaney, artist, Reading Viaduct Project
Tom Miles, Miles & Generalis, Inc
Lesley Mitchell, artist, Dance Philadelphia Argentine Tango
Jay Pennie, Studio Incamminati, School for Contemporary Realist Art
Gary Reuben, Wolf Building, Underground Arts, architect
John Struble, John Struble Fine Furniture, Reading Viaduct Project
Andrew Suggs, Vox Populi, artist
Becky Suss, artist
Laurence Tom, Chinese Christian Church + Center
South Philadelphia was an obvious choice for a study of “natural” cultural districts in Philadelphia. The district, which stretches south from South Street on the east side of Broad Street, has long been associated with culture and the arts. It is home to some of the city’s older cultural institutions, like the Samuel S. Fleisher Art Memorial. A largely Italian-American community for many years, the neighborhood has supported opera-related enterprises, like Victor Café, where servers might at any time take a break to sing an aria. Located just south of Center City, the district has served both as a residential neighborhood for those who work in the downtown cultural sector and as a cultural quarter that reflects the distinctiveness of its own community.

In the past generation, South Philadelphia has benefited from a number of new migrant streams. Most noticeably, immigrant groups from Southeast and East Asia and from Latin America have settled in the area. At the same time, another migrant stream of artists and art students were attracted to the affordable work and living spaces of the district. Although affordability has declined over the past decade, these earlier waves continue to animate the district’s cultural scene.

History is a living presence in South Philadelphia. Indeed, it is difficult to interpret the contemporary cultural ecology without seeing it as a result of layer upon layer of cultural sediment deposited by previous generations. The length and diversity of its history explains the complicated montage of contemporary South Philadelphia.

South Philadelphia is, by and large, not shy about expressing itself. A few virtuoso hucksters still hawk fruits and vegetables with intriguing but often unintelligible chants on Ninth Street; glittering passages of glass and broken ceramics insinuate themselves onto walls and facades deep into the heart of South Philadelphia from their origins at the Eye’s Gallery on South Street; monumental portraits of Italian Americans – crooners, tenors, rockers, and one particularly monumental former mayor – look down on local residents and visitors from upper stories on Ninth Street and along Broad; chants of
Buddhist monks float over Mifflin Square from the windows of the neighboring Preah Buddha Rangsey Temple and Khmer Buddhist Association, a repurposed synagogue; recent Mexican immigrants from Puebla celebrate the traditions of their home in an annual April procession that honors their patron, San Mateo Ozolco, on the anniversary of the defeat of the French Army by a greatly outnumbered Mexican Army; and once a year on New Year’s Day legions of musicians and dancers in feathers and sequins migrate from their headquarters throughout the community and take over South Broad for a day-long parade, returning after the parade to raucous celebrations on Second (Two) Street. On a daily basis South Philadelphians participate in a changing and expanding notion of what counts as culture. This is the South Philadelphia I know.

That history also explains one of the major themes of this chapter: the repurposing of cultural spaces. Anyone who has ever walked the streets of South Philadelphia knows that space is always tight. Rowhouses, ranging from tiny “trinities” to more magnificent examples, are crammed next to one another, often without much concern for public space, grass, or trees. Although infill construction continues, new institutions, artists, and cultural firms typically must re-use and re-purpose existing space. Synagogues, reform institutions, and fabric shops have all been recycled as Buddhist temples, community arts venues, and studio spaces.

After a brief description of data and methods, we divide the chapter into three sections. First, we use SIAP’s demographic and cultural databases to provide a profile of the social geography and cultural ecology of South Philadelphia. We then assess the district’s cultural ecology and built environment with a focus on three themes: the impact of immigration and repurposing of assets; the role of educational institutions, their students, and their alumni; and the changing nature of arts practice and production. Lastly we discuss the importance of “shared space” to South Philadelphia’s sustainability as a cultural district and the implications of the case study for our broader understanding of “natural” cultural districts.

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2 The Mexican carnaval celebrates the Battle of Puebla. In 1862 an outnumbered Mexican army defeated the French Army outside the city of Puebla. (Puebla fell one year later and Mexico was under French domain from 1862 to 1867.) The outfits worn by the dancers, or carnavaleros, symbolize the different groups that fought in the battle. From Works in Progress, Philadelphia Folklore Project (Spring 2011).

3 For the South Philadelphia case study, SIAP brought onto the research team a veteran visual arts professional and South Philadelphian, Thora Jacobson. Jacobson has worked in South Philadelphia since 1972 and lived in the neighborhood since 1977. As Director of Fleisher Art Memorial, Jacobson discovered that a significant aspect of South Philadelphia’s vibrancy was a direct result of being a community that: embraced artists of all disciplines, nurturing the likes of Mario Lanza, Eddie Fisher, Eddie Lang and Chubbie Checker; trained visual artists like Frank Gasparro, the late Chief Engraver of the United States Mint; and dozens of filmmakers, fashion designers and choreographers; has provided affordable housing and work space to hundreds of artists; and embraced a wide range of art forms – high and popular, culinary and contemporary, traditional and cutting edge. “Culture in South Philadelphia, it has always seemed to me, is a deep well of renewable resources.”
Data and Methods

Geographic and cultural asset data and analysis

For our analysis of the social geography of South Philadelphia, the primary source of data is the US Census’s American Community Survey (ACS) five-year summary file. This file—available at both the block group and census tract level of aggregation—combines data for the ACS annual surveys between 2005 and 2009. In this chapter, we combined data for a set of census tracts to make population estimates for the South Philadelphia district. In addition, the data were integrated into a geographic-information system database in order to map variations in population characteristics across the district.

For analysis of the cultural ecology of South Philadelphia, we used the cultural asset data base compiled by the Social Impact of the Arts Project (SIAP). SIAP developed four inventories to provide small-area estimates of nonprofit cultural organizations, commercial cultural firms, resident artists, and cultural participants for the city of Philadelphia. The four indexes were then combined to develop a Cultural Asset Index (CAI). Individual CAI scores were calculated for each of the city's block groups. A more detailed description of the cultural asset indicators and index are provided in Chapter 2.

Interviewing, fieldwork, and photographic documentation

For the South Philadelphia fieldwork, the research team developed a list of key informants who represented a range of perspective and experience with the arts and culture and immigrant communities in South Philadelphia. In particular, we identified individuals who could give us multi-disciplinary, multi-generational, and multi-ethnic perspectives; institutional and independent, as well as nonprofit and for-profit perspectives. Conversations elicited their view of the neighborhood as a cultural district, the elements and dynamics that make the place work for artists and residents, as well as shortcomings or challenges to its sustainability as a cultural district.

In addition to interviews, the study was based on extensive observation of physical space and the traces left by the use of space. This dimension of the research was supported by an extensive use of photography to document the uses and re-uses of spaces throughout the district. As Jacobson noted:

The camera was my viewfinder. It encouraged me to be attentive to details that I don’t always see in my meandering travels through South Philadelphia. I saw how the products and signage of corner stores track the foodways of their neighboring populations. I read the names and dates on public buildings and contrasted them to the current use of the site.

I observed what people showed in their windows, beautiful wrought iron railings, and efforts to individualize homes as personal expression. And I noted what they put out on the street and what they planted in their postage-stamp gardens. I saw their communal efforts to improve the streetscape with flowers and shrubs; the entrepreneurial spirit of Asian vendors on the pathways in public parks; and the increasing pattern of red, white and green – that now proudly speaks to Mexican rather than Italian immigrant enterprise.
I saw public art in a range of manifestations: the formally commissioned Philadelphia Beacons by Ray King at Broad and Washington that changes throughout the day and night; Quan Yin, the goddess of mercy that graces the entrance to the BoDe Temple at 13th and Alter; and dozens of murals throughout the community – by Mural Arts Program commissioned artists as well as Isaiah Zagar.

This melding of quantitative and qualitative data provides a portrait of South Philadelphia that captures both the major structural forces that have shaped its people and built environment and the creativity and commitment of its residents to directing those changes in ways that are consistent with their heritage and current needs.
Social Geography and Cultural Ecology of South Philadelphia

South Philadelphia and its neighborhoods

South Philadelphia is a celebrated geographic designation, associated with a host of cultural images from Rocky to the Italian Market to the home of the Phillies, Eagles, Flyers, and Sixers. Yet, as an actual geography, South Philadelphia can have many meanings. The term can refer to the entire city between the Schuylkill and Delaware Rivers and south of South Street. Even the South Street boundary is now open to question. In the Philadelphia City Planning Commission’s most recent comprehensive plan, for example, South Philadelphia’s northern boundary is designated along Washington and Christian Streets, which puts a significant section of traditional South Philadelphia in what the Planning Commission now designates as Central.

For the purpose of this analysis, we have adopted a definition of South Philadelphia that is narrower than the river-to-river definition but more traditional than that of the Planning Commission. Our analysis includes three of the city’s 69 neighborhoods: Wharton/Hawthorne/Bella Vista, Pennsport/Whitman/Queen Village, and central South Philadelphia. This includes neighborhoods between the Delaware River and Broad Street and from South Street to Oregon Avenue. More precisely, the northern tier of South Philadelphia includes the neighborhoods of Hawthorne, Bella Vista, and Queen Village. South of these areas are Passyunk Square, Jefferson Square (formerly known as S.E.N.E.), and Pennsport. Finally, at the farthest south end of the area are Central South Philadelphia, Greenwich/Lovely, East Oregon, and Whitman.

Figure 5-1. South Philadelphia neighborhoods
South Philadelphia’s social geography

Age structure

South Philadelphia has significantly fewer children than the city of Philadelphia as a whole. Only 20 percent of the population is under the age of 18, compared to 26 percent for the city. Although South Philadelphia has slightly more middle-aged and older residents, its adult population is concentrated among young adults. Thirty-one percent of South Philadelphians are between the ages of 18 and 34 compared to a citywide figure of 27 percent. South Philadelphia residents are particularly concentrated in the 25-34 years old age group, which makes up 23 percent of the area compared to only 17 percent of the population citywide.

Figure 5-2. Percent of population 18-34 years old, Philadelphia block groups, 2005-09

In South Philadelphia, the concentration of young adults is most apparent in the north end of the neighborhood, in the blocks just south of South Street. In this respect, this section of South Philadelphia shares much with Center City. Farther south, the proportion of young adults is closer to the citywide average.

Race and ethnicity

South Philadelphia’s historical identity has been tied to white ethnic groups, most notably the Italians. Certainly, at midcentury, the area was predominantly white. Even in 1980, most of the area remained homogeneous non-Hispanic white.
In the past generation, however, this image of South Philadelphia has given way to one that emphasizes its diversity. In 2005-09, the area remained majority white (63 percent non-Hispanic white), but other groups had significant representation in the area: 13 percent Asian, 10 percent African American, and 12 percent Hispanic. Two percent of the population identified itself as multi-racial.

About half of the Hispanics in South Philadelphia (9,229 or six percent of the population) were Mexican and four percent (2,910) were Puerto Rican. Indeed, over 30 percent of the Mexican population of the city lived in South Philadelphia.

The Asian population of South Philadelphia too was diverse. The largest Asian group was the Chinese, who made up five percent of the neighborhood’s population. Southeast Asians were also strongly represented, with Vietnamese and Cambodians making up 2.4 and 2.6 percent of the population, respectively. Just fewer than 900 Indonesians—one percent of the population—were included in the 2005-09 counts.

Although whites remain the largest racial group in the neighborhood, the number of homogeneous white neighborhoods has declined over time. Large sections are ethnically diverse, including black/white block groups in the northern part of the area and black/Hispanic block groups in the far northeast corner and the central part of the district. “Other diverse” block groups, in which at least three groups have significant representation, occur throughout the district. Although there are no homogeneous Asian sections, several white/Asian block
groups are prominent. Still, homogeneous white areas remain, particularly in Bella Vista, Queen Village, Passyunk Square, and Central South Philadelphia.

Figure 5-4. Ethnic composition, Philadelphia block groups, 2005-09

Nativity
South Philadelphia has a prominent history as an immigrant-receiving neighborhood. Even at midcentury, when the proportion of Philadelphians who were foreign-born reached its nadir, the census tracts of South Philadelphia included 15 to 30 percent foreign-born residents.

As the region’s foreign-born population began to increase after 1980, South Philadelphia was one of the first neighborhoods to feel its effects. By the beginning of this century, expanding sections of the district had a foreign-born population that composed over 20 percent of the district. Ironically, the speed of turnover in the district was concealed to some extent as an older generation of European immigrants migrated out or died and was replaced by Asian and Latino residents.
Figure 5-5. Percent foreign-born, Philadelphia census tracts, 1960

Figure 5-6. Percent foreign-born, Philadelphia census tracts, 2000
In 2005-09, 18 percent of South Philadelphia’s residents were foreign-born, compared to a citywide figure of 11 percent. More than half of the foreign-born population was Asian, with Vietnamese (2.4 percent) and Chinese (2.3 percent) the largest groups. The Latin American population made up 6.1 percent of the population, with Mexicans representing 4.5 percent of the total. Just over two percent of residents were European immigrants, with Italians remaining the single largest European group.

South Philadelphia continued to attract new migrants. Forty percent of its foreign-born population had entered the United States since 2000, a bit higher than the citywide figure of 36 percent. As a result, the proportion of the foreign-born population that was naturalized (44 percent) was slightly lower than the citywide figure of (45 percent).

In 2005-09 virtually the entire district had a significant representation of foreign-born residents. In large sections of the district, in fact, over 30 percent of the population was foreign-born.

Figure 5-7. Percent foreign-born, Philadelphia census tracts, 2005-09
The foreign-born composition reflects the heavy concentrations of Asian and Latin American groups within the population. Latin Americans are the most numerous migrant groups in several areas, but mixed-Asian or completely mixed sections are more common.

**Figure 5-8. Foreign-born composition, Philadelphia census tracts, 2005-09**

**Household structure**

Over the past two generations, the United States has experienced a revolution in household structure. The hegemony of two-parent families with children has given way to a mixture of individuals living on their own, childless couples, and other “nonfamily” households.

In 2005-09 just over half of Philadelphia’s households (55 percent) were family households, and in South Philadelphia they remained a slim majority (50.8 percent). Married-couple with children households represented only 12 percent of the total in the city and South Philadelphia. Female-headed households were considerably less common in South Philadelphia (7.1 percent) than citywide (14 percent). More than three-quarters (78 percent) of South Philadelphia’s households had no children present, well above the citywide average of 70 percent. This included 19 percent of households with a married couple only and 49 percent nonfamily households.
The household figures make the transition appear more radical than those that examine percent of individuals living in different types of families. Although nearly half of South Philadelphia’s households were non-family, 73 percent of South Philadelphians lived in a family household, slightly below the citywide figure of 75 percent. If we used a less rigid definition of *family*, the number of family households would be even larger. For example, seven percent of South Philadelphia’s households were composed of “unmarried partners,” compared to six percent for the city as a whole. Two percent of the unmarried partners were same-sex and the other five percent were opposite-sex partners.

Our previous research has pointed to the association of nonfamily households and the concentration of cultural assets, so the high level of nonfamily households in South Philadelphia is no surprise. Nonfamily households are particularly concentrated in the northern part of the district, between South Street and Washington Avenue. As one heads south, the proportion tends to decline. In the southeastern corner of the district, in fact, the proportion of nonfamily households is below the citywide average.

![Figure 5-9. Percent nonfamily households, Philadelphia block groups, 2005-09](image-url)
**Educational attainment**

In recent years, Philadelphia’s civic leaders have brought attention to the fact that Philadelphians are less likely to possess a college degree than the residents of other major cities. For example, in 2010, only 18 percent of Philadelphians 25 years of age or older had attended college for at least four years. This was well below the figures for other major cities including Seattle (48 percent), Washington DC (38 percent), Boston (36 percent), and New York City (28 percent).

Instead, Philadelphia is dominated by adults with a high-school degree only or some college, a group that makes up 57 percent of the adult population. South Philadelphia is more likely to have adults either without a high school degree or with a post-secondary degree than the rest of the city. Twenty-four percent of adult South Philadelphians have an educational attainment of less than a high school degree, compared to a citywide average of 21 percent. At the other end of the spectrum, however, 27 percent of adults in South Philadelphia have at least a bachelor’s degree, compared to a citywide average of 22 percent.

The bifurcation of educational achievement shows up as well in the dropout rates for the district. Among teens between the ages of 16 and 19, ten percent of South Philadelphia residents have dropped out of school or failed to earn a diploma, well above the citywide average of seven percent. Although male dropout rates are higher than female rates, the gap between the two is smaller in South Philadelphia than in the city as a whole. As a result, the South Philadelphia female dropout rate of 9.6 percent is more than one and one-half times the citywide rate (6.0 percent).

**Economic status**

Economic status can be measured in a number of ways, including occupational status, income, and the value of real estate. With all of these methods, we find that South Philadelphia is more varied than the city as a whole, but on average has a higher economic status.

**Occupation**—South Philadelphia has slightly more managers and professionals than the city as a whole (26 percent). Reflecting its role as a center for restaurants and other food industries, 8.5 percent of South Philadelphia’s labor force is employed in food preparation, compared to only 5.7 percent of the city’s labor force. As the lower end of the occupational hierarchy, the district’s labor force includes nine percent involved in transportation and material moving, considerably higher than the citywide proportion (6.4 percent).

South Philadelphians are more likely to be self-employed than the workers in the rest of the city (8.0 versus 5.6 percent), and as a result, fewer of them work for government or the nonprofit sector.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>South Philadelphia</th>
<th>Philadelphia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employed Civilian Population 16 Years and over:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed Civilian Population 16 Years and over:</td>
<td>38,456</td>
<td>624,546</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management, business, and financial operations occupations</td>
<td>4,504</td>
<td>69,315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional and related occupations</td>
<td>9,298</td>
<td>141,969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>24.2%</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthcare support occupations</td>
<td>377</td>
<td>22,261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protective service occupations</td>
<td>660</td>
<td>23,946</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food preparation and serving related occupations</td>
<td>3,285</td>
<td>35,278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building and grounds cleaning and maintenance occupations</td>
<td>1,462</td>
<td>28,891</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal care and service occupations</td>
<td>1,123</td>
<td>22,889</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales and related occupations</td>
<td>3,753</td>
<td>56,506</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office and administrative support occupations</td>
<td>6,080</td>
<td>107,845</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farming, fishing, and forestry occupations</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>793</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction, extraction, and maintenance occupations</td>
<td>2,585</td>
<td>41,113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production occupations</td>
<td>1,794</td>
<td>34,034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation and material moving occupations</td>
<td>3,477</td>
<td>39,706</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Income**—Overall, household incomes in South Philadelphia are above those of the rest of the city. Compared to a citywide figure of 46.5 percent, 51 percent of the district’s households earn more than $40,000 (in 2009 dollars). While only 12 percent of Philadelphia households earned more than $100,000 in 2005-09, 15 percent of South Philadelphia households did so.

This same edge is present in per capita income, that is, the total income of the district divided by the total number of residents. For the city as a whole, per capita income in 2005-09 was $20,882, while the figure for South Philadelphia was $23,412. As in the rest of the city, African Americans ($14,879) and Hispanics ($18,368) did worse than whites ($30,059) in per capita income. However, the ethnic hierarchy did not fully reflect that of the city. On the one hand, where Philadelphia’s Asian population generally had higher incomes than black or Hispanic residents, South Philadelphia Asians’ per capita income ($11,300) was considerable lower than...
that of African Americans. At the same time, South Philadelphia Hispanics had a per capita income that was well above the citywide figure of $12,016 and higher than that of Asians and African Americans as well.

South Philadelphia has a very steep income gradient as one moves from the north to the south. Neighborhoods adjacent to Center City have per capita incomes that are among the city’s highest. However, in the central and southern parts of the district, per capita incomes are frequently below ten thousand dollars, placing them in the bottom fifth of the city’s block groups.

Figure 5-10. Per capita income, Philadelphia block groups, 2005-09

Poverty—The poverty rate for South Philadelphia was significantly lower than that for the rest of the city. In 2005-09, when the citywide average was 24.2 percent, the South Philadelphia figure was 20.4 percent. Much of this difference is attributable to the relative absence of extreme hardship in the district. In contrast to the city, in which 11 percent of the population had an income of less than half of the poverty threshold, in South Philadelphia only 7.8 percent of residents experienced such deprivation. The proportion of South Philadelphians between 50 percent and 100 percent of the poverty threshold (12.6 percent) was nearly identical to the citywide figure (12.8 percent). The same was true for those between 100 and 200 percent of the poverty threshold: 20.1 percent in South Philadelphia and 20.8 percent citywide.
As with income, the relationship of poverty to race and ethnicity in South Philadelphia diverged from the citywide pattern. Whites were a bit less likely to be poor in South Philadelphia than in the rest of the city, and African Americans were slightly more likely to be poor. The most significant differences, however, concerned Latinos and Asians. The Hispanic poverty rate of 17.1 percent was less than half of the citywide figure of 39.7 percent. In contrast, the Asian poverty rate in South Philadelphia—42.6 percent—was one and three-quarters times the citywide figure of 24.4 percent.

Between 2000 and 2005-09, the number of economically diverse block groups citywide increased from 186 to 223, an increase of 35 block groups. However, the number fell in South Philadelphia. Eight block groups that had been economically diverse became more homogeneous, while six block groups became economically diverse. In aggregate, the number of diverse block groups in South Philadelphia dropped from 11 to 9.

By the end of the decade, the center of economic diversity in South Philadelphia had changed markedly. In 2000, the area south of Washington between Broad and 11th and along 9th Street between Kimball and Tasker had been the centers of economic diversity. By 2005-09, these areas had become more homogeneous. In their place, two other economically diverse areas had emerged; one along Passyunk Avenue east of Broad Street and another surrounding Jefferson Square between 6th and 2nd Streets.
Figure 5-12. Economic diversity status, Philadelphia block groups, 2000 to 2005-09

**Housing**

South Philadelphia is predominantly a community of homeowners. Fifty-nine percent of occupied units were owner-occupied in 2005-09. Seventy percent of the housing units in the district were attached, single units, typically rowhouses. Only two percent of units were in structures with more than 20 units, compared to 11 percent of units in the city as a whole.

Rental housing tends to be concentrated in the central sections of the district, particularly between Jefferson and Dickinson Squares. Another center of rental housing borders Mifflin Park in the far southern part of the district.
The district had a significant vacancy problem—12 percent of units were vacant, but this rate was below the citywide average of 14 percent. Overall, South Philadelphia appeared to be somewhat more affordable for its residents than other parts of the city. Although rents were slightly higher than those in the city as a whole (average gross rent of $872 compared to $846 citywide), the proportion of renter households that spent more than 50 percent of their income on rent (26 percent) was somewhat below the citywide average of 29 percent. The same was true of owners’ costs. Citywide, where only 59 percent of owners with mortgages spent less than 30 percent of household income on housing costs, in South Philadelphia 61 percent did so.

Clearly one of the great advantages of South Philadelphia is its location near Center City, as shown in data on the journey to work. Twenty-one percent of workers in South Philadelphia either walked or biked to work, compared to a citywide figure of 10 percent. Whatever their mode of transit, 30 percent of South Philadelphia’s workers were able to get to work in under 20 minutes, compared to 26 percent of the city’s workforce.
South Philadelphia’s cultural ecology

We chose South Philadelphia for study as a “natural” cultural district because of its unique combination of different types of cultural resources. As in other district studies, we focus on four types of resources—nonprofit cultural organizations, commercial cultural firms, resident artists, and cultural participation. Finally, we combine all of these to calculate a cultural asset index (CAI) score for each block group in the city.

Nonprofit cultural providers

SIAP’s inventory of nonprofit cultural providers identified 89 organizations and groups in South Philadelphia. Performing arts organizations in dance, music, and theater make up the largest percentage of this total, followed by community organizations that offer arts education and programming. Special events (including mummers’ clubs), museums, and resource organizations are also present in the district in significant numbers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of nonprofit</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Performing arts</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community arts &amp; education</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special events</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museums</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource organizations</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural &amp; social programs</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-arts organizations</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>89</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As with the nonprofit cultural sector as a whole, very small organizations (generally with a budget under $100,000) and small organizations (under $500,000) dominate South Philadelphia’s cultural sector in numbers. Larger organizations (budget over $2 million) include non-arts organizations like United Communities of Southeast Philadelphia, community arts and education providers like the Samuel S. Fleisher Art Memorial, and several Mummers’ clubs.
There are notable relationships between size and type of organization. Performing arts groups, resource organizations, and cultural and social programs tend to be very small, making up over seventy percent of this category. Community arts and education programs tend to be either small or medium sized.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type (by size)</th>
<th>Very Small</th>
<th>Small</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Large</th>
<th>All orgs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Performing arts</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community arts &amp; education</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museums</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural &amp; social programs</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special events</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource organization</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-arts organization</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total number</strong></td>
<td><strong>30</strong></td>
<td><strong>26</strong></td>
<td><strong>12</strong></td>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
<td><strong>73</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The geography of South Philadelphia’s nonprofit cultural providers is influenced by its proximity to Center City. Many of the district’s resources are located in the neighborhoods bordering Center City, and many of Center City’s resources are within easy walking distance of South Philadelphia. As the map on Figure 5-14 suggests, these factors combine to make Hawthorne, Bella Vista, and Queen Village the neighborhoods with the densest concentration of nonprofit cultural resources. More recently, East Passyunk has emerged as a center of cultural activity as
well. Overall, the density of nonprofit organizations tends to decline as one heads south and east from these areas.

Figure 5-14. Density of nonprofit cultural providers, Philadelphia, 2010

Commercial cultural firms

South Philadelphia’s commercial cultural sector reflects several streams of the district’s history. On the one hand, the area has strong craft production—including jewelers, metal working, and framing firms—that connects to its industrial legacy. At the same time, the district’s long-standing identity as an arts district has provided a foundation for a diverse mix of performance groups, galleries, design firms, and for-profit dance schools.

Craft production and supplies constitutes the largest number of commercial firms in the district, followed by artist supplies, publications, and performance groups. The area is home to at least seven private, for-profit dance schools that appeal to local residents as well as many from other neighborhoods. In addition, ten photographic studios are located in the district.
### Type of firm

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of firm</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Craft production &amp; supplies</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artist Supplies</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books/publications</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance group</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photography</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education/instruction</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galleries</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical instruments</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio studio</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance facility</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual arts</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>142</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As with the nonprofit sector, smaller firms make up a majority of the commercial cultural sector. However, very small firms with revenues of under $100,000 are relatively rare. Rather, firms with budgets between $100,000 and $500,000 are the most common, making up nearly half of all firms. Medium-sized firms, too, are strongly represented.

### Revenue size

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Revenue size</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Small</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-total</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>142</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Different types of firms are concentrated in particular size categories. The dance schools and other educational institutions are over-represented among the very small firms, while music instrument stores and photographers are strongest in the small category. Bookstores, craft production and supplies, and performance facilities are most common among the medium firms, while artists’ supply enterprises and galleries are most common among the large firms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type (by size)</th>
<th>Very Small</th>
<th>Small</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Large</th>
<th>All firms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Artist Supplies</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio studio</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books/publications</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craft production &amp; supplies</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education/instruction</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galleries</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical instruments</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance facility</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photography</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual arts</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total number</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The geography of South Philadelphia’s commercial cultural sector is similar to that of the nonprofit sector. The northern sections of the district and Passyunk Avenue East have the highest density of firms. Fourth Street, south of South Street, is also a center for commercial firms, with a number of fabric stores—a legacy of South Street’s earlier commercial identity—and design firms anchoring the corridor.


**Resident artists**

Like cultural organizations, resident artists concentrate in the northern part of the district. As with other types of cultural resources, their numbers decline considerably in the southern and eastern parts of the district. However, in the neighborhoods just east of Broad Street, artists are present in considerable number even as one moves south.
Cultural participants

In collaboration with the Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance, SIAP has analyzed the participant files of over one hundred cultural organizations in regional Philadelphia. We computed a cultural participation rate based on an estimate of the proportion of households in each block group that were present on at least one of these participant lists during 2010.

The geography of cultural participation in South Philadelphia closely follows that of the district’s other cultural resources. The highest rates of cultural participation (over 113 participants per 1,000 households) were recorded in the neighborhoods adjacent to Center City and south to Passyunk Ave and Broad St. Neighborhoods farther south were characterized by low cultural participation. Immigrant neighborhoods to the north and south of Mifflin Park have quite low participation rates, which is consistent with SIAP’s previous findings on migrant cultural engagement. High immigrant neighborhoods, like South Philadelphia, often rely on informal and home-based forms of cultural engagement that the Cultural Alliance data do not reflect.
Cultural asset index

SIAP used its four cultural indicators to compute a composite index—the Cultural Asset Index (CAI)—for each block group. This index is expressed as a percent of the citywide average (100). For example, a score of 50 means that the index for that block group is half of the citywide average, while a score of 200 is twice the citywide average.

Given our discussion above, it is not surprising that the CAI is highest in the northern tier of neighborhoods and along Passyunk Avenue as it moves to the south and west. Indeed the index dips below average when one reaches the most southerly parts of the district, scores that are consistent with the concentrations of the four types of resources discussed earlier.
The CAI can also be analyzed by examining the relative density of cultural resources across the area. This method assigns the CAI for each block group to a point at its center and then calculates the relative concentration of resources in the vicinity of each block group. The effect is to smooth the gradient of the CAI to highlight where it is consistently high and low.

The density analysis gives a slightly different portrait of the geography of cultural assets. In this analysis, the northwest corner of the district has notably higher cultural asset scores than any other part of the district. Moderate-high cultural assets are present through much of the area north of Passyunk, with scores falling quickly as one moves south and east.
South Philadelphia is a complex and rich cultural district. It provides an example of a cluster where history has deposited layers of social reality that continue to influence contemporary patterns. A classic early 20th century immigrant neighborhood, South Philadelphia is experiencing a new wave of migrants even as forces of redevelopment have brought large numbers of high-income professionals and managers into the district. Although clearly connected to Center City, it retains a distinctive neighborhood culture.

South Philadelphia’s art scene reflects these various forces. Its varied commercial cultural sector is built on the history of the district in craft production and supplies but has incorporated a variety of more contemporary forms as well. Meanwhile, its nonprofits and artists reflect the diversity of the regional cultural scene as well as a set of older, established organizations.
Shaping the Cultural Ecology of South Philadelphia

The social geography and cultural ecology of South Philadelphia provide the stage on which a variety of cultural players act their parts. Two forces—diversity and history—drive the lives of artists, cultural participants, immigrant leaders, and community developers as they drive the neighborhood’s cultural life. The infusion of immigrants over the past generation has made the district one of the most diverse in the city at the same time that it has added to, rather than replaced, existing cultural forms and resources.

To some extent, cultural assets are in the eyes of the beholder. Although we are able to count the number of nonprofits and commercial firms with some accuracy, each resident can assign their own value to those resources and determine what counts as a resource.

As the geographic analysis shows, South Philadelphia has a significant artist population, although a new generation of artists may be bypassing the district in order to locate in West Philadelphia or the section of East Philadelphia that stretches from Northern Liberties to Port Richmond. This multi-disciplinary population includes visual artists, performance artists including dancers and choreographers, as well as poets. Curators, arts administrators, and arts educators flesh out the mix of those who make their livings in the “creative economy.” The district’s stable and growing arts organizations—and arts education programs, in particular—have provided employment as well as training for artists. Its gallery scene has shifted over time, with contemporary work still prominent along the northern edge of South Philly.

Is South Philadelphia a cultural district?

“I don’t know what a cultural district means. South Philly has great ethnic diversity, Asian and Mexican restaurants, creative people, small businesses with very particular character, like this place [Black and Brew]. There are organizations, like Headlong, Miro, Kun Yang Lin ... Fleisher, Settlement. Mural Arts has had an impact ... And there are the Mummers. They really are an asset.”

Photo: Thora Jacobson, 2011
Art on walls at SEAMAAC

4 Realtors and some locals have coined the term “Port Fishington” to refer to this set of neighborhoods (Port Richmond, Fishtown, and Kensington) or “North Port Fishington” (including Northern Liberties). See: philadelphia.cbslocal.com (April 15, 2011), “Philadelphia residents combine neighborhoods, come up with ‘Port Fishington’.”
Dedicated galleries have been augmented by a robust “café” or “coffee” culture throughout the community where artists show their work and artisanal culture thrives on both East Passyunk Avenue and South Street. Affordable studio space is available, if increasingly rare, and South Philadelphia maintains considerable appeal as a community where you can “make a place your home as opposed to find a place to live.”

In this section we discuss three sets of forces that have shaped the cultural ecology of South Philadelphia: immigration and adaptation, arts education, and changing artistic practice and production. Appendix, South Philadelphia Arts and Community Timeline, accompanies the narrative and highlights trends and events from 1960 to the present.

**Immigration—collective culture and repurposing of assets**

**Migration and cultural adaptation**

Philadelphia, despite its location a hundred miles up the Delaware River from the Atlantic, has served as port of entry to the U.S. for millions of foreign-born settlers for over three centuries. South Philadelphia, in particular, having a port at the foot of Washington Avenue, has been a point of entry for many groups. People born in the countries of Northern, Southern and Eastern Europe; Southeast and South Asia; and the Caribbean, Central and South America have migrated to and settled in the district. Foreign-born immigrants have intersected not only with natives but also with U.S.-born migrants to South Philadelphia. African Americans from the South have migrated to Philadelphia since the late 18th century, originally to the South Street corridor where the Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church was founded in 1787. A small but visible Puerto Rican community has settled in South Philadelphia; it has attracted Latin Americans from a variety of other nations, particularly Mexico, as well.

The contemporary cultural character of South Philadelphia reflects its long history as an immigrant-receiving locale. Thanks to its geographic location, proximity to Center City, and adaptable built environment, South Philadelphia has continued to be a resettlement site for successive waves of immigrants, migrants and refugees. “All appear to be drawn by affordable housing stock, storefront space, and restaurants.”

The combined impact of the expansion of immigration after 1965 and ongoing resettlement of refugees has contributed to the diversity of South Philadelphia. When the first Vietnamese refugees arrived in 1975, the Seventh Street Market “was a vibrant place with Jewish merchants as well as Irish and Italian businesses.”

I grew up in an interesting intersection [south of Snyder near 7th]. To the East were Irish and Polish families; to the west were mostly Jews and Italians. To the north there were African Americans and a sizable Puerto Rican community along 5th Street, which is now mostly gone. It was a very diverse environment.

The second wave of Southeast Asians—Cambodian, Lao, and Hmong associated with the “boat people” refugees of the late 1970s and early 1980s—converted storefronts along Seventh Street to residences and, by the early 1980s the corridor became a center for Southeast Asian

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5 The Pennsylvania Railroad built and operated a Washington Avenue Immigration Station from the 1870s to 1915.
refugees. By the 1990s Seventh Street took on its current character as a Cambodian and Laotian business corridor. Cambodian ex-monk and artist Eang Mao, with whom the Philadelphia Folklore Project (then at Fleisher Art Memorial) worked in the 1990s, has painted many beautiful signs for Cambodian shopkeepers along South Seventh Street.

New Asian populations in South Philadelphia, according to the Fleisher Art Memorial, include communities of Bhutanese, Nepali, and Thai; a small Indonesian group centered on an Indonesian store near 7th and Snyder; and a declining Filipino community near St. Agnes Hospital (west of Broad). South Philadelphia’s Latino communities include a small Puerto Rican community; a new, large Mexican population; and newer Brazilian, Colombian and Peruvian groups. One artist mentioned her family connections with “a small but interesting Lebanese community” associated with St. Maron’s Church at 10th and Ellsworth. Surprisingly, according to Fleisher research, the Irish are the largest community of undocumented workers in the district.

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6 From 2008 to 2011 Fleisher Art Memorial, with support by the Wallace Foundation, coordinated research on new immigrant and African American communities in South Philadelphia as part of HOMEMADE: A Celebration of Neighborhood Identity.
Places of worship are important to the stability of immigrant and refugee populations. Epiphany of Our Lord, Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and St Thomas Aquinas (west of Broad), for example, serve Catholic populations. A number of Buddhist temples, serving different communities, occupy former synagogues. There is a Cambodian temple at Sixth and Ritner Streets, and we have heard of a new Thai temple. Among the recent Nepali immigrants and refugees are Hindis as well as Buddhists.

"Public art" in cultural context: Quanyin, the goddess of mercy, is a powerful symbol of protection for the Bo De Temple monks and congregants. Photo: Thora Jacobson, 2011
Traces of these many migrations endure today in South Philly’s cultural traditions and foodways; community institutions and celebrations; and adaptive reuse of buildings, public spaces, and streets. The earliest legacy of settlement, in fact, can be traced to the Lenni Lenape tribes, which gave their names to the creeks and pathways that connected the Delaware and Schuylkill Rivers just north of the point where they come together near Fort Mifflin. The Lenape routes, Moyamensing and Passyunk, have survived as cross-cutting diagonals underpinning William Penn’s 1682 grid as it extended southward along the Delaware River. Over time communication and communities grew up along these avenues and the north-south streets that connected Southwark with Philadelphia.

These pathways – Second Street, Fourth Street, Seventh Street, Ninth Street, 11th Street, and Broad Street – each had their own character over time serving specific ethnic groups. The corner stores that served multiple groups became points of intersection and commerce. ... [Meanwhile,] small east-west street enclaves in South Philly evolved that preserve tradition and foster old perceptions of “outsiders”.

At least one of these streets has become a local institution, the Ninth Street Market, with its historic center at Christian Street and extending south past Washington Avenue. What many still call the Italian Market boasts claims to be “the oldest and largest working outdoor market in the United States.” Since the late 19th century, new immigrants to South Philadelphia have found food a low-cost business to enter—go down to the docks early in the morning to buy produce, come back and sell it all day from a cart or stand. “For more than one hundred years, the Market has been a bellwether of the flux that characterizes South Philadelphia. ... From its inception, the Market was an ethnic mix.”

When I first came to Philadelphia, ... I particularly liked Ninth Street. I have a vivid memory of being there at Giordano’s and the huckster call, “Spend all your damn money!” It was a real human interaction.

The Ninth Street merchants continue to evolve and develop their own styles. This “multicultural mosaic” and sensuous tableau continues to captivate shoppers and passers-by.

In the early 1900s Eastern European Jews as well as Italians were settling in South Philadelphia in great numbers. The Jews at the Market tended to specialize in dry goods but also developed their own commercial corridors, originally with pushcarts and eventually storefronts, along South Street and down 4th and 7th Streets. Fourth Street (“Der Ferder”) evolved into Fabric Row, serving the needs of women who worked as seamstresses either in local textile factories or out of their homes. Kosher butchers, poultry shops, dairy businesses and delicatessens, and dozens of pushcarts filled the gaps.

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7 Foodways is a term used in social science to refer to the cultural, social, and economic practices pertaining to the production and consumption of food.

8 Southwark was an independent community until the city annexed the county of Philadelphia in 1854.

9 PhillyItalianmarket.com.

10 Journeys South, The Ninth Street Market, by Joan L. Saverino (38-39)

While “downtown” – as South Philadelphia was known – has not always been welcoming of new populations and their cultural traditions, immigrants in successive waves have come nonetheless and managed to leave enduring marks on the streets south of South Street. In the early 19th century, Irish and German settlers battled over turf eventually melding into neighborhoods that were virtually indistinguishable from one another. In the mid-19th century, a community of Tuscan “figurinai”\textsuperscript{12} began to arrive in South Philadelphia, followed by hundreds of thousands of immigrants from Southern Italy over the next 80 to 100 years. Many worshipped at St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi, the nation’s first national parish, founded in 1852 at 7th and Montrose Streets. In 1862 Octavius V. Catto, an early African American civil rights advocate, was murdered outside a polling place on South Street. In 1896 W.E.B. DuBois conducted his groundbreaking research on Philadelphia blacks in South Philadelphia’s 7th ward\textsuperscript{13}. Hostility toward African Americans by white South Philadelphians continued to the late 20th century when residents of Whitman fought a two-decade-long battle to prevent the construction of an integrated low-income housing development in the neighborhood.

A mix of artists and artisans and a medley of cultural practices have long been spawned among the migrant populations that have settled in South Philadelphia. The 17th and 18th century Swedish and English settlers, for example, brought the mummers and shooters New Year’s rituals that are the root of Philadelphia’s tradition of mummery.\textsuperscript{14} Philadelphia’s Mummers Parade is an annual New Year’s Day festival that has its roots and base on “Two Street” in South Philadelphia.

This is where the Mummers rose up. Where hard-working people—longshoremen, welders, electricians, masons, truck drivers—transform into costumed performers and moving tableaux with themes taken from current events or, equally likely, from popular legend and myth. The Mummers live and breathe the connection between mundane reality and magical reality, and find their footing on Two Street. ...

Two Street is where the Mummers come from, and where they return each year for their own parade following the Big Broad Street Bash.\textsuperscript{15}

Local clubs spend several months a year fabricating costumes and mobile scenery to compete in one of four divisions—comics, string bands, fancies, and fancy brigades. Mummery has grown and changed dramatically over three centuries and has accommodated, sometimes ungraciously, outsider participation. The Fancy Brigades, the youngest division that grew out of the Fancy Clubs, work with local choreographers and sculptors to stage elaborate performances. As live music has been introduced to accompany the fancy clubs and fancy

\textsuperscript{12} Figurinai or figuristi, creators of plaster statuettes, came primarily from Lucca in Tuscany and emigrated in large numbers beyond France and England beginning in about 1840. (Italian Image Makers in France, England and the United States, Paola Sensi-Isolani, St. Mary’s College of California, from a published collection of papers presented at the 22nd annual conference of the American Italian Historical Association, 1990, ed. G.E. Fazzi).


\textsuperscript{14} Uses of Tradition, Dorothy Noyes, Philadelphia Folklore Project, 1988, catalogue of the exhibition, Fleisher Art Memorial, 1989.

\textsuperscript{15} Journeys South, “Pennsport and Two Street,” by Tom Carroll (p 78)
brigades, African American musicians and “pick-up” bands, like the O.V. Catto group, and brass ensembles like New Orleans “second line” bands have given the parade a taste of Mardi Gras. Other non-traditional participants include a Cambodian folk opera troupe and a band of comics called the Vaudevillains who grew out of the contemporary art collective Space 1026.  

Vaudevillains New Years Brigade, “Philly Phood Phantasia,” Mummers Parade, January 1, 2010. These mummers come from the ranks of Philadelphia contemporary artists. Since a 2006 appearance in the Comic Division “for a lark,” they have returned each year investing more time in their theme, choreography and costuming. Photo: Anthony Locicero [vaudevillainsnyb.wordpress.com/home/photos/]

A recent but lively addition to South Philadelphia’s public performance culture is the annual San Mateo Carnavalero parade and procession that commemorates the history of the village of Ozolco in the state of Puebla, Mexico. Over one-third of the population of San Mateo Ozolco—about 12,000 Mexicans—have emigrated to Philadelphia. The pageant involves constructing elaborate costumes and choreographing dances, as well as preparation of traditional foods, to recall the battle of the 5th of May 1862 when the people of Puebla defeated occupying French forces.

17 Photo credit and article: Philadelphia Folklore Project, Making Home Place project and Works In Progress, “‘We’re gong to continue walking’: South Philadelphia’s Carnaval de Puebla,” by Leticia Roa Nixon, Spring 2011.
Cultural citizenship and repurposing of assets

South Philadelphia’s habit of adaptive repurposing is characteristic of its popular performance-based cultural traditions as well as its streetscapes, buildings, and institutions. By the early 20th century, South Philadelphia had a highly organized vernacular architecture, numerous religious centers—Catholic parishes, Protestant congregations, and Eastern European Jewish synagogues—and settlement houses.

The streetscape was dominated by replicating rowhouse developments, with scale, ornament and geography used to differentiate social class. Along South Broad Street stately brick dwellings with brownstone facades housed merchants and professionals. On other wide streets were smaller three-story row homes owned by skilled tradesmen and business proprietors who often had shops on the first floor. On smaller blocks two-story houses were built originally for blue- and white-collar workers (seamstresses, mechanics, stone masons and “brickies”, ironworkers, and decorative painters), many who worked on the construction and ornamentation of the grand buildings of the “City Beautiful.”

To this day, among the most distinctive visual features of South Philadelphia’s row homes, regardless of the ethnic background of the residents, are the intentional individualizations lavished on the buildings – from flamboyant seasonal displays and elaborate planters and window boxes, to intimate indoor window ornamentation, to distinctive wrought iron railings, to tile and brick patterns on renovated facades. Communal Christmas lighting displays on a number of blocks in South Philadelphia have become a hallmark both of South Philly hospitality and neighborhood solidarity.

Figurines and family photograph in a window display at 4th and Carpenter.
Photo: Thora Jacobson, 2011

Alongside these residential blocks, South Philadelphia’s immigration history is told in the ways that local cultural, social and religious institutions over many years have adapted old buildings to serve new uses. In 1914 the classes of the Graphic Sketch Club (now Fleisher Art Memorial) were moved into what had been the St. Martin’s School for Indigent Boys, an Episcopalian

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18 History of the Parkway – From Building the City Beautiful [parkwaymuseumsdistrictphiladelphia.org/About-the-Parkway/Past/38/]

19 Uses of Tradition, Dorothy Noyes
institutions. United Communities of Southeast Philadelphia’s Houston site occupies the old quarters of St. Mary’s House. More recently, the Emanuel Lutheran Church at 4th and Carpenter Streets, completed in 1869 to serve the German Lutheran community that had first settled in 1683, abandoned and turned over its historic building to the Phat Quang Buddhist Temple to serve a nearby Vietnamese community. And the Preah Buddha Rangsey Temple at 6th and Ritner Streets, the seat of a growing Cambodian community, has converted both a former church and a synagogue to accommodate its religious and humanitarian activities.

In the political discourse of the 20th century, the creation and reuse of spaces and institutions by immigrants to South Philadelphia to serve their communities is part of a process of “cultural citizenship.” The challenge of immigrants within a dense and dynamic urban community is how to both validate their national or ethnic identities and integrate into the larger society. The director of the Southeast Asian Mutual Assistance Aid Corporation (SEAMAAC) talked about his mission of “building multi-racial neighborhoods” toward the realization of full cultural pluralism, and how the arts and culture are part and parcel of that vision.

SEAMAAC had existed for 20 years. It has always had great resources—a great and talented staff. But it was still invested in the old country, with strong nationalistic identities. For me, that comes out of my own family life. My mother kept thinking that

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20 [planphilly.com/preservation-row-new-life-landmark-church-south-philadelphia]


23 The Southeast Asian Mutual Assistance Associations Coalition, Inc, known as SEAMAAC, was founded in 1984 to serve and advocate for refugees, immigrants, and asylees in Greater Philadelphia.
South Philly was a temporary situation. At some point though, she realized that she wasn’t going back – and didn’t want to go back.

Our core strength is still in serving Southeast Asians, but you cannot make one family or ethnic group thrive in spite of the other. You look around and walk from block to block. Hardly any blocks are homogenous—one ethnic group—any longer. I couldn’t recognize any one ethnic or racial group over another. I wanted SEAMAAC to think about building multi-racial neighborhoods, not just tolerate one another but genuinely respect neighbors.

I don’t think of myself as an immigrant or refugee without thinking of the broader history of immigration in America. For me, arts and culture are part and parcel of a vision of community building. I will respect faithfulness to authenticity in art forms, but art is not static to me. It changes and evolves, and your environment helps it evolve. If we look at our culture, if you try to dissect jazz or rock-and-roll, you will find that it comes from so many different places and cultures. It is hard to define what is Asian American art.

How neighborhood structures, congregations, social service agencies, and locally owned businesses have changed and adapted side-by-side over the years is key to understanding why South Philadelphia has never experienced the level of decay common to many Philadelphia neighborhoods. It appears that a capacity for rethinking community institutions and repurposing physical assets has enabled South Philly neighborhoods to maintain a precarious balance of working class stability and gentrification, insularity and welcome, and cultural adaptation and creative expression.

South Philadelphia residents, old and new, seem to treasure their postage stamp gardens and narrow frontage, preserving ancient fig trees and marking their front sidewalks with seasonal plantings, herbs and perennials.

Photo: Thora Jacobson, 2011
Arts education—community institutions and neighborhood effects

Community institutions as anchors

Education and training in the arts, both formal and informal, has long been a major feature of South Philadelphia’s cultural ecology. Rooted in the cultural values of Italians and Eastern European Jews, nurtured by the settlement movement and accessible community institutions, and connected to regional professional training opportunities—South Philadelphia has enjoyed “an embarrassment of riches” when it comes to learning the arts. Historically, “there was something in the fabric of the neighborhood that supported the arts.”

The settlement house movement led by 19th century progressives and industrialists to educate and provide “culture” for multiple new communities provided the foundation for several South Philadelphia arts institutions—as well as the beginnings of philanthropy. Fleisher Art Memorial started as the Graphic Sketch Club meeting in the Jewish Union Building at 4th and Bainbridge Streets.

As Vice-President of the [Fleisher Yarn Company], Samuel Fleisher ... acknowledged the integral role that the workers played in the company and was mindful of carrying on mutually beneficial engagements with his employees. .... Springing from this morale, Fleisher acted on the suggestion of his sister Helen to create opportunities through the factory, wherein neighborhood children, many of whom were the sons and daughters of the factory workers, could enjoy free art classes.

In 1906, with expanding enrollment of “adults and children of all races and nationalities,” the club moved to 740 Catharine Street. During the next decade it relocated across the street to its current site, the abandoned St Martin’s College for Indigent Boys (1916) and the adjacent Church of the Evangelist (1922).24

Settlement Music School was founded in 1908 as the music program of the College Settlement in Southwark, “a typical turn-of-the-century settlement house offering a variety of services to the newly arrived immigrants in the community.” 25 Now the largest of South Philadelphia's cultural organizations, Settlement has trained in their formative years thousands of the city's most illustrious classical musicians.

The relocation of the Rock School for Dance Education (originally, the school of the Pennsylvania Ballet) to South Broad Street and Washington Avenue in the late 1980s broadened the disciplinary frame of South Philadelphia-based arts education to include dance as well as music and the visual arts. When the Pennsylvania Ballet Company moved north of Center City, the Rock School became an independent entity. The Rock School now includes a residence program housed in the Marine Club, a renovated condominium facility across the street, and draws students from all over the region and beyond.

While these established programs focus primarily on classical Western art forms, South Philadelphians also have access to folk arts education through ethnic-based social service

24 Samuel S. Fleisher Art Memorial: fleisher.org/about
25 Settlement Music School: smsmusic.org/about
organizations. SEAMAAC\textsuperscript{26} teaches traditional Asian art forms, folk and classical, along with an active and popular Hip Hop Heritage program that includes instruction in dance, mural and graffiti art, and video.

We have a hip-hop heritage program that has always served a range of Asian American kids, but last year we also had African American and European American participants too. They produced a CD with a rap artist – an Italian American who learned how to make beats from an Asian DJ – and who adapted a traditional Turkish rhythm. It is wonderful that these kids are using all these bits of themselves. We have an Indonesian kid who wrote a song about the environment, half in English and half in his native language. Some are native; others have been here for less than five years. They call each other brother and sister. And they find it through their passion for hip hop. They are breaking in one class, DJ-ing in another, and graphic design in another class.

A few years ago, coming to after school class [at Furness], the kids were being beaten up by both white and black kids. ... It’s funny, because it is so multi-racial, now the groups walking to the classes are multi-racial. It helps to break down the attacks in bullying.

SEAMAAC also runs an elders program with Chinese, Cambodians, and Laotians participating. Artists do projects and workshops, “but what they love is making lanterns for the autumn festival,” which their children or grandchildren carry and they walk through the neighborhood in the evening. Some elders know how to make paper and silk flowers, so they now teach the others. “They sold them and gave a bunch to SEAMAAC.”

Casa Monarca\textsuperscript{27}, a cultural center in a storefront location at 17th and Dickenson Streets, just west of Broad, opened in the fall of 2009 to serve South Philadelphia’s burgeoning population of Mexican and Mexican American youth. Recent research by the Historical Society of Pennsylvania (Balch Institute) suggests that Mexican communities have been successful because they create connections to informal learning opportunities, with most learning about culture from family and community members. However, with respect to connecting with mainstream institutions, “so many of the newer immigrants have lost so much that it is hard to build and broker trust.” As a new organization serving a vulnerable community, Casa Monarca is using a strategy of “principled self-exclusion” so that these newcomers can meet their own needs without reference to everyone else.

Reinventing institutions

South Philadelphia’s arts institutions, though conservative by virtue of history and discipline, appear to be working in parallel with artists who see themselves as animateurs to encourage cultural production and participation in the community. Institutions reinventing themselves to respond to changing communities represent an inherent challenge. As explained by a local anthropologist: “Institutions tend to reproduce the conditions that reinforce their own identity. Sometimes they feed off artists and art forms in ways that sustain themselves and distort and appropriate authentic experience.” An artist working with an arts education program noted: “One thing that kept coming up is that we serve Southeast Asians and Mexicans, but we teach

\textsuperscript{26} Southeast Asian Mutual Assistant Associations Coalition, Inc: www.seamaac.org/aboutus

\textsuperscript{27} Casa Monarca: casamonarca.org
European. The folks we talked to said ‘we don’t go there because we don’t know what to do there.’”

Skill-based programs, like Settlement Music School and the Rock School, have particular difficulty with reinvention. Settlement has stayed true to its community mission of quality and access and its artistic roots in largely Western classical traditions. The school has evolved as a pioneer in arts-based early childhood education and development of methods to document the value of learning through the arts. The Rock School for Dance Education, a bastion of rigorous ballet training, has begun to acknowledge that its successes can be touted in new ways. A Rock School alumnus, Vince Johnson, has returned to teach “Extreme Movement” that incorporates hip-hop and other contemporary dance forms.

Fleisher Art Memorial has worked for over 15 years to develop a wider understanding of and approach to culture, beginning with its collaboration with the Philadelphia Folklore Project and continuing with a steady building of relationships with schools and social service agencies. “[The Folklore Project] was instrumental in my understanding of a broader definition of culture and together we attempted to establish pathways.” As a result of active research and fieldwork in South Philadelphia over a three-year period, Fleisher has taken steps to serve immigrants and families through staff and program diversification—such as, use of Spanish language and Mexican folklore in classes; publication of printed materials in Lao, Cambodian, Spanish and Vietnamese; and start-up of a knitting circle for Bhutanese women. Of particular note have been its reorganization of staff to diminish the separation between programs on-site and off-site; its interest in welcoming new immigrant and refugee populations; and its community-based public performances. Fleisher Art Memorial continues to articulate and reinterpret its own mission identity as a community-based arts organization that seeks to tap into individual creativity while welcoming everyone.

This past weekend at Fleisher I saw Mexican mothers in the park, and in the lobby there were women speaking Mandarin using the new visitor services techniques to make folks feel welcome.

Breakdance Boys in South Philly, by Mariel Waloff, Philadelphia Weekly
Posted Jan 22, 2010

“Racial tensions and violence have been escalating at South Philadelphia High School, and peaked a little over a month ago when 30 Asian students were the target of a violent attack. But one group of diverse students have resisted the divisive racial tensions by breakdancing.”

Photo: SEAMAAC at seamaac.org
SEAMAAC runs one of the best-attended, most cohesive arts programs in the city on the uppermost floor of The Academy at Palumbo. There, contemporary art forms that have grown up together—dance, rap, video, graffiti—are practiced and taught by a group of seasoned multi-ethnic practitioners to a group of equally multi-ethnic students.

Together, these programs reflect the value that South Philadelphia families from a wide range of backgrounds place on arts education. As such, these community-based institutions have served as feeders for arts-based public and charter schools in South Philadelphia. The Meredith School, considered one of the best public elementary schools in the city, was for almost 20 years an arts magnet school. Meredith is credited with turning out generations of candidates for academic and arts magnet high schools, like the Girard Academic Music Program and the High School for Creative and Performing Arts—both located in South Philadelphia. The Philadelphia Performing Arts Charter School, founded in 2000 at 2600 South Broad Street, anticipates opening a second site in South Philadelphia.

Philippine High School for the Creative and Performing Arts (CAPA) relocated in 1997 to the restored Ridgway Library at South Broad and Christian Streets in South Philadelphia. Students major in one of six areas: creative writing, instrumental music, visual arts, theater, dance, or vocal music.

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28 The Academy at Palumbo, which opened in September 2006, is an academic magnet public high school (grades 9-12) located at 1100 Catharine St in South Philadelphia.
29 Girard Academic Music Program (GAMP), grades 5 through 12, is located at 2200 West Ritner Street (at 22nd Street). Since 1997, the Philadelphia High School for the Creative and Performing Arts (CAPA), grades 9 through 12, has been located in the restored Ridgway Library building at South Broad and Christian Streets.
Alumni villages and 30-somethings

The University of the Arts, located at Broad and Pine Streets just north of South Street, has had considerable interaction with South Philadelphia over the years in a variety of interesting ways. Created in 1985, the university was the result of a merger of two century-old institutions: the Philadelphia College of Art and the Philadelphia College of Performing Arts. The University of the Arts has always drawn students from South Philadelphia but, more importantly, it also draws students to Philadelphia and South Philadelphia in particular. In the first few years after World War II, the art school (then known as the Museum College) found itself without adequate space for returning GIs and looked to another Museum-affiliated organization, the Fleisher Art Memorial, to expand its classroom and studio space. The resulting student and faculty influx to the area around Seventh and Catharine Streets, combined with a growing post-war Italian immigration, resulted in the opening—and success—of a flurry of inexpensive Italian restaurants.

As Philadelphia’s art schools have expanded over the years, so has the appeal of South Philadelphia as a nearby, affordable, safe and lively community for art students. The city of Philadelphia is home to five art and music schools—Moore College of Art and Design, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Tyler School of Art and Boyer School of Music and Dance at Temple University, and the University of the Arts—and their growth over the past 20 years has served to drive more art students into South Philadelphia. Graduate and undergraduate students from the University of the Arts, the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, and Tyler are, in fact, encouraged by their school administrations to look for housing in South Philadelphia, specifically near Broad Street.

The rentals in South Philadelphia are less costly than campus living or Center City. The area is relatively flat, both walk-able and bike-able, and has good transit. “You can take a bus to the movie theater, and it’s one subway to downtown.” Along with affordable rents and a walking neighborhood are plentiful amenities—grocery stores and corner stores, Asian supermarkets,

30 The Philadelphia College of Art (PCA) was established in 1876 as part of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Together they were originally known as the Pennsylvania Museum and School of Industrial Art, founded in response to the growing interest in art and art education stirred by the country’s Centennial Exposition. In 1949, PCA changed its name to the Philadelphia Museum School of Art, reflecting expanded programs that trained artists in a variety of areas. The school received accreditation as a college in 1959, and in 1964 it separated from the Museum to become the Philadelphia College of Art.

The performing arts programs of the University of the Arts date back to 1870, when three graduates of Germany's Leipzig Conservatory opened the Philadelphia Musical Academy, one of the first European-style conservatories of music in America. The Academy became an independent college of music in 1950, one of only eight institutions in the nation to offer four-year Bachelor of Music degrees. The school changed its name to the Philadelphia College of Performing Arts (PCPA) in 1976. One year later, the Philadelphia Dance Academy became part of PCPA, and in 1983 the School of Theater was created, achieving the college's ideal combination of dance, music and theater arts.

In 1985, PCA and PCPA merged to become the Philadelphia Colleges of the Arts, a collaboration bringing the institution one step closer to becoming the nation's first comprehensive arts university. In 1987 upon granting of university status, the University of the Arts became the largest institution of its kind in the U.S., offering programs in design, fine arts, media arts, crafts, music, dance and theater. Source: www.uarts.edu/about/history
weekly farmers markets, the open air Ninth Street market, and easy access to modestly priced pizza, dim sum, pho, tacos, enchiladas and shawarma—that foster recurring mini-waves of four-year art school migrants.

After graduation some aspiring artists stay in South Philadelphia and explore the dwindling stock of affordable factory buildings, garages and print shops. However, much of the available factory space has recently been transformed into loft spaces for residential use, not studios. Most of the practicing artists interviewed, regardless of where they went to school, acknowledged their draw for workspace is to neighborhoods to the north and east—Northern Liberties, Port Richmond, and Kensington—even if their social networks were tethered south of South Street.

I see people not moving here. Those who do are moving to deep south Philly, west of Broad. And, of course, Passyunk Avenue is developing nicely, but it is being developed by 30-somethings. It’s generational. The 20-somethings are heading northward.

Washington Avenue, formerly home to several of South Philadelphia’s 19th century factories, now has three Asian shopping plazas between 5th Street and 16th Street. The supermarket at Hung Vuong Plaza has a very diverse clientele.

Photo: Thora Jacobson, 2011

Still, many artists do reside in and move into South Philadelphia, especially if they are ready for stability and/or family life. “If you are buying a home, you are looking for stability. We weren’t gentrifying, we were just replacing the Italians. Similar values for stability.” Neighborhood safety and stability were mentioned repeatedly among interviewees as reasons why they have stayed in or returned to South Philadelphia. Artists seek not only affordable space and accessible locations (via public transit) but also environments that are safe for their families, friends, and other collaborators. Single women, gays and lesbians, minorities and mixed-race, even Jews from outside the district expressed concerns about South Philly’s insider reputation.
When I first came [in the 1990s], I always swore I would never live in South Philadelphia because I considered it ugly and kind of stable in a way that was unappealing. It seemed that it was stable and impenetrable. That was my outsider opinion.

But many artists have tested the waters and found South Philadelphia a good place to live. “All the things we were told about weren’t true.” “I think it is an ‘anything goes’ place down here.”

I thought to myself, this is really gritty and dusty and urban and hot. But maybe this is where I belong. It was more real; the space was raw and my friends could get there on their bicycles. ... Now having a big open studio where people come and work and could park their bikes is appealing. I feel safer here than in any place I have ever lived.

Neighborhood amenities support the artists and changing residential community. “I was thrilled to find out there is a community pool. We would get the New York Times on Sunday, and everyone was there. ... There are places to play tennis – at Columbus Square – and skateboarders and graffiti. There’s Hawthorne Café, Devil’s Den, and Morning Glory Café. And it is still relatively affordable.”

The Ninth Street Market and lesser-known businesses serve artists in non-traditional ways. For example, Triple Play printed photographic transfers on awnings; a store for work uniforms supplied costumes for a theatrical performance; and A & C Paper has become a staple for muralists. “I buy all my containers for mixing paint, spoons and ketchup containers. Now, they understand what I am using them for. I turn my muralist friends onto them too.”

South Philly changes and stays the same. From the point of view of an artist, one of the things that keep South Philadelphia “alive and interesting” is immigration. One artist recalled the procession of the saints (from St Mary Magdalene de Pazzi Church) that she saw from her daughter’s window.

It was out of my culture and out of my religion, but it was in my face. I didn’t find it offensive – it was more like ‘welcome to the neighborhood.’ Artists are interested in things outside of ourselves. We need the context and a way of seeing connections across cultures.

From the point of view a new immigrant or refugee, South Philadelphia offers accessibility to work and a few familiar signposts. “If you cannot speak the language or are otherwise marginalized, the foodways and cultural experiences can make you feel at home.” But most of these newcomers experience a strange and hostile social environment. Arts educators working with newly-arrived groups know that the keystone of any program, especially for teens and youth, is escort services. 31

The good news is that artists aren’t all looking to New York any more. “Art schools used to have a single directional sign to New York. In the 1990s, people would move to New York and go to Brooklyn, but it was a long commute. They would stay for a year and move back. People are moving here from New York. They are investing in Philadelphia. It is a first choice, not settling.”

Changing artistic practice and production

The layering of immigrant experience and adaptation, the repurposing of cultural traditions and institutions, and the presence of art students and practitioners do not by themselves make for a “natural” cultural district. How these elements interact over time—how “people rub up against one another”—are at the heart of a healthy cultural ecology. “There needs to be a symbiosis between residential and commercial and cultural resources for a range of people.”

Artists are an essential element of a “natural” cultural district. They have an impact on communities because they respond to and reflect the times they live in and the places they know. As observed by established artist James Dupree:

> Whether people like you or not – you are the contemporary culture of the day – if you are the real deal. You are working harder than most people, but you are working from passion. They respect it, and even when they disrespect it, they respect it. You don’t think about the impact you are making just because you are living your life.

The story of South Philadelphia as a cultural district is tied not only to neighborhood immigration but also to the story of South Street, its shared boundary with Center City. A number of artists and entrepreneurs arrived during and after the Crosstown Expressway depression of the 1960s. People remember the area starting to turn around during the 1970s and attribute much success to artists and other mavericks.32 “What is really interesting to me is that I have lived long enough to see the changes. Real estate follows the artists and the gays.”

South Street was beginning to get some traction after the failure of the Crosstown Expressway. The art community moves into these dilapidated places because they are affordable, and slowly but surely you see the neighborhoods change. Artists need what everyone else needs – drug store and dry cleaners. Restaurants followed and the whole neighborhood changed. You see it everywhere – in the Village in New York City, in Haight Ashbury in San Francisco.

The recent history of South Philadelphia as a “natural” cultural district has been heavily influenced by changes in the city and district’s real estate market during the past decade. At the beginning of the 2000s, South Philadelphia was hardly a desirable location from the standpoint of property values. The Reinvestment Fund’s Market Value Analysis in 2001 classified the vast majority of the district as a “distressed” housing market that required significant improvements to avoid further decline.

Over the next seven years, the entire city enjoyed improved economic conditions and rising expectations for its housing markets. South Philadelphia, in particular, benefited from this change. By 2008, no part of the district was classified as distressed. Large sections of Bella Vista and Queen Village were classified as “regional choice,” the highest rating, while the remainder of the district was classified as either steady or transitional.

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32 See movie on YouTube re the 40th reunion of South Street in 2010. “It’s a story of how business wealth and greed degraded the community. Artists and projects couldn’t stay—Eye’s Gallery, Works, TLA, and the Painted Bride.”
Artists as community animateurs

A number of artists took advantage of these transitions to set down roots in the neighborhood. In 1968, like other “artists and urban pioneers,” Julia and Isaiah Zagar moved to South Street, where properties were abandoned and cheap due to planned construction of the Crosstown Expressway. That year the Zagars opened the Eye’s Gallery on South Street at 4th Street, a Latin and Central American folk art gallery which they saw as an extension of Isaiah’s studio practice as well as a market for crafts produced by native communities they met in Peru with the Peace Corps. During the next decades, as they purchased and renovated properties along South Street for their residence and for rental, Isaiah developed his practice as a mosaic mural artist. The intensity and scale of the artist’s broken Mexican pottery, mirror and glass murals began to “brand” South Street. Isaiah himself branded the Zagar House at 10th and South with the title: “Art Is The Center Of The Real World.”

Mirror murals by Isaiah Zagar appear throughout South Philadelphia, here at Napoli Pizza on East Passyunk Avenue at 7th Street and above on a wall along the 1200 block of Ellsworth. Photos: Thora Jacobson, 2011
In 2002 Isaiah Zagar, as creator of dozens of distinctive mosaic murals, became a focal point for South Street’s cultural survivability when his vast “squatter’s” installation at 10th and South was threatened by the decision of its Boston-based owner to sell the property. Having considerable community and media support, Zagar managed not only to purchase the double-sized lot but also to turn it into a tourist attraction called Philadelphia’s Magic Gardens. He converted part of his studio into a workshop, which evolved into a community arts organization with community development ambitions. Programs range from cultural events and performances, to specialized workshops for schools and museums, to private rentals. Magic Gardens, open daily from 10 to 7 and 8 on weekends, claims that they hosted 60,000 visitors in 2011.

Zagar’s studio work can now be seen down the alleys of South Philadelphia and on the walls throughout the neighborhood. A particularly prominent location is the façade of Chi MAC, headquarters of the Kun Yang Lin Dancers and movement education program, just below the “Cheese Steak Triangle,” where 9th Street, Wharton Street, and Passyunk Avenue converge.

   Isaiah mostly wants walls covered. But he is making a living at it. He doesn’t keep secrets. He wants people to know how to do it. Young people are thinking differently. You never showed your magic when we were younger. It is very different from the way we thought when I was at Cooper Union.

In 2007 the Zagars purchased a warehouse at 10th and Watkins Streets to convert to a studio and public space. The passage down 10th Street from South Street to Watkins Street has, in the past couple of years, become the route of a parade and procession organized by the Mexican Cultural Center to celebrate the Day of the Dead. The event weaves together the folk art interests that inspired the Zagars’ establishment of the Eye’s Gallery in 1968 with the contemporary community mission of Magic Gardens to respond to the traditions of South Philadelphia’s expanding Mexican community.

Ultimately, Isaiah Zagar envisions a concentration of murals in South Philadelphia with South Street—ideally, Magic Gardens and the vacant Pearl Paints building converted to studios—as a gateway down to the rest of South Philadelphia. Between South Street and Watkins Street, adjoining the Ninth Street Italian Market and the Mexican community, 10th Street would become the connecting passageway. The Watkins Street Building and studio would be open to the public as a school, gallery, and performance space.

Dupree Gallery at 703 South 6th St, purchased as a residence in 1979 by painter James Dupree, is also a product of opportunity and entrepreneurship afforded by the fall and rise of the South Philadelphia real estate market. As a young African American artist in Philadelphia, who wanted to start a family, he knew he would always have to have a studio that also served as a home or dwelling. “I was always involved in commerce. I knew the institutions were racist, so I needed a space to show and sell my work. I always had art in the storefront.” He found a building at 6th and Bainbridge that was zoned R-2 and the price was right.

    When I applied for a mortgage, I realized my block was red lined. When I purchased that building in 1979 I had to go to 10 banks. I needed 33 percent down. They told me that if I didn’t change the zoning, I would need more. ... I had to borrow an additional $5,000 between Monday and Friday. I had to put up $15,000 on a $32,000 building.
The R-2 zoning allowed Dupree to have both a gallery on the first floor and a residence above. “That allowed me to put a mark on the space that there was an artist living there. I am now the only R-2 on the block, and my building is even more saleable. That made me . . . way ahead of the curve.” As soon as he cleared the first floor and set it up as a gallery, he was able to sell work. Bainbridge Street, one block south of South, was part of the South Street artists’ community but more affordable.

I was also selling artwork from the street. There were 17 artists on the block at the time. Photographer Ray Metzker had a beautiful building, and he painted it intricately. There was the South Street Art Shop, the Painted Bride on South Street, with Gerry Givnish as director. I could show there too. I could walk a block and buy art supplies and be part of the artist community.

“Everyone in the community knows me—the artist. ... The people who live in that community have seen art on that corner for more than 30 years.”

In recent years, Dupree has expanded his practice into Mantua in West Philadelphia, where he has converted former stable and carriage houses into a rambling studio. Here he offers drawing classes, open studio figure drawing and painting, an artist residency program for contemporary artists, and a live-work loft studio space for rent. He welcomes neighbors to drop by and mentors young artists to show them that a career is possible. The City of Philadelphia has proposed demolition of the site for redevelopment as a supermarket.

PPainter James Dupree has constructed sets like this Ganesha for the Mummers New Year’s Day Fancy Brigade, the Shooting Stars. Photo: Thora Jacobson, 2011

According to the artist, much of his work “renders visible what is heard and felt in music.” Forbidden Fruit is another theme. To visit Dupree Studios’ online gallery: http://www.dupreestudiosinc.com/gallery/#all
A South Philadelphia artist whose studio work pushes the boundaries of public art is Zoe Strauss. Strauss uses photography to explore the connection of culture to community and to expand people’s access to the arts in their everyday lives. Her street photography undertaken over the past decade has brought attention to her South Philadelphia neighbors, with special attention to the most isolated and invisible members of this expressive urban neighborhood. Annually from 2001 to 2010 she held an Under I-95 show beneath the highway in South Philadelphia to display her photographs on concrete pillars and sell reproductions for $5 each.

Zoe used to take her work and sell it under I-95. She grew up down here and has said that everyone should have access to art. And she photographs the people and places that stir emotions within her. One of her powerful images shows a large sign, Hope not Dope, over a storefront church.

The ten-year retrospective exhibition of her work at the Philadelphia Museum of Art (January – April 2012) is amplified by 54 billboard-sized images in neighborhoods throughout the city.

Putting art on billboards isn't any more innovative than the types of photos Strauss makes, but her populist outreach feels like a natural extension of her working philosophy, to "present an epic narrative about the beauty and struggle of everyday life."... She clearly identifies, and empathizes, with people living on the margin of polite society. She also displays a gift for friendship with strangers that allow her what is often a startling degree of intimacy in photographing them.  

Strauss is unabashed in her exuberance about the stories her subjects tell. Through her intimate exposure of faces and places, Zoe Strauss forces us to confront the breadth of diversity in urban living and American life.

Studio artists who engage in what is now called “social practice” are also an important part of integrating the arts into community life. Fiber artist Kathryn Pannepacker worked with homeless adults, through the Mural Arts Program, on a mural that involved weaving personal stories onto strips that were woven into mats, which became part of the painting. Through Arts on South, they were able continue the project at a temporary studio at 626 South Street, called Arts Street Textile Studio as “a home base for the homeless to make art.” With the installation of floor looms, participants could make scarves and earn a little money.

What we quickly realized was that getting folks to South Philly was hard because the shelters weren't there. So we didn’t limit ourselves to working with the homeless. We worked with anyone in transition all with the same goal—to diminish stigma – folks in recovery, anyone walking down South Street. It became a drop-in place. Some people were turned off that we were working with people in recovery. But visibility was important to us, and we didn’t want anyone to feel shamed or uncomfortable. People kept giving us supplies.

From a neighborhood point of view, community engaged artists tend to be visitors. On the one hand, independent artists are able to be flexible and responsive to communities and agile in

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34 Arts on South, a project of Philadelphia’s Magic Gardens and the South Street Headhouse District, loans vacant South Street storefronts to artists to showcase their work.
Connecting people with organizations and resources. On the other hand, projects that are artists’ works-in-progress generally do not achieve a stable presence in a community.

The (nine) artists (and one ethnographer) involved in “Journeys South,” a South Philadelphia initiative of the City of Philadelphia Mural Arts Program, found that their work helped develop relationships between resident artists and members of the broader community. Although the awnings created for the Ninth Street merchants were temporary, artists Michelle Angela Ortiz and Tony Rocco perceive a longer-term impact from their oral history, photography, and video-making process.

A community is introduced to different kinds of art. With the videos, they were seeing the history that makes the place and get a better sense of the history of it. The process generated new stories; … the short lived gallery that was next to Sabrina’s where they had handmade clothing and paintings. The more that these things happen, it begins to break down barriers to different kinds of art, and makes it easier for the next person who comes along.

The artists worked for almost two years on the project called Different Paths, One Market. “There is a real value to patience. Not just the planning but the deliverable. You celebrate and it is the beginning of a relationship.”

**Niche realtors, property owners, and artist-driven development**

Artists of all disciplines have found their way to South Philadelphia through powerful but informal networks of family and friends. In the 1990s a group of dancers, initially connected through their work at the Pennsylvania Ballet (then located with the Rock School at the corner of Broad and Washington) began to look for housing close to South Broad Street. One choreographer in that loosely knit group had a stepmother who was a local realtor. She started Kun Yang Lin/Dancers’ rehearsal space and education center at 1316 S 9th St (at Wharton) marks one of the most visible presences of dance in the community. Chi Movement Arts Center has made itself part of the "vernacular" by commissioning a mosaic mural by Isaiah Zagar.

Photo: google.com
helping people find houses and get mortgages. As it turned out, the brokerage of this realtor proved critical. She understood the neighborhood and the needs of her clients at a moment in time when residential properties near Broad Street were still affordable for artists, art educators, and arts administrators. A dozen or so dancers, choreographers, filmmakers and theater professionals now call South Philadelphia home—including Nichole Canuso Dance Company, Headlong Dance Company, Miro, Theatre Exile, Kun Yang Lin/Dancers, White Box Theater—and several have their company offices and studios nearby on Broad Street.

The lagging real estate market of the early 2000s encouraged entrepreneurs to see the arts as a desirable use. Local businessmen and real estate developers who owned properties in South Philadelphia have often found artists to be good tenants. Artists tend to be responsible, not demanding, and courteous. For these owners, the incentive to maintain their buildings as artist studios is simple—working artists keep the building occupied and in use; maintain the spaces and share utilities (like a kiln); and interact with people who get along well enough with one another.

I found the art community wonderful. Artists were pleasant and honest; I liked everything about them. I found that they were not needy; they are a hardy bunch. If you give them four walls, light and electric, they are happy.

Our interviews uncovered the potential of artist-driven space development, like the former cigar factory at 700 South 10th Street that was converted to live-work studio space, originally to accommodate the artist-developers’ own work as sculptors and architectural fabricators. The case of 1241 Carpenter provides an example of this type of development.

Steve Krupnick, President of Webb Manufacturing, is owner and developer of 1241 Carpenter Street, which currently houses some 20 artist studios, a yoga studio, a T-shirt business, and arts and crafts classes for Mexican children and youth. He bought the building—built in 1866 for Maine Belting Company—35 years ago to start a business manufacturing industrial textiles. He and his partner are the third owners of the building.

My second partner whose wife was an artist suggested we create some artist studios. So the building was kind of an incubator for small businesses that became larger. My own business took up the entire second floor, and the first floor was full of printing equipment. The Abrasive business was the most lucrative, and we sold off the others to good companies. I decided to build out the studios. It took less than a year to fill the building up. And every time something changed, we opted to bring in artists rather than small businesses.

Artist Mike Smash approached 1241 Studios’ owner, Steve Krupnick, to create graffiti style signage for the building. Photos: Thora Jacobson, 2011
I have 46 artists in the building now. I want more diversity. … I’d like a glass blower here. Short of that, I think I have the mix I need. We have people who make jewelry, printmakers, presses, clay artists, fiber artists, and a printmaking collective.

My nature, since I am in the building, is that I realize that they are my livelihood. I prefer to be nice. I built them a light table, a sink for silkscreen to wash out that could be shared on the third floor. And I installed the electronic directory at the front door. The goal is to have a happy community to do what they do.

Artists say that the building is affordable and there’s a waiting list. Krupnick bought the building in the mid-1970s and can afford to rent it out cheaply, particularly relative to the rest of the city. “The net result of what I get out of this is great, including people to trade with. You see the work of a number of artists here.”

The rise in property values, however, suggests that this story is not likely to be repeated. Krupnick is not optimistic about the prospects for other buildings like 1241 coming on line in South Philadelphia. He views this kind of development “a one of a kind” and financially untenable in this day and age.

Folks are often surprised that there are studios in this neighborhood. I don’t think you could pull this off – owning the building forever, having the right building, really enjoying. We own a lot of property – and I bought the property next door so that I could have parking spaces if I wanted to do condos. But, having spent all that money and done all that work, I wouldn’t be making much more than I do now. I have no intention of changing this building, just make it better. I think this is a one of a kind.

Is South Philadelphia a “natural” cultural district? I have watched the Cambodians, Vietnamese, and Mexican come in over the years … But all I know is that, prior to my being here, the only place you could get a studio was up on Spring Garden. When we opened, it was like a vacuum that was drawing local folks in.

The artist-developer team of Tom Miles and Alex Generalis work to mentor a new generation of artists as developers and small businessmen, both as integral to their services as Miles & Generalis Inc and as advisers and instructors with the Corzo Center for the Creative Economy at the University of the Arts. “Now I think of artists as small businessmen.” Tom notes that sculptors and artisans, in particular, are adaptable to the construction and development trades. The film industry in Philadelphia, for example, has employed a lot of carpenters and furniture makers. “It is still artist-driven, with artists as pioneers. Kids coming to art school these days have different skills and tools that will accelerate the growth of a cultural district.”

**Artist-run and pop-up spaces**
During the 1990s artist “instigators” began to move to the neighborhood to awaken sleepy institutions and start-up spaces to support emerging artists and foster an arts community. Some artists are especially adept at working within and without systems. Kathryn Pannepacker found a space to rent on the third floor of the building owned by the Da Vinci Art Alliance, started in 1931 by a group of Italian men, mostly sculptors.

Programming was slow and sleepy – I kept thinking why can’t it be more active? I started thinking and talking with ... one of the older members, who was just worn out. He was a great framer and encouraged me. I guess I stirred things up and eventually Giuseppe left and got a great studio elsewhere. With colleagues I started having events and poetry readings ... My vision was for artists who wanted to show new bodies of work – instigating – and we wanted to make it professional. ... We would meet up on the third floor or hang out on the roof and drink wine. It was about creating a welcome place to bring people together—a potluck model – but we wanted it to be professional.

Shelley Spector opened Spector Gallery in 1999 “to bolster the scene here.” “There are always artist co-ops for work that is installation based, but I wanted to carry the torch for artists who wanted to make a living.” Spector maintained the gallery for seven years but then had “an intentional closing” in order to focus on her own work. Her studio practice now works with the artists from her gallery days.

A newer generation of artists, disillusioned with gallery representation, contributed to the changing mix of artists in the district. “I think the emergence of artist-owned spaces is a direct response. I just want to make my work and hang it up.” Another artist noted that a few collectives have emerged in South Philadelphia and are run as businesses, including relatively new places for live performances. “It is kind of natural and fits into the scene.”

A number of young artists—drawn by the same amenities that brought them to the neighborhood as students—have gravitated to South Philadelphia, taking over buildings of various types for a range of DIY enterprises. These projects are often temporary, multi-media, and free-wheeling, and the artists are hard to pin down unless you are part of the social network of the principals (live or virtual). “They work on a need-to-know basis.” Storage

35 Do-it-yourself (DIY) is a phrase that describes building, modifying, or repairing something without experts or professionals that came into use in the 1950s with reference to home improvement projects. DIY is now used to describe crafting and “homemade” production as a subculture or movement outside of art school.
Space, My House, and Cha-cha-razzi create performance works, host bands, organize theme-based exhibitions and serve as incubators for a new generation of artists who need space, not necessarily commercial galleries. Oddly, this “free-wheeling” often slows the creation of social networks: “There are individual pockets, not very well organized, and not a lot of cross-fertilization among these venues.”

Along with this scene is the rise of the owner-operated coffee shop as “an anchor institution.” South Philadelphia has shared fully in the caffeination of urban culture, but with space at a premium, neighborhood coffee houses often serve double duty as artists’ workspace. “When your life is always changing, your collaborators are changing, and your topics are changing, it’s nice to have something that is stable.” A lot of artists use coffee shops as their offices. Apparently, comic book artists use cafés as their studios.

**Artists and commercial revitalization, again**

In South Philadelphia artists and cultural production have historically lubricated the local economy. During the 1990s and 2000s the interaction of art and commerce has contributed to the revitalization of commercial corridors, in particular, South Street and East Passyunk Avenue. Local business associations that support merchants in these corridors acknowledge the value of the arts to neighborhood economic development. The recession that began in 2007, however, marked another turn in the real estate fortunes of South Philadelphia.

**Arts on South (AoS), a program of Philadelphia’s Magic Gardens on South Street,** makes vacant retail space available to artists and community groups at no cost except for utilities.

In 2008, when the economy was foundering, South Street that relied on commerce had a particularly hard time. ... The 600 block had 12 vacant stores, and it went up and down the street. ... The big guys who owned a lot of real estate ... were persuaded to help in their own self-interest. They realized that South Street was an arts community, and it was a way to keep the street looking good.

AoS staffs the space during the street’s busiest hours, turns the lights on, and keeps the façades clean. The program provided an outlet for Arts Street Textiles, a weaving group, which opened its doors as a functioning fiber studio for men and women who had been part of the Mural Arts Program’s homelessness project. Another group was the Philadelphia Dumpster Divers, artists who make things out of trash, most of whom participated in the earlier South Street Renaissance. After a year and a half, the Dumpster Divers decided “to leave to make room for someone else.” While neither group could have afforded standard commercial rental rates, member artists have been able to showcase their work and earn money, and AoS has been able to rekindle the spirit of the 1970s and occupy buildings that would have cost their owners much more in insurance premiums.

East Passyunk Avenue has been long characterized by blocks of Italian salumerie and cheese shops; shops for parochial school uniforms, christening gowns, and first holy communion dresses; Italian boutiques and tailor shops; and classic Italian American pizzerie. The corridor

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36 In summer 2012 Philadelphia’s Magic Gardens put the Arts on South program “on temporary hiatus” to evaluate and revise the program. AoS is now partnering with the South Street Headhouse District.
now features a more diverse “cultural” character—people say—without having lost its more traditional charms.

Moreover, East Passyunk remains a haven for locavores. Small artisanal businesses, locally-owned cafes, upscale restaurants, taquerias, gourmet grocery shops and gelateria now line the street—with nary a “chain” business in sight.

Passyunk Avenue merchants are supported by an active business improvement district (BID), which brought in 20 businesses in 2009, invested in streetscape improvements, and sparked the reclamation of several empty buildings for new businesses. The streetscape design included a suite of four murals along Passyunk between Broad Street and 11th Street. The East Passyunk Avenue BID also supported a series of temporary public art installations as part of Journeys South: “honor boxes” that housed broadsides with poems that celebrated South Philadelphia immigrants, dance patterns on the sidewalk, and videos that tell the stories of neighborhood residents through the eyes of artists.  

Fashion, textiles, and crafts are a growing niche on East Passyunk Avenue with shops like Nice Things Hand Made and Fabric Horse.

[Fabric Horse] was a coup. She was being priced out of her space in Northern Liberties. Wonderful young women who are making clothes. Alyssa sells almost every medium of artwork. Does a monthly show for Second Saturday. When I go in there, there is always someone sitting on the sofa working there.

“We are a changing and growing corridor ... People say it’s a hipster place, but the hipsters are the artists.”

37 Journeys South, “Start Here,” by miro/Amanda Miller and Tobin Rothlein
Implications of South Philadelphia Study for “Natural” Cultural Districts

The purpose of the three-city study was to broaden our understanding of the character and evolution of “natural” cultural districts, the dynamics of the cultural ecosystem, and its relationship to the vitality of urban communities. Each district study contributes to development of typologies of “natural” cultural districts—based on both social geography and cultural ecology; our understanding of the history and life cycle of a cultural district; and the dynamics of cultural space in the context of neighborhood revitalization.

Social geography typology—location advantage and economic standing

We have proposed two ways of thinking about types of “natural” cultural districts. First, we have examined districts with respect to their location and economic advantage. We’ve noted that our cultural asset index (CAI) is strongly correlated with distance from Center City and several measures of economic standing. Yet, at the same time, we know that there are less favored parts of the city that have active cultural scenes in spite of these barriers.

To identify these sections of the city with greater precision, we calculated a corrected CAI that identifies districts with higher CAI scores than their location and economic standing would lead us to expect. We then classify cultural districts into three categories:

- **high market districts**—neighborhoods with significant location and economic advantages that exceed their predicted CAI scores;
- **market districts**—neighborhoods with location and economic advantages that have CAI scores near what we would expect; and
- **civic clusters**—neighborhoods with significant location and economic disadvantages that have high corrected CAI scores, that is, they exceed their predicted CAI scores.

Our previous research suggests that the different types of districts are amenable to different policy interventions. **High market districts** are generally able to advocate for their own interests. Representing more privileged parts of the city, they often create business improvement districts (BIDs) to improve their streetscapes and services. **Market districts** present the most difficult policy challenges. The individuals and organizations in these locations would benefit from improvements in city services to accelerate the process of placemaking. At the same time, market districts are likely to generate fears of gentrification and displacement that can undermine their contribution to increasing opportunity and equity. **Civic clusters** require integrated strategies that cut across different sectors. In these neighborhoods, which suffer many challenges, the level of cultural engagement can be seen as a strength.

South Philadelphia is unusual in that sections of the district are classified in all three of these categories. Unsurprisingly, large sections of Queen Village and Bella Vista are classified as high market districts that have high levels of cultural assets even given their location and economic advantages. Sections of Hawthorne and Passyunk East and a sliver of Queen Village are market districts, having CAI scores in line with what we’d expect to find in neighborhoods with these advantages. Finally, sections of the district south of Passyunk and between Dickinson and
Jefferson Squares are civic clusters, having cultural assets that exceed expectations given their lower socio-economic status and distance from Center City.

**Cultural ecology typology—asset mix**

Our second approach to categorizing “natural” cultural districts focuses on the mix of cultural assets in the neighborhood. Districts can vary from one another given the prominence of, for example, nonprofit arts organization versus commercial culture or resident artists. The method is simply to examine the ratio between one type of asset and the overall Cultural Asset Index (CAI) score for a block group. For example, if the ratio of nonprofits to the CAI is higher than the citywide average, it suggests that in that particular area nonprofit organizations make up a disproportionate share of assets.

The asset mix analysis suggests that artists and, to a lesser extent, commercial cultural firms are the leading institutions in most of South Philadelphia. The map on Figure 5-20 shows the asset ratio for nonprofit cultural institutions. With the exception of the far northwest corner of the district and one block group near Jefferson Square, the nonprofit ratios of the district range from average to below average.

![Figure 5-20. High cultural asset index (CAI), nonprofit ratio, Philadelphia block groups, 2010](image)
In contrast, the commercial ratio for South Philadelphia across the northern tier of neighborhoods and in East Passyunk is well above the citywide average. However, as with several other measures we’ve examined, the ratio of commercial cultural firms to the CAI declines quite sharply as one moves south and east.

Resident artists appear to drive the cultural assets of large sections of the district ranging from Hawthorne and Bella Vista in the north through Passyunk Square and even into central South Philadelphia, where the artists’ ratio is well above the average for the city.
Finally, the cultural participation ratio is a bit above average in the north side of the district but below average through most of the rest of South Philadelphia. Again, this is not to say that cultural participation is low in South Philadelphia, but simply that relative to other cultural assets in the district and to participation in other neighborhoods, resident participants in nonprofit cultural programs are less important.

The participation data, in particular, point out the gap between formal and informal types of cultural engagement. This index represents participation in the programs of Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance member organizations and does not pick up individuals and households participating in collective culture and public performances and celebrations—such as, the Mummers clubs and Mummers Parade, congregation-based programs, the San Mateo Ozolco and Day of the Dead processions, or the Ninth Street Festival.
Characterizing cultural districts by cultural asset mix or composition is still largely experimental, so our findings should be taken as preliminary. However, the method does show that the balance among the four cultural indicators varies as one moves from neighborhood to neighborhood. Certainly, the conclusion that South Philadelphia is an artist-driven cultural district is consistent with the result of our interviewing and observation in the district.

“Natural” cultural district life cycles—annuals or perennials?

One of goals of the larger project has been to understand the “life cycle” of cultural districts like South Philadelphia. What factors contribute to their emergence as “natural” cultural districts, and what elements sustain or threaten them as they grow? South Philadelphia, however, raises an entirely different question. We’ve learned that South Philadelphia’s history as a cultural cluster dates back decades if not centuries. Tracing a beginning to this history is likely to be a futile task. More importantly, it suggests that certain areas of the city recur as cultural districts. Although they pass through periods of growth, decline, and regeneration, these phases are not necessarily a linear progression.

South Philadelphia therefore suggests that, in some cases, a cyclical notion of the “natural” cultural district life cycle is more appropriate. At any particular time, the district may be in one stage or another, but to see decline as the same as death or growth as the same as birth is
probably a mistake. To use a horticultural metaphor, some “natural” cultural districts are perennials rather than annuals.

In this respect, South Philadelphia is similar to Capitol Hill in Seattle, where people have differing perspectives on its life history as a cultural district. Some told us about how the Capitol Hill had been in decline a decade ago, but that it was now on the rise. Others suggested that it had already peaked, that the rise in property values and rents had driven out emerging artists, and that the district was losing its arts identity. The lesson may be that for some “natural” cultural districts, certain qualities—their location, built environment, long-term residential community—may sustain a concentration of cultural resources. Some phases are stronger than others, but its cultural character is likely to endure. “Culture in South Philadelphia, it has always seemed to me, is a deep well of renewable resources.”

Cultural space and place

The implications of cultural clusters for the space needs of artists and cultural organizations are a central question of the study. Up until this point, our observations regarding space have focused on the actual physical structure of the built environment and the real estate market. In Seattle, for example, we found great concern that the dynamism of real estate markets is reducing the availability of the types of spaces that members of the cultural community seek and that this problem is particularly acute for artists.

The South Philadelphia case study underlines that physical space and real estate markets are only part of the story. Other factors are an important part of the mix—cultural infrastructure, the changing nature of artistic practice and production, community flux and contested terrain. In the South Philadelphia interviews, we found a recurring theme—“shared space”—a notion with multiple meanings and the potential to connect and divide different groups.

Cultural infrastructure

Our notion of cultural infrastructure derives from Howard Becker’s classic formulation in Art Worlds. Becker argues that, from a sociological point of view, we should see the artist as only one of the elements that are necessary to produce art. Becker made a compelling case that the image of the artist as a genius existing outside of any social organization was fallacious. Individual creativity—even in its most idiosyncratic form—is tied to a pattern of organization of social activity that allows the genius to be a genius. “Works of art,” Becker explains, “are not the products of individual makers, ‘artists’ who possess a rare and special gift.”

They are, rather, joint products of all the people who cooperate via an art world’s characteristic conventions to bring works like that into existence. Artists are a small subgroup of the world’s participants who, by common agreement, possess a special gift, therefore make a unique and indispensable contribution to the work, and thereby make it art.38

Based on our fieldwork and interviews, it is clear that the cultural producers of South Philadelphia value the various individuals and institutions that contribute to the construction of these art worlds. A number of interviewees pointed to the presence of art supplies—or rather,

38 Howard S. Becker, Art Worlds (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982).
these days, stores selling supplies that they can use to make art—as important contributors to their work. Of particular note is the critical role played by the coffee shops now sprinkled across the district (several artists included them in their list of “anchor institutions”), for example, to cartoonists who use them as studios and painters who use them as galleries. Apparently, everyone finds a favorite coffee shop to use as his or her office.

It doesn’t seem far-fetched to conclude that the rich cultural ecology of South Philadelphia attracts and holds many artists even when more tangible factors like the availability of affordable and suitable space are less inviting.

Changing nature of artistic practice and production

What would make South Philadelphia a more vibrant community? What would keep you as an artist in the neighborhood? Most artists interviewed are content with their community, along with the typical complaints about urban living in close quarters. However, many expressed fear that the changing real estate market would prevent another generation of artists to follow their example.

Our fieldwork also suggested that fundamental changes influencing artistic practice and production have implications for the space needs of a cultural district. In part, technology—the increasing presence of digital art forms, from filmmaking to music to graphic design—is changing the requirements for many fields. To use the obvious example of film editing, a medium that once required elaborate specialized equipment now may require nothing more than a compact digital video camera and Final Cut Pro.

Just as importantly, many artists—including a disproportionate share of young and emerging artists—are searching for new organizational forms that reduce the gatekeepers to their work and allow them to collaborate across media and disciplines. One of the drivers of “shared space” is the effort by younger artists to find these opportunities. A number of interviewees suggested that South Philadelphia has an acute shortage of the sorts of space needed to afford these opportunities.

Younger artists’ ideas about space needs may render South Philadelphia less attractive. Several interviewees noted that the meaning of “studio” has shifted for the coming generation of artists. While not rejecting the need for a space to paint, print, or choreograph, artists now more often wish for “shared space” that could serve production, presentation, and participation. South Philadelphians representing a range of art world perspectives—residents, arts administrators, and business people—all used virtually the same terms. All expressed the need for a large multi-use space that could be shared, a place for people to gather, a space to share traditions as well as new ideas.

In many ways, South Philadelphia has been most successful as a cultural community when its residents have shared space: along its commercial corridors, through its religious and cultural traditions, and in public performance rituals. While no one wants to lose the sense of community generated by the public domain and collective cultural practice, younger generations desire spaces that afford opportunities for more intimate conversations and sharing of experiences. Whether these types of spaces will continue to be available and affordable in South Philadelphia remains an open question.
Community flux and contested terrain

Mifflin Square in southeast South Philadelphia is contested terrain. Many different groups now live around the park: ethnic Chinese, Laotians, Cambodians, Mexicans, African Americans, Iranians (non-Islamic), and Nepalese families being resettled by the Nationalities Service Center. Some longstanding residents have remarked that “those new Asians have ruined the park.” Yet, SEAMAAC and its partners have worked to make the park “a place to gather, play sports, vending, and celebrate.” The association hopes to develop a micro-enterprise program.

When I first started, the vendors were being harassed. I wanted to have them trained and educated so that they couldn’t be harassed. When we canvassed, the vendors said it was simpler and cheaper just to have their food confiscated.

Fleisher Art Memorial has been working on a plan for Mifflin Square to provide a “shared space” that a variety of groups could use and feel comfortable. Regarding arts programming, they want “not just ‘make and take’. Really we want to have a conversation about art. And it will happen again. In shared spaces, that is what happens.” Fleisher staff wants to investigate how people use public space, how different groups value and share space, and how groups negotiate change. “It is interesting to me that these communities have found ways to negotiate change – so it is a ‘natural cultural district’ but defined really broadly.”

What would build or sustain culture, broadly defined, in South Philadelphia?

I don’t have an answer for that. I think about creating space for people to be themselves. ... For instance, at Mifflin Square, there is the Preah Buddhist Temple. What is going into the temple is stuff coming from Cambodia, but they are making things there by artisans brought from Cambodia. The difference is perspective.

Creating space for people to be themselves, in the context of community flux and contested terrain, will likely require cultural brokers well beyond artists as animateurs.

As an artist, I see South Philadelphia through the eyes of being a New Yorker – like Queens. It is becoming something else. ... What is interesting to me is that it appeals to me artistically. There is a full range of people and how they experience one another. They are engrossed in this socio-economic mix. I like hearing snippets of conversation in different languages. ... There is an Old World-ness about it. Its presence still infuses the character. So does art have a role to play in this clannishness?

Within the district broadly known as South Philadelphia, multiple “neighborhoods” continue to spring up, with help from realtors as well as homeowners associations. Commercial corridors have merchants associations and, more recently—with technical assistance from the Center City District—business improvement districts. There appears to be no South Philadelphia-based community development corporation or community-based organization with district-wide vision or mission. What is the potential of the arts to renew and sustain this historic “natural” cultural district? How can artists and cultural workers help South Philadelphia bridge its many cultures and communities and integrate cultural infrastructure with community development?
The framework that has emerged for the analysis of space—built environment and building stock, real estate market, cultural ecology, changing arts practice and production, community flux and contested terrain—is a promising contribution to understanding the evolution and sustainability of “natural” cultural districts.

For a relatively small, dense neighborhood, South Philadelphia embodies many of the patterns influencing contemporary urban communities and the role of culture and the arts in shaping their future. From new immigrants following previous generations in the Ninth Street Market to university-trained artists, from the generations who have had their first arts class at the Fleisher Art Memorial to initiatives to rebuild cultural life around Mifflin Square, South Philadelphia brings together the hopes and aspirations, the fears and frustrations of our cities. “I am large,” a son of Camden, NJ once wrote, “I contain multitudes.”39 The same could be said of South Philadelphia.

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39 From the poem “Song of Myself” in *Leaves of Grass* by Walt Whitman, first published in 1855.
Appendix:
South Philadelphia Arts and Community Timeline
| **SOUTH PHILADELPHIA ARTS AND COMMUNITY TIMELINE, Thora Jacobson 2012.** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **1960s** | **1970s** | **1980s** | **2000s** | **2010s** |
| **Commerce and development** | 1964—Flanned Crosstown Expressway depressed South St real estate values. 1968—Eve’s Gallery opens. | 1970—First settlement of Vietnamese refugees in So Philadelphia. | 1980—Phila. Art Museum expands; SuperFresh & Whole Foods open on South St; 2009—E Passeyck Ave BID helps launch 9 new businesses | E Passeyck Ave BID, center for new restaurants and food stores; civic arts work with recreation centers start community gardens, tree plantings; 2000—2006 Arts on South St/owners, vacant space to arts groups, free to nonprofits; 3 farmer’s markets open (Broad & South, Passeyck & South, Tuker at Passyunk) |
| **Immigration and migration** | 1970—Sixth generation of Cambodian refugees. 1978—South Street becomes home for Asian immigrants. 1982—“Journeys South,” temporary projects sponsored by Mural Arts; 2008—“Journeys South” temporary projects sponsored by Mural Arts | 1980—SEAMAAC founded in W Phila. 1990s—Performing Arts Charter School purchased armory building at Broad & Wharton for expansion | 2007—SEAMAAC moves offices from West Phila to South Broad, expands range of programming in So Phila. | National Service Center begins to work with new South Asia refugees (Bhutan, Burma & Nepal); 2012-Catholic Archdiocese closes Annunciation BVM that serves large Mexican population |
| **Community Institutions, religious** | Post WW2 expansion of parochial and diocesan schools, building boom | Synagogues in So Philadelphia begin to close, conversion to condos | Catholic parishes and schools begin to close in large numbers | 2008—Phila. Art Museum moves to 720 S Broad St to launch international festival for contemporary print |
| **Cultural organizations** | 1966—Clef Club founded as Black Musicians’ Union, 1968—Theater of the Living Arts (TLA) opens on South St; 1969—Mummers Parade begins as a multiuse space; 1970—Brandywine Workshop founded; 1982—Painted Bride Art Center opens on South St. 1994—Post Modern Art Alliance reorganized, 1999—600 Arts expands educational programs, collaborations; 2001—Live Nation acquires TLA as live music venue; 2009—Casa Morlan opens dance studio on 9th Street | 1949—Delitzs¢ Art Alliance founded; 1959—Folk Arts Education begins with Phila Folkork Project at Fleisher; 1960—Brandywine moves to new facilities at 730 Broad St; 1997—CAPA moves to Ridgeton Library | 2003—Philadelphia Beaks replaces “Rousseau” mural at 6th St & Christian; 2006—“Plenty of Good Women Dancers,” choreographers begin to move into South Philadelphia | 2010—El Vayo, Spanish language art classes begin at E E Passyunk Ave BID, center for new restaurants and food stores; civic arts work with recreation centers start community gardens, tree plantings; 2000—2006 Arts on South St/owners, vacant space to arts groups, free to nonprofits; 3 farmer’s markets open (Broad & South, Passeyck & South, Tuker at Passyunk) |
| **Public performances and celebration** | 1964—Backstage burlesque from Mummer’s Parade | South Street draws gallery goers, music fans, and performance audiences | 1994—Philadelphia Folklore Project founded (at Fleisher); 2000—Philadelphia Performing Arts Charter School purchases armory building at Broad & Wharton for expansion | 2010—El Vayo, Spanish language art classes begin at E E Passyunk Ave BID, center for new restaurants and food stores; civic arts work with recreation centers start community gardens, tree plantings; 2000—2006 Arts on South St/owners, vacant space to arts groups, free to nonprofits; 3 farmer’s markets open (Broad & South, Passeyck & South, Tuker at Passyunk) |
| **Artistic practice and production** | Miles & Galleries develop former St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi School as artist live-work space, 7th and Christian | 1241 Carpenter St; the first site for artists’ League St and Carpenter St studios open; dancers and choreographers begin to move into So Philadelphia | 2005—50th anniversary of Bicentennial at 2nd & Washington | 2010—El Vayo, Spanish language art classes begin at E E Passyunk Ave BID, center for new restaurants and food stores; civic arts work with recreation centers start community gardens, tree plantings; 2000—2006 Arts on South St/owners, vacant space to arts groups, free to nonprofits; 3 farmer’s markets open (Broad & South, Passeyck & South, Tuker at Passyunk) |
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Chapter 6. Seattle:
Capitol Hill, the Central District, and Chinatown-International District

This chapter explores the cultural ecology of Seattle—the Emerald City—and the unique qualities of three neighborhoods identified as “natural” cultural districts: Capitol Hill, the Central District, and Chinatown-International District. While a number of Seattle neighborhoods might be considered “natural” cultural districts,¹ we chose these areas because their relatively central locations facilitated fieldwork and afforded interesting comparative opportunities.

In this chapter, first, we present a set of hypotheses about the distinctiveness of Seattle’s cultural sector. In particular, we suggest how the structure of the sector and the pressures of the real estate market influence cultural development in the city. Second, we present an overview of the three study areas—Capitol Hill, the Central District, and Chinatown-International District—and examine the differences in their social geography. Finally, we focus in turn on each area and discuss its assets and challenges as a cultural district.

A note on method

The observations discussed in this chapter are based primarily on a series of interviews and conversations conducted during our fieldwork undertaken during July-August of 2011 and May-June of 2012. These conversations were the result both of planning and circumstance. Our plan was to begin with a set of interviews with key informants about the overall character of Seattle’s cultural sector and then move on to interviews with individuals involved in local culture (studio practice, organizations, commercial firms) within our study areas. We soon discovered, however, that Seattle is a highly networked city, and every interview seemed to generate suggestions for at least two or three other people we needed to seek out.

¹ Other neighborhoods that might be considered “natural” cultural districts include: Georgetown and SoDo (South Seattle), Rainier Valley and Columbia City (Southeast Seattle), Delridge (West Seattle), Fremont and University District (North Seattle).
Our interviews were complemented by observations of three types. First, we walked our study areas to get a feel for the neighborhood ecology as well as to validate our cultural asset databases (compiled in Philadelphia prior to the field trip) against what we could observe on the ground. Second, we attended a variety of cultural events noting the nature of the event, the composition of the participants, and what happened. Events ranged from art exhibits, art walks, and tours to workshops and performances. Residence-based “What’s Up?” gatherings among “people engaged in the arts” gave us a window on Seattle’s cultural commons.

Third, thanks to the hospitality of the Seattle Arts Commission’s Facilities and Economic Development Committee, we gained an understanding of the significance of cultural space issues to the local arts community as well as the players and strategies that have emerged to address them. In particular, we were guests at the SAC Committee’s monthly meeting (August 2011) and participated in a two-day public forum, Cultural Space Seattle (December 6-7, 2011) hosted by Seattle Office of Arts & Cultural Affairs.

Seattle’s Distinctive Cultural Ecology

Most of SIAP’s theories about the networks that support creativity have been based on experience in Philadelphia. Our study, however, has made it clear that the cultural ecology of the Emerald City is quite distinct from that of Philadelphia.

Three issues frame the discussion of the Seattle’s cultural ecosystem. First, the composition of the city’s cultural sector is quite different from that of Philadelphia as a result of a relative absence of mid-sized organizations and presence of numerous working artists. Second, because of the city’s overall real estate market—often characterized by rapid churning of residential and commercial properties—facility development and stability concerns have a stronger salience in Seattle than in Philadelphia or Baltimore. Third, these citywide dynamics impact the evolution and character of neighborhoods that emerge organically as cultural districts.

Dynamic nature of cultural ecosystem

Several features of Seattle’s cultural ecosystem highlight the differences between this young and growing city and the mature and reviving city of Philadelphia.

- Seattle’s nonprofit sector appears to have a shortfall in mid-sized cultural organizations (roughly a $500,000 - $1.2 million budget). For example, the presenting group On the Boards, once part of a cohort of about seven organizations in a mid-sized funding category, reports that it is now the only survivor.

- Seattle’s scarcity of community-based arts centers is likely a reflection of its lack of mid-sized nonprofit organizations and the associated shortfall of community cultural space. Two community-based arts centers discussed below, Langston Hughes Performing Arts Institute and Pratt Fine Arts Center (Central District), were
both founded in the 1970s by the City of Seattle Department of Parks and Recreation and have since

Our interest in the Wing Luke Museum of Asian Pacific American Experience (C-ID) stems, in part, from Philadelphia experience with community-based arts centers and the key role they play in the city’s cultural ecology. We have found that community arts and cultural centers typically function as nodes that connect residents and communities with artists, other organizations, and regional resources. 2

- The shortage of mid-sized organizations has generated a variety of models for sustaining artistic activity. One popular model is based on combining the arts with food and drink. The most common form is the connection between music and bars, as any issue of The Stranger will verify. The model is also developing among galleries and other performing arts venues. Most theaters count on alcohol (and sometimes parking) to subsidize performances. Theatre Off Jackson represents the low-end of this strategy, where the concessions are as important as the nominal fee ($225) that TOJ charges the presenting organization to use the facility. For On the Boards, which represents a higher-end strategy, parking generates as much income as ticket sales.

A number of galleries combine a bar to subsidize their arts business. The Hideout in First Hill flips the model by cultivating artists and artwork salon-style to foster its bar business. Paintings by contemporary Northwest artists, most for sale, cover the walls. Staff provides clipboards and ballpoint pens for patrons who want to contribute to its in-house publication, The Vital 5 Review. More recently, the jukebox has been replaced by Earl the Robotic Art Dispenser.

- The shortage of mid-sized nonprofits and community-based centers affects the career strategies of artists as well. Generally, there are fewer out-of-school opportunities for “teaching artists,” 3 although there is opportunity afforded by Seattle’s commercial arts sector. Moreover, with relatively little trouble, Seattle artists can start up organizations (or quasi-organizations) that can seek City funds for projects. In fact, the ability of the Seattle Office of Arts and Cultural Affairs to make grants to non-chartered organizations (non 501c3s) helps encourage a project- rather than an organization-based cultural sector. In any event, individual artists, artists’ guilds, and collectives tend to be much more prevalent in Seattle than in Philadelphia.

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3 Arts Corp, a nonprofit arts education organization, matches teaching artists with schools and community centers. STAN, Seattle Teaching Artist Network started by local artists, meets informally once a month. In June 2011 Seattle Public Schools received a Wallace Foundation planning grant to work with the City Office of Arts and Cultural Affairs on a K-12 Arts Plan, to be completed by February 2013.
The dynamic nature of Seattle’s cultural ecosystem interacts with the facility issue, discussed below, as “fragile” arts groups try to find their footing in a real estate market characterized by constant churning.

In part, Seattle reflects a national trend with respect to the vulnerability of mid-sized nonprofit arts and the overall contraction of this component of the cultural sector is part of a national trend. Participants at the 2007 Grantmakers in the Arts conference suggested a definition of mid-sized arts organization, based on direct experience rather than budget size, as a group “always on the edge, struggling with the community’s expectations, and functioning without capital reserves.”

Seattle is notable in that this core part of its cultural sector—small but established arts groups—never got a foothold. Some people attribute this pattern to funding decisions since the 1960s that have given priority to the fiscal health of the city’s large cultural organizations. Two districts have been the primary focus of arts investment: Seattle Center, the site of the 1962 World’s Fair, owned and managed by the City of Seattle and home to over two dozen arts groups and venues; and, in recent decades, Downtown Seattle, where two major facilities have been constructed, the Seattle Art Museum and Benaroya Hall, home of the Seattle Symphony.

Seattle as a small city has “managed to create a powerful arts ecology from scratch in less than fifty years”—but at a cost. Some say that funding priorities set in the past continue simply because that’s the way things were done in the past. Some believe that public funding agencies, in particular, continue to favor the large organizations. Philanthropy (much tied to new tech wealth) is not established and giving directed toward regional and international interests—such as, environmental sustainability; social services, asset-building, education; global health; science and technology. The Paul G. Allen Family Foundation, founded in 1986, supports Seattle’s cultural sector with a focus on presenting work by professional artists and the financial performance of nonprofits. JPMorgan Chase, which took over Washington Mutual after its collapse in 2008, has a team responsible for strategic philanthropy, which contributes to

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6 Seattle Center’s listing of arts organizations and venues: Academy of Interactive Entertainment, Armory/Center House Theatre, Armory Playroom, Book-It Repertory Theatre, Center Theatre, Chihuly Garden and Glass, Children’s Museum, EMP Museum, Ethnic Heritage Council, Gates Foundation Visitor’s Center, Intiman Theatre (see Cornish College of the Arts), KCTS 9, McCaw Hall, Mural Amphitheatre, Pacific Northwest Ballet, Pacific Science Center, Pottery Northwest, Seattle Children’s Theatre, Seattle Opera, Seattle Repertory Theatre, Seattle Shakespeare Company, SIFF Film Center, Teatro ZinZanni, Teen Tix, Theater Commons, Theatre Puget Sound, and the Vera Project (www.seattlecenter.com, December 2012).
Washington-based arts and cultural groups that support economic growth and community development.

Still, Seattle has developed a multi-tier support system for the arts. In addition to Seattle Center, the City of Seattle has three entities that support local arts, culture, and creative economy: Office of Arts and Cultural Affairs; Office of Film + Music and Office of Economic Development, and the Department of Parks and Recreation. The key regional agent is 4Culture, the cultural services agency for all of King County, which supports individuals and groups that foster creative expression and community engagement, advance community, or promote tourism and economic development. In 2003, as a consequence of the post-9/11 recession, 4Culture transitioned from a King County department to an independent, tax-exempt Public Development Authority (PDA). ⁸

Artists and advocates have also developed a network of nonprofit resource organizations. Artist Trust, founded in 1987, supports individual artists of all disciplines throughout Washington State, providing financial grants as well as career training and professional resources. Shunpike, founded in 2001, functions as a fiscal sponsor and umbrella for artists and arts groups that don’t have 502c3 tax-exempt status. Shunpike also offers business and financial planning services—all the back-office functions—for its “financially-challenged members” across Washington. "Our mission is to handle all of that for them and let them spend their time doing what they do best, which is producing art."⁹

One theme that emerged early from our observations of Seattle’s cultural sector is the unintended impact of policy decisions on a city’s cultural ecology. That is to say, policies that have one particular goal—such as support for the region’s major institutions—can affect the composition and stability of the cultural sector as a whole.

The cultural space dilemma

A variety of characteristics of the Seattle real estate market influence its art world. Like many cities, with the transition from a manufacturing/extractive to a service/information economy, Seattle accumulated an excess of warehouse and obsolete manufacturing space. For several decades, this supply served as low-quality, low-cost artist space. Although artists might be shuffled from one space to another, involuntary relocation was more an annoyance than a problem. Now, however, there is a perception that the supply of these old-economy spaces is running low as the combination of condo-conversion, seismic remediation, and competition from high-tech commercial operations that also value “cool, loft” spaces (and are able to buy and remodel them) has driven artists out. Here are two examples:

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⁸ In Washington a public development authority (PDA), created by a city or county, is a public entity that can “provide public services with the agility and flexibility of the private sector; provide services more efficiently than an agency of government; and administer federal and state funds.”

• South Lake Union—a neighborhood (Cascade) at the top of what people are calling “the crescent” of arts neighborhoods surrounding downtown was for many years essentially a warehouse district that spawned a variety of arts groups. Now, however, the area is under development on a large scale by Vulcan (Paul Allen) and Amazon. The site neighborhood currently houses a number of software development firms, which employ trained artists, but independent artists and cultural organizations have virtually disappeared.

• SoDo—a light manufacturing district South of Downtown has for several decades attracted artists and related businesses that converted vacant factories and warehouses into lofts and studios. We met an established artist, working predominantly in the public realm, with a bright and spacious studio space in SoDo suitable to the scale of her work. When she moved in many years ago, the building was full of artists providing a community of peers. In recent years, most of the lofts have been rented out as office space (although they may not meet ADA and other requirements for this use). Last summer, as one of the few artists remaining, she decided to move out of SoDo and relocated her studio to a converted garage at her residence (in the Central District).

SoDo is an example of the City of Seattle’s goal to retain its industrial areas primarily for industrial use, illustrating the potential and limits of the policy. Unlike other cities, which have rezoned industrial areas for mixed residential and commercial development, Seattle does not allow residential use in its industrial areas and restricts size as well as use of retail or office development. According to the planning director:

- We have a robust maritime and industrial sector, and we want to maintain the family wage jobs. By limiting the other uses allowed, we are trying to keep the prices down so industry can compete for the use of the land.
- However, we have long had a special exception in our code for artist studio/dwellings, which are allowed only in existing buildings. This is the one exception for residential use. We do know, however, that there are artists who happen to sleep in their studios, as some were in 619, although not necessarily a permitted use for that building!

Thus, even in the city’s protected Industrial District, by upgrading loft structures artists brought about an “up-and-coming feel” and paved the way for new business ventures.

Generally, Seattle’s push for new arts space has moved south. People cite Georgetown and Columbia City as places where the hipper artists are moving. Yet, as shown on the map on Figure 6-1 (with data provided by Artist Trust and the Seattle Office of Arts & Cultural Affairs), Capitol Hill, Downtown, and sections of the Central District continue to have a gravitational pull on artists.
Interviewees cited a number of turning points in the history of artists’ displacement in Seattle. A key event was the 2008 sale of the Odd Fellows Hall on Capitol Hill, which displaced a number of artists and arts groups. More recently, in August 2011, closure of 619 Western in Pioneer Square—a building identified as seismically unfit for nearly a decade but perennially full of artists—set off a scramble for new space near the center of town. People working in Chinatown-International District noted that a number of artists and arts-related firms had popped up in the C-ID, associated in part with the closure of 619 Western.
Pioneer Square is actually part of a long story of artists’ displacement in Seattle—artists and arts businesses resuscitating a languishing historic district, triggering development and market interest in the area, subsequently being priced out or evicted, but mitigating the fall-out through activism. During the 1990s, given its downtown location, tensions began to build in Pioneer Square between neighborhood residents—professionals, families, and transient homeless—and a nightclub scene attracting regional performers and patrons. In the early 2000s community activism spearheaded by resident artists, initially to petition for a noise ordinance, culminated in the city inviting the Minneapolis-based nonprofit real estate developer Artspace into Seattle. Long-time Seattle artist (and Pioneer Square resident at the time) Cathryn Vandenbrink became regional director of Artspace Projects Inc and has run the division for ten years.

Artspace holds a unique position when it comes to cultural development. We create permanently affordable space for artists, arts organizations, and arts related businesses in communities across the country.

Artspace has completed two projects in Seattle and started construction of a third. Tashiro Kaplan Artist Lofts, on the border of Pioneer Square and Chinatown-ID, provide 50 units of permanently affordable housing for artists and 40,000 square feet of affordable space for arts related businesses (15 galleries), organizations (home to 4Culture) and 12 individual artist studios. Vandenbrink credits Tashiro Kaplan, in operation for eight years, with preserving Pioneer Square as an arts district and spurring cultural activity in Chinatown-International District.

The Seattle-based Artspace (the only such arrangement in the US) is a key player in building local capacity for nonprofit development of arts space. Artspace—with the Catholic Archdiocese, Historic Seattle, and Delridge Community Development Association—have constructed/planned a total of 221 units of low-income housing units available to Seattle artists and their families (see text box). “I think these projects have had a huge impact on Seattle’s art scene ... I don’t know of any other city that has supported its artists to this extent through the development of artist housing. ... These projects provide 221 permanently affordable spaces for artists, which are a great stabilizer for Seattle’s creative community.”

10 Pioneer Square’s rise and fall as an arts district is tied to the Samis Land Company, started by Sam Israel, “the absentee landlord who presided over his neighborhood land empire with benign neglect for the second half of the last century -- a boon to artists until his death in 1994.” From “There’s a Whole World Underground” by Grant Cogswell, The Stranger, Mar 30 – April 5, 2000 issue.
Artist Housing in Seattle
Planned development of 221 permanently affordable units, 1998 – 2013

Harbor Lofts
Downtown, Pioneer Square—420 2nd Avenue, Seattle 98104
Project: 11 low-income live/work studios
No Vacancy, waiting list
Developer: Catholic Archdiocese, opened 1998

Good Shepherd Center
Wallingford—4649 Sunnyside Avenue N, Seattle 98103
Project: 6 low-income live/work studios
No Vacancy, waiting list
Developer: Historic Seattle, artists housing 2002

Tashiro Kaplan Artist Lofts
Downtown, Pioneer Square—115 Prefontaine Place S, Seattle 98104
Project: 50 low-income live/work units (1, 2, & 3 bedroom)
No Vacancy, waiting list
Developer: Artspace, opened 2004

Youngstown Cultural Arts Center/Cooper Artist Housing,
West Seattle, Delridge—4408 Delridge Way SW, Seattle 98106
Project: 36 low-income live/work studios
No Vacancy, waiting list
Developer: Delridge Community Development Association, opened 2006

Hiawatha Lofts
Central District—843 Hiawatha Pl S, Seattle 98144
Project: 61 low-income live/work units (1 & 2 bedroom)
No Vacancy, waiting list
Developer: Artspace, opened 2008

Mt. Baker Station Lofts
South Seattle—2915 Rainier Ave S, Seattle 98144
Project: 57 low-income live/work units
Developer: Artspace, construction start, January 2013
Still and all, constant threats of displacement influence Seattle’s cultural ecosystem. Small fly-by-night artists’ projects, which have relatively little fixed capital and don’t depend on a stable audience, can adapt to these changes. Large organizations, with public support, have been able to secure their own facilities. Middle-sized groups, however, are dependent on developing a steady audience and face a need for fixed capital investments in their space.

On the Boards (OtB), at the Behnke Center for Contemporary Performance in the lower Queen Anne neighborhood, provides a cautionary tale of the risks these groups face. For its first twenty years, the organization used Washington Hall, a former fraternal association hall in the Central District. OtB rented the space from the Sons of Haiti, who proved to be a difficult landlord for a number of reasons, not the least of which was the requirement that OtB maintain a month-to-month lease. OtB was able to obtain its current building on favorable terms and successful in raising funds to complete the sale without taking on new debt. Still, the first two years after the move—faced with declining revenue and audiences, high staff turnover, and serious cost overruns—turned out to be a close call for the organization. With tight management, they were successful in righting themselves and are now viewed as a model organization. Still, the challenges OtB faced, in spite of all of their good planning and good luck, show the potential for a crack-up that middle-sized groups face when they try to make the jump to ownership along with management of a larger space.

Because of the strains faced by its artists and arts organizations, Seattle provides an exemplary case for examining cultural space issues in other cities. A key theme of the study—based on observations in Seattle and past experience in Philadelphia—is that facility development and management is best left to professionals. We’ve encountered several models in Seattle. In older models, dating from the 1970s, the City of Seattle purchased a vacant structure, renovated and repurposed it as a community arts center, under the jurisdiction of Seattle Parks and Recreation for management and operation. Below we look at two such cases in the Central District, Langston Hughes Performing Arts Institute and Pratt Fine Arts Center. In newer models, non-arts community developers develop projects and manage the space as a multi-tenant arts facility or mixed-use facility with “tons of space for the arts.” Among the challenges are development of a capital funding plan, development of an operating plan, and a commitment to remaining an affordable facility. Below we discuss two such projects—12th Avenue Arts in Capitol Hill and Washington Hall in the Central District—currently under development. An exceptional arts-led model (2008) is that of the 40-year-old Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience—its successful acquisition and adaptive reuse of an historic property in the Chinatown-International District, with a $23 million capital campaign, as its new home with spaces for community use and rental for special events.

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11 On the Boards/Behnke Center for Contemporary Performance, located at 100 W Roy St, occupies historic Queen Anne Hall built in 1912 as an assembly and dance hall.
Neighborhood dynamics—life history of a “natural” cultural district

One goal of the three-city study was to develop the “life history” of a variety of neighborhoods identified as “natural” cultural districts. What is the relationship of the arts to neighborhood change? What is the role of place in the sustainability of a city’s cultural ecosystem? The three Seattle neighborhoods discussed in this study are indeed at different points in their life cycle as a cultural district.

Capitol Hill tends to be a perennial cultural district, although long-time residents report that in the late 1990s, its commercial core was suffering. Chinatown-International District (C-ID) has a set of relatively established cultural organizations but is now experiencing a burst of activity associated with the efforts of local players and the region’s shifting cultural economy. Central District—a vast area that really cannot function as a single district—has had a long history as a center of African American community and culture. However, as African Americans have moved southward, Central is attracting a new population of white and diverse professionals, including established artists who are buying homes as well as younger artists who are more likely to rent. These new populations have sparked concerns about gentrification in the Central District. (The film, 23rd and Union, which won the local filmmaker prize at the Langston Hughes Film Festival in 2011, explores these tensions).

These neighborhood dynamics are discussed below in more detail. The point here is that different life-cycle stages bring different kinds of challenges. When a cultural district is in “mid-life”—for example, Capitol Hill—there is less disagreement about its vision and trajectory than when a district is at either end of its life cycle. Central District, by contrast, is in the midst of a “reinvention” stage in which the old African American cultural scene—tied especially to jazz and rhythm and blues—is giving way to something new. But the vision of what that new scene will be is contested. Will Central become an adjunct to Capitol Hill? Can 23rd and Yesler be reborn as a center of black and diverse cultures? Will Washington Hall emerge as an anchor cultural center of the new Central District? A similar set of questions is percolating about prospects for Chinatown-International District.

Like any community, a “natural” cultural district is an organic process characterized as much by change as continuity. How a neighborhood navigates change will affect its community quality of life as well as its sustainability as a vital node in the local cultural economy. Another emerging theme, we have found, is that organic cultural districts must be viewed as vulnerable habitats, especially in the context of a growing technology and information sector. Policy matters—not only to development of a healthy cultural ecosystem but also to the cultivation of healthy communities.
Social Geography of Capitol Hill, the Central District, and Chinatown-International District

Seattle’s three study districts—Capitol Hill, the Central District, and Chinatown-International District—provide a useful set of comparisons and contrasts in terms of both their social geography and their cultural ecology.

Ethnic composition and immigration

Seattle has a distinctive ethnic composition. The city has relatively few African Americans and Latin Americans compared to Philadelphia and Baltimore and a larger Asian-Pacific Islander population. As a result, in contrast to the Eastern cities, where diversity has only recently increased, Seattle is dominated by diverse neighborhoods with the remainder of the city comprised of homogeneous white neighborhoods.

Figure 6-2. Ethnic composition of neighborhoods, Seattle block groups, 2005-09

On the above map, provided by the Seattle City Clerk, Capitol Hill encompasses the areas identified as Stevens and the eastern section of Broadway. Central District encompasses the areas identified as Minor, Mann, and Atlantic. Chinatown-International District is shown as International District.
Of course, although different in many ways from the Eastern cities, Seattle does share a legacy of racial segregation. African Americans for most of the city’s history were confined to the Central District, while Asian Americans—when they weren’t being expelled or interned—lived largely in Chinatown and its associated ethnic enclaves.\(^\text{12}\)

**Figure 6-3. Percent black persons, Seattle census tracts, 1960**

Unfortunately, census data on Asians and Pacific Islanders are not available for the early postwar years. However, data on “other” races (which lump together Asians, Pacific Islanders, and a variety of indigenous peoples) suggest that the current Chinatown-International District was well-defined in 1960.

Although redlining has been illegal for a generation, the remains of these residential patterns are apparent. The northern sections of Capitol Hill (Stevens) are predominantly white while the southern areas are diverse. The Central District (Minor, Mann, Atlantic)

\(^{12}\) From the 1940s to 1960s, with in-migration from Texas, Louisiana and California, Seattle’s black community “became a fairly segregated ‘ghetto’ ... The racism of the period was exemplified by the restrictive covenant to stop northward expansion of the ghetto.” Michael Brown and Richard Morrill, ed. *Seattle Geographies*, 121.

Seattle’s early Chinese and Japanese migrants were attracted in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century by the railroad construction boom. Japanese agricultural workers were brought in by contract during the 1920s. While Chinatown survived despite a general Chinese exclusion of 1910, Japantown did not survive the forced internment during WWII. Postwar Asians were refugees—from Korea (1950s), Vietnam and Cambodia (1960s-1970s). In recent decades, many migrants from the Philippines, China, India, and Pakistan have been attracted by employment in high-tech industries. Brown and Morrill, *Seattle Geographies*, 122.
is more complex. What local residents refer to as African American neighborhoods would be described, by SIAP’s classification, as either diverse or black/white neighborhoods (meaning that neither group constitutes more than 80 percent of the population). Several sections of the Central District also have a significant Latino population and are classified as black/Latino. Similarly, no part of Chinatown-International District is homogeneously Asian. Rather the entire district is classified as diverse.

Figure 6-4. Percent other persons (Asians, Pacific Islanders, and indigenous), Seattle census tracts, 1960

Immigrants make up a large share of Seattle’s population. However, most of our study areas have relatively few immigrants. The two exceptions are, unsurprisingly, Chinatown-International District, where the foreign-born population is greater than 40 percent, and sections of the Central District adjacent to the C-ID where both Asian and Latin American immigrants make their home. A smaller European-born population makes its home in the homogeneous white sections of north Capitol Hill.
Figure 6-5. Percent of population foreign-born, Seattle census tracts, 2005-09

Figure 6-6. Percent of population born in Asia, Seattle census tracts, 2005-2009
Figure 6-7. Percent of population born in Latin America, Seattle census tracts, 2005-2009

Figure 6-8. Percent of population born in Europe, Seattle census tracts, 2005-2009
Socio-economic characteristics

The city of Seattle is distinctive because of the high socio-economic standing of its residents. Seattle enjoys a poverty level below the national average and less than half that of Baltimore and Philadelphia. Still, one doesn’t have to stay in Seattle long to realize that economic deprivation and joblessness are present in the city.

Poverty

Seattle still has a classic “skid row” neighborhood. The only part of the city that would be considered a concentrated poverty zone is primarily within the Central Business District and includes parts of Pioneer Square and Yesler Terrace and the northwest section of Chinatown-International District, between Yesler and Jackson Streets, west of the I-5 freeway.

Of the three study areas, C-ID clearly has the highest poverty rate, with most of the district having poverty in excess of 24 percent. With the exception of a small part of the Mann section of the Central District that has poverty at this level, most of Central and Capitol Hill have poverty rates below 10 percent.

Figure 6-9. Poverty rate by census block group, Seattle, 2005-09

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13 The term “skid row” is said to originate with Seattle’s Skid Road, the rather run-down path (common to the Pacific Northwest) along which working men skidded logs.
Educational attainment

One of the best predictors of cultural assets in a neighborhood is the concentration of residents with at least a bachelor’s degree. In Seattle, of course, the proportion of residents in this category is high across the city. Indeed by 2009, the Census Bureau estimated that 56 percent of Seattle’s adult population had a college degree.

Figure 6-10. Percent with BA or higher degree by census block group, Seattle, 2005-09

Among our study areas, the only place with what might be considered a low proportion of BA degrees is Chinatown-International District. Still, even here, educational attainment of the residents would be considered high if it were a Philadelphia neighborhood. The proportion of adults with a bachelor’s degree in the Central District, which would be considered high in the Eastern cities, is average for Seattle.
Per capita income

The data on per capita income show essentially the same pattern. Chinatown-International District’s average per capita income is in the seventeen to twenty-three thousand dollar ($17,000 - $23,000) range, while most of the Central District is between twenty-three and thirty-four thousand dollars ($23,000 - $34,000). Finally, virtually all sections of Capitol Hill have an average per capita income of over thirty-four thousand dollars (over $34,000).

Figure 6-11. Per capita income by census block group, Seattle, 2005-09
Property ownership and rental

In our research on Philadelphia, the ratio of owner-occupied to renter-occupied units has not emerged as a significant factor in predicting either the location of cultural clusters or the spillover effect of clusters on a neighborhood’s well-being. However, this study suggests that Seattle may be different. One of our contentions in Philadelphia has been that the overall sluggishness of the city’s economy means that neighborhood revitalization is a protracted process that takes decades. In Seattle, real estate markets are often hot and the possibility for rapid neighborhood turnover is high. As a result, the presence of many homeowners may act as a drag on turnover, while the presence of many renters may accelerate it.

Figure 6-12. Percent renters by census block group, Seattle, 2005-09

Legend
Census blockgroups
Percent renters
Less than 18 percent
18-34 percent
34-49 percent
49-67 percent
Over 67 percent
For the most part, the presence of renters in a neighborhood follows other measures of economic standing. C-ID has the highest proportion of renters, Central is somewhere in the middle, and Capitol Hill has the lowest proportion.

Obviously, home ownership and income are related. It may be, however, that that correlation obscures the relative concentration of renters in a neighborhood. This relative concentration—that is, a high number of renters in a high-income neighborhood—could have a variety of effects on cultural assets. First, it suggests the
presence of a high-income renter population, which may have the disposable income and time to engage in cultural activities. Second, it might represent a neighborhood that is vulnerable to displacement, because renters are easier to displace than owners.

The analysis of the corrected renter variable suggests that two of our three study areas—Capitol Hill and Chinatown-International District—have concentrations of rental units that exceed what one would predict based on their socio-economic status (per capita income). Although the two areas share this feature, they come to it from different directions. Capitol Hill is a relatively affluent district that has this higher-than-predicted number of renters because of a concentration of well-off renters.

Chinatown-International District, in contrast, has a higher-than-average poverty rate for the city. Its high concentration of renters could make residents particularly vulnerable to displacement in an unfettered real estate market. Fortunately, several neighborhood community development agencies—notably, Seattle Chinatown International District Preservation and Development Authority (SCIDpda) and InterIm Community Development Association (InterimCDA)—are working to develop and renovate affordable housing (using tax credits and other incentives) as well as manage and “protect” subsidized units for local residents. “Related to this condition of a high concentration of a low income residents, the International District housing inventory can be classified as almost exclusively affordable.”

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14 Brian P. Kalthoff, An Analysis of Historic Preservation and Affordable Housing Incentives in Seattle’s Chinatown-International District, 2012 (43-59, 64).
Capitol Hill’s Cultural Ecology and Life-Cycle Dynamics

While there is general consensus that Capitol Hill deserves attention as a “natural” cultural district, we found significant disagreement about where the neighborhood is in its life cycle as an arts district. Some say such debate is part of the history and cultural character of Capitol Hill. After all, the headquarters of The Stranger, Seattle’s free weekly alternative arts and culture newspaper, was founded in 1991 and remains in Capitol Hill.

In this section, we look at the ecology and evolution of Capitol Hill as a “natural” cultural district, the role of community planning and cultural space activism, and issues regarding the neighborhood’s sustainability as a cultural district.

Neighborhood overview

The social geography of Capitol Hill is distinguished among Seattle neighborhoods by its density and its self-conscious diversity. The community has long been considered a center of counterculture attracting people who sought alternative lifestyles as well as community and political activists. It was to no one’s surprise, for example, that Capitol Hill streets became one of the centers of Seattle’s 1999 World Trade Organization (WTO) protests.

Many people refer to Capitol Hill’s historic identity as a gay neighborhood and its current role as center of Seattle’s LGBT community. As early as the 1950s and ’60s, Capitol Hill was a neighborhood where gay men could find safe sites to rent rooms. By the late 60s, institutional support began to emerge. In 1969 Dorian House opened as the first gay counseling and employment service in the US. In 1974, in sync with Seattle’s first Gay Pride Week, was the opening of the city’s first Gay Community Center at 1726 16th Ave E in Capitol Hill. Capitol Hill landmarks and landscape generally reflect the community’s openness to queer culture. The prominent Cal Anderson Park, for example, is named for the legislator who died of AIDS in 1995.¹

The Capitol Hill district—the area to the east of downtown and Interstate 5 and to the north of First Hill and Central District—is large and varied. Identification of Capitol Hill as our study area may, in fact, be misleading. According to the Seattle City Clerk’s neighborhood designations (Figure 6-2), the area actually consists of several neighborhoods. The district was first called “Broadway Hill” after the avenue that forms its commercial heart. The map of cultural assets, including nonprofit groups and commercial enterprises, indicates that most are concentrated in the southern part of “Broadway” (Figure 6-14). In our conversations, no one used the term Broadway, and most people referred to this area as Pike/Pine. Capitol Hill’s arts core, in fact, is located on the southern boundary of Broadway and laps into some Central District neighborhoods.

Old Broadway

The northern part of “Broadway”, settled along a ridge that overlooks downtown and associated waterways, is the site of some of Seattle’s most prosperous residential streets. On the west slope, the Harvard-Belmont Landmark District recognizes the distinctive architectural styles of homes built in the early 20th century by the city’s business leaders. The “Stevens” neighborhood to the east, developed with large houses on small lots, attracted large Catholic families through the 1980s, giving the district its nickname “Catholic Hill.”

North Broadway neighborhoods house a variety of parks—Volunteer Park, Interlaken Park, and Washington Park and Arboretum—that over the years have seeded several regional cultural institutions. ² Volunteer Park Conservatory, run by Seattle Parks and Recreation, opened in 1912 as a botanical garden and greenhouse modeled after London’s Crystal Palace. Seattle Asian Art Museum in Volunteer Park occupies the

² In late summer 2011, we heard a discussion led by an “artist in transportation” about the planned expansion of Route 520, which borders these institutions, and its threat to the city’s cultural heritage and the public environment generally. See Save our Soul (SOS) Seattle: http://citytank.org/2011/08/05/save-our-soul-sos-seattle-why-the-seattle-arts-and-heritage-community-should-vote-to-reject-the-tunnel/
original home of the Seattle Art Museum (SAM) built in 1933. In 1991 SAM moved its main collection to a new facility downtown and opened the Asian Art Museum. Washington Park Arboretum and the 60-year site of Seattle’s Museum of History and Industry (MOHAI) are also located in this area. In December 2012 MOHAI opened its new home in the former Naval Reserve Armory—renovated to house and display MOHAI’s extensive collection of historic artifacts, documents, maps, and photographs—in South Lake Union Park. ³

Cornish College of the Arts, founded in 1914 by music educator Nellie Cornish, also has its roots in Broadway. Its oldest building, Kerry Hall, is a national register site in the Harvard-Belmont Landmark District. For years the Cornish School—first a music school with dance and visual arts and later a teachers’ college—occupied a building at Broadway and Pine Street (currently Pike/Pine). In 1977, after many stages of reinvention, Cornish became a fully accredited degree-granting college with an integrated undergraduate program in performing and visual arts. A private nonprofit school, its mission is to prepare students “to become practicing artists ... [and] ... to contribute to society as artists, citizens, and innovators.” In so doing Cornish seeks to serve “as a focal point in the community for public presentation, artistic criticism, participation and discussion of the arts.” ⁴ In 2003 Cornish College of the Arts opened a new campus in Denny Triangle north of downtown.

**Pike/Pine**

The current core of Capitol Hill, known as Pike/Pine, is named for the east-west corridor between Pine and Pike Streets, roughly from Interstate 5 to 15th Avenue East. The Pike-Pine Triangle—bounded by Pine, Broadway, and Madison—intersects with the Central District, a historically African American neighborhood that over time has become a cultural district.

³ Seattle Parks and Recreation opened South Lake Union Park in September 2010. In 2000 the U.S. Navy conveyed the land (with the Naval Reserve Training Building) to the City of Seattle, making possible a new park on Lake Union.

⁴ Cornish College of the Arts: cornish.edu
One of the historical accidents of this part of Capitol Hill, beginning in the early 20th century, was its concentration of automobile dealers along with auto parts and repair shops. This cluster of car dealers and services—mostly on Broadway, Pike and Pine—became known as “Auto Row.” Through the 1950s, along with automobiles, Capitol Hill business districts developed as a destination for high-end goods and services—including furniture, interior design, and commercial arts.

By the 1960s, the best shops had relocated to Pioneer Square, and Seattle’s counter-culture was beginning to spill over from the University District into Capitol Hill. Also during this period, the business character of Capitol Hill was changing.

Large commercial spaces that once housed car dealerships, repair shops, and other businesses needing lots of room, were broken up into smaller shops and studios, providing space for artists, artisans, and traditional and non-traditional businesses of all stripes.⁵

The Ford Building at 1521 Tenth Ave—in the heart of Capitol Hill’s Pike/Pine corridor—was built in the 1930s as a truck service center, later used for garment manufacture into the 1980s. It is now home to Elliott Bay Book Company and café and Everyday Music.

Photo: SIAP 2011

The Ferrari dealer at 12th and Union is one of the few remnants of what was once Auto Row. Because auto parts are heavy, these buildings tend to have the support structures that allow them to be easily converted to arts uses. Thus a number of sites that have served as arts spaces at one time or another were auto or parts dealers. Creature advertising agency, for example, located on 12th Avenue in the heart of Pike/Pine, occupies an old auto parts store that has been converted into open-space loft-like offices.

⁵ HistoryLink Essay/Capitol Hill, Part 2, HistoryLink File #9841 at historylink.org.
Velocity Dance Center, a Capitol Hill institution founded in 1996, had rented space in Odd Fellows Hall for 13 years when sale of the building and a 300 percent rent hike forced its relocation. After extensive search, Velocity found a vacant automotive dealership at 1621 12th Avenue to renovate as its new home. Elizabeth Linke, real estate developer and “well-known friend to the arts,” owns several Capitol Hill properties—including those that house Velocity (former site of the for-profit Capitol Hill Arts Center) and the Northwest Film Forum (see below). Velocity was able to negotiate an affordable rent and a 15-year lease and in March 2010 moved into its new facility.

Velocity Dance Center promotes contemporary dance in Seattle and the region through subsidized training and rehearsal space, an adult dance class program, support of dancers and independent choreographers, and production of new work. As a nonprofit, Velocity has developed a studio and theater space rental program for dancers, other artists, and community events.

Like Velocity, a number of Capitol Hill cultural anchors were founded during the 1990s. Northwest Film Forum started in 1995 by filmmakers Jamie Hook and Deborah Girdwood as a collective called Wiggly World Studios. The group’s original focus was post-production, but they gradually expanded to include other aspects of production and began to show films. In 1997 the group acquired the historic Grand Illusion Cinema in the University District (University of Washington) and in 1999 the new Little Theatre on 19th Avenue East. Eventually, the organization took the name Northwest Film Forum (NWFF) to describe its full range of operations—exhibitions, education, equipment access, and productions. In 2004 NWFF sold its two cinemas and consolidated all programs under one roof at 1515 12th Ave, between Pike and Pine. The cinematheque has two theaters (with 119 and 48 seats), facilities and equipment for filmmakers, a dedicated space for workshops, and filmmaker offices.

In 1995 at 814 E Roy St, on the corner of Broadway East in Capitol Hill, a couple with design experience and artisan connections in Japan as well as Seattle, opened a gallery and shop called KOBO—the Japanese word for artist’s studio or workspace. They wanted a place to show and sell fine craftsmanship and design work by Japanese studio
artisans as well as Northwest artists. The selection and display of artifacts and gifts reflects the philosophy of the owners, BInko Chiong-Bisbee and John Bisbee:

There is a desire for a quality of life that is defined not by the accumulation of things but rather a paring down to the essentials. In a world of limited natural resources we hope to provide a hint of inspiration, respite and a reminder of the human hands that go into making the things we surround ourselves with. 6

KOBO Shop and Gallery is also billed as a museum where people feel welcome to visit and appreciate how we make things—as well as browse and shop. Exhibits throughout the year feature artists who work in ceramics, jewelry, glass, textiles, metal, wood, and print media.

In 1996 three Seattle writers, women who noticed that Seattle had lots of writers and bookstores but no hub for writers and readers, founded a center for writers they called Richard Hugo House. In 1997 they bought and renovated a 1902 Victorian house at 1634 11th Avenue, across from Cal Anderson Park, that was built as an apartment house and later used as a funeral home and a theater. In 1998 they opened the center, which houses a range of space for programming as well as rental: an 86-seat theater (can be reconfigured for 148); an 80-seat cabaret performance space with a café/bar; two meeting rooms and a conference room; and the Zine Archive and Publishing Project, a library with over 20,000 handmade zines. The founders were “committed to an entrepreneurial vision; they wanted to use business-like practices to build a strong institution that would remain flexible and risk-taking in its programming.” Hugo House offers classes, resources, and events for writers, readers, and audiences of all ages and levels of experience.

As a marker of Capitol Hill’s changing cultural ecology, the most frequently referenced event was the sale of Odd Fellows Hall. Developer Ted Schroth purchased the building in January 2008 and notified the building’s tenants—many nonprofit arts groups and individual artists—that their rents would be raised to current market rates. Thus the community witnessed the conversion of historic Odd Fellows Hall, at East Pine & 10th Streets, from a collective arts space to Oddfellows Café + Bar EST. 2008. “This is the end of Capitol Hill as we know it!” 7

The affordable rents and large open spaces at Oddfellows Hall that had previously created an environment hospitable to cultivating artists was lost, and

6 Kobo Seattle: www.koboseattle.com/about
7 Jonathan Kauffman, “Does Oddfellows Gentrify or Rectify?” Seattle Weekly (February 18, 2009)
now Velocity—along with Freehold Theatre, Century Ballroom, [Reel Grrls] and many individual artists—were faced with the reality of being homeless. It was like witnessing all the negative aspects of gentrification occurring in the microcosm of that one building.  

Current tenants—retail, office, and “creative users”—include the Century Ballroom, social dancing instruction and nightclub (former tenant of Odd Fellows Hall), the Tin Table (same owner as Century Ballroom); Miss Indigo Blue’s Academy of Burlesque; NuBe Green, all-American, all-green merchandise as ground floor retail—and Oddfellows Café + Bar.

OddFellows Building—“Established 1908, re-established 2008” Built in 1908 as Odd Fellows Temple at 915 E Pine Street, Seattle. Photo: SIAP 2012

Some speculate that Schroth intended to convert Odd Fellows into high-end condominiums, but then the housing bubble burst. In July 2011 a local journalist credited Seattle’s “real estate bust” for the arrival of two enterprises in Capitol Hill that represent “a new brand of interdisciplinary creative spaces.”  

FRED Wildlife Refuge (127 E Boylston St) provides “a collaborative habitat for artists,” implicitly dubbing Seattle artists as a kind of wildlife that need protection. “Part high-tech photography studio [...], part dance floor, and part multidimensional projection chamber, the space is really like an underground nightclub.” Its owner/founder has designed the center to stimulate cross-genre partnerships and collaboration among music, dance, physical performance, digital media, and literary artists.


Also in 2011 a nonprofit storefront opened at 1315 E Pine St called The Project Room. Former Cornish School of the Arts curator Jess Van Nostrand founded the space, financed through personal funds and individual donations, as a multidisciplinary art center. “The Project Room feels more like a Shaker’s foyer, with clean white walls and not much more than a few bold furniture pieces anchoring the décor, welcoming artists to make what they will of it.” During the summer of 2011, The Project Room hosted “a process performative, multi-platform project” by multidisciplinary artist Mandy Greer. Greer’s seven-week residency featured weekly community crochet parties and a variety of guest artist events including a fiber artist, a movement analyst, a wood sculptor and jeweler, an interactive poetry installation, a book carving demo, and a representative from the Department of Artistic Licensing. Van Nostrand looks to curate an exchange of ideas among artists of different disciplines. “I think it’s where we’re headed—toward erasing some of the boundaries between disciplines.” The Project Room publishes an online journal called *Off Paper* that accompanies its programming. For a year, The Project Room is asking the Big Question: *Why Do We Make Things?*

The Project Room, 1315 E Pine St, Capitol Hill
*Why Do We Make Things?* projectroomseattle.org/category/why-do-we-make-things

Photo: Mandy Greer 2011 [stonemandy.wordpress.com/about/about](stonemandy.wordpress.com/about/about)

Yet another adaptation by artists to the real estate realities of Capitol Hill has been the recent trend of pop-up galleries featuring one-night exhibits. In December 2010 curator Sierra Stinson started Vignettes. “It’s my apartment-based, one-night-only exhibition space.” She mounts exhibits every two weeks in her studio apartment and has to move all four pieces of furniture to do so. “Each show has completely been different from the other. The crowd changes with the artist drastically.” Sierra got the idea abroad while attending Glasgow School of Art. Apparently “it was common all over Europe” for people to open up their apartments to show art—and those were the shows to go to.  

Meanwhile, Capitol Hill’s Auto Row is again finding a niche in the local creative economy. Apparently basements in Pike/Pine, long used for car storage, are now “in great demand” by a variety of business owners.

With respect to Capitol Hill’s character as an arts district, possibly the 2002 founding of Creature advertising agency (1508 10th Avenue, between Pike and Pine) was as significant as—but less disruptive than—the Odd Fellows conversion.

    Our philosophy is simple - The best media space you can buy is in someone’s mind, and that space cannot be bought with dollars alone. It requires intelligent thoughts that involve the audience and invite participation. ¹¹

Creature represents the interdependency of Seattle’s creative and cultural economy—that is, an unofficial subsidy of independent artists and nonprofit arts by the commercial arts and entertainment sectors. From the point of view of real estate, we noted that nonprofits like Richard Hugo House tend operate a full bar and café and/or space rental program. From the point of view of income, we noted that Seattle artists (and/or spouses) have opportunities to make a living wage with a job in the creative industries.

Several people we met at Creature describe themselves as artists who maintain their own practice apart from their day job. Indeed, the issue of an artist’s “day job” may prove to be an important difference between Seattle and the Eastern cities. Generally speaking, in Philadelphia, when artists talk about their day jobs, they are referring to low-paying jobs in the service sector—waiting tables or tending bar as the archetypal examples. In Seattle, by contrast, advertising and design industries appear to provide the largest pool of day jobs. As a result, we could hypothesize that Seattle artists—relative to their counterparts in Philadelphia and Baltimore—have opportunities in their day jobs to earn higher incomes as well as use their professional skills. Day jobs in the commercial arts could even boost their independent artwork by providing entrepreneurial models of how to turn their craft into a paying proposition.

Another twist on the day job issue is the Seattle Art Museum (SAM). It appears that SAM—which includes the downtown facility and permanent collection, the Seattle Asian Art Museum in Volunteer Park, and Olympic Sculpture Park and pavillion overlooking Puget Sound—has a policy of hiring artists for all sorts of positions, including security guards and ticket booth attendants. Seattle artists were surprised to hear that in other cities many museum jobs are not open to artists and that in some cases—such as the Philadelphia Museum of Art—security officers are unionized. ¹²

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¹¹ Creature: www.alladvertisingagencies.com/profile/view/creature.html
¹² Security officers at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, employed by Allied Barton Security Services, won a union contract in April 2011 after four years of organizing.
Life-cycle dynamics

So, where is Capitol Hill in its life cycle as a cultural district? Young artists—20- and 30-somethings—support the hypothesis that Capitol Hill is in decline. Says a veteran arts advocate, “that was the exact case fifteen years ago as well!” The younger set argue that the neighborhood used to be an arts district, but that artists have now been crowded out by gay and upper-middle income groups, so that Capitol Hill is now more about restaurants, entertainment, and nightlife. Real working artists, they say, have been pushed to the margins of Capitol Hill. We talked with a several young artists and a musician who live in the nearby Central District or in Madison Valley, the boundary between Capitol Hill proper and Madison Park. These neighborhoods afford proximity to Capitol Hill’s arts and entertainment resources without its high rents (or housing prices).

Others agree that, because of high property values in Capitol Hill, 20-something artists are likely to live in other neighborhoods. But they also point out that more artists still live in Capitol Hill than in any other part of the city (Figure 6-1). Something notable about Capitol Hill is that, even as artists complain about their vulnerability to gentrification, they tend to treat it as a fact of life. Unlike the Central District or the Chinatown-International District, where people express concern about destabilizing existing residential communities, displacement in Capitol Hill is framed as an artists’ or arts community issue.

For the first time in 50 years, more workers young and old are rejecting the sameness of the suburbs for the character of old neighborhoods. ... But the appeal of old neighborhoods also leads to new construction. ...
Small arts venues like the Sunset Tavern or Annex Theatre give old neighborhoods character, but are the types of business most threatened by new construction and rising rents. When a neighborhood is (re)developing, those with the least resources—often artists and small arts organizations—are among the first to go. To preserve the soul of a neighborhood, we must preserve affordable arts space—or create it.  

Many emerging artists are fine with the social churning of the neighborhood and appear to like the action associated with density. They just don’t like the economic impact on them as individuals, especially at an early stage in their careers. “This is a key point and seems to be different in Seattle—the steely-eyed realism about capitalist forces.”

During the summer of 2011, for example, a public art installation called “Mad Homes” was staged along the 700 block of Bellevue in North Capitol Hill. The Mad Homes exhibit was suggestive of the complex relationship of Seattle artists to neighborhood development. Billed as a public art opportunity, competing artists accepted as a matter of fact that four single-family residences in sound and livable condition would be condemned for demolition based on the development rights—presumably, high-density residential use—of a site with breathtaking views of the Space Needle and Puget Sound. (Apparently, the relentless roar of the expressway from the valley below does not dampen property values.) Eleven emerging artists, free to use all inside and outside spaces of [four] houses as “creative canvases,” were thrilled with the opportunity to scale up their work and gain the exposure afforded by this “novel and noteworthy venue for the public to view art.”

With abandon—it would appear—Mad Homes was an artistic celebration of gentrification-as-opportunity: growth is desirable and inevitable, value is determined by the highest and best use, so let’s make the most of it. Indeed, “instead of a protest, it was a celebration.”


14 The mission of Seattle’s MadArt is to support emerging artists and “bring art into our lives in unexpected ways.” See website: www.madartseattle.com/mad-homes/exhibition.
Community planning, cultural space, and 12th Avenue Arts

Capitol Hill Housing (CHH), a public development authority (PDA) started in 1976 “as an outgrowth of community action,” is evidence that affordable housing and community stability have been long-standing issues in the neighborhood. A community-based real estate developer, CHH develops, owns, and manages a variety of safe and affordable housing for a low- and moderate-income individuals and families. The enterprise currently maintains 44 buildings in nine neighborhoods, of which 28 are located in Capitol Hill.

Capitol Hill Housing has developed a broad programmatic approach to its mission of “creating equitable and sustainable communities in central Seattle.” One CHH goal is to sustain Capitol Hill’s character as a vibrant and diverse neighborhood by stabilizing the arts community. Already CHH development has provided a fair amount of affordable housing that is open to artists. A planned new development—12th Avenue Arts—would provide permanent affordable performance and studio space as part of a mixed-use facility. The site—on 12th Avenue between E Olive Way and E Pine St—has long been a city-owned surface parking lot used for police department vehicles. CHH with neighborhood groups persuaded city officials to repurpose this prime location for theaters and housing, with community and small business space—and police parking underground. The rationale is to “[build] on the work of the Cultural Overlay District Advisory Committee and related efforts to preserve and expand cultural space in the city ... and help address the displacement of cultural organizations from Capitol Hill ...”

Capitol Hill Housing Foundation was formed in 2010 as an independent 501c3 nonprofit organization to raise funds and support the mission of CHH. CHH Foundation is leading the capital campaign for the 12th Avenue Arts project, a great fit for founding executive director Michael Seiwerath, who had been active in Seattle for 15 years as arts professional and advocate with first-hand experience in cultural space development. From 1995 to 2008, Seiwerath helped build the Northwest Film Forum from a filmmakers’ collective to a “comprehensive center for filmmakers and audiences in Seattle” with a permanent home in Pike/Pine. During one phase, he recalls, NWFF acquired and renovated two small theatres over a six-month period, “which was crazy, but we were young and didn’t know any better.” Seiwerath sees lack of affordable space for small- and mid-sized groups as the most pressing issue facing Seattle’s cultural sector. Individual artists can still “finesse” the market, but for many arts organizations the facility issue is critical. As Seattle Arts Commission member and chair of its Facilities and Economic Development Committee, he has been able to work directly on this issue with other citizen-volunteers and the Mayor’s Office of Arts & Cultural Affairs.

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15 As a Public Development Authority (PDA), Capitol Hill Housing is a public corporation organized by the City of Seattle, legally separate from the City, and governed by a volunteer council.
16 Capital Hill Housing is developer of the $43 million construction project with funds from city, state and federal government sources. All funds are secured, except the $550,000 needed to complete current $4.6 million capital campaign. From: “Ground broken for 12th Avenue Arts building” by Misha Berson, Seattle Times (Thursday, Feb 21, 2013).
In February 2013 Capitol Hill Housing broke ground on 12th Avenue Arts and expects to open the building in late summer of 2014. Following its RFP for “a performance space management organization,” CHH selected three local theater companies—New Century Theatre Company, Strawberry Theatre Workshop, and Washington Ensemble Theatre—to manage the two planned new venues. The three companies connected and prepared a joint proposal to share space and costs. None thought they could meet the CHH specifications on their own, but all share a common facility problem. As described by New Century’s managing director:

We were spending more and more time searching for (performance) space and less time working on our programming ... It’s never been easy but it definitely has been getting harder. It’s a challenge to find space suitable for the level of production we do that has enough power and lighting and is affordable and available. 17

The companies are setting up a nonprofit entity, with separate staff and board, to manage the two theaters. Each company will pay for the space on a monthly basis rather than as-needed for production. The trade-offs with respect to direct cost savings and/or longer-term benefits of a consistent venue vary for each group.

Design of the new state-of-the art performance venues has been a collaborative process. The two flexible theaters—one with 149 seats and one with 80 seats—have been designed in consultation with the small theater companies that will perform there. An advocate for preservation of old buildings, Seiwerath is likewise appreciative of the merits of new construction for fringe groups.

When [12th Avenue Arts] opens next year, it will give neighborhood artists and arts organizations what they need: flexible performance space that works for multiple users; quality black box theaters, with green rooms, dressing rooms and proper sound isolation. And perhaps most importantly, something that we consistently heard was lacking at small theatres across the city: clean bathrooms. ...

Now the idea is to create something smaller theatre companies never get: quality performance space. In a neighborhood where the presenting arts organizations rent their space, here’s a rare case of new construction providing a new home, new partnerships and new ideas. 18

“It’s almost unheard of to have small fringe theaters in on the design of something like this.”

18 Seiwerath, City Arts Magazine (February 26, 2013).
In February 2013 Capitol Hill Housing began construction of 12th Avenue Arts as a mixed-use development on the site of a police parking lot at 12th Ave and Pine St. At street level will be two small theaters and retail and restaurant space. On the second floor will be nonprofit office space—for Capitol Hill Housing, the theater management group, and others—and community meeting space. The top four floors will provide 88 affordable apartments for individuals and families. Underground will be 110 parking spaces the police department.

With 12th Avenue Arts, Capitol Hill Housing affirms its commitment to the arts and its importance to community vitality. “Ensuring a strong presence for the arts is an important part of community development and we are excited to be able to make this dream a reality.”

Another Capitol Hill Housing community planning initiative is to explore the establishment of a Capitol Hill EcoDistrict. An ecodistrict is “sustainability applied at the neighborhood scale” with respect to energy, pollution, the ecosystem, and the community. The catalyst for the vision is the planned development of a light rail station along 10th Avenue East (connecting Capitol Hill with the University of Washington to the north and SeaTac Airport to the south) in the heart of the neighborhood. The EcoDistrict concept starts with a set of transit-oriented development (TOD) sites and then moves on to consider the total energy use of the district, including the possible use of new sources of energy, such as geo-thermal power or recycling of light rail station heat. CHH is working with a variety of nonprofit and private developers to take a holistic approach to development of the Capitol Hill light rail station.
Sound Transit, the agency responsible for Seattle’s light rail development, runs a public art program called STart (Sound Transit Art Program). STart’s Capitol Hill Wall Project is underway as a “public art lab” that features temporary installations “by regional established and emerging artists to explore the ever-changing landscape of the neighborhood and the city.” Capitol Hill based artist D K Pan (despite allegations of running illegal gambling “speakeasy” bars) has been retained as lead public artist. Pan with NKO, “captains of mischief,” co-founded the Free Sheep Foundation in order to formalize a relationship between artists and development processes.

The Free Sheep Foundation is an architectural non-profit organization whose mission is to foster specific projects in artistic interventions and architectural spaces. Free Sheep Foundation seeks for partners, developers, government agencies, architects and arts organizations to identify and occupy buildings without activity. Opening these spaces to artists as facilities for any cultural production, exhibition, performance space and artist studios. By transforming disused spaces, the foundation helps to integrate artists within the process of development. Through research and investigation, each project will contribute to the continuum of the past and future memories of a site.\(^{19}\)

While the status of the Free Sheep Foundation is uncertain, the spirit of its founders is not. As for the Capitol Hill Wall Project—aka the “Red Wall”—its canvas is the construction wall along the two-block area that will be under excavation and reconstruction over a four-year period through 2014.

\(^{19}\) Free Sheep Foundation: freesheepfree.org
Capitol Hill activists have been instrumental in getting the attention of city government on issues of arts and cultural space development. The unexpected turnover in early 2008 of Odd Fellows Hall led to a petition to Seattle City Council to name a committee of citizens to investigate the sustainability of neighborhood cultural districts and make recommendations. Council appointed a Cultural Overlay District Advisory Committee (CODAC), which submitted its final report in April 2009, outlined a vision of a cultural district as “a defined, limited geographic area within a neighborhood.”

... [D] evelopers would be able to access incentives that would allow for the creation of permanently affordable space for designated cultural uses. [...] A district model [...] would integrate with existing planning processes, including neighborhood planning, neighborhood councils, and existing overlays, incentives and other zoning tools that are in place or in process in the neighborhoods (including affordable housing and historic preservation) ...

The CODAC vision is driven by community demand for urban development tools that will empower us to build on local cultural assets, invest in creativity and reward efficient collaboration on a neighborhood scale. ... 

CODAC has passed the baton to the Seattle Arts Commission (SAC), citizen volunteers as advisory to the Seattle Office of Arts and Cultural Affairs. SAC’s Facilities and Economic Development Committee, chaired by Michael Seiwerath of CHH Foundation, has pursued the focus on affordable space for emerging, small, and mid-sized arts groups. The Committee believes that maintaining a stock of old cheap commercial buildings, flexible spaces with low overhead and short-term leases, is essential to the health and sustainability of Seattle’s cultural ecology. “Good art just happens. It rises out of old buildings.” Capitol Hill has evolved as the prototype neighborhood that has defined Seattle’s cultural space issues, mobilized arts activism, and effected City response. 

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20 The final report of the Cultural Overlay District Advisory Committee (CODAC), *Preserving & Creating Space for Arts & Culture in Seattle*, was submitted to Seattle City Council on April 30, 2009.

Capitol Hill’s sustainability as a “natural” cultural district

The neighborhood dynamics of Capitol Hill highlight the plight of Seattle artists, who are generally uptight about where they are going to be able to work and live. Artists need mobility. It is important that they can move into and out of and across neighborhoods to adapt to their changing creative and life-cycle stages. We might speculate that a dynamic housing market that allows for transitional residence—that is, a strong and affordable rental stock—is not just desirable but necessary to maintain an organic cultural district. Transition from a mixed housing market to one locked in with property ownership triggers displacement and economic exclusion of artists. Mixed tenure options as well as affordability could well be a precondition for a healthy cultural district.

While individual artists need mobility, arts and cultural programs and enterprises need stability—typically contingent on available, accessible, and affordable cultural space—in order to focus on artistic development and build community connections. On the one hand, transition from a mixed commercial market to one locked in with property ownership—like housing—leads to displacement and barriers to emerging and start-up groups. On the other hand, small and mid-sized groups with a track record need opportunities to own or control property. Mixed tenure options—including long-term leases or commercial/industrial condominiums (where a group owns its own storefront, office, or loft unit)—as well as affordability could help foster a healthy cultural district.

But most groups need and want rental opportunities. Michael Seiwerath, with reference to urban activist Jane Jacobs, explains why old buildings afford financial as well as creative opportunities for artists and creative enterprises.

Unlike new construction burdened by heavy bank loans, old buildings are often owned debt-free, so landlords aren’t desperate to squeeze every penny out of tenants. In old buildings, storefronts are often small, so rents can be low—a great recipe for beginning a business. First and second floors become offices for small startup companies. Creative firms like World Famous start with film production, migrate to video and soon are running 3-D printers in 100-year-old lofts. Sole Repair opens an event space in an old shoe repair supply center, sharing the liquor license and kitchen with the restaurant next door. A pizza shop and bar is carved out of half of a storefront coffee bean storage room.

For Capitol Hill we posed the central question as: where is the neighborhood in its life cycle as a “natural” cultural district? Is Capitol Hill on the rise; is it a mature arts district; or is it in decline? The Capitol Hill study suggests that the issue may not be life cycle at all but rather whether the neighborhood is shifting from one type of cultural district to another. Perhaps the question is whether Capitol Hill is reinventing itself vis-à-vis the role of artists and cultural opportunities in its community life and the role of its community within the city and regional cultural ecosystem.

22 Seiwerath, City Arts Magazine (February 26, 2013).
Two qualities appear to have contributed to Capitol Hill’s origins and evolution as a cultural district and its potential for resilience: social diversity and community activism. These qualities have generated neighborhood support for community planning initiatives—in particular, a commitment to an arts identity and development of affordable cultural space in the context of a high market cultural district that is becoming an entertainment destination.

Capitol Hill suggests the possibility that a “natural” cultural district—depending on its cultural ecology, social geography, and housing market—can evolve from serving one type of constituency to another. Maybe the life cycle metaphor is a red herring because it posits a single path, with ups and downs. Rather, the important issue may be that, at any one time, a district may have the potential to move in a number of directions and that what actually happens depends on the choices people make as well as the exogenous forces that are sometimes beyond their control. We can reframe the central question, therefore, as: are there critical junctures or tipping points that determine the trajectory and sustainability of a “natural” cultural district?

Central District’s Evolution as a “Natural” Cultural District

The Central District, located east of downtown and the Chinatown-International District and south of Capitol Hill, encompasses Seattle’s oldest residential areas. In the mid-1800s, Yesler Way was “skid road” where logs were slid down to Henry Yesler’s sawmill. By the turn of the 20th century, though farms and nurseries still dotted the landscape, much of the housing stock had been built.

Throughout its history, Central District has served as an immigrant and migrant-receiving district. During the early decades of the 20th century, Central was predominantly Jewish (Jews arrived in successive waves from Germany, Eastern Europe, Turkey and Greece), as evidenced by a number of former synagogues in the neighborhood. Scandinavians too established community organizations and congregations. A Japanese community expanded east from Chinatown into the Central District. Two African Americans settlements slowly emerged, middle-class families near East Madison and single transient workers near Jackson Street.

A potpourri of colors and cultures flowed in and out of this four-square-mile area during its more-than-a-century-old history. There were the European Americans, the Japanese, the Jews, and the African Americans. All left a distinct imprint.¹

During and after World War II—due to Japanese internment, housing discrimination, and restrictive covenants—Seattle’s growing black population largely settled in the Central District. By the 1970s the Central District was predominantly African American and “the center of the civil rights movement in Seattle.” Meanwhile, the Japanese community revived its residential and institutional presence in the neighborhood, which remains strong today, especially along Yesler Way and Jackson Street between 14th and 18th Avenues.

With the turn of the 21st century, despite significant demographic changes, Central District retains a strong African American presence and identity as the center of Seattle’s black community. At the same time, unlike many urban “ghettos” in the East, the CD has maintained its historic character as a racially and ethnically diverse residential neighborhood.

The Central District proved to be a challenging district to study, largely because its formal boundaries (east of 12th Avenue, northeast to Madison St and southeast to Rainier Ave S) encompass an expansive and primarily residential area. There are several clusters of arts activity in the CD: 12th Avenue corridor at Madison and Union adjacent to Capitol Hill; a set of community-based cultural institutions (Langston Hughes, Pratt Fine Arts, Washington Hall) and Hiawatha Lofts; and the Northwest African American Museum, where the CD transitions to Southeast Seattle.

Figure 6-15. Nonprofit cultural organizations (red) and commercial cultural firms (blue), Central District, Seattle 2010
Source: SIAP 2010
Capitol Hill spillover—12th Avenue at Madison and Union

One take on Central as a “natural” cultural district is that it is picking up a spillover effect from Capitol Hill, as rents and property values have become more expensive and competing uses make life difficult there for many members of Seattle’s arts community. Central’s most visible arts cluster is integrated with the Pike/Pine corridor of Capitol Hill. Activity is focused along the 12th Avenue corridor, from its intersection with East Madison and Union Streets, south past Seattle University.

Seattle University (SU), though historically disengaged from the neighborhood, is a significant institutional presence in this northwest corner of Central District. In the summer of 2010, the university made the long lobby of its performance space available for use as a gallery. The space, called Hedreen Gallery at the Lee Center for the Arts, opens onto the west side of 12th Avenue at Marion. Hedreen’s mission was articulated: “to strive to catalyze artistic process and dialogue; to connect artists, audiences, and resources; and to engage the community in the arts.” SU hired two young artists as co-curators with the charge to explore innovative practices.

When Whitney Ford-Terry and Jessica Powers kicked off their new tenure as co-curators for Seattle University’s Hedreen Gallery with a manifesto full of words like “radical experimentation” and “social justice activism,” you knew the times were a-changin’.2

The artists reported that SU paid them “a poverty wage” for managing Hedreen as a shared, part-time position, but they were positive about the role of Seattle University and its intention to become a good neighbor.

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2 “CultureMakers 50: The people behind the scenes of the music and arts we love,” by The Editors, CityArts, January 1, 2011.
In November 2012 SU hired a new curator to build on Seattle U’s liberal arts and interdisciplinary core and her personal interest in “liturgical storytelling and transhistorical multidisciplinary narratives.” During the early months of 2013, the new curator invited “local artist and creative community builder Joey Veltkamp” to host a series of artist salons at Hedreen Gallery.

**HEDRENN GALLERY**

At the Lee Center for the Arts at 12th and Marion. Admission is always free.

**SALON REVISITED**

Four Gatherings hosted by Joey Veltkamp and Friends

February 2, 2013 – March 2, 2013

... Veltkamp’s perspective on community is the antithesis of cliques and close-mindedness. And it’s contagious. ... It’s a chance to meet new people, collectively revisit the idea of what an art community can be, make attitude adjustments, kick off the new year with some facetime and fun …

—Amanda Manitach, curator

Source: www.seattleu.edu/hedreen/

During these early years, Hedreen’s artist-curators seem to be making the most of SU’s 12th Avenue lobby-gallery, less to engage the community in the arts than to engage artists in community.

Across the street from Seattle University and the Hedreen Gallery, at 900 12th Avenue, is Photo Center Northwest. The Photo Center was founded in the early 1980s as a small photography school, relocated in 1997 from downtown (and Greenlake) locations to its current site in an ambulance building at 12th Ave and Marion, and is now an established nonprofit regional photographic arts education center. The center offers classes and workshops open to students of all ages and levels, from teens to seniors; a certificate program; master classes; and public programs. Darkroom, processing, and printing facilities are available for rent and open to all, from amateurs to professionals. Gallery space is used for its collection of past work, current exhibitions, and public programs. The faculty draws professional fine arts photographers and teaching artists from throughout the region.3

Central District, like Capitol Hill, can claim tolerance for “queer space” from time to time. The neighborhood has been home to a number of gay community organizations, including the Gay Community Center, briefly housed in the Seattle Urban League building; People of Color Against AIDS Network (POCAAN); and the Seattle Men’s

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3 Carina A. del Rosario, co-founder of IDEA Odyssey Gallery and collective (discussed in Chinatown-International District section below), is on faculty at the Photo Center Northwest.
Chorus. Founded in 1979, SMC is now the largest gay men’s choir in the world. The Seattle Men’s Chorus (and its ensemble, Captain Smartypants), the Seattle Women’s Chorus (and its ensemble, Sensible Shoes), and their parent company Flying House Productions are housed at 319 12th Avenue (at Terrace St).

The 12th Avenue corridor appears to be evolving as an extension of Pike/Pine. Lee Center for the Arts/Hedreen Gallery, Photo Center Northwest, and Flying Hill Productions—all post their location as Capitol Hill rather than Central District. Still, 12th Ave eating establishments reflect a cultural mix characteristic of the Central District. Café Press (Parisian-type bar-café) and Lark (artisan-focused restaurant) near Madison give way to a cluster of Ethiopian restaurants—Kokeb (at Marion), the Blue Nile, Zobel, and Ambassel (at Jefferson), and Saba Ethiopian Cuisine (at Yesler Way)—and a few Haitian, Thai, and Japanese eateries. 12th Avenue businesses, residents, and institutions from John St to Yesler Way are members of 12th Avenue Seattle, a neighborhood planning initiative by Capitol Hill Housing to strengthen the corridor and link Capitol Hill with the Central District. The 12th Avenue Neighborhood Festival, launched in 2010, is now an annual event held on a Sunday afternoon in August along 12th Avenue between Union and Pike Streets.

4 Flying House website: www.flyinghouse.org/about/.

12th Avenue Seattle Neighborhood Map
(Pictured left are E Pine St north to E John St)
Source: 12thaveseattle.com
Community-based cultural and artist centers

Central District is home to a set of community-based cultural institutions that serve the local communities as well as the region. Several African American cultural arts centers anchor the CD’s historically black neighborhoods—the Langston Hughes Performing Arts Institute (former Langston Hughes Performing Arts Center) and Pratt Fine Arts Center. The Northwest African American Museum (discussed in the next section) opened in 2008 in the south Central District bordering Southeast Seattle. Japanese Cultural and Community Center of Washington is the site of a language school founded in 1902. Washington Hall, one of Central District’s oldest community institutions built by the Danish Brotherhood in 1908, is under renovation as a multi-tenant arts center.

Central District is fortunate to have an artists’ live/work project that expands its base of resident artists and feeds these cultural centers. Artspace Hiawatha Lofts opened in 2008 in the Jackson Place neighborhood (842 Hiawatha Place S). In addition to housing 61 artists in affordable apartments, Hiawatha Lofts provides community and commercial space. Tenants include: the Artspace Seattle office, My World Dance & Fitness Studio, Seattle Capoeira Center, and Café Weekend. Many Hiawatha artists teach at Pratt or the Japanese Cultural Center or perform at Langston Hughes and “participate in the rich cultural fabric” of the neighborhood.

Langston Hughes Performing Arts Institute (LHPAI), at 17th Avenue South and Yesler Way, bears testimony to the cultural evolution of the Central District. The facility, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, was opened in 1915 as the Synagogue of Chevra Bikur Cholim to serve the Central Area’s Orthodox Jewish community. In 1969 the Langston Hughes Performing Arts Center was established under the Urban Renewal Model Cities Program. In 1971 the city purchased the vacant synagogue to house Black Arts/West, Seattle’s first African American theater, and a minority film center called Oscar Productions. However, because renovation and expansion took too long to complete, these groups found other accommodations. In 1972 the Langston Hughes Performing Arts Center, the synagogue now repurposed, became a program of Seattle Department of Parks and Recreation.

The mission of the 40-year old center has been newly affirmed and expanded:

[Langston Hughes] celebrates, nurtures, presents and preserves African American and Diaspora performing arts, cultural wealth and iconic legacies. Named for the prolific African American artist Langston Hughes, LHPAI
represents the pluralism of local, national and global Black people in the media platforms of film, dance, theater and music.\footnote{Press release by Chandra Childers, “A New Era for Langston Hughes Performing Arts Institute, January 30, 2013, announcing its new home, new name, and new website: www.langstoninstitute.org.}

Since its founding, Langston Hughes Performing Arts Center has offered instruction, performances, and artist opportunities in a range of traditional and contemporary art forms—programming that “reflects the diversity of the surrounding neighborhoods, the Central District and the International District.” As described on its previous website [www.langstonarts.org]:

It has been an essential gathering place for an African American canon of work in a neighborhood that has seen numerous demographic changes over the past three decades. The Center is committed to championing a cultural and artistic voice while building powerful connections with the diverse cultures in our community. This is accomplished through the creation of dynamic performing arts experiences for all.

From 2009 to 2012 this public performing arts venue was the beneficiary of $2.8 million in seismic retrofitting, electrical, and architectural renovations.

The year 2012 marked “a new era” for the Langston Hughes Performing Arts Center. In his 2013 budget proposal, Mayor McGinn supported its transfer from the Department of Parks and Recreation to the City Office of Arts & Cultural Affairs. The Mayor said publically that running the cultural facility “aligns with the Office’s mission and fits the purview of the Admission Tax to fund arts-related programs and keep artists living, working and growing in Seattle.” In fact, the move is intended as an interim step in its transition from a city program with city employees toward becoming an independent nonprofit renting a city facility.

LHPAI Executive Director Royal Alley-Barnes is enthusiastic about the move to OACA: "This is an amazing opportunity for underrepresented and marginalized grassroots communities to become highly visible in the city’s public performing arts scene." The name change (from Center to Institute) is significant, as Alley-Barnes explains.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{film_festival_poster}
\caption{10th Anniversary Langston Hughes African American Film Festival, April 13-20, 2013 \ Source: www.langstoninstitute.org/film-festival/}
\end{figure}

This new name reflects our evolving and expanded role in the broader arts community. We are not just a presenter of performances. We also serve as
educators and incubators for local grassroots talent. This name reflects that whole mission.

The organization is bidding farewell to its history as a community center and reinventing itself as “a curated performing arts organization.”

The Pratt Fine Arts Center, located at 19th and Main Street on the grounds of Pratt Park, was founded in 1976 by the City of Seattle Parks and Recreation Department. Both park and art center are named for Edwin T. Pratt, Seattle civil rights leader who was assassinated in 1969 at his home in the Central District. In 1982 the city transferred the center to a new independent 501c3 nonprofit organization (called City Art Works).

Pratt Fine Arts Center has three buildings—former truck garage, loading dock, and Hostess factory—on two city blocks, with the main building in Pratt Park and the others on the block just south. Pratt has four industrial studios—each one fully equipped for glass, printmaking, sculpture, and jewelry and metal fabrication—in addition to drawing and painting studios. The studios are available for rent by artists at all stages of ability “from journeyman to master” and can be booked by the hour, day, or month.

Pratt’s mission is to make the visual arts approachable and accessible to all. Although the neighborhood remains predominantly African American, the center caters to a wide participation pool in its course and workshop offerings. Programs include adult and youth instruction, master artist and visiting artist workshops, and studio access for working artists. Scholarships and tuition assistance keep the studios open to students and artists regardless of age, experience, or economic status. Pratt’s claim:

Pratt is the only facility in the Northwest where absolute beginners and established artists work side-by-side creating art. Affordable studios with unparalleled equipment offer artists of all ages, abilities and backgrounds with the opportunity to learn, experiment, and create.

Patrons love Pratt. “Pratt has every tool you need (and then some) and also offers open studio hours so you can come take advantage of their space and tools for a small fee.” “It’s more a sanctuary than just a space and place for art.” “Pratt is my adult playground.”
In June 2011 Pratt was a recipient of the Mayor’s Arts Awards, selected by the Seattle Arts Commission. Said Mayor McGinn of the winners: “They engage our youth, connect different cultures, give artists a place to grow and create access for all people to participate in the arts and tap their own creativity.” The Central District News reported that it’s surprising how many Central District residents are unfamiliar “with this groundbreaking organization sitting in its own back yard.”

Capital improvements over the past two years, intended to support Pratt’s ambitious mission, have brought on a set of fiscal and administrative challenges for the organization. Since 2011 Pratt has raised nearly $500,000 for improvements to activate unused space, in particular, to create a new Wood Art Studio and a dedicated Youth Art Works Studio and relocate painting and drawing studios. The investment is intended to generate additional earned income by expanding programs, course offerings, and studio rental opportunities. In addition, Pratt relocated its gallery to a larger, more visible space in the Tashiro Kaplan Building in Pioneer Square. During this same period, however, anticipated revenues have declined, notably sales from the annual auction and grant contributions from foundations.

There have been several new developments during 2012. In May the board hired a new executive director with experience in operations management as well as development and marketing of cultural facilities. The board wants “to bring focus to the goal of creating a true campus and visual arts resource for the Northwest.”

In August, as part of the City Art Office’s new pilot program to fund cultural facilities, Pratt received a grant ($10,000) to upgrade its security lighting and add signage.

In December Pratt received a National Endowment for the Arts ArtWorks grant ($20,000) to support its Master Artist and Artist-in-Residence programs. Pratt seeks to bring six nationally and internationally renowned artists to Seattle over the next year.

Pratt Fine Arts Center—an established community and artists’ center—seems to be adjusting its fit within Seattle’s changing cultural ecology. Hopefully, given 35 years of both community and capital investment, Pratt’s new business model will support sustainability not only of the organization but of the CD as an ethnically and economically diverse cultural district.

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6 LizWas, “Winner of Mayor’s Award, the Pratt Fine Arts Center makes creating art accessible,” Central District News, posted on June 15, 2011.
Washington Hall, an historic building and landmark at 153 14th Avenue (Fir Street), is one of the oldest centers of cultural activity in the Central District. Constructed in 1908 by the Danish Brotherhood in America to shelter immigrants, Washington Hall—with its performance and dance hall and stage on the second floor—has long served as an important social and cultural facility. Moreover, Washington Hall is credited with the launch of Seattle’s “remarkable jazz history,” with a performance by Miss Lillian Smith’s Jazz Band on June 10, 1918, “the first documented jazz performance by a local band in Washington.”

In 1973 the Sons of Haiti, an African-American Masonic Lodge, purchased Washington Hall. During the 1980s and 1990s, the Hall was the home of On the Boards (OtB), a nonprofit presenter of contemporary performance. From its founding in 1978 till 1998, when the group purchased its own building in lower Queen Anne, OtB rented the upstairs performance space from the Sons of Haiti on a month-to-month lease.

After the departure of On the Boards, Washington Hall limped along as a space and in 2007 came under threat of demolition for condo development. In 2009 thanks to the recession, Historic Seattle, a historical preservation public development authority, acquired the deteriorating property, and the City designated it an historic landmark. Besides its role in Central District’s African American musical heritage, Washington Hall was identified as “one of the last remaining mid-sized performance venues in Seattle.” As noted by Jim Kelly, executive director of 4Culture, King County’s cultural services agency: “Those are exactly the kinds of spaces we have lost over the last few years in the real estate market.”

A local organization called Central District Forum for Arts & Ideas—founded in 1999 to present and produce Black cultural programs for a citywide constituency—played an intermediary role in the property transfer. But for a variety of reasons, CD Forum decided not to pursue moving into the Hall for use as its main facility. In the meantime, Historic Seattle collaborated with 4Culture, in consultation with two local community

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Washington Hall, on 14th Avenue at Fir St, built in 1908 for the Danish Brotherhood.
Photo: SIAP 2011

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7 Paul de Barros, *Jackson Street After Hours, The Roots of Jazz in Seattle*, 1993 (vii, 10)
and cultural development firms, Reflex Strategies and Dunn & Hobbes LLC, in formulating a redevelopment plan.

Historic Seattle’s long term vision for the property is “full rehabilitation” as a community performance hall and “a permanent home for community arts and cultural organizations.” Renovation costs were estimated at $6.5 million. Phase I improvements, completed in 2010, made “the building secure, safe, and comfortable for use again as a place for people to gather for arts, social, and cultural events.” Phase II work, which includes replacing the roof and rebuilding the south exterior wall as well as interior systems, began in October 2012.° The goal is to stabilize and upgrade the building so that it “can serve the need for affordable rental space for a wide range of users.”

During renovation, Historic Seattle has continued to rent out space on evenings and weekends. Selected 2012-13 bookings are: The Cherdonna & Lou Show (hilarious dance-theater); On the Boards: 12 Minutes Max; 206 Zulu: 9th Anniversary (hip hop gathering); Historic Seattle Film Night; Electro Swing Dance; Voices Rising Seattle; Northwest Sweet 16 b-boy competition; Copious Love Productions; and CD Forum for Arts & Ideas: Food & Race—The Politics of Your Plate (discussion).

Photo: SIAP 2011.

Redevelopment of Washington Hall is an ambitious project that faces a set of complex challenges. The overall plan for the Hall is to identify a set of “anchor” organizations that

° Historic Seattle raised major funding for Phase II from Washington State Historical Society, 4Culture, and the Wyncote Foundation NW.
can use the space for artistic and administrative purposes. During the summer of 2010, through a community planning process, Historic Seattle and 4Culture put out a Request For Proposals and selected four organizations that represent a diverse set of community-based producing and performing organizations.

From one perspective, the new configuration of Washington Hall is exciting. The anchor organizations represent a departure from the old 501c3 paradigm and are clearly connected with particular constituencies and sub-cultures—for example, international hip hop, queer artists of color, and African heritage. At the same time, all these groups are organizationally and fiscally fragile, which makes them a difficult foundation for a facility project. Of more immediate concern, the financial plan for the Hall requires that the anchors play a significant role in raising funds for the redevelopment, a role that none of these groups have played in the past.

Washington Hall, then, stands as a fitting symbol of the Central District. It looks back toward the “golden age” of the CD when jazz and rock luminaries used to play there, and it looks forward to incorporating contemporary constituencies—well-off homeowners, up-and-coming artists, and an expanding Little Saigon. Its future is just as hard to predict as that of the Central District generally. Thus Washington Hall is poised to stand as a symbol either of the successful fusion of the city’s complicated cultural ecology or of the challenges to fulfilling that vision.
Northwest African American Museum, linking Central District with Southeast Seattle

The Northwest African American Museum (NAAM) is a young but prominent regional institution that occupies a former school at the far southern end of the Central District. Indeed, although the City Clerk’s map places it in CD’s Atlantic neighborhood, its executive director—painter and writer Barbara Earl Thomas—describes the neighborhood as Beacon Hill in Southeast Seattle.

NAAM’s location reflects the settlement patterns of Seattle’s African American community. For many years, due to restrictive covenants and *de facto* segregation, most African Americans resided in the Central District. Since 1980, while African Americans reside in every Seattle neighborhood, a majority live in Southeast Seattle. During recent decades, Southeast Seattle neighborhoods have also attracted immigrants and refugees from across Africa.¹⁰

NAAM opened its doors at the former Colman School in March 2008, the culmination of a concept first proposed to Mayor Royer in 1981 by a multi-racial coalition, Community Exchange. The museum site too has a history that predates that of the institution itself. The battle over the site began in 1985 with a take-over of the vacant Colman School building by a group of African American community activists. For a number of years thereafter, a nonprofit formed to explore the idea of developing a museum of African American heritage either at the Colman School or elsewhere without a concrete plan emerging. Finally, in 2001 the Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle got involved and purchased the Colman School from the school district with an eye to developing most of the building as housing and locating the long-planned museum on the first floor. In 2008, though originally intended by the Urban League to operate under its umbrella, the museum spun off as an independent 501c3 private nonprofit corporation.¹¹

NAAM has three galleries that exhibit a variety of collections. The Journey Gallery features a permanent exhibition telling the story of African Americans’

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¹¹ HistoryLink File #8602, “Northwest African American Museum. Community activists—including Earl Debman, Michael Greenwood, Charlie James, and Omari Tahir-Garrett—occupied the vacant Colman School building for over eight years.
journey to and settlement in the Pacific Northwest, illustrated with a “cultural album” of photographs, artifacts, and narratives. The Northwest Gallery and Legacy Gallery are smaller spaces devoted to temporary exhibits and events on topics ranging from history, culture and the fine arts, to social and community-oriented issues. The museum’s café gallery and entry foyer provide additional space where local artists from the Pacific Northwest can show their work.

Past temporary and traveling exhibitions include: Stories That Cover Us (2009), with the Pacific Northwest African American Quilters; Tacoma’s Civil Rights Struggle: African Americans Leading the Way (2009); After Hours (2010), the Northwest jazz scene from 1930 to 1960; The Corner: 23rd & Union (2011), re-installation of the 2009-10 public art and community story-telling project about change in the Central District; IndiVisible: African-Native American Lives in the Americas (2011), exploring shared ancestry and cultural intersections; Checking Our Pulse (2010-11), with the Swedish Medical Center, highlighting health issues that affect the Puget Sound African American community; and The Test: The Tuskegee Project (2012), story of the first black aviators in the U.S. military.

In the fall of 2011, International Examiner arts editor Alan Lau alerted us to the opening of a show at NAAM called “Xenobia Bailey: The Aesthetics of Funk.” A Seattle native, Bailey grew up in a blue collar African American family in the Central District until 1974, when she left for New York (Brooklyn) where she studied industrial design at Pratt Institute and needlework from a fellow Swiss-Italian studio artist. Thirty-seven years later she returned to Seattle to do a solo show. “Radiant, crocheted mandalas in every...
thinkable color are hanging—still, yet throbbing—on sunny yellow walls at Northwest African American Museum in the manner of a proud homecoming parade.” As The Stranger art critic Jen Graves recounts: 12

This winter, having swept back in like a hovering storm, [Bailey] tells me, "I think my work is more Seattle than anything else."

Bailey's art is the meeting of imperial China, royal Africa, the funky 1970s, science fiction, Eastern healing, European needlework, Native American philosophy—this is not the white Seattle most people imagine when they think of the Pacific Northwest ...


Bailey’s “culturally rich beginnings in Seattle” started with Ruby Chow, daughter of Chinese immigrants, and her Buddhist preschool in Chinatown. 13 Teatime and naptime were in a temple, where elders made elaborate costumes and slippers for the Chi-ettes drill team and Chinese opera performers. Every day Bailey skipped nap and slipped upstairs to watch. Ruby Chow herself was one of Bailey's early cultural icons.

Ruby Chow’s husband, Ping, was a Chinese opera star. And Ruby had a Chinese cooking television show! I mean, she was sustaining her culture, but giving it to everybody.

Before leaving for New York, Bailey had discovered ethnomusicology at the University of Washington, studied tailoring and millinery at Seattle Central Community College, designed costumes for Black Arts/West (now defunct), and taught herself traditional hair-braiding. Last fall in Seattle, reflecting on “the evolution of my aesthetic of Funk,” Xenobia Bailey also credited the “discriminating taste of the African American Homemaking Mothers ... back in the days of my youth.”

... I can honestly say ... Seattle’s African American and surrounding communities, nurture a Soulful Funky Cultural Aesthetic like no other on this planet.

Alan Lau remarks on the city’s potential for cultural cross-fertilization: “Development of Seattle bred artist Xenobia Bailey testifies to the power of community and culture and how neighborhoods in Seattle can sometimes intersect.”


NAAM’s location (2300 S Massachusetts St at 23rd Avenue) is a clearly a challenge. South and east of downtown, it is cut off from the rest of the Central District by I-90. Although only 15 minutes from downtown by bus, the museum sits high on a hill in a residential neighborhood that is well removed from any foot traffic. Indeed, the school was built as an automobile-oriented site with a large parking lot between the street and the facility. Though served by numerous bus routes, the site is most accessible by car or as a field-trip destination for school children and other institutional groups. Still—especially given the $6.00 adult fee, free admission on first and second Thursdays, and free parking—the trip is well worthwhile.
Central District’s fit as a “natural” cultural district

With its cultural assets more dispersed than in Capitol Hill or Chinatown-International District, Central District is tends to be characterized by community culture and resident artists. As shown on SIAP’s Cultural Asset Index (CAI) map below, Seattle’s strongest concentrations of assets are in the two other districts under study, Capitol Hill and Chinatown-International District. Although the parts of Capitol Hill, First Hill, and the Chinatown-ID that are closest to Central score in the highest 10 percent on the CAI, only one block group actually located in Central—Pike/Pine—has a score this high.

![Cultural Asset Index Map](image)

Figure 6-16. Cultural Asset Index (0 = citywide average), Seattle block groups, 2010
Source: SIAP

The CD’s character a cultural district reflects its evolution as a predominantly residential area, which we discovered on our walks through the neighborhood. For example, the James and Janie Washington Jr. Foundation at 1816 26th Avenue—to our surprise—is a modest single-family residence in an all-residential neighborhood. The property houses the residence, studio, and garden of artist James Washington as well as his personal library and archives on 20th century American and Northwest art. The Foundation offers month-long residencies in sculpture making for Washington artists. However, besides a plaque that marks the site as “a culturally significant place,” there were no other indicators (on a Sunday morning in July) of its active use as an artists’ space.
Seattle Film Institute is housed at 1709 23rd Avenue (at Olive) in north Central District. SFI is a for-profit film school founded in 1994 offering full-time certificate and degree programs. SFI plans to relocate to a new building in the Interbay neighborhood in March 2013.

The understated nature of Central District cultural assets is illustrated by a cluster that occupies a one-story brick warehouse at 21st and Union. Central Cinema, at 1411 21st Ave, has developed a following as a movie-dinner-theater eat-drink-watch experience. The 126-seat café venue welcomes independent filmmakers and mixes live performance with projection. Next door is the nonprofit Reel Grrls (formerly housed in the Odd Fellows Building in Capitol Hill), an after school media and technology training program for girls 9 to 19. Around the corner on Union Street (in the same building) are 20/20 Cycle and Hollow Earth Radio. 20/20 Cycle is a bike shop that features Sealth, a handcrafted Seattle-built touring bike, and hosts about six shows a year with their favorite bands. Hollow Earth Radio, home of the annual Magma Festival, is a freeform online radio station that “presents a forum for underrepresented music, sounds and perspectives” in the Pacific Northwest.
There is historical precedent for the residential character of cultural life in the Central District. Born in 1931, jazz pianist Patti Bown grew up in the Central District “in the heart of Seattle’s upwardly mobile black community.” In their two-family house on 22nd Ave, the Bown household hosted weekly “at-homes” and “was a center of social and cultural activity.”

... [V]isiting black artists such as Marian Anderson and Roland Hayes sometimes boarded overnight, because they were not welcome in white-owned hotels. Neighborhood music gatherings were common. [As Patti recalls:] ‘We had the whole ground floor of this big, old-fashioned house, with a big backyard and a lot of fruit trees. It was really a beautiful place, lovely flowers in it. Saturday night, we would have “at-homes.” My mother and father were exquisite chefs, so they would cook unbelievable food. The bread was always homemade. There was fresh cake, dill bread, homemade booze. There would be music and people reading poetry and painters coming there to visit ...’ 14

The Seattle Art Museum (SAM) “listening party” series—originally intended as outreach to the Central District community in conjunction with the show Theaster Gates: The Listening Room—recalls this kind of “at-home” cultural practice. Gates’ solo show at SAM (Dec 2011 – Jul 2012) centered on “a collection of vinyl records that reflect cultural and social currents on the 60s, 70s and 80s.” SAM curator Sandra Jackson-Dumont proposed the concept of “listening parties” hosted by CD artists as a way to connect residents with the district’s jazz and pop music legacy. In the end, the “listening parties” with Theaster Gates’ collection happened in “SAM’s Record Store,” a temporary installation (in collaboration with Olson Kundig Architects) in a storefront in Pioneer Square.

Much of the current churning of the arts in the Central District appears to be due to artists and other cultural workers taking advantage of the relatively low rents and house values, given the neighborhood’s proximity to downtown and Capitol Hill, rather than to a concerted organizational or business scene. Generally, gentrification in the classic

14 Paul de Barros, Jackson Street After Hours, page 111.
sense—that is, displacement of poor or working-class residents through a process of property acquisition and investment by more prosperous people—is an active concern in the CD. Walking through Central District, we were keenly aware of a housing market in flux, where properties maintained for years at a modest level sit cheek-by-jowl with properties undergoing extensive renovation.

Most Seattleites appear to be at best conflicted about gentrification. Some ask what role the arts can or do play in the process. One vehicle for expression in the CD has been public art installations. In June 2009, on the vacant lot at 23rd and Union—once a thriving neighborhood commercial hub—public radio producers installed an artwork called The Corner: 23rd and Union—“an interactive public radio documentary about, for, and created with the people who make the corner part of their lives.” The purpose of the phone and video community storytelling project was to give people a chance to talk about neighborhood change in the Central District.15

The Corner installation, which came down a year later, inspired another community public art project called the Jackson Street Music History Project. A neighborhood group, Jackson Place Community Council, got permission from the Low Income Housing Institute to use part of the vacant lot at 21st and Jackson next to Blanche Lavizzo Park for a temporary community art installation. “Our art honors musicians from the Central District’s rich history of jazz, funk, soul/gospel, and hip hop much of which took place in the music clubs that used to line Jackson Street.” Partners included Pratt’s Youth Art Works, the creative lead on the project with Washington Middle School and Nova High School, Langston Hughes, 206 Zulu, and Casa Latina.

A neighbor of James and Janie Washington on 1800-block of 26th Avenue, Central District
Photo: SIAP 2011

Upon reconsideration, Central District’s arts scene may be characteristic of neighborhood cultural districts throughout Seattle. Our James Washington Foundation discovery was not an isolated experience. In all study areas, many address listings of cultural organizations and businesses were in fact either postal boxes (unconnected to arts space) or residences (presumably of a founder or director). In other words, our street surveys reinforced observations that Seattle has a surprisingly low level of organizational infrastructure and a rather high representation of resident artists and artist-entrepreneurs.

As a “natural” cultural district, of course, the CD is a study in both continuity and change. In 2011 Central District started “its very own art walk series” called Second Saturday, 1-5 PM monthly from May to November. “It’s time to reveal all the awesome artists and crafters hiding everywhere in this historic part of Seattle.”

Magma Fest 2013, Hollow Earth Radio’s month long underground music festival, March 2013
hollowearthradio.org/magma
Chinatown-International District’s Evolution as a “Natural” Cultural District

The Chinatown-International District, one of Seattle’s oldest districts, is sometimes described as the most complex neighborhood in the region. “It houses one of the most diverse Asian American settlements on the continent, in a space where Chinese, Filipinos, Japanese, Vietnamese, Koreans, and Cambodians have all settled together.”

According to the International District Housing Alliance, over 40 ethnic and cultural groups live and work in the area, and a majority of community members speak English as a second language.

Still, according to the 2005-09 American Community Survey, although a majority of residents are of Asian ancestry, over 40 percent identify as black, white, and/or Latino.

The original Chinatown, just east of Pioneer Square near 2nd Ave and Washington St South, was settled in the 1870s by Chinese immigrants who were “recruited to help lay the area’s first railroads, dig its coal mines, and can its salmon harvests.” But in 1886, following economic recession, whites expelled Chinese residents from the city. In the early 1900s, the Chinese community began to re-establish Chinatown on reclaimed tidal flats to the south and east of downtown. In the 1920s Japanese agricultural workers and businesses arrived and began to form a Japantown along Main Street from 4th to 7th Avenues. Filipino workers, who could enter the U.S. as “nationals” after the Spanish American War, lived in local SRO hotels and became yet another cog in the local economy. During World War II, African Americans migrating to Seattle for military service and defense jobs moved into areas vacated by the round-up and internment of Japanese-Americans. Post-war demolition to make way for construction of Interstate 5 through the heart of the district (1960s) and the Kingdome arena to the south (1970s) caused significant business and residential displacement. After the Vietnam War, in the 1980s, Southeast Asians began to arrive and form a “Little Saigon” along Jackson Street to the east.

We identified the Chinatown-International District (C-ID) for study because of our prior relationship with the Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience as well as the opportunity to explore a multi-ethnic neighborhood from the perspective of a “natural” cultural district. During our early fieldwork and conversations, we learned that neighborhood identity is a longstanding issue and reflects the area’s complexity. While outsiders refer to the area as the International District—or simply the ID—for people living and working there, it is important to maintain its formal identity as Chinatown-International District.

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1 Brown and Morrill, eds, Seattle Geographies (177-178).
2 International District Housing Alliance, Resident and Employee Parking Needs Assessment, December 2002 (1).
3 King County’s Kingdome domed sports stadium at 201 S King St was constructed from 1972 to 1976 and imploded on March 26, 2000.
4 In 1951 Mayor Devin proclaimed the neighborhood the “International Center” in recognition of its mix of ethnicities. Some of the Chinese community believed that “internationalism” threatened their historical leadership. In 1975 two groups submitted competing applications for a public corporation that
Within the district—generally south and east of downtown—are three sub-area identities. Chinatown, the central core, extends roughly from Fifth Avenue South to Interstate 5, with Jackson and King Streets as its primary commercial corridors. Up the hill is Japantown, centered on Main Street and 6th Avenue South to Jackson Street. Little Saigon is the area east of the I-5 freeway, officially part of the C-ID but physically cut off from its center. Centered along Jackson Street and 12th Avenue South—once the hub of Seattle’s after-hours’ jazz scene—Little Saigon dovetails with the Central District and the city’s historic African American community.

Figure 6-17. Chinatown-International District and its sub-districts

Seattle’s Chinatown-International District is east of Pioneer Square and south of the Central District. The sub-area identities noted above are suggestive of the district’s diverse immigrant history and ethnic communities.

Source: SIAP 2010

would allocate City Council funds to develop a community and social service center. A multiracial community group proposed an “International District,” and a Chinese benevolent association proposed a “Chinatown Preservation and Development Authority.” Mayor Ullman created a compromise corporation, “Seattle Chinatown/International District Public Development Authority” (SCIDpda). “To this day the name has stuck in the neighborhood, encompassing its true diversity, yet still recognizing the special history of the Chinese Americans.” Brown and Morrill, ed, Seattle Geographies (178)


The 45-year old Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience, a Smithsonian affiliate, has earned a national reputation as the only pan-Asian Pacific American museum in the U.S. and, in recent years, for its successful financing and adaptive reuse of an historic Chinatown hotel. The new home of the Wing Luke Museum is a conversion of the East Kong Yick Building—built in 1910 by an investment company with pooled funds from 170 Chinese immigrants—that served as a business and social center for the district. Historic Seattle, in conferring a Best Adaptive Reuse Project award to Wing Luke in 2009, cites the significance of the $23.2 million project.

The Museum's new facility expands its role as an economic and community resource for a distinctly diverse neighborhood, as one of Seattle's historic and creative treasures, and as a cultural institution of national significance.

The hotel site is in fact the Wing’s third incarnation in the Chinatown-International District. The Wing Luke Memorial Museum opened in 1967 as a small storefront on 8th Avenue South (north of King). From 1987 to 2007, the Wing Luke Asian Museum occupied the second floor of a former taxi garage on 7th Avenue South (off Jackson). In May 2008 the Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience reopened in the renovated hotel at 719 S King St (at 8th Avenue South). Wherever possible the renovation preserved features of the historic structure—including hotel rooms on the upper floors, a family association room, living quarters off Canton Alley, and the Yick Fung Company grocery store. Designed with “a unique blend of old and new,” the Wing’s permanent home reflects its social mission as “a living museum.”

Visitors to the Wing enter a bright Welcome Hall and are greeted by a ready staff. A Welcome Hall exhibit tells the story of Wing Luke—Chinese-born Seattle lawyer and civil rights activist, first Asian American to hold elected office in the Pacific Northwest, credited with Seattle’s Open Housing Ordinance of 1963—and in 1965 his death by plane crash at age 40. The museum—in addition to exhibition galleries and a marketplace shop—houses a community hall, a small story theater, a space for teens, the Luke Family Association office, a library and community heritage center, and an oral history lab. Visitors can take a guided tour of the Yick Fung hotel and company store, hearing about their role in Seattle’s immigrant story, as well as a neighborhood tour.

Exhibits run the gamut from a permanent exhibit on the history of Asian Pacific Americans in the Pacific Northwest (Honoring Our Journey); to a set of galleries devoted to the stories of particular communities, Vietnamese-, Indian-, Filipino-, and Cambodian-Americans (Community Portrait Galleries); to temporary “high art” exhibits by contemporary Asian American artists and artisans, such as glass and jewelry works, woodworking and furniture design, and fashion and garment-making (Special Exhibition Galleries); to current social issues, such as “APA girls and suicide” and “hidden

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7 Historic Seattle is a public development authority (PDA) devoted to architectural preservation in Seattle and King County, Washington (www.historicseattle.org).
homelessness” (New Dialogues Initiative); to a sound installation in the halls of the old hotel with the whispering voices of history. The Wing Luke Museum functions as a cultural and community center for the neighborhood, Seattle’s Asian Pacific American communities, and “hometown strangers” as well as a destination for visitors.


A permanent sound installation in the lightwell of the old hotel echoes with the whispering voices of history. They are the myriad voices and languages of letters—read aloud—between immigrants and their families back home. The original sound/sculpture installation, “Letter Cloud,” is a work by Seattle artists, Susie Kozawa and Erin Shie Palmer, 2008.

Photo: SIAP 2011

There is an unmistakable message, or more accurately messages, underpinning the museum. One message is validation. The Wing collects and tells stories about the presence of Asian Pacific Americans in American history and the extent to which they have been the object of discrimination and have mobilized to overcome it. This is the primary organizing principle of the permanent collection, Honoring Our Journey, which documents dimensions of community building among Asian Pacific Americans as well as key events in the attacks on these communities. (Notable among such events are the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, not repealed until 1943, and relocation and internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II, from 1942-46).

Another message is engagement. The Wing engages the community in the museum’s planning and curatorial processes. The museum has developed a community-based exhibition process, along with oral history gathering and storytelling, as the basis for
developing programs and exhibits. For an exhibit called “Cultural Confluence: Urban People of Asian and Native American Heritages” (2011), for example, community members wanted the focus to be on the Urban Indian experience and its connection to cultural genocide. Community process plays a particularly important role in developing exhibits that recount an intimate view of the experience of particular Asian Pacific American communities. Another strategy used for every major project is to generate a community asset inventory that includes people, places, objects, and experiences. “People don’t know they have things that are museum-worthy.” Documentation in the galleries highlights the role of community members, artists, and partner organizations in the development and execution of each exhibit.

An artist who works with Wing Luke Museum noted that the community curatorial process works better in some situations than in others. When there is a unified vision that all committee members can buy into, it works. But when committee members differ on an approach, the exhibit sometimes ends up as a compromise. Still, the artist agrees, the Wing’s commitment to a community process model keeps the museum grounded.

Navigating the duality of the old and the new—as voiced by community curators and contemporary artists—is central to the mission and challenge of the Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience. How to respect an immigrant-founded business and family legacy and bring an historic structure into the future? How to honor the social justice legacy of Wing Luke and make a gathering place “where the widest number of people can come and share”? How to share the common stories of old immigrant families and the particular experiences of new refugees? How to recognize multiple ethnic traditions and forge a pan-Asian Pacific American identity?

More than forty years after its modest beginnings, the Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience is rising to its full stature as a community-based regional institution. The Wing is participating in both a national dialogue about what it means to be Asian Pacific American and a local story-telling process that honors the multiple peoples and cultures encompassed by that identity.

**Chinatown**

The core of Chinatown—located to the south of Jackson between 5th Avenue and Interstate 5—is a collection of five- to seven-story buildings with the ground floor spaces occupied by restaurants and markets, shops and services of all sorts. Despite its central location, the area has a surplus of vacant and underused properties. Many of the buildings are owned by family associations with actual ownership spread among members of dozens of families. That the Wing Luke Museum was able to negotiate with the associations that owned the vacant East Kong Yick Building, and acquire and renovate the property, was an important achievement with respect to transitioning Chinatown toward desirable future development.

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8 For documentation of the process, see *Community-based Exhibition Model*, by Cassie Chin, Deputy Executive Director, Wing Luke Museum, 2006.
The Chinatown field study highlighted the issue of how to define “cultural asset” in a multi-ethnic community. Although SIAP maps indicated a significant concentration of cultural resources in Chinatown-International District, many were not visible on our walks through the neighborhood. Wing directors informed us that many groups on our list, while formally located in or near the C-ID, are not actually involved in the community. They asked about our definition of “cultural asset”—in particular, why we don’t include food as culture—and provided us with a neighborhood directory in which restaurants, markets, and specialty goods feature prominently. In spring 2012 the Wing opened an exhibit devoted to food as culture: “From Fields to Family: Asian Pacific Americans and Food.” “[The show] explores the traditions, techniques and mouth-watering stories of food through culture and cooking techniques passed on through home and restaurant over the years.”

Among the cultural assets missing from our inventory is a lovely site at the center of Chinatown called Hing Hay Park (which translates as “Park for Pleasurable Gatherings”). According to Seattle Parks and Recreation, this public park at Maynard Ave S and King St, designed and constructed from 1970-74, is a symbol of the integration of the Asian Americans into Seattle’s community life. The terraced plaza—with its “authentic pagoda,” benches, and chess tables—invites a variety of social and cultural activities, spontaneous and planned, at most any time of day and in all seasons.

People gathered in Hing Hay Park to welcome in the Year of the Snake with the Lunar New Year Celebration on Sat, Feb 9, 2013.

Photo: IDEA Space shared Downtown Seattle’s photo, Facebook, Feb 2013.

A less visible but no less valuable local institution is the International Examiner (IE), a free semi-monthly newspaper, founded—not so coincidentally—in 1974 as the community newspaper of the International District. Its history is a story in itself, but the spirit of its mission is consistent: “to promote critical thinking, dialogue and action by providing timely, accurate and culturally sensitive coverage of relevant APA matters.” Its tagline is: “The only nonprofit pan-Asian American media in the country. FIND YOUR

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11 www.iexaminer.org/about-ie/history/
INSPIRASIAN.” In 1977 “the indispensable Alan Lau began to write about the arts.” As arts editor, grocer-artist-poet Alan Chong Lau continues to compose IE’s far-reaching column—Arts, Etc.—knitting together the region’s APA and arts communities.

Wing Luke Museum’s relocation to its permanent home on King Street enabled another Chinatown-based cultural institution to build its capacity. Since 1987 the museum had shared the converted taxi garage at 409 7th Ave South (at Jackson) with Theatre Off Jackson (TOJ), a company that once produced work primarily by Northwest Asian American Theatre (NWAAT). In 2005, due to NWAAT concerns about sustainability, TOJ developed a new mission and business model:

Theatre Off Jackson exists to advance Seattle’s vibrant artistic community. We accomplish this by operating a sustainable venue, facilitating a collaborative network for artists and engaging audiences by providing accessible, innovative work.

Photo by Joe Mabel 2007, Wikimedia commons

In short, TOJ reorganized to develop programming with broader community appeal and—given increasing scarcity of affordable space for small and mid-sized performing groups—decided to focus on co-production and facility management. Within the next few years, NWAAT stepped out of the picture and Wing Luke relocated. TOJ has thus been able to realize its vision as “home for the most adventurous theatre in Seattle.” Downstairs is a popular lobby bar and intimate, underground 140-seat theater used for performances, concerts, film screenings, and readings. The Upstairs Gallery is a large, open room used for special events and exhibits. TOJ curates and co-produces artists and groups “with high artistic credibility” (many aren’t 501c3s) for a fee of $225 per show or 20 percent of the gross income, whichever is greater. Neighborhood groups and Asian Pacific American artists receive a discount. Recent productions by Chinatown-ID’s
“independent art-house” include: Solo Performance Fest, Salon of Shame, Whedonesque Burlesque, the 14/48 Festival (14 new plays in 48 hours), and SketchFest 2012 (The World’s Original Sketch Comedy Festival).

Theatre Off Jackson (TOJ) attributes much of its success in the neighborhood to the local public development authority—Seattle Chinatown International District Preservation and Development Authority (SCIDpda)—which owns the building that TOJ manages and operates. SCIDpda has been “very supportive” about TOJ’s need for a long-term lease and an affordable rate. However, with characteristic Chinatown complexity, a local optometrist—not their landlord—owns the land. The site’s 31-year land lease is coming to an end, which opens up great uncertainty for TOJ about site control and its potential for infrastructure investment, renovation planning, and capital campaigns.

SCIDpda—founded in 1975 to “preserve, promote and develop [the district] as a vibrant community and unique ethnic neighborhood”—has spawned one of the newer features of the Chinatown-ID cultural scene through its IDEA Space neighborhood design center.

For over 30 years SCIDpda functioned as “a typical CDC” with a focus on development of affordable housing and assisted living facilities, operations, and property management. During its 2007-08 strategic planning process, the PDA identified arts-based revitalization as a way to build on the momentum generated by the Wing Luke Museum and model the success of projects like Tashiro Kaplan Artists Lofts (Artspace).

IDEA Space has developed rather as a young and activist initiative to use the arts as a vehicle of community engagement and a tool of community revitalization. “Let’s pull people together to do arts! ... We came out of the gate running and found we could do a lot.”

IDEA Space, our design and resource center, serves as a catalyst for spurring dialogue and mobilizing community members to participate in the decisions that will shape the neighborhood. Our multilingual staff is able to inform community members about neighborhood projects, collect their feedback, and ensure our
community’s voice is heard. We also connect our community with the resources necessary to accomplish neighborhood improvement projects.12

IDEA Space has a walk-in resource center and gallery facing Hing Hay Park. The center runs four labs—Business Lab, Design Lab, Neighborhood Safety Lab, and Real Estate Lab—that provide a range of design services, technical assistance, and collaborative tools for businesses, organizations, and residents. They support local cultural institutions (such as Wing Luke Museum’s monthly summer JamFest) and bring the arts into community initiatives (such as public artists working with immigrant parents on the renovation of International Children’s Park.)

IDEA Space with community and cultural partners (and support by Seattle Department of Neighborhoods and State DOT) is active in the Historic Alley Project to upgrade and redesign historic Canton Alley (just outside The Wing) and Maynard Alley in Chinatown. Alley events bring life back into the alleys and help engage the community in envisioning their comeback as part of the pedestrian streetscape. In Canton Alley during 2012, IDEA Space had monthly summer Alley Parties, partnering with Wing Luke’s JamFest and Arts in Canton Alley; a Spooky Alley Party for Halloween; and a Holiday Pop-Up Shop in December.

IDEA Space with Shunpike, nonprofit arts consultant, was instrumental in the 2010 start-up of Storefronts Seattle to address the growing number of vacant storefronts in Chinatown-ID. (Other partners include 4Culture, City Department of Planning and Development, City Office of Arts and Cultural Affairs, and community-based groups.) The purpose is to animate commercial properties and enliven street life by making vacant ground floor spaces available to artists and creative enterprises at low (or free) rent on a three-month basis. Storefronts projects range from window displays, to installation studios, to working studios staffed on a regular basis. The program represents IDEA Space’s responsive approach to matching needs of artists (affordable display and work space, not housing) with SCIDpda assets (as a commercial property owner), with C-ID neighborhood needs (eyes on the street).

Storefronts Seattle has evolved as a welcome broker between property owners and artist-entrepreneurs in Pioneer Square as well as C-ID. In Pioneer Square, we visited Daniel Carrillo, photographer and printmaker specializing in

12 See websites: SCIDpda.org and idea-space.info.
archaic photographic methods, who produced a series of portraits of contemporary Seattle artists. Carrillo shared his Storefronts space (604 Second Ave) with Youth In Focus, a teen photography program, and did workshops demonstrating his large-format antique camera and the wet plate collodion process. When his lease expired (fall 2011), he moved with other artists to Georgetown, a former industrial neighborhood in south Seattle.

In Chinatown-ID, Storefronts spaces house an eclectic mix of creative enterprises. Storefronts enterprises are intended to be temporary, but some are achieving longevity. The Seattle Pinball Museum (508 Maynard Ave S), for example, agreed to be a Storefronts tenant from mid-December 2010 through the end of February 2011. They never moved out. In March the owners signed a lease with the landlord to stay and invited the neighborhood to celebrate with a Lion Dance and an hour of free admission. The Wing Luke Museum is delighted to have Pinball Museum in the neighborhood.

We love them! ... What we want from [newcomers] is that they are respectful of historic cultures and they participate in neighborhood activities. But some galleries who come in may as well be dead space, because they don’t participate in the community.

Seattle Pinball Museum—“part arcade, part museum, part art exhibit”—is now listed in A Guide to the Chinatown-ID. Yelp reviewers give it 4½ (of 5) stars: “For $7, you can get endless play on a variety of pinball machines.” “Very cool spot.”

Seattle Pinball Museum at 508
Maynard Ave South, Chinatown-
International District
Photo: SIAP 2011

Another Storefronts Seattle start-up seeking permanent space in the Chinatown-ID was IDEA Odyssey Gallery (666 South Jackson St), an artists’ collective and nonprofit gallery operating under SCIDpda. Started by three photographers, the collective recruits “visual artists of diverse cultures” (primarily of Asian, African, Latino, Native American and Pacific Islander heritage) and “artists who explore culture, diversity and identity in their work.” The Exhibition Statement of its May-June 2012 Open Call show called “IDxID: New Identities” describes such an exploration:13

13 From IDEA Odyssey Gallery website at: http://ideaoysseygallery.com/
Census boxes, credit reports, online avatars, passports (and the absence thereof). These are just a few social conditions that claim to tell us who we are and what we do. How do artists give us new maps to navigate these territories? How do they pull us up? Whole? Fractured? ...

When we get to the new world what will it look like? [...] snapshots depict two mass transit riders and their semi-anonymity as they attempt to organize private lives in public. [...] women’s portraits intimate a new convention of femininity arriving as people of color move to become an American racial majority. ...

The Odyssey concept germinated among local artists during Chinatown-ID’s first Art Walk, organized during the summer of 2009 by IDEA Space with Wing Luke Museum, Theatre Off Jackson, and other community organizations (Interim CDA and Chinatown-International District Business Improvement Area). Their mission is to bring contemporary art to this historic neighborhood and in so doing contribute to its community and economic development.

IDEA Odyssey Gallery, Storefronts space at 666 S Jackson St, opened in May 2011 with a show called “A Sense of Place.” Photo: ideaodysseygallery.com/blog/

IDEA Odyssey founders envisioned a permanent presence in Chinatown-ID, community partnerships to engage residents, and synergy with other cultural sites to generate critical mass. While they were in lease negotiations with the property owner, they were allowed to extend the Storefronts’ residency past the standard three months. Unfortunately, the parties were unable to come to a mutually agreeable lease. At the end of August 2012, after one year of rotating exhibitions, IDEA Odyssey Gallery had to vacate the space to make room for one of the creative enterprises on Storefronts Seattle’s waiting list. Thus, even with the sweat equity of the artists and the sympathy
and support of the landlord, IDEA Odyssey Gallery could not negotiate a lease to stay at 666 S Jackson St. A fellow artist observed:

The landlord was supportive but in the end needed a minimal amount of money to keep the space viable, and the cooperative, try as they might, just could not get enough cash flow to make the space self-sustaining. It is a difficult situation, even under the best of circumstances, for nonprofits and artists to sustain themselves in a neighborhood and stay within the city limits.

IDEA Odyssey maintained its online presence and went on hiatus “to rest and re-imagine what model would work best for fulfilling our mission.” During the holidays, member artists were featured in SCIDpda/IDEA Space’s Canton Alley Pop-Up Shop. Early in 2013, the collective began to plan two group shows and a collaborative project with elders in Chinatown-International District.

Storefronts Seattle continues to incubate arts and activate space in the C-ID. In January 2013 a group called the Massive Monkees stirred up excitement by opening the neighborhood’s first hip hop dance studio—The Beacon. The Beacon occupies the ground floor of the historic Milwaukee Hotel, now Milwaukee Apartments, at 664 S King Street. Massive Monkees is a Seattle-born dance troupe that has traveled the world performing in break dance competitions. Now the “b-boys” want a home, in part to teach dance to kids so they can see that becoming a performing artist or entertainer is a viable option. So far, so good. “The free after-school program is serving a great group of kids every week, and we couldn’t be happier with all of the guest artists who have dropped in to collaborate.” But their three-month lease expires on April 9th. As a commercial group that wants to be part of the C-ID, they may have a chance for a long-term lease.  

**Japantown—**Seattle’s historic Nihonmachi

The Chinatown-International District continues to struggle between the pulls of internationalism—however defined—and those of its local ethnic communities. Our conversations elaborated the diversity of the area and the different needs and directions envisioned by people invested in the community. One of the most striking shifts concerns Japantown.

Historically Japantown or *Nihonmachi*—the center of Japanese commercial activity—was “up the hill” from Chinatown, along Main Street from 4th to 7th Streets. However, although a few businesses survived—like the Higo Variety Store on Jackson Street—Japantown never recovered from the internment of Japanese-Americans during WWII. Today along Main Street, in the place of commercial activity, are a number of subsidized...
high-rise housing developments and a community garden (Danny Woo International District Community Garden), which is part of Kobe Terrace Park.

Adjacent to the park was the Nippon Kan Theater, a Japanese-American theater started in 1909, reopened in 1981 but closed finally in 2005. Once a hub of the community, the site is now a messenger business. Fortunately, Nippon Kan’s original stage curtain—“a tapestry of painted ads” that had been lost and forgotten for decades—has been found and conserved and now hangs across the story theater stage at the Wing Luke Museum. Still, for many, Nippon Kan represents “a lost legacy.” “It’s sad that the community let [Nippon Kan] slip through its fingers. ... Every space and every place has a special feel.”

The Panama Hotel, the SRO made famous by Jamie Ford’s 2009 novel Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet, likewise fell into a neglected state, as did most of the block. The hotel and associated businesses served Japanese immigrants and other itinerant workers (in the railroad, fishing, and forest industries) and international travelers from 1910 to 1941, when Japantown disappeared. The current owner bought the hotel in 1985 from the Hori family, the owners since 1938, and has been slowly working to rehabilitate it. In 2001 the Panama Hotel Tea House opened at 605 1/2 Main St. The upper floors are run as a bed and breakfast. A small museum in the basement houses the unclaimed belongings of local Japanese families, stored there since 1941 and never reclaimed. Visitors can tour the traditional communal bathhouse or sento.

The aesthetic of the renovated hotel and the 500- and 600-blocks of South Main Street distinguish it from much of the Chinatown-ID. The Panama Hotel Tea House resembles coffee shops throughout Seattle, while in Chinatown many places that advertise espresso in the window do not actually serve coffee. The hotel owner works doggedly to keep the public environment of the block orderly and clean and to beautify the sidewalk with potted geraniums. She recounts her efforts to push the itinerant population that inhabits the C-ID and Pioneer Square to respect her standards, for example, by getting them to pick up their trash or “chasing after them with a broom.”
In this sense, the South Main Street blocks look more like Pioneer Square (and, at that, its more upscale sections) than like much of the C-ID. Arts businesses are moving in—Cullom Gallery, Artform Custom Framing and, most recently, 519 Studios and Prole Drift Gallery. Indeed, the Panama Hotel owner spoke of “the moat” that separates Japantown from Pioneer Square and her dream that the two be bridged by a large below-ground parking garage (to relieve one of the district’s persistent problems) and a number of artisan shops that would create a continuous shopping and arts district. Chinatown shopkeepers, by and large, have not bought into the Japantown aesthetic. From a Panama Hotel point of view, Chinatown merchants are resistant to change.

Chinatown aesthetics, however, represent a broader set of social class and generational tensions. The IDEA Space team, in particular, has articulated the importance of “authenticity,” which represents a different tack on the arts and culture in the C-ID. One wrote a column in the *International Examiner* to decry “the relentless use of dragons as a cultural image for the ID.” Promotion of cultural stereotypes to brand streetscape and signage, as a pitch to regional visitors and tourists, is “a step backwards” as an economic development strategy. “Creative use of open space and designs can celebrate our sense of place in the ID and attract visitors and customers. ... If we are an authentic ethnic community, the tourists will come.”

Of course, the ethnic enclaves within the C-ID are neither homogenous nor discrete. The Japanese community has had long connections with downtown and greater Seattle. Uwajimaya, an Asian market located at 5th Ave South and South King St, is both community institution and tourist destination. Uwajimaya attracts “the most diverse clientele in Seattle ... from itinerants who steal beer, to low-income seniors who come for daily specials, to the wealthy who drive in to buy Oriental specialties.” What began in Tacoma in 1928 with a Japanese immigrant selling fish to workers off the back of his truck is now the largest Japanese supermarket in the Pacific Northwest. ¹⁵

Still, even to “resurrect the idea of Japantown” has required foresight and commitment to cultural preservation. In 2004 the owner of Higo Variety Store—a five-and-dime run by the Murakami family since 1932—closed the store and set out to find a “steward” for the property who would “keep the legacy of Japantown.” He approached the artist-architect team, John Bisbee and Binko Chiong-Bisbee, who for nine years had run KOBO gallery in Capitol Hill showing studio work of Japanese artisans and functional Northwest artists. The couple agreed to open KOBO at Higo—an expansive storefront at 602-608 South Jackson St with “vintage” interiors, merchandise artifacts, and family archives—on an experimental basis. They have since committed to the challenge of developing a destination gallery for contemporary art and design and preserving the cultural history

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¹⁵ The company has three regional markets (Bellevue, Beaverton, and Renton) as well as its Seattle flagship store. In fall 2000 Seattle Uwajimaya moved one block south to anchor the new Uwajimaya Village, which includes a 176-unit apartment complex above the store and additional retail—Kinokuniya Bookstore (a Japanese bookstore chain), Paris Miki Optical, Savvy Asian Cosmetics, Salon Juno, Chase Bank, and an Asian food court.
of Higo and Japantown—and thus to the regeneration of the Chinatown-International District.

Over the past eight years, KOBO owners have worked to restore and renew the space and its contents in sync with this vision. KOBO at Higo works as a contemporary artisan gallery and shop set in a refurbished 1930s showroom. They schedule six shows a year—featuring ceramics, jewelry, furniture, sculpture, textiles, metal, works on paper, photography, and mixed media—and make space available for performances, special events, and larger exhibitions. In summer 2012, years of in-house “urban archaeology”—in partnership with the Wing Luke Museum and with a National Park Service grant to preserve the history of Japanese American internment—culminated in a permanent exhibition called “Meet Me at Higo: An Enduring Story of a Japanese American Family.” The exhibit features a 1920s booth from a local café, original pendant lights dating from Higo’s opening in 1932, and multimedia screens showing historical images and an interview with the two Murakami sisters.

KOBO’s structure and site have also received attention. With city funding, the owners have made improvements to the façade—rebuilt the historic Higo Variety Store sign; displayed names of new businesses in the building; and installed “striking black awnings” that upgrade the Jackson Street streetscape and “provide an elegant new element to the International District.”

The newest project is Higo Garden, a plan to reactivate a hidden garden space behind the building, with Wing Luke Museum as lead partner (and ArtPlace grantee). Wing Luke is worried about the proximity of the site—and C-ID neighborhood businesses generally—to construction of the new city streetcar line. But Binko is optimistic, expressing KOBO’s arts-entrepreneurial approach to neighborhood revitalization.

I never would have imagined all of this coming together in this way when we first embarked on taking over this space in 2004. We are very excited about these new developments and how they will contribute to helping the overall neighborhood.
The September 2012 issue of *Seattle Magazine* featured shopping in the Chinatown-International District—and a photograph of “eclectic Kobo at Higo’s in-store ‘museum’.”

**Little Saigon**

Little Saigon is a small business district east of Chinatown, where the International District intersects the Central District. The majority of businesses are owned by Vietnamese who came to Seattle as refugees after the fall of Saigon in 1975. At first the refugees settled in Chinatown, but they soon noticed that there were lots of vacant buildings “up the hill” around 12th and Jackson, so that became the draw for new businesses. Thus since the 1980s, Jackson Street at 12th Avenue S—once the heart of Seattle’s “after hours” jazz scene—has become the hub of Seattle’s Vietnamese community.

This intersection was a thriving center of jazz music decades earlier during the ’30s, ’40s and ’50s. Jazz luminaries such as Ray Charles, Quincy Jones and Ernestine Anderson played in the booming jazz clubs along Jackson Street during this period. 17

People report that Little Saigon is poorly organized at the community level, with few stable organizations and few connections to citywide resources. Even the Friends of Little Saigon say that the community “does not have any civic institutions capable of advocating and engaging on the community’s behalf.” Most of the Chinatown-International District cultural resources that SIAP has tracked, as indicated on Figure 6-18, are located west of the freeway, outside of Little Saigon.

The Friends of Little Saigon (FLS) have emerged to address concerns about the neighborhood’s vulnerability in light of anticipated development pressure. Public initiatives—rezoning of South Downtown, construction (underway) of the First Hill streetcar line, and proposed rezoning of Seattle Housing Authority’s Yesler Terrace property—signal potential redevelopment of this low-rise commercial-industrial district to high-density, mixed-use development. “Little Saigon is facing displacement forces of tsunami intensity.” During 2012 SCIDpda’s IDEA Space worked with FLS to develop a

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16 http://www.seattlemag.com/article/shopping-international-district

17 Friends of Little Saigon website: friendsoflittlesaigon.org.
community vision and action plan and community engagement strategy for the next two years. 18

Wing Luke Museum and IDEA Space with FLS and other community-based organizations have been working to raise awareness of Little Saigon, build local capacity, and connect it with the rest of the Chinatown-ID community and greater Seattle. Engaging the community involves getting people to think about what they value and talk about what they’d change “to improve the social, cultural, and economic fabric of Little Saigon.” In 2010 the community launched an annual photo contest—EXPOSED—open to people of all ages to submit their interpretation of Vietnamese Americans in Little Saigon. Photographs are invited in four categories: food, spaces and places, the marketplace, and culture. All 2012 photographs were exhibited in the C-ID for a community vote on First Thursday at Inscape Arts (discussed below). Winning photographs were exhibited at Seattle Center.

Another strategy to strengthen Little Saigon’s community identity is public art. Friends of Little Saigon and Interim Community Development Association held a design competition for signage at the intersection of 12th and Jackson. An RFP called for artists, architects, designers or group of designers to submit applications for the opportunity to design a sign for this site. “This sign will represent the experiences of the Vietnamese-American and ‘Little Saigon’ community and will also provide a map to help visitors navigate through the Little Saigon neighborhood.” An advisory committee received 20 design concepts for a new informational kiosk and selected four finalists, which were presented to the community for public voting (800 votes were submitted online or in-person). Estimated construction start date is late 2012.

“Mother Vietnam” by Tran Sinh Duyer & Linda Letran, winning kiosk design for Little Saigon neighborhood. Source: Friends of Little Saigon, April 2012.

Chinatown-International District’s fit as a “natural” cultural district

Certainly, the Chinatown-International District is a complex place. How does the concept of “natural” cultural district fit the realities of the C-ID? From one perspective, few core cultural resources are located in Chinatown-ID, and some appear to be more a spillover from Pioneer Square. A closer look reveals that, especially given its high poverty rate, the C-ID scores high on SIAP’s cultural asset index—indicating that the concentration of cultural organizations, businesses, and artists in the neighborhood exceeds expectations.

The issue of what is a “cultural asset,” as raised by Wing Luke Museum directors, plays into the ambiguities in our conceptualization of a “natural” cultural district. On the one hand, to do comparative data collection across cities and neighborhoods, we need a consistent definition of cultural asset. (To define food as culture, for example, would be a methodological nightmare.) On the other hand, we can certainly complement a neighborhood’s cultural asset inventory with community assets that reflect local values.

Moreover, we know that a key feature of a “natural” cultural district is the wider social networks generated by clusters of cultural and community assets. Clearly the Wing is engaged with multiple levels of community. On one level, the museum functions as a community center in a transitional neighborhood. The C-ID has among the highest poverty and vacancy rates in the region, exacerbated by a concentration of homeless people—along with drug trade and crack cocaine use—spilling over from Pioneer Square. At the same time, the museum reinforces the historic role of Chinatown-International District as the cultural hub of Seattle’s diverse and dispersed Asian and Pacific American communities. 19 “The more people disperse, the more they want their history—their historic center—as a touchstone.” An anchor institution like Wing Luke Museum demonstrates the capacity of culture and the arts to build and bridge both place and identity communities.

SCIDpda’s IDEA Space team is probing the question of how communities of color fit into mainstream models of a cultural district. The team was disappointed that the city’s Cultural Overlay District Advisory Committee (CODAC), active from 2008-09, focused on the need for planning tools to mediate real estate markets in “typical arts districts” like Capitol Hill. However, CODAC and Seattle Arts Commission’s Facilities and Economic Development Committee have been less concerned with the space and place issues of cultural districts like Chinatown-International District. Even SCIDpda’s board articulates

19 Counter to its “model minority” stereotype, Seattle’s APA community is far more diverse than many people appreciate. As noted by Carina A. del Rosario: “The APA community itself is extremely complex, comprised of immigrants and refugees who have been here for decades or just a few years, and those who are second, third, fourth or fifth generation in the US. If one disaggregates demographic information, it is clear that while certain ethnic groups [Chinese, Japanese] within the APA community are among those living in prosperous suburban communities; others (such as Filipinos, Cambodians, Hmong and Pacific Islanders) struggle with poverty and high dropout rates in the city’s urban core and outskirts.”
a narrow view of arts-based revitalization—that is, how to catalyze construction of affordable artists’ housing and studios.

IDEA Space seeks to build its capacity as a neighborhood design center serving a multicultural community. The center is organized around four Labs in order to develop its community practice on an experimental basis. Drawing on its own experience (as well as research and practice elsewhere), IDEA Space has been working to articulate its role as the design and arts arm of a community-based public development authority. We discussed how the concept of “natural” cultural district works in neighborhoods like the Chinatown-International District and how it could inform their work. The team’s operating principles suggest that the concept is a good fit.

*Core objectives for the C-ID are to boost neighborhood economic vitality while preserving cultural integrity and community stability.*

*Artists and cultural workers can be agents in the revitalization and sustainability processes—that is, the arts are part of the intervention strategy.*

*Artists engaged in social practice have potential as community mediators—between the past and the future, the old and the young, the insiders and the outsiders, the local and the global.*

*Placemaking in the C-ID must be a community-building process, driven from the bottom-up and the inside-out, and of necessity must bridge the younger with the “ruling” generations.*

*Sustainability, like community, is a work-in-progress. It’s about how not what—less about vision or outcome and more about the process whereby the community shapes its future.*

A major development undertaken during the course of this study—the conversion of the old U. S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) Building into an artists’ center—indicates a new cultural hub emerging in the Chinatown-International District. The federal government opened the massive edifice on the western edge of Chinatown (at 815 Seattle Blvd South/Airport Way S) in 1932 and vacated it in 2004.20 A central function of this station was enforcement of the Chinese Exclusion Act, which involved segregation of Chinese from “whites”. During its 73-year history, hundreds of thousands of INS detainees from all over the world were incarcerated in this facility. The four-story neo-classical structure is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places. With the economic downtown, the original plan to turn the building into office space was no longer viable. Conversion to artists’ studios was much cheaper. And it’s okay if ghosts linger. “Artists are outsiders anyway.”

In October 2010 the space opened officially as INSCAPE, calling itself “the largest arts and cultural enclave in Seattle.” A Grand Open House in July 2012 celebrated completion of the project with studios (work space only, not live/work) that

accommodate up to 125 tenants. Artists and artisans of all disciplines, creative businesses and nonprofit organizations—all are welcome “to build a mutually supportive alliance that engages the Greater Seattle community in the experience of art and the celebration of culture.” INSCAPE sits at the juncture of three cultural districts—its INS history links it with the Chinatown-International District; its public persona, like First Thursday Art Walks, links it with Pioneer Square; and its function as an arts production cluster links it with SoDo and Georgetown.

INSCAPE—Seattle’s former INS Building redefined by Culture, Arts, Preservation and Engagement

Source: www.inscapearts.org, July 2012

What does Chinatown-International District need to become a sustainable cultural district? A long-time Seattle artist points out that an artist is “just another person in the community with certain things to offer” and—like other people—needs a healthy neighborhood in order to thrive.

What makes a neighborhood? A neighborhood is a place with families living there. With families comes another dynamic. Artists need low rents and places to congregate. Density without families—like Pioneer Square or Pike Place Market—does not make a sustainable neighborhood. Artists need places to congregate, hospitable and welcoming places to gather—that are not just for artists.

In short, the C-ID needs more kids.
Implications of the Seattle Case Study for “Natural” Cultural Districts

Despite the recession, and unlike Philadelphia and Baltimore, Seattle is growing and anticipates an additional 120,000 residents and 115,000 jobs by 2031. The State has mandated that the City revise its Comprehensive Plan to guide new development over the next two decades. A core challenge will be to “encourage targeted density” and at the same time “improve the quality of the public realm.” Seattle is a city of garden neighborhoods, set atop a ring of hills affording views of Puget Sound, inland lakes and the not-so-distant mountains beyond. “There are elements of the natural, built and cultural environment that truly make Seattle Seattle,” says Kristian Kofoed, the planner responsible for developing the Plan’s urban design document.21

A number of comp plan challenges will impact the future of the arts and culture in Seattle. The zoning code, for example, needs revision to encourage creative retrofit and reuse of existing buildings, whether or not historic. The new plan should boost support of neighborhood diversity—economic, cultural, and generational.

The great in-migration to urban centers of the last three decades has been dominated by young singles and couples, and by the newly retired. While this has brought badly needed investment and new attention to safety and security, it has also driven out artists and other economically fragile groups.

Several interviewees suggested that a “crescent” of neighborhoods surrounding downtown is where Seattle’s future arts-based community development is likely to take place. The neighborhoods that comprise this crescent are, from south to north: Pioneer Square, Chinatown-International District, Yesler Terrace, Central District, Capitol Hill, and South Lake Union.

The places that we have studied are all part of this crescent. In some ways, this was a practical decision. Because they are close to downtown, we could get to them relatively quickly and maximize the benefits of fieldwork. Also, the networks of contacts that we collected in these areas overlapped and reinforced one another.

Moreover, the contrasts among the neighborhoods—Chinatown-International District, which faces economic challenges, including poverty and vacancy, but also is seeing new businesses and development potential; Central District, which merges an older, less dynamic African American cultural fabric with a newer, younger set of Capitol Hill artists and enterprises; and Capitol Hill, a “vibrant neighborhood” that may be “tipping” out of being an arts district—have provided a rich set of case studies. The Seattle study has helped us understand the importance of urban and regional context. How do “natural” cultural districts fare in an economically vital region? Can the arts contribute to neighborhood quality and community sustainability in the context of growth? How does an engaged civil society work with city planners and elected officials to influence the trajectory of neighborhoods as well as the cultural economy?

In the summer of 2011, the Seattle Department of Planning and Development began to solicit input from the public on Seattle’s new comprehensive plan. “How do urban villages grow? What can we do to feed and seed them?” A companion question is how can urban design help create and preserve “Seattle’s sense of place— the look and feel of the city”?

In December 2011 the Seattle Office of Arts & Cultural Affairs (OACA) and the Seattle Arts Commission (SAC) convened Cultural Space Seattle, a two-day conference with a public forum and two working sessions including a cross-section of stakeholders. The decades-long concern addressed by the event was Seattle’s acute need for “accessible, affordable, dedicated space for artists, organizations, and cultural groups of all types and sizes.”

In May 2012 OACA with SAC released a report on conference findings and recommended next steps to address cultural space needs in the region. They presented findings “to a full house at City Hall” and have continued to advocate for proper funding for a cultural space program at the City of Seattle. In November 2012 City Council passed two additions to the budget, increasing funds for cultural facilities and funding a half-time cultural space program leader at the Arts Office. “[This is] a longtime goal of us activists. It’s the important step towards a city cultural space program.”

SIAP anticipates continuing to learn from Seattle about the evolution and changing character of “natural” cultural districts. We look forward to watching Seattle’s new cultural space program and its relationship to development of the city’s urban villages, preservation of its “sense of place,” and sustainability of a neighborhood-based cultural economy.
Seattle Contributors

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John Bisbee, KOBO Shop and Gallery, KOBO at Higo
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Chapter 7. The Social Impact of “Natural” Cultural Districts

In this chapter, having immersed ourselves in the details of three cities and seven cultural districts, we pull back to examine what we have learned in comparative perspective. We address two questions. First, how can we classify different types of cultural districts? Second, what impacts do these different types of districts have on the art worlds of the three cities and on their neighborhoods?

We propose two ways of looking at different types of districts. The first focuses on the composition of a cultural district’s ecosystem. How many of different types of cultural assets are there in a neighborhood, and what is the balance among different resources? The second grows out of a typology we used in the case studies. It examines the spatial and socio-economic advantages enjoyed by some districts, but not others, as a way of examining their trajectory over time.

The chapter then turns to impacts. It argues that each typology leads to a different set of impacts. The cultural composition of a district appears to have an important impact on its sustainability over time. The spatial and economic status of a district influences the economic and non-economic impacts on its neighborhood.

Types of “Natural” Cultural Districts

One of the goals of the three-city project was to gain a fine-grained understanding of the nature of organic cultural districts. During our initial investigations, our primary focus was on the density of cultural assets. Our cultural asset index (CAI) was based on a scaling of the three major assets—nonprofit organizations, commercial cultural firms, and resident artists—in a community.

Here we investigate two other ways of assessing the cultural ecology of a city and its neighborhoods. First, we assess the composition of a neighborhood’s cultural sector. Obviously, a district’s character is as influenced by what kinds of resources are located within it as it is by their total number. In particular, we examine the diversity and
balance of different types of assets within a district. We hypothesize that the composition of a cultural district influences its sustainability and resilience. In particular, we ask if a complex district with a diverse cultural ecology is more sustainable than one where a single type of resource dominates. Second, we examine the role of economic and geographic advantage in defining cultural districts. In contrast to composition, which is focused primarily on the art world itself, this dimension is concerned with how the arts connect with other measures of social inclusion and well-being. A vital cultural life is an essential element of social well-being. In some neighborhoods, achieving a lively cultural scene is easier than in other neighborhoods. This perspective allows us to examine the social context within which these districts develop.

**Composition**

In this section we investigate the composition of cultural districts within our three cities. As a starting point, we examine the concentration of the three types of assets across our cities. Chapter 2 discusses the distinctive cultural ecologies of the three cities, with Philadelphia characterized by a very large number of nonprofits relative to its commercial sector and artists, and Seattle simply having a very high number of cultural assets relative to its population.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Within quarter mile</th>
<th>Within block group</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Commercial cultural firms</td>
<td>Nonprofit cultural organizations</td>
<td>Artists</td>
<td>Commercial cultural firms</td>
<td>Nonprofit cultural organizations</td>
<td>Artists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Baltimore</strong></td>
<td>5.19</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>24.14</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>3.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Philadelphia</strong></td>
<td>8.30</td>
<td>7.43</td>
<td>11.71</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Seattle</strong></td>
<td>19.04</td>
<td>8.26</td>
<td>42.83</td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>8.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>9.59</td>
<td>6.42</td>
<td>20.39</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>3.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7-1. Average number of assets within quarter mile and within block group, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Seattle, 2010

Source: SIAP

In Chapter 2 we assessed the concentration of these assets across the three cities. But in addition to simple density, we are interested in knowing if the diversity and complexity of a district contributes to its sustainability. We operationalized this concept by examining where artists, commercial firms, and nonprofits dominate a block group’s assets compared to citywide averages. In each city, we categorized block groups with above average CAI scores into one of five groups. Block groups that were high all on three indexes were identified as *complex block groups* to indicate that they have a high
concentration of all three asset types. The remaining block groups were classified as either high on one type of resource (high commercial, high nonprofit, high artist) or other above average (a CAI above the citywide average), which also are complex but have a lower density of assets.

Overall, about 40 percent of block groups across the three cities fit into one of these categories. The proportion of block groups in each category is roughly the same in each city. The one exception is the dominance of nonprofit organizations in Philadelphia. Not only do they make up a larger share of the entire cultural sector, but also roughly 10 percent of the city’s block groups are strong in that single type of asset.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Baltimore</th>
<th>Philadelphia</th>
<th>Seattle</th>
<th>3 cities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Complex</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial-dominant</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonprofit-dominant</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artist-dominant</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above average cultural assets</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>708</td>
<td>1816</td>
<td>567</td>
<td>3091</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7-2. Distribution of block groups by composition of cultural assets, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Seattle, 2010

Source: SIAP

In Baltimore, the core of the cultural ecology along Charles Street tends to fall into the high complex category, indicating that it has strength in all three sectors. In contrast, commercial- and nonprofit-dominated parts of the city tend to be farther removed from the center. There appears to be a distinctive racial profile to these neighborhoods. Ethnically diverse neighborhoods—as we noted in Chapter 2—are over-represented among all of the clusters, but black and white block groups are split. Homogeneous white districts are over-represented among block groups with a disproportionate share of commercial cultural firms and resident artists, while homogeneous African American block groups are more likely to have a large number of nonprofit organizations than the rest of the city.

Our two Baltimore case study neighborhoods have different compositions. Station North is primarily a high complex district with one block group dominated by artists. Most of Highlandtown-Patterson Park has too few cultural assets to be classified by this typology. Two block groups have a concentration of artists, and the Greektown neighborhood (including the Crown Cork & Seal site) has commercial cultural firms dominant.
In Philadelphia, although the share of nonprofit-dominant block groups was greater than in the other cities, in other ways it is similar to Baltimore. Center City, the cultural core, is characterized by complex block groups. The core is surrounded by concentrations of artists. Immediately north of Center City, including Callowhill-Chinatown North, is a section in which commercial cultural firms are predominant. Other concentrations of commercial and nonprofit cultural organizations are scattered across the city. Northwest Philadelphia and West Philadelphia also include significant concentrations of artist-dominated neighborhoods.

Our case study neighborhoods have distinct profiles. South Philadelphia has several high complex neighborhoods in its northeast corner, but most of the district is artist-dominant. Callowhill-Chinatown North, as noted above, is part of a tier of commercial-dominant neighborhoods that stretch to Northern Liberties and Fishtown to the east.
As in Baltimore, Philadelphia’s African American neighborhoods are more likely than the city as a whole to be dominated by nonprofit cultural organizations, while homogeneous white neighborhoods have higher concentrations of artists and commercial cultural firms. Ethnically diverse neighborhoods are close to the citywide averages for most composition categories, a contrast to Baltimore where they have higher than average concentrations of complex commercial, nonprofit, and artist-dominated areas. This reflects the change in the character of diverse neighborhoods noted in Chapter 2.

Seattle’s distribution of cultural clusters shares many features with the Eastern cities. The largest cluster of complex block groups stretches from the Seattle Center in lower Queen Anne through much of Belltown and the Central Business District. A second center of high complex neighborhoods centers on the Pike-Pine corridor in Capitol Hill and First Hill. Commercial arts are dominant in the area from Pioneer Square stretching south through SoDo and Georgetown and in the South Lake Union district. Nonprofit-dominant areas are fewer and smaller than in Philadelphia, with First Hill and the western and the far southeastern sections of the Central District having significant clusters.
In Seattle, given the persistent attention paid to the migration of artists, the number of artist-dominant neighborhoods and their location is notable. Resident artists continue to dominate sections of Capitol Hill, but they seem to center on a band between 15th and 21st Avenue East from Roy and Mercer down to Yessler in the Central District. A second concentration of artists can be found immediately to the east, stretching from 23rd Street to Lake Washington. Finally, the data suggest that artists have migrated far into south Seattle neighborhoods like Rainier Valley, Mount Baker, and Columbia City.

![Figure 7-3. Composition of cultural sector of block groups, Seattle, 2010](source: SIAP)

**Complex cultural ecology and sustainability**

In nature, a complex ecology is more sustainable than a monoculture. We have used the idea of cultural ecology as a metaphor to refocus research and policy thinking on the interaction of cultural resources rather than on their internal structure. Still, one test of a metaphor is whether it can be applied to more than one aspect of a topic. In this section, therefore, we take the ecological concept that complexity promotes sustainability and test its application to cultural districts.

In order to explore this question, we need to study cultural districts over time. Philadelphia is the only city for which we have gathered quantitative data for over a
decade. In this section, we use SIAP’s three sets of cultural inventories for Philadelphia—in 1997, 2004, and 2010—to address the question of sustainability.

The Philadelphia analysis shows patterns of both stability and change. For example, high complex block groups were remarkably stable over time. Of the 63 block groups that were judged high complex in 1997, 47 (75 percent) were still high complex in 2010. The block groups dominated by a single cultural asset were much less stable. For example, among high commercial districts in 1997, only 29 percent were still high commercial in 2010. Fifty-four percent of them, in fact, had below average cultural district scores in the latter year. Artist- and nonprofit-dominated districts were slightly more stable. Only 35 percent of them were still a high nonprofit district in 2010, while 56 percent had a below average cultural asset score in that year. Thirty-eight percent of high artist districts from 1997 remained in that category in 2010. However, where a majority of both high commercial and high nonprofit districts had lower than average CAI’s in 2010, only forty percent of artist-dominated districts from 1997 ended up with below average asset scores in 2010.

Figure 7-4. Composition of cultural sector of block groups, Philadelphia, 1997
Source: SIAP

Two patterns stand out most clearly. First, large sections of Northwest Philadelphia—East Mount Airy and upper Roxborough—and of West Philadelphia—Wynnewfield and Overbrook—that had had concentrations of artists or above average cultural assets lost
these by 2010. Second, the concentration of nonprofit organizations in North Philadelphia had shrunk in size. Where in 1997 nonprofits had stretched from Strawberry Mansion through Hartranft, by 2010 the cluster was focused around Temple University (on North Broad Street) with just a sprinkling among the block groups west of Broad.

![Legend](image)

**Figure 7-5. Change in composition of cultural sector of block groups, Philadelphia, 1997-2010**

Source: SIAP

Other sections of the city gained concentrations of cultural assets. Between 1997 and 2010, 134 block groups became commercial-dominant and 136 block groups became nonprofit-dominant. The vast majority of these were located in upper North Philadelphia and the lower Northeast, areas that were attracting both immigrants and African Americans during these years. In addition, nonprofit cultural organizations began to dominate the University City area as well as neighborhoods along City Line Avenue in West Philadelphia. Artist concentrations emerged in 90 block groups, which included significant clusters in West Philadelphia and adjacent to the existing cluster in South Philadelphia. Artist concentrations also formed in the Art Museum and Brewerytown neighborhoods.
Figure 7-6. Composition of emerging cultural districts, Philadelphia, 1997-2010
Source: SIAP

Economic and location advantage

Districts are influenced not only by the concentration and composition of cultural assets. Cultural hubs are located in particular social and geographical settings as well. As noted earlier in this report, the geography and social context of a neighborhood influences the likelihood that it will emerge as a cultural cluster. Still, these factors are far from deterministic. Across the three cities, we have identified areas that “beat the odds,” that is, they became cultural hubs in spite of economic and location disadvantages. At the same time, we can use the method to identify neighborhoods that share advantages with existing cultural districts but have not yet attracted significant assets.

In order to test this line of thought, we conducted an analysis of the effect of a set of economic and spatial conditions on a neighborhood’s concentration of cultural assets. Using multivariate analysis, we estimated the impact of three specific variables on the concentration of cultural assets—per capita income, percent renters in a district, and distance from downtown. Using these three variables, we were able to “explain” between 32 and 63 percent of the variance in our cultural asset index. We were least successful in Baltimore, where our corrected renter measure had only a minor predictive power and most successful in Philadelphia where all three variables had a
robust influence. In Seattle, per capita income had a small, albeit statistically significant, effect on cultural assets.

The next step of our analysis involved identifying over-achieving neighborhoods in each city, that is, areas with a cultural asset index higher than we would predict based on their economic and geographical status. Some over-achieving districts are downtown neighborhoods that enjoy considerable advantages but still possess cultural assets that exceeded their predicted value. Others are disadvantaged areas that do well in spite of their economic status and location. This process produced a typology with three distinct types of districts:

- **High market cultural districts**—“natural” cultural districts that have higher asset scores than their socio-economic and location advantages would predict.
- **Market cultural districts**—“natural” cultural districts with high asset scores that are consistent with their socio-economic and location advantages.
- **Civic clusters**—disadvantaged neighborhoods in terms of socio-economic status and location that “outperform” their predicted asset score.

The three types of districts identify three distinctive cultural ecologies. The high market districts identify sections of the city with a vital and visible cultural scene, often located near the city center. Market districts more often than not are adjacent to the high market areas, close in both geography and economic status. Civic clusters are the least visible of the three. The casual visitor will typically question whether these are cultural districts at all. Because their cultural assets—smaller organizations and individual artists—often occupy older, nondescript structures, they usually don’t have the street-level “look” of the other districts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Baltimore</th>
<th>Philadelphia</th>
<th>Seattle</th>
<th>All cities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>High market</strong></td>
<td>9.2%</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Market</strong></td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Civic</strong></td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Not NCD</strong></td>
<td>75.9%</td>
<td>74.4%</td>
<td>77.6%</td>
<td>75.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total number</strong></td>
<td>696</td>
<td>1752</td>
<td>566</td>
<td>3014</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7-3. Distribution of census block groups by type of cultural district, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Seattle, 2010
Source: SIAP
The three cities differ somewhat in the representation of the different forms of cultural districts. Baltimore has a somewhat larger number of high market districts and fewer market and civic districts, while Philadelphia—a geographically larger city—has more market and civic districts than the other cities. Indeed, where market and civic districts make up only 15 percent of Baltimore’s block groups and 12 percent of Seattle’s, they account for 18 percent of Philadelphia’s block groups. Seattle has many more high market districts—a testament to the overall size of its cultural sector—and fewer market and civic districts.

The three cities share some geographic characteristics. In Baltimore, for example, the high market areas of the city are for the most part located along the central north-south spine. The market areas are often “in-fill” between obvious centers like the Inner Harbor, Mount Vernon, Fells Point, and Johns Hopkins University. Finally, the civic clusters are more scattered. Neighborhoods like Highlandtown—one of our case study communities—lie relatively far from the north-south spine.

Figure 7-7. Types of “natural” cultural districts, Philadelphia, 2010
Source: SIAP

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1 Philadelphia’s differences are also a result of the inclusion of a fourth index of cultural engagement—cultural participants—in the calculation of its asset index.
Philadelphia shares some features with Baltimore and is distinctive in others. As with Baltimore, the central core of the city is a high market district. However, relative to Baltimore, high market districts are relatively dispersed with University City, Northwest Philadelphia, Fishtown and lower Kensington all including high market districts. Market districts are primarily adjacent to the high market areas. Indeed, to the north and west of Center City, the Art Museum, Callowhill-Chinatown North, and Northern Liberties are market neighborhoods; while South Philadelphia neighborhoods include Pennsport, Queen Village, Wharton-Hawthorne, Passyunk East, and Schuylkill Southwest.

![Map of types of cultural districts in Seattle, 2010](image)

**Figure 7-8. Types of “natural” cultural districts, Seattle, 2010**  
*Source: SIAP*

Seattle’s high market area is larger than those in the other cities, a characteristic that is visually emphasized because of several very large block groups south of downtown in the Georgetown district. In addition to Seattle Center and the central business district, Seattle’s high market districts include much of Capitol Hill and the Central District and the Fremont and Ballard neighborhoods to the northwest of downtown. As in the other cities, the market districts tend to be adjacent, with the area between downtown and Capitol Hill-Central District having the largest number of market districts. Finally, civic clusters are much less prominent in Seattle than in the Eastern cities. They are scattered to the east along Lake Washington and well to the north.
Relationship of Cultural Composition to Economic and Location Advantage

We have proposed two ways of differentiating cultural clusters. The first method focuses on the internal organization of the cultural sector in a particular neighborhood, while the second examines the connections between the cultural sector and the wider community. Although these two dimensions are conceptually distinct, they are related to one another, as the following table demonstrates. In all three cities, we find a very strong relationship between the high complex block groups and the high market cultural districts. This is hardly surprising because both typologies require block groups to have a fairly high concentration of cultural assets. Block groups that are both complex and high market have cultural asset scores seven times the citywide average.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>High market</th>
<th>Market</th>
<th>Civic</th>
<th>Not NCD</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High complex</td>
<td>722</td>
<td>432</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>704</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High commercial</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High nonprofit</td>
<td>301</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High artist</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other above CAI average</td>
<td>353</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>77</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>413</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7-4. Cultural asset index (100=citywide average) by composition of cultural assets and type of cultural district, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Seattle, 2010

Source: SIAP

In Baltimore and Seattle more than 90 percent of complex cultural clusters are also classified as high market districts. In Philadelphia, the decentralized nature of the its cultural system reduces this scores somewhat; only 63 percent are classified as high market, with the remaining 37 percent classified as market districts.

High market districts are also over-represented among artist-dominant districts in all three cities. In Baltimore, the high artist districts are relatively evenly divided among the three types of cultural cluster—21 percent are high market, 26 percent are market, and 21 percent are civic. In Philadelphia, the high artist districts are more concentrated in high market and market areas with only 12 percent in civic clusters. Finally, in Seattle, artist-dominant districts are more likely to be either high market or civic. The relationship of artist concentrations to civic districts relates again to the extent to which
real estate pressures in the city are pushing artists away from the center of the city in the search for low-cost space.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>High complex</th>
<th>High commercial</th>
<th>High nonprofit</th>
<th>High artist</th>
<th>Other above CAI average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Baltimore</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High market</td>
<td><strong>93.8%</strong></td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td><strong>21.1%</strong></td>
<td><strong>38.8%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td><strong>16.7%</strong></td>
<td><strong>26.3%</strong></td>
<td><strong>36.2%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td><strong>28.9%</strong></td>
<td><strong>16.7%</strong></td>
<td><strong>21.1%</strong></td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not NCD</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>60.5%</td>
<td>58.3%</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Philadelphia</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High market</td>
<td>63.3%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>26.4%</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market</td>
<td>36.7%</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>28.5%</td>
<td>36.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not NCD</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>75.5%</td>
<td>71.2%</td>
<td>32.6%</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Seattle</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High market</td>
<td>90.0%</td>
<td>36.1%</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>24.1%</td>
<td>25.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market</td>
<td><strong>10.0%</strong></td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not NCD</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td><strong>33.3%</strong></td>
<td><strong>61.3%</strong></td>
<td><strong>53.7%</strong></td>
<td><strong>34.1%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7-5. Distribution of block groups by composition of cultural assets and type of cultural district, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Seattle, 2010

Source: SIAP

The location of commercial-dominant districts varies across the three cities. In Baltimore, they are much more likely to locate in civic districts; but in Seattle they are over-represented in high market and market districts, perhaps a reflection of the importance of the commercial culture sector to the city’s economy. In Philadelphia, 76 percent of commercial-dominant block groups not classified as a cluster.

Block groups with a cultural ecology dominated by nonprofit arts organizations don’t have a consistent relationship with the economic and location advantage categories. In Philadelphia, the city with the largest nonprofit concentration, nonprofit-dominant block groups are over-represented only in civic clusters, likely because both civic and nonprofit-dominant clusters are more common in African American neighborhoods.

The overall cultural asset index score of a neighborhood varies along both of these dimensions. Looking first at composition, we find that complex districts have CAI scores
over six times the citywide average in all three cities. The commercial-, nonprofit-, and artist-dominant districts, however, are not consistent across the three cities. In Baltimore and Philadelphia, artist-dominant districts have scores well over 100, while the commercial and nonprofit districts have scores around or below the citywide average. In Seattle, all composition types have scores well above the citywide average. Indeed, it is artist-dominant districts that have the lowest asset score—12 percent above the citywide average—again reflecting that artists in Seattle are seeking out outlying districts because of the city’s high rents and property values.

**How does the composition of a cultural district influence its sustainability?**

Our interest in the composition of cultural districts builds on the emerging literature on the role that clusters play in industry production. Cluster economic theory builds on the literature on post-industrial trends in “flexible production.” This work has demonstrated that in the wake of “vertical disintegration,” related producers in particular industries choose to locate near one another. Piore and Sabel, for example, in the first statement of the flexible production paradigm, noted that the industrial districts of Northern Italy were characterized by many small specialized firms that work together through an intense set of social networks. In Japan, using a slightly different model, independent automobile component producers located near the major assembly facilities.

In the United States, California’s Silicon Valley stands as the exemplar of the concentration of independent firms and provides an excellent parallel for the creative sector. First, the concentration of producers is associated with the availability of trained labor. Stanford and other universities train the computer engineers and other personnel necessary to develop computers. Second, the very concentration of individuals and firms in one location spurs a cross-pollination of ideas and innovation. This leads to the development of “a milieu of innovation” which allows the initial comparative benefit of a particular place to reproduce itself. “What defines the specificity of a milieu of innovation is its capacity to generate synergy, that is, the added value resulting not from the cumulative effect of the elements present in the milieu but from their interaction.”

Clusters, a dynamic and vulnerable feature of urban form, are characterized by multiplicity and dispersion across a region. Southern California, for example, is composed of multiple discrete industrial districts, each of which contains numerous individual establishments seeking the economic benefits of agglomeration. In the high-technology industrial districts of Greater Los Angeles, Allen J. Scott has documented “a peculiar leap-frog dynamic”—essentially a scenario of growth and decomposition—that characterizes their historic pattern of urbanization. This dynamic is attributed to the interplay of land prices, wages, transaction costs, and agglomeration economies in the growing metropolis.

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Emerging sectors of small-scale industries “much given to network forms of interaction” are especially vulnerable and, according to Scott, deserving of policy attention.

Their future success will most likely depend ... on their continued ability to form specialized industrial agglomerations and to reap the advantages of spatially dependent external economies. These external economies constitute an asset that is held jointly by all participants in the local economy. They accrue, of course, from individual efforts, talents, and skills; but they also exist as synergies that grow out of the forms of collective order that always characterize local industrial systems ... They are thus legitimately, if not inescapably, an object of public policy.⁴

The new economics of competition, therefore, suggest that a “supply-side” logic could be integrated into public policy to develop and leverage the creative sector. The focus of current economic development is on “demand-side” strategies—such as cultural facility, cultural district, and cultural tourism development—to stimulate downtown revitalization and regional economies. In fact, as Scott points out, the production of culture has become more and more concentrated in a set of localized clusters of firms and workers, while final products are channeled into “ever more spatially extended networks of consumption.” That is to say, in the cultural products industries, production is increasingly local, while consumption is increasingly global.⁵

Clusters are a form of spatial organization particularly well-suited to the creative sector, which has never been organized either as a single or a vertically-integrated industry. The arts, in fact, are inherently collective enterprises. Each individual artist is dependent on an array of services, personnel, audiences, and colleagues in order to produce his or her work.⁶ We still know very little, however, about the geographical consequences of these interdependencies.

If the emphasis on the role of creative clusters in arts production is correct, we would expect that the composition of cultural clusters would have implications for their long-term success. Specifically, we could hypothesize two possible ways that composition would influence success:

- **Single-industry clusters.** In this case, similar producers and perhaps their suppliers would locate in a particular location, fostering growth by reducing transaction costs, disseminating innovation, and perhaps spurring competition.

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- **Complex clusters.** In this case, the diversity of a cultural cluster could improve prospects for the long-term sustainability of a particular district. This might be a function of its location or perhaps the character of its built environment that attracts a variety of cultural resources. These districts might possess a level of resilience that single-purpose clusters lack. One could imagine a high level of turnover, but because the turnover hits different dimensions of the district at different times, the district survives even as its case of character changes.

There are several points to make about these hypotheses. First, they produce opposite conclusions. The first suggests that narrowly-defined or homogenous clusters would be more likely to demonstrate success, while the second suggests that diverse districts would be more successful.

Unfortunately, we are not in a position to test these hypotheses definitively. The level of data specificity for defining single-industry clusters, in particular, exceeds the current capacity of our data. However, in the case of Philadelphia, we can at least provide a first approximation of their relative fit with the empirical data. This is possible because in Philadelphia, we have measures of the cultural assets of block groups going back to 1997. Using these data, we can answer two questions:

1—Does the success rate of particular cultural clusters vary with their composition? Here, we are interested simply in whether different categories of composition have statistically significant differences.

2—Are homogeneous or complex cultural districts more successful over time?

Until now, we have used the term success as if it is an obvious concept. A full measure of success would entail a variety of qualitative and quantitative measures of growth, profitability, influence, and prestige of individual organizations and individuals and their aggregate impact.

As a starting point, however, we will examine two measures of the well-being of a cultural district. The first is the change in the density of its cultural resources. If a cluster is “successful,” we would imagine that over time it would attract additional resources.

The second measure examines changes in a block group’s cultural asset index rank. Here, rather than measuring success, we are more interested in failure. We ask whether the composition of a district influences the likelihood that a district will maintain a high asset score or whether it falls below the threshold of being a district.

To summarize, we want to examine whether the composition categories have a statistically significant impact on changes in the cultural asset index and whether they remain a cultural district, and we want to see what kinds of districts—complex or homogeneous—have higher rates of success.
Density of cultural assets

The indicator used here is based on the total number of cultural assets—the sum of all artists, nonprofits, and for-profit firms—in a block group.\(^7\) We present two sets of calculations: one is the simple sum of the three, the second is “weighted” to give the commercial and nonprofit firms three times the weight of individual artists. It seems fair that having an organization in a block group provides more of an asset than an individual resident artist. However, with no clear idea about how much more, we chose what we consider a conservative weight.

In Philadelphia between 1997 and 2010, complex block groups saw their asset count increase by 134 percent, from 9.4 to 22.2 per block group. If we weight the sum for organizations, the increase was 123 percent, from 24 to 38 assets per block group. Among the single-asset dominant clusters, the fastest growth was among commercial- and artist-dominant areas. The asset count for commercial-dominant areas increased from 1.6 to 3.5 or 114 percent over the period. Weighted, the increase was from 3.8 to 8.6 assets, an increase of 129 percent. For artist-dominant areas, the increase was from 1.6 to 4.0 assets, an increase of 150 percent. However, if we weight these numbers (which disadvantage artists), the increase was only 48 percent.

Nonprofit-dominant areas were the least dynamic set of cultural clusters. Their average number of assets increased only from .62 to 1.3 or 102 percent over the period. Weighted, their increase was only 80 percent.

The map of changes in net assets (weighted) suggests that over this period, areas with already high assets were more likely to gain, with Center City appearing to be the big winner. In terms of our case study districts, both South Philadelphia and Callowhill-Chinatown North increased their assets considerably during these years.

In order to judge the unique contribution of composition to the change in cultural assets, we conducted a regression analysis in which the dependent variable was net change in number of assets between 1997 and 2010 (weighted) and the independent variables were the composition category, the cultural asset index rank of the block group in 1997, per capita income, and distance from Center City. All factors but the 1997 cultural asset score were statistically significant. When other variables are controlled, the complex block groups gained more assets between 1997 and 2010. Generally, the conclusions from the uncontrolled data are confirmed. Among the single-asset block groups, high commercial districts in 1997 gained the most assets and the nonprofit-dominant block groups gained the fewest.

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\(^7\) For this analysis, we use only the counts of resources within a block group rather than the estimate of assets within one-quarter mile. This measure is more sensitive to changes over time in particular places, whereas the estimate of assets within a quarter-mile buffer is more stable across space and time.
The composition of the cultural district clearly influenced its rate of change. Both the raw and weighted averages were statistically different from one another, and the composition of the cultural district in 1997 “explained” 14 percent of the variance in the change in number of assets (10 percent if we use the weighted figures). Most of the difference between categories separated the complex block groups from the single-dominant ones. The differences between the changes of commercial, artist, and nonprofit dominant groups were not statistically significant.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composition 1997</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High complex</td>
<td>27.949</td>
<td>2.552</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High commercial</td>
<td>7.707</td>
<td>2.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High nonprofit</td>
<td>3.889</td>
<td>1.987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High artist</td>
<td>5.463</td>
<td>1.790</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate complex</td>
<td>4.636</td>
<td>1.651</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5.366</td>
<td>1.579</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7-6. Change in number of cultural assets in block group, 1997-2010, by composition of cultural assets, controlling for other variables, Philadelphia
Source: SIAP

In answer our second question, these data support the case for complexity. The complex block groups, although they began with a much larger number of assets, appeared to increase that gap between 1997 and 2010. Although, far from definitive, these results suggest that a complex cultural ecology with a variety of different assets improves the likelihood that a district will experience robust growth of its cultural sector over time.

**Change in asset rank**

Our second test of the impact of composition focuses on change in the relative rank of a block group on our cultural asset index between 1997 and 2010. Here, we ask if a block group’s rising or falling in rank is related to its cultural composition at the outset. We divide Philadelphia’s block groups into six equal groups (sextiles) by their 1997 CAI rank and measure their change in rank between 1997 and 2010. For example, if a block group was in the second highest rank and fell to the fourth highest, it would receive a score of -2. In the reverse situation, it would gain 2. Obviously, if a block group is classified in either rank 1 or rank 6, it can move only in one direction. Because of this, we control for a block group’s rank in 1997.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composition 1997</th>
<th>Cultural asset index 1997</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lowest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complex</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial-dominant</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonprofit-dominant</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artist-dominant</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above average assets</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7-7. Change in cultural asset index rank, 1997-2010, by composition and asset index, 1997, Philadelphia
Source: SIAP

Because complex block groups were all in the top rank, this is our major point of comparison. As the data show, none of the complex block groups in the top 1997 rank declined; all were still in the top rank in 2010. Among the single-asset dominant block groups in the top rank, the declines were substantial. The commercial- and artist-dominant block groups fell one-half rank on average, while the nonprofit-dominant block groups fell only one-fifth of a rank.

If we look at the data more generally, we see that the largest declines across the city were in block groups in the fourth sextile, that is, those just above the median. Over the 13-year period, these areas on average fell by more than one rank, by far the largest decline. The most substantial declines were among the nonprofit-dominant block groups in this rank.

Indeed, the data underline the two worlds of nonprofit arts during this period. The nonprofit-dominant block groups with the highest asset scores, typically in Center City, gained resources during this period. Those with moderate CAI scores, often in African American neighborhoods, lost resources.

This perception is reinforced by the map of increases and declines in CAI rank. The block groups in the highest 1997 CAI rank are marked in blue. These block groups, literally, could only move in one direction—down. Yet, very few of them did so. For the most part, these sections of the city were much more likely to have a complex cultural ecology and were able to maintain their dominance citywide.
The areas that suffered the most substantial declines were in North Philadelphia, Germantown, East Mount Airy, West Philadelphia, and Point Breeze. For anyone familiar with the social geography of the city, it is clear that these are predominantly African American neighborhoods. The near Northeast—which experienced the most rapid ethnic transition during these years—also lost a substantial number of resources.

This analysis is consistent with that of net change in assets. Both support the conclusion that block groups with a complex cultural ecology are more likely to retain their status, while those with a single strength are more likely to suffer a loss of resources (or at least a smaller gain) and a decline in overall position in the citywide cultural sector.

This analysis is hardly a perfect test of our hypothesis. It represents a first approximation of the relationship of the composition of a cultural district to its sustainability. In the future, we will test alternative operationalizations of both the dependent and the independent variables. But this analysis has staked out the set of questions that need to be answered as we move forward.
How do the economic and geographic advantages of a cultural district influence its neighborhood spillover effects?

Our second typology of cultural districts, based on their economic and geographic advantage, is relevant for addressing how “natural” cultural districts influence their neighborhoods, that is, what are their spillover effects.

As in the previous section, some questions we can answer for all three cities, while for others we will turn to the more detailed Philadelphia data. Among the outcomes we address in this section are: change in poverty status, public health status, ethnic and racial relations, housing market status, and evidence of displacement.

Social and economic benefits associated with cultural clusters

Most studies of the economic impact of the arts on American cities have focused on the direct economic benefits of cultural organizations with respect to employment and consumption. Often these studies have had methodological flaws, in particular, not accounting for the substitution effects associated with cultural activity. A more substantive problem arises from the distribution of economic impacts across organizations of different sizes and their relationship to location.

The vast majority of the direct economic impact of the arts is associated with a region’s major cultural institutions. A neighborhood theater performance attended by a few hundred patrons pales in comparison with a blockbuster exhibit at a major art museum or gallery. Yet, it is precisely the neighborhoods that house these smaller cultural programs that are the most distressed and benefit the most from cultural engagement.

Base on SIAP research through the years, we have come to see that the economic impact of the arts on urban neighborhoods is a product of their social benefits. It is the arts’ capacity to animate public space and stimulate community engagement that lays the foundation for neighborhood revitalization. The arts’ contribution to economic resilience flows from its role in building the civic infrastructure of a community. In previous work, SIAP has demonstrated the relationship of cultural engagement to a variety of economic and non-economic impacts. The current study builds on this work by considering some new connections between the arts and social well-being and, where possible, by comparing Philadelphia to our other two cities.

Although cultural engagement has a clear impact on the economic fortune of neighborhoods, it is hard to see how this impact is associated with the direct economic impact of the arts. After all, with relatively few exceptions, community cultural organizations have relatively small budgets. Other scholars have made a more plausible case that the economic benefits of community arts derive from their non-economic benefits.

The Arts and Culture Indicators Project (ACIP) at the Urban Institute completed in 2006 a long-term investigation of approaches to the study of the arts’ impact. ACIP found

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that to understand the arts at the community level requires a definition of culture that incorporates not only official nonprofit cultural organizations but also informal cultural phenomena and the work of artists and businesses. The authors suggest that past work paid too little attention to non-mainstream social groups and their contribution to cultural engagement. They argue that we move beyond a focus on passive participation to include a more diverse and varied set of indicators, including the presence of opportunities for cultural participation, actual participation, and the nature of cultural support systems. For ACIP, cultural participation incorporates amateur and collective art-making, youth-oriented programs both in and out of school, and public discussion about the arts in different sorts of media, as well as more conventional measures of attendance and visitation.9

A 2003 study of “small budget” cultural organizations in Chicago recommended more concrete strategies for measuring the impact of community-based arts groups on their neighborhoods. Based on fieldwork in Chicago neighborhoods, the authors identified three domains of influence: access to resources, collective problem-solving, and building social relationships. They suggest that small arts organizations can serve as anchors of local business districts, repurpose older spaces, and benefit local young people by offering in- and out-of-school programs that provide arts training as well as technological and entrepreneurial skills.10 They suggest that the collective problem-solving dimension of cultural organizations includes helping neighborhoods address local problems through their convening capacity. Cultural organizations also foster collaboration and provide a safe haven and opportunities to learn new skills. These capacities are particularly important in turning a potential neighborhood problem—under-occupied young people—into a community asset.

A 2007 Chicago study underlined the varied types of social relationships that can flow from relatively small arts and cultural organizations. Even small groups can make important contributions to leadership development and provide a structure for meaningful social interactions. Furthermore, they can provide a means of incorporating excluded social groups—whether defined by race, immigration status, or other distinctions.

Regarding social exclusion, several studies have focused on the role of informal social interactions in building a local arts community and its connection to excluded groups. Two studies—one in California and the other in Chicago—underlined the role of informal connections in connecting immigrants to institutions in which they might feel marginalized. This last point was reinforced by a study in Philadelphia that found that


immigrants are culturally active, but that they rarely channel cultural practices and creative activities through established cultural organizations.\textsuperscript{11}

Building on this scholarship, SIAP has developed a model based on community cultural ecology as a social mechanism through which cultural engagement generates social and economic benefits. The ecological approach suggests that we focus on the range of community assets involved in producing, cultivating, and engaging the arts and culture; as well as the variety of contextual factors, including regional cultural institutions, non-arts community organizations, and policy- and grant-makers. It is the networks developed between and among these different elements, rather than the health of any particular organization, that lay the foundation for the cultural vitality of a community.

\textbf{Public health}

Previous SIAP research has found that cultural clusters in Philadelphia were much less likely to suffer from a variety of social ills that characterize urban neighborhoods, even after we control for the effect of income. Thanks to a collaboration of the City of Philadelphia’s health department and the University of Pennsylvania, we have access to an index of public health for the city. The index, described as a measure of social stress, includes census block group-level data on a variety of conditions, including underweight infants at birth, births to younger teenagers, infant deaths, substantiated incidents of child abuse, and out-of-home placements for delinquency and other dependent children.\textsuperscript{12}

Not surprisingly, a number of these public health conditions are strongly related to socio-economic status. In order to correct for this effect, we controlled for the relationship of “social stress” to per capita income. The findings of this analysis were striking. The average social stress index in sections of Philadelphia with a low concentration of cultural assets was 0.2 standard deviations above the citywide average, while the index for neighborhoods that were cultural clusters was 0.5 standard deviations below the citywide average.

\textsuperscript{11} Maribel Alvarez, “There’s Northing Informal About It: Participatory Arts Within the Cultural Ecology of Silicon Valley” (San Jose: Cultural Initiative Silicon Valley, 2005); Alaka Wali, Noshir Contractor, and Rebecca Severson, “Creative Networks: Mexican Immigrant Assets in Chicago.” The Field Museum.\[ archive.fieldmuseum.org/creativenetworks/pdfs/MIA_fullreport.pdf \]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural asset index 2004 (quintiles)</th>
<th>Social stress score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lowest quintile</td>
<td>0.447</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-39th %</td>
<td>0.153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-59th %</td>
<td>0.107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-79th %</td>
<td>-0.035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest quintile</td>
<td>-0.656</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7-8. Social Stress Index by Cultural Asset Index (quintiles), Philadelphia, 2005-06

Source: SIAP

Diversity

As we’ve noted earlier, ethnically, economic, and household diverse neighborhoods are more likely to be “natural” cultural districts. In previous studies, we have found that the presence of cultural resources in a diverse Philadelphia neighborhood increased the likelihood that it would remain diverse across decennial censuses.

Figure 7-11. Percent of ethnically diverse block groups in 1990 that remained diverse in 2000, Philadelphia

Source: SIAP

13 Stress index is standardized with a mean of zero and standard deviation of 1 for the city.
The character of diversity changed dramatically during the first decade of the twenty-first century, especially in Philadelphia. Before the 2000s, ethnic diversity was a relatively rare situation. Only about 20 percent of the city’s population lived in a diverse block group according to the 1990s census. Those diverse neighborhoods were divided roughly speaking into two types: transitional neighborhoods that were “diverse” between the time that ethnic succession began and when it ended and intentionally diverse neighborhoods where residents had decided for one reason or another to live in a diverse quarter. By 2000—and accelerating over the next decade—the city moved from a predominantly black and white city to a multi-ethnic city, thanks to the increased Latino and Asian population.

As a result, in Philadelphia the nature of ethnic diversity itself changed. Thus, the relationship of cultural resources to stable ethnic diversity that we found in Philadelphia was no longer as strong as it had been in earlier years. Certainly, the neighborhoods with the highest concentrations of cultural assets were much more likely to remain diverse, but so were neighborhoods with very low cultural asset scores. Most notably, a higher number of high resource neighborhoods that had been diverse became homogeneous during the first years of the new century.

![Figure 7-12. Percent of ethnically diverse block groups in 2000 by diversity status in 2005-09 and cultural asset index 2010 (sextiles), Philadelphia](image)

*Source: SIAP*

This was not the case in Baltimore. As we noted in Chapter 2, during the early 2000s Baltimore much more than Philadelphia remained a black-white city. Although there were some significant concentrations of Hispanics in the city—including in
Highlandtown-Patterson Park—most of the city remained predominantly black, white, or diverse.

In Baltimore, the presence of cultural assets continued to be associated with stable diversity. Between 2000 and 2005-09, in the city as a whole, 24 percent of block groups were stably diverse, nine percent became diverse, and eight percent became homogeneous. In the block groups with the highest concentration of cultural assets, many more block groups either remained diverse (42 percent) or became diverse (15 percent), and only seven percent became homogeneous.

Figure 7-13. Percent of ethnically diverse block groups in 2000 by diversity status in 2005-09 and cultural asset index 2010 (sextiles), Baltimore
Source: SIAP

Similar patterns are apparent when we use our economic and geographic advantage typology. In Philadelphia, between 2000 and 2005-09, market and high market block groups were much more likely to have remained diverse (stable diverse), and civic clusters were slightly above average in this regard. But all three types of districts were also more likely to become ethnically homogenous during these years. Likewise, in Baltimore, the three types of districts were more likely to remain or become ethnically diverse. Civic districts were notable, however, because during these years they were more likely to become homogeneous (14%) than the average block group in the city (7%).
Table 7-9. Change in ethnic diversity, 2000 to 2005-09, by type of cultural district, Baltimore and Philadelphia

Source: SIAP

In Chapter 2, we documented the relationship of economic diversity to cultural clusters. There we found that areas of the city with consistently higher than average poverty rates and higher than average number of professionals and managers in their labor force (pov-prof) were more likely to have high concentrations of cultural assets. When we examine this relationship through the lens of economic and location advantage, the picture becomes a bit more complicated. Clearly, the relationship between stable economic diversity and cultural districts remains. To use Baltimore as an example, only four percent of the city’s block groups were stable pov-prof districts between 2000 and 2005-09, but 16 and 12 percent of its high market and market districts were stable economically diverse. Civic districts, however, were actually somewhat less likely to remain economically diverse but were more likely to become economically diverse (12 percent) than the citywide average (9 percent).
### Change in economic diversity, 2000 to 2005-09

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural District</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Became homogenous</th>
<th>Became pov-prof</th>
<th>Stable pov-prof</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>High market</strong></td>
<td>Baltimore</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seattle</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Market</strong></td>
<td>Baltimore</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seattle</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Civic</strong></td>
<td>Baltimore</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seattle</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Not cultural district</strong></td>
<td>Baltimore</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seattle</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>All block groups</strong></td>
<td>Baltimore</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seattle</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7-10. Change in economic diversity 2000 to 2005-09, by type of cultural district, three cities

Source: SIAP

In Chapter 2, we identified household diversity—the presence of nonfamily households and a concentration of young adults—as the strongest link between diversity and the arts. When we examine this relationship by type of cultural district, this finding is reinforced. High market and market districts had extremely high rates of household diversity throughout the 2000s. For example, in Seattle 44 percent of high market districts were household diverse in both 2000 and 2005-9, compared to 16 percent of all block groups. Civic districts, however, were no more likely to be household diverse than the city as a whole.
### Change in household diversity, 2000 to 2005-09

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Became homogeneous</th>
<th>Became diverse</th>
<th>Always diverse</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>High market</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baltimore</td>
<td></td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seattle</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
<td>44.3%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Market</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baltimore</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seattle</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>60.6%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Civic</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baltimore</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seattle</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Not NCD</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baltimore</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seattle</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baltimore</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seattle</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7-11. Change in household diversity, 2000 to 2005-09, by type of cultural district, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Seattle

Source: SIAP

**Ethnic and racial harassment**

Philadelphia is in the midst of a major restructuring of its ethnic composition. Immigrants from Latin America, Europe, Africa, and Asia have entered the city in numbers not seen since the early twentieth century. At the same time, U.S.-born Latin Americans and Asian Pacific Islanders have moved to the city in increasing numbers in recent years.

These population shifts have had a variety of positive effects. The increased diversity of neighborhoods means that a larger proportion of Philadelphians have learned to live with—even expect—that community life will be characterized by a mix of different peoples. Ethnic diversity often provides a set of crosscutting networks that reduce social isolation.

Yet, the shift of a neighborhood from homogenous to diverse can also carry with it a variety of negative side effects. In Philadelphia, we identified a strong correlation between a shift to ethnic diversity and the number of incidents of reported ethnic and racial harassment in the neighborhood. Overall, a neighborhood that became ethnically
diverse between 1990 and 2000 had more than twice as many incidents of ethnic and racial harassment per capita as the city as a whole in 2001. However, the relationship of increasing ethnic diversity and harassment in an area was modified by the presence of cultural assets. Neighborhoods that became ethnically diverse but had very few cultural assets experienced more than three times the citywide average per capita number of harassment incidents. In contrast, neighborhoods with many cultural assets that became diverse had only .47 incidents per 1,000 residents compared to a citywide average of .61 incidents per thousand. In short, culturally-engaged communities develop the capacity to address changing circumstances without resorting to violence and intimidation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural asset index 1997 (quintiles)</th>
<th>Became ethnically diverse, 1990-2000</th>
<th>All block groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lowest quintile</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-39th %</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-59th %</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-79th %</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest quintile</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All block groups</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7-12. Average incidents of ethnic and racial harassment per 1,000 residents in 2001, by Cultural Asset Index (quintiles) in 1997, Philadelphia block groups
Source: SIAP

**Economic benefits**

In addition to the noneconomic benefits discussed above, we have discovered a set of persistent economic benefits that are associated with a concentration of cultural assets in a neighborhood. In Philadelphia between 1980 and 2000, for example, the presence of nonprofit cultural providers in a neighborhood was a good predictor of changes in poverty and population.

For the years between 2000 and 2005-09, we were able to document the relationship between cultural assets and changes in poverty in Baltimore and Seattle, as well as in Philadelphia. We discovered that, as in earlier years, poverty declined most quickly in neighborhoods with a high concentration of cultural assets. In Philadelphia and Seattle, virtually the entire decline in poverty was concentrated in neighborhoods with a high concentration of cultural assets. In Baltimore, where poverty fell more quickly than in the other two cities, areas with the greatest number of cultural assets had the largest decline.\(^\text{14}\)

\(^{14}\) The America Community Survey poverty data for Baltimore has been quite volatile. In 2000, the official poverty rate from the census was 26 percent. For the years from 2005 to 2010, the ACS reported annual...
In Philadelphia, we were able as to examine the relationship of cultural assets to housing markets. Given our appreciation of the housing bubble that occurred during these years, we should be skeptical about whether these data reflect real economic improvement or simply speculative activity. Still, compared to other cities, Philadelphia’s bubble and bust were both relatively mild. Indeed, according to the Federal Housing Finance Administration, at the end of 2011, the metropolitan area’s housing index was higher than it had been in early 2005.

Given these cautions, we discovered that increases in property values during the early years of the last decade were strongly related to the concentration of cultural assets. In most of the city, between 2001 and 2006, median sale price increases averaged less than 40,000 dollars. During the same period, in block groups with the highest concentration of cultural assets, sale price increases were over 80 thousand dollars.

We are able to extend this analysis by using The Reinvestment Fund’s (TRF) Market Value Analysis (MVA). TRF used a variety of data to assess Philadelphia’s housing markets at the census block group level in both 2001 and 2008. Although the MVA categories used in the two years are not precisely comparable, it is possible to identify parts of the city that had clear improvement or decline in their housing market.16

---

Table 7-13. Change in poverty rate (2000 to 2005-09) by Cultural Asset Index 2010, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Seattle 15

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural asset index 2010 (quintiles)</th>
<th>Baltimore</th>
<th>Philadelphia</th>
<th>Seattle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lowest quintile</td>
<td>-1.0%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-39th %</td>
<td>-0.5%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-59th %</td>
<td>-0.6%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-79th %</td>
<td>-4.1%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest quintile</td>
<td>-2.5%</td>
<td>-3.5%</td>
<td>-1.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SIAP

15 General linear model results controlling for per capita income

The 2001 MVA used an eight-category scheme for rating a block group’s housing market from regional choice to reclamation. In 2008 the classification had changed somewhat. Three categories of transitional markets had been replaced by steady and transitional markets, while distressed and reclamation markets had been recast as two strata of distressed markets. Because of comparability concerns, we classified a block group as having an improving or declining market only if it changed by at least two categories.

In Philadelphia between 2001 and 2008, the presence of cultural assets in a block group was associated with changes in neighborhood housing markets. Among higher-status block groups (regional choice and high value), those that remained stable over the seven years had a cultural asset score that was four or five times the citywide average, while those that declined had much lower than average cultural asset scores. Among middling housing markets, the block groups that improved their status began with much higher asset scores, and those that declined began with much lower scores. For example, among transitional and steady markets in 2001, those that improved had a 1997 cultural asset index of 362—more than three times the citywide average of 100; those that remained stable had a cultural asset score of 71; and those that declined had a score of 51. Finally, among markets that were distressed or reclamation in 2001, those that improved had cultural asset scores of 169 and 160, respectively, while those that remained stable or declined had scores well below the citywide average.

As we have noted, areas of the city with higher concentrations of cultural assets tend to be associated with a set of social and economic benefits. However, the character of these benefits is not uniformly distributed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Market value analysis 2001</th>
<th>Housing market improved</th>
<th>Housing market remained stable</th>
<th>House market declined</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regional choice</td>
<td>409</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>394</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High value</td>
<td>547</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>484</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional Up</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>78</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional steady</td>
<td>362</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional down</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distressed, stressed</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>72</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reclamation</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>54</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All block groups</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>86</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7-14. Average cultural asset index score (1997) by housing market status (2001) and change in housing market status (2001-08), Philadelphia block groups

Source: SIAP, The Reinvestment Fund
In Philadelphia, for example, we have noted the association between the incidence of racial and ethnic harassment and the presence of cultural assets. If we break down these data by our market-civic typologies, we discover that civic clusters demonstrated among the lowest-rates of harassment. Indeed, it appears that the non-economic benefits associated with the concentration of cultural assets are present in all types of districts—civic, market, and high-market.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of cultural district</th>
<th>Improved</th>
<th>Stable</th>
<th>Declined</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High market</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>48.3%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>66.9%</td>
<td>30.9%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
<td>84.0%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not NCD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>119</td>
<td>1013</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>87.6%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>100%</td>
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<td>1223</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>1540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>18.4%</td>
<td>79.4%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7.15. Change in housing market 2001-08, by type of cultural district, Philadelphia
Source: SIAP, The Reinvestment Fund

In contrast, civic clusters do not share the market districts’ capacity to translate these social benefits into economic benefits. For example, between 2001 and 2008 in Philadelphia, two-thirds of market districts and one-half of high-market districts enjoyed substantial improvement in their housing markets. However, only 14 percent of civic cluster block groups saw their housing markets improve, just slightly above the figure for the rest of the three cities (10 percent).
To what extent do cultural districts influence geographic mobility?

The final indicator of neighborhood effects that we examine is geographical mobility. Two faces of geographic mobility are relevant to cultural districts. First, we have an interest in *in-migration*, the extent to which these districts attract migrants from outside the city. This question has gained particular prominence since the 2002 publication of *The Rise of the Creative Class*, in which Richard Florida argued that the key to urban dynamism was its role as a magnet for talented people.\(^\text{17}\) Second, we would like to investigate *selective out-migration*, whether cultural district development leads to the displacement of disadvantaged populations.

The investigation of geographic mobility poses a number of challenges. First, the data are available only at the census-tract level, so they lack the precision of most of our analyses. For the study of in-migration, we attached tract-level data to our block group file. Although this does not change the findings, we should keep in mind that we have far fewer data points than when we can use block group level data.

For the study of in-migration—in line with the “creative class” hypothesis—we focus on movers from another state or abroad. Clearly, not all movers from another state represent substantial relocation. In Philadelphia, for example, we will pick up residents who crossed the Delaware River from New Jersey. At the same time, a move from eastern Washington to Seattle is a much longer move than that of our New Jersey native. But overall, the creative class hypothesis is more consistent with these generally long-distance moves than those who stayed within the same county or state.

The study of out-migration raised a number of even thornier issues. First, in order to compute out-migration, we need to link data from two or more censuses or American Community Survey (ACS) files. In this case, we combined the tract files for 2005-09 with the file for 2006-10. This was somewhat more difficult because the two files used different geography; the older file was based on the 2000 census tract boundaries and the newer file on 2010 tracts. In fact, because of the rather radical redrawing of boundaries in Philadelphia, it was impossible to link them for this analysis. In Baltimore and Seattle, the basic geography remained the same, but there were small changes—combining some tracts and dividing others—that complicated the analysis.

The ACS questions on geographic mobility do not provide the precision one would like. The survey asks about one’s residence the previous year, and it divides respondents into those who lived in the same house, those who moved from elsewhere in the same county, those who moved from elsewhere in the same state, those who moved from another state, and those who moved from abroad. For the study of in-migration, it would be desirable to know whether those who moved from elsewhere in the county remained in the same census tract.

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Our measure of out-migration is the difference in the population of the census tract in the two years minus the number of residents who moved into the tract during the year. We make the assumption that out-migrants make up the vast majority of this number, but it will also include those who moved within the tract during the year and those who died. In the future, we hope to correct these data for mortality.

This brings us to the independent variable. We are interested in the extent to which different groups—particularly different socio-economic groups—are moving in or out of cultural districts. Because we need to compare numbers across years, we need to use groups that do not change easily over time. For example, the ACS includes data on mobility by poverty status, which we can use for a single year, but if we wish to compare two years, we would need to assume that people are consistently in the same poverty status, an assumption that is inconsistent with the literature on poverty dynamics. The same is true with income.

The best measure of socio-economic standing we have, therefore, is educational attainment. For persons over the age of 25, we know their mobility status by whether they had less than a high school education, a high school diploma, some college, a bachelor’s degree, or a graduate or professional degree. Obviously, a certain number of people in their late twenties or older will change their educational attainment. Yet, we consider one’s educational attainment after age 25 stable enough to examine comparisons over a year.

**In-migration: Do cultural districts attract a “creative class”***?

Overall, Seattle was a much more mobile city than either Philadelphia or Baltimore. According to the 2005-09 ACS, six percent of Seattle residents had moved either from another state or from abroad in the previous year compared to only three percent of Baltimore or Philadelphia’s population. At the other extreme, 83 percent of Baltimore’s residents and 88 percent of Philadelphia’s residents lived in the same house as the previous year, compared to only 77 percent of Seattle’s residents.

If cultural districts serve as magnets for attracting outside talent to a city, we would expect to find a relationship between these districts and the proportion of their population that lived elsewhere the previous year. The data from the 2005-09 ACS support this hypothesis. Particularly in the Eastern cities’ cultural districts, the proportion of residents who had lived in another state or abroad the previous year was well-above the citywide average. For example, in Philadelphia, seven percent of the residents of high-market districts and five percent of those in market districts had lived elsewhere the previous year, compared with the citywide average of three percent. Baltimore’s pattern was similar; seven percent of the residents in both high market and market districts had lived in another state or abroad a year earlier, compared to a citywide average of 3 percent. In Seattle, 5 percent of the population had moved from

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18 In 2010, five percent of the population over the age of 25 reported that it is attending school.
another state or abroad in the previous year, and eight percent of the residents of high market districts and 12 percent of those of market districts had done so.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Type of cultural district</th>
<th>Outside state, less than BA</th>
<th>Outside state, BA plus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>High market</td>
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<td>5.40%</td>
</tr>
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<td>Market</td>
<td>0.80%</td>
<td>4.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Civic</td>
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<td>0.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not NCD</td>
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<td>0.70%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>1.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>High market</td>
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<td>5.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Market</td>
<td>1.00%</td>
<td>4.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Civic</td>
<td>0.90%</td>
<td>0.50%</td>
</tr>
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<td>0.50%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>1.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seattle</td>
<td>High market</td>
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<td>5.30%</td>
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<td>Civic</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>1.10%</td>
<td>3.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1.40%</td>
<td>3.60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7-16. Percent of all residents over the age of 25 with given educational attainment and mobility status, by type of cultural district and city

Source: SIAP

Even within these districts, the level of in-migration was differentiated by educational attainment. While between one and three percent of the entire population of the three cities were college graduates who had migrated from outside the state in the past year, more than five percent of the population of high market districts were in this group. In market districts, college-educated recent migrants made up four percent of the residents in Baltimore and Philadelphia and five percent in Seattle. In Baltimore and Philadelphia, those with a college degree were more likely to have moved into the district than were those without one.

It appears then that cultural districts attract a disproportionate share of better-educated residents who recently migrated to the cities from another state or country. We can’t offer a full test of Florida’s thesis, which is concerned with the attractiveness of a regional economy rather than with the characteristics of particular neighborhoods. Our analysis does, however, suggest that “natural” cultural districts are often the places where better-educated migrants choose to reside.
Some of our case study neighborhoods fit this pattern and others do not. In Baltimore’s Station North, we find that an extraordinarily high proportion of the residents had lived in another state or country a year earlier.

![Figure 7-14. Percent of residents who reported living in a different state or abroad the previous year, by city and neighborhood](image)

Source: SIAP

Over 10 percent of Greenmount West residents and over eight percent of Charles North residents had lived elsewhere the year before. By contrast, the Highlandtown-Patterson Park district was much less of a destination; just over two percent of residents had lived elsewhere the previous year. In Philadelphia, Callowhill/Chinatown North, at just under five percent, had the highest rate of in-migrants. Surprisingly, South Philadelphia had fewer recent migrants on average than the city as a whole. Rates of in-migration were high in virtually all of our Seattle neighborhoods. Broadway—in the heart of Capitol Hill—had the highest rate at 10 percent, but Stevens (Capitol Hill) and Mann (Central District) had rates above five percent. Indeed, the rate of the least mobile Seattle neighborhood, Chinatown-International District, was higher than that of the most mobile Philadelphia neighborhood.

In most cases, a majority of the new residents were college-educated. For example, in Baltimore’s Greenmount West neighborhood, eight percent of the population was recently-arrived college graduates and only one percent was recent migrants without a degree. The Philadelphia case study neighborhoods broke with this pattern. Indeed, in Callowhill-Chinatown North a majority of the recent migrants had less than a college education, most likely reflecting the migration of Asian immigrants into the district.
Out-migration: Do cultural districts displace low-income residents?

In order to estimate differential out-migration, as noted, we must link the 2005-09 and 2006-10 summary files. This is possible only for Baltimore and Seattle because Philadelphia’s boundaries changed too radically to allow a reliable merging of the two files.

Let’s examine the logic involved in calculating out-migration. From a single ACS file we are able to determine how many residents remained in the same house they lived in a year earlier. However, we need to account for those who lived outside the state one year earlier.

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19 Because of the link, we did not merge these data with our block group file. As a result, the measure of cultural assets used here is the weighted asset count by census tract that we used earlier in this chapter.
year earlier and, if not, whether they moved within the same county, same state, or from a different state or abroad. We don’t know how many people left the census tract and how many died. Consider how this situation changes when we have information for two successive years. Now, we know the net change in population. If we know how many people moved into a tract and the net change of population, we can calculate the difference between the two, which represents the number who have died or moved. 20

**Baltimore**

Overall, between 2005-09 and 2006-10, the average census tract in Baltimore lost 109 residents over the age of 25. Most of this decline (80 percent) was among persons with a high-school education or less. Overall the population with a high school degree or less declined by 5.4 percent, while that with at least a bachelor’s degree fell by 4.4 percent.

But this modest change in the total population of tracts hid the level of churning in the population. Of the average of 2,059 residents who lived in a tract in 2006-10, only 1,736 (86 percent) lived in the same house they had a year earlier. The remaining 284 residents, 14 percent of the 2005-09 population, either had moved into the area or changed their residence within the neighborhood. If we add together the net change and the number who moved in, we can calculate the number of people who moved out, died, or changed residence within their census tract—a total of 392 adults or 18 percent of the 2005-09 population.

In the city as a whole, better-educated residents were more likely to have moved out. Taken together, we estimate that an average of 20 percent of those with at least a BA moved out of the city’s census tracts during the year, while 18 percent of those with less education moved out, changed residence, or died.

As noted earlier, market and high market districts were less stable residually than the rest of the city. High-asset tracts (those in the top sixth) lost on average 175 adult residents during the year. The largest declines were among the less educated. Adults without a college degree declined by 10 percent compared to seven percent among those with at least a BA. Overall, only 79 percent of adults were still living in the same house as the year before, compared to 85 percent for the entire city. In these high-asset neighborhoods, the better educated were somewhat less likely to live in the same house as the year before than those with a high school diploma or less (77% versus 81% respectively).

There is little evidence that less-educated residents left cultural districts more frequently than those with a college degree. In districts with large concentration of cultural assets, 27 percent of adult residents with less than a college degree moved out, changed residence, or died during the year compared to 28 percent of those with a degree. Certainly, the composition of high-asset tracts was changing, but more as a result of in-migration of highly educated residents than the out-migration of those with a high-school diploma or less.

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20 All figures are average number per census tract.
Seattle

The evidence of differential migration was stronger in Seattle than in Baltimore. The average net change in tract population for the city as a whole was a loss of 87 residents, about 2.5 percent of the population. Most of this decline, however, affected less educated residents, who experienced a nine percent decrease while the college-educated population actually increased by one percent. This shift was the result primarily of population loss. On average, 31 percent of those without a college degree moved out, changed residence, or died; while only 19 percent of the college educated population did so.

These patterns were exaggerated in cultural districts, where the population without a college degree fell by 17 percent while the college-educated rose by five percent. Although those with no degree were more likely to move in than those with a BA (36% versus 22%), they were even more likely to move out, change residence, or die (53% versus 17%).

In summary, Seattle presents a much stronger case than Baltimore that economic displacement was taking place. In Baltimore most of the change in the socio-economic status of residents of cultural districts was the result of in-migration. In Seattle, by contrast, residents without a bachelor’s degree were three times more likely to move out of a cultural district than were more highly-educated residents.
“Natural” Cultural Districts—Summary of Typologies and Impacts

This chapter summarizes several of the central findings of the three-city project. Our purpose was, first, to propose different ways of thinking about “natural” cultural districts. We tested two ways of classifying districts: by cultural composition and by economic and spatial advantage. Our second purpose was to show how these two typologies help us understand the cultural and social impacts of these districts.

We were able to classify cultural districts by their composition. We identified one set of districts that possessed a dense and complex set of cultural assets and one set of districts with assets that were predominantly of one kind, either nonprofit organizations, commercial cultural firms, or resident artists. We discovered that over time the complex districts were geographically stable, while the single-asset clusters experienced quite a lot of change. In Philadelphia, we were able to show that complex districts appeared to be more sustainable than single-asset districts. Our measures of sustainability—change in density (number of assets per block group) and in block group overall ranking over time—provide a starting point for further investigation of how the composition of a cultural district influences its subsequent evolution.

We were also able to classify cultural districts by their economic and spatial advantage. We divided cultural districts into three groups:

- **high market districts**—those with a high number of assets, exceeding what we would predict based on their advantages;
- **market districts**—those with a high number of assets consistent with their advantages; and
- **civic clusters**—those with a lower number of assets, but exceeding what we would predict based on the disadvantages they face.

The first category—high market districts—overlapped with the complex cultural districts identified based on their composition of assets.

We found that a wide range of social and economic benefits were associated with this typology. All three types of districts were associated with a variety of social benefits. However, the civic districts—those facing considerable economic and spatial disadvantages but with a significant number of cultural resources—were much less likely to translate cultural resources into economic advancement. This split between the widely enjoyed social benefits and the more narrowly enjoyed economic benefits of the arts has implications for policy-making in the field, a topic to which we turn in the next chapter.
Chapter 8. Conclusion:  
Policy Implications of “Natural” Cultural Districts

Since 1994, the Social Impact of the Arts Project (SIAP) has worked to understand how the arts and culture influence neighborhood revitalization in Philadelphia. Through the application of quantitative and qualitative methods, we have discovered a set of persistent relationships between the arts and social wellbeing in the city.

Yet, our conclusions based on statistical analysis have often left room for doubt. Certainly, there was no doubt that we were finding a set of compelling statistical associations between cultural engagement and a variety of positive social and economic trends, but skeptics were quick to point out that “correlation does not equal causation.” Were we actually finding important connections between the arts and society, or were the relationships simply the result of other social processes that influence both social wellbeing and the arts?

Over the past several years, SIAP has used two strategies to address this question. First, we have been able to accumulate data on cultural engagement in Philadelphia over more than a decade. Our inventories of cultural assets in 1997, 2004, and 2010 provide us with the opportunity to study how cultural engagement at one point in time might influence subsequent community change. This approach is not airtight; there is still a gap between our statistical associations and a strong form of explanation. However, finding that the arts were present at point A and that something else happened later at point B at least rules out the possibility that the causality (if any) runs in the opposite direction.

This report represents the other strategy we’ve used to address our doubts. The opportunity to compare our results from Philadelphia with other cities would point out both the ways that Philadelphia is unique and the ways its profile is similar to that of other American cities.

As we dug deeper and deeper into the relationship of cultural ecology to social geography in Philadelphia, the gap between our detailed sense of Philadelphia and our
superficial knowledge of other cities grew. We had hoped that eventually other scholars would take our methods and apply them to other cities, but for the most part that did not happen.

This study has allowed us to answer that question. In what ways is the model of culture and society we’ve found in Philadelphia applicable to other cities? To no one’s surprise, the answer to the question has not been simple. We’ve discovered many patterns that cut across our three cities and seven cultural districts, and many, many others that were unique to one city or shared by two, but not the third.

This concluding chapter undertakes two tasks. First, we summarize our findings and conclusions drawn from analysis of the development of citywide cultural patterns and the dynamics of “natural” cultural districts. Second, we examine the policy implications of the study in three areas: the cultural composition of districts, the connection between cultural districts and social equity, and implications for policy regarding cultural space development and sustainability.

Summary of Findings

Social geography of three cities

SIAP’s past work in Philadelphia had identified a set of relationships between cultural engagement and the social and spatial structure of the city. Chapter 2’s goal was to determine whether these same patterns were present in Baltimore and Seattle as well. Generally speaking, we were more impressed with the contrasts among the three cities than their similarities.

The social impact of the arts is caught in two cross-cutting currents in all three cities, but the nature of those currents varies with context. The two currents are social inequality and diversity. None of the cities can resist the broad national and international explosion in inequality, although its effects can be mitigated to some extent through economic growth. Diversity is more complicated. This study focuses on three dimensions of diversity—economic, ethnic, and household. Although the three are present in all three cities, their prevalence and interactions vary.

The economic stratification of the three cities emphasizes the similarities between Baltimore and Philadelphia and their differences with Seattle. Seattle has enjoyed buoyant economic growth over the past generation, which shows in the prosperity of the population. The city’s poverty rate is half that of Philadelphia and Baltimore, and the proportion of the population possessing a college degree is about twice their rates. Although all three cities were affected by the recession of 2007-09, the Eastern cities are still feeling its effects in terms of housing prices, unemployment, and poverty.

The three cities have very different diversity profiles. The one dimension that cuts across is household diversity, which continues to become more common in all three. Economic diversity has increased somewhat but seems to be associated more with neighborhood change than a stable condition. Finally, ethnic diversity varies considerably across the three cities. At one extreme, Baltimore is still very much of a
black/white city in which racial segregation remains the rule. At the other end of the spectrum, Seattle is a classic multi-ethnic city with a large number of ethnically diverse neighborhoods. Philadelphia is now in the midst of a relatively rapid transition. During the 2000s, it moved to a point where a majority of its residents live in an ethnically diverse neighborhood. However, a large majority of African Americans continue to live in segregated neighborhoods. This leaves it somewhere in between the Seattle and Baltimore models.

**Cultural ecology of three cities**

Although Baltimore and Philadelphia share a similar socio-economic profile, they differ quite sharply on their cultural ecology. Baltimore is characterized by a very centralized concentration of cultural assets along the Charles Street corridor, from downtown to Johns Hopkins Homewood campus to the north. This contrasts with large sections of east and west Baltimore in which we were unable to identify significant concentrations of cultural resources. In contrast, Philadelphia has several cultural clusters outside of Center City, of which the Germantown Avenue corridor is prominent.

Notably, Philadelphia’s cultural resources are dominated by nonprofit cultural organizations, especially when compared to the other cities. Seattle stands out for the sheer quantity of cultural resources in the city. Its artist sector, in particular, is distinctive both because it is so much larger than those of the other cities and because artists—driven, it appears, by real estate and housing markets—are increasingly located in more remote neighborhoods that are separated from the concentration of organizational assets.

**Relationship between social geography and cultural ecology**

A surprise finding has been the varied relationships between social geography and cultural ecology across the three cities. Only two factors—distance from downtown and household diversity—played significant roles in all three cities. We expected socio-economic status—which is so important in Philadelphia—to play a prominent role across cities; but this was not the case in Seattle, where the richest neighborhoods did not have the highest cultural asset scores. The same contrast between the Eastern cities and Seattle held for the relationship of cultural resources to educational attainment, occupational status, and poverty.

One discovery to come out of the project is the role of housing tenure, a factor to which SIAP had paid relatively little attention in the past. Based on our fieldwork in Seattle, we became sensitive to the role of renters in cultural districts. Specifically, we found that neighborhoods with a high proportion of renters relative to their per capita income were much more likely to have a high concentration of cultural assets. In other words, these districts thrive in a sweet spot where a neighborhood is not too poor but still has sufficient rental opportunities. It turned out that the relationship of rental percentage (corrected for income) and cultural assets was present in all three cities.

In conclusion, we found that the two forces—increasing inequality and increasing diversity—influence the trajectory of the arts and culture in all three cities, albeit in
different ways. We doubt if both trends are sustainable. Indeed, it appears to some extent that inequality has been killing off diversity. Whether they both can survive or, if not, which will survive is a dilemma for the arts—and for society as a whole.

Case studies

Baltimore

The two Baltimore case studies—Station North and Highlandtown-Patterson Park—are distinguished by the fact that both are designated arts and entertainment districts by the state of Maryland. Yet the two districts each have a distinct character, in terms of their regional perception as well as the facts on the ground.

The Station North district, located in central Baltimore, is one of the densest concentrations of cultural assets in the city. For many years, the district has been seen as the weakest link in a number of neighborhoods stretching north and south along Charles Street. The district—particularly the Greenmount West neighborhood—includes a number of former industrial and commercial buildings that became artists’ work and live spaces during the 1990s. One of the earliest successes of the designated arts and entertainment district after it came into being in 2002 was to encourage the city to change the zoning for parts of the neighborhood to legitimate the artists’ presence.

The pace of development in the district accelerated in the mid-2000s, when a group of important institutional entities—including the Maryland Institute College of Art, the University of Baltimore, and Johns Hopkins University—joined forces as the Central Baltimore Partnership to generate increased development activity in the area. Although the recession has slowed major redevelopment, the increase in cultural resources in the district has continued apace.

Still, a number of challenges continue to face Station North. Speculators who have done little to support the district’s development hold a large amount of the real estate. The intersection of North Avenue and Charles Street—the natural center of the district—has been one of the slowest to develop. In the area surrounding Penn Station, if the real estate market in the district picks up again, there is likely to be serious competition between arts-based uses and residential development for a more upscale commuter market.

Local community organizations are committed to revitalization without displacement of longer-term residents. Thanks to the high number of vacant rowhomes, this is likely to succeed in the short-term. Yet, given the low rate of owner-occupancy, relatively small changes in the real estate market could affect the affordability of the district for both members of the African-American community as well as resident artists. Indeed, there is increased discussion in the district of ways to expand owner-occupancy as a strategy for stabilizing the artist population.

Highlandtown-Patterson Park in East Baltimore as a “natural” cultural district has a different story. In contrast to Station North, it has experienced neither the “white flight”
of the early postwar years, nor the spread of abandonment in the more recent past. As a result, the cultural history of the district includes a traditional folk culture based on its white ethnic and blue-collar past and a variety of newer dimensions. A distinguishing element of its more recent cultural development has been a public performance culture focused on Patterson Park and the Creative Alliance, which moved in 2003 to the old Patterson Theater. Beginning in 1998, political and business interests in the neighborhood sought to develop the district as a “creative class” hub, which provided the rationale for seeking designation as an arts district and for significant public investment, including the rehabilitation of the Patterson and the construction of a new area library on Eastern Avenue.

The creative-class development never materialized. Instead, over the past decade, the district has become a center for Latin American immigration to the city. As a result, in recent years, cultural workers in the neighborhood have joined forces with community-based organizations and youth-serving programs to address the ethnic tensions and social exclusion often associated with neighborhood change.

Philadelphia

Likewise, the two Philadelphia districts—South Philadelphia and Callowhill/Chinatown North—are studies in contrast. South Philadelphia is an established, large, and diverse community that mixes a long history as a cultural center and immigrant-receiving area with new waves of artists and immigrants. Callowhill/Chinatown North, by contrast, is an old industrial district with virtually no history as a residential neighborhood.

A challenge for both districts, however, is contestation over space and place. Callowhill/Chinatown North has survived a variety of schemes for its redevelopment ranging from battles over the Vine Street Expressway in the 1980s to proposals for a ballpark or casino in the past decade. In 2011 and 2012, a proposal to redevelop the abandoned Reading Railroad viaduct as an urban park and a plan to redevelop the old Philadelphia Inquirer building—just across Broad Street—as a casino-entertainment center again pose a challenge to the neighborhood. Now, an older artists population finds itself literally squeezed between an expanding Asian population to its east and condominium development to the west. Meanwhile, a set of newer nonprofits—most of which rent their space—live a precarious existence. Asian Arts Initiative, which during our field work has been able to buy its building and develop it as a multi-user facility, stands out as a hopeful sign that the arts can serve as a bridge across the many divisions within the neighborhood.

Certainly, South Philadelphia is not without its tensions. An older white ethnic population has learned to accommodate new immigrant groups including a variety of East and Southeast Asian groups and a recent influx of Mexicans. Social history, though, is a living cultural resource in the district, and the spatial dimension of that history is captured by the idea of repurposing. For decades, if not centuries, residents have recycled the built environment as churches and synagogues have become Buddhist temples and community arts schools.
Today, a process of mutual adjustment is repeating itself in South Philadelphia as immigrants, art students, and another generation of artist-homeowners seek to make South Philadelphia their home. Although the archetypal rowhouse may not be as well adapted for use as an artist’s workspace as are the industrial lofts of Callowhill/Chinatown North, they impose a scale that remains attractive to artists as living and social spaces. Still, there are concerns about the shortage of workspace, especially as collaborative modes of production become a common part of the artists’ vocations.

This process of change and adaptation helps explain why South Philadelphia has generally avoided both runaway gentrification and neighborhood decline. It appears that a capacity for re-thinking community institutions and re-purposing physical assets has enabled South Philly neighborhoods to maintain a balance of working-class stability and gentrification, insularity and welcome, cultural adaptation and creative expression.

Seattle

Seattle’s social geography and cultural ecology have combined to give the city a unique cultural profile. Our study focused on several factors, including the distinctive character of its nonprofit sector, the impact of rapid development and increasing real estate prices, and the challenge of cultural facilities.

Although Seattle has more nonprofit cultural organizations per capita than the other cities, the sector is dominated by a number of very large organizations and a plethora of smaller nonprofits. As a result, middle-sized nonprofits—those with budgets between one-half and 1.2 million dollars—are less common than in Philadelphia. The shift away from mid-sized nonprofits, as a national trend, has been noted by cultural sector researchers over the past decade. In Seattle, this process seems to have accelerated because of competition from commercial cultural firms as well as funding decisions.

Seattle’s shortage of mid-sized organizations and limited arts philanthropy has stimulated a variety of models for linking the arts to income-generating schemes. The live music/bar connection is common in most cities, but in Seattle it has been joined by bookstore/coffee shops, theater/parking lots and dance/sushi bars and a variety of less likely combinations. In place of a large number of more-or-less stable nonprofits, the Seattle cultural scene appears to be dominated by a project-based mindset, in which artists and entrepreneurs come up with ways of mounting time-limited projects. This approach is facilitated to some extent by the city’s policy of funding projects that are not 501c3 formal nonprofits. The cultural ecology of the city has adapted to these realities by generating a set of conduits, like Shunpike, to bridge the gap between funding and less-formal arts projects.

Because Seattle’s economy and real estate markets are so dynamic, artists find themselves at risk of displacement. As we noted in Chapter 4, artist-dominant districts now stretch far into South Seattle. The sectors folklore is filled with stories of property turnover. The sale of the Odd Fellows Hall in Capitol Hill in 2008 ago continues to be offered as a cautionary tale.
The combination of “fragile” groups and projects and rapid shifts in the real estate market has made facility development a much more acute issue in Seattle than in the other cities. For several decades, the city’s “old economy” spaces—lofts, warehouses, and manufacturing—provided a supply of low-quality, low-cost artist spaces. The relentless push of the real estate market has reduced these spaces, especially as the cultural sector finds itself in competition with other, more-profitable parts of the “creative” economy, like web- and video-game designers. South Lake Union, for example, for many years was essentially a warehouse district that spawned a variety of arts groups, but they have been largely displaced by the redevelopment plans of Amazon and Vulcan.

The threats of displacement influence Seattle’s cultural ecosystem. Small fly-by-night artists’ projects, which have relatively little fixed capital and don’t depend on a stable audience, can adapt to these changes. Large organizations, with public support, have been able to secure their own facilities. The middle-sized groups, however, are dependent on developing a steady audience and face a need for fixed capital investments in their space.

**Types of “natural” cultural districts**

In Chapter 7, we proposed two ways of viewing “natural” cultural districts—by their cultural composition and by their socio-economic and location advantage. We also examined the usefulness of these typologies for understanding the life history of cultural districts and their impacts on the wellbeing of neighborhoods.

The composition approach focuses on the relative concentration of different types of cultural assets in a neighborhood. It contrasts districts with a complex cultural ecology, in which many types of organizations and artists are present, to ones in which a single type of asset predominates. The analysis of composition complemented our fieldwork, for example, by identifying the extreme concentration of cultural assets in Baltimore and the expansion of artist-dominant districts south from Seattle’s cultural core.

In Philadelphia, we were able to use our historical data from 1997, 2004, and 2010 to examine the trajectory of cultural districts. We found that complex cultural districts were much more stable than single-asset districts. The vast majority remained complex districts between 1997 and 2010. In addition, complex districts were more likely to grow over time (by increasing their density, that is, number of enterprises and artists located there) and much less likely to decline than single-asset districts. Although these conclusions must be seen as preliminary, they support the hypothesis that a more complex cultural ecology increases the sustainability and resilience of “natural” cultural districts.

Where composition provides a means of understanding the internal development of cultural districts, socio-economic and location analysis allows us to understand how cultural assets influence community wellbeing in the context of inequality and exclusion. By differentiating districts into those that succeed in the context of social advantage—high market and market districts—from those that must overcome legacies of exclusion
and discrimination—civic clusters—it focuses our attention on the social and economic benefits of cultural engagement and on the challenges to achieving cultural equity.

The findings of this analysis are in some ways quite stark. All three types of “natural” cultural districts carry with them a set of social benefits, including higher rates of social diversity, improved public health outcomes and declines in ethnic and racial harassment. Furthermore, we find that, although cultural districts do attract new residents of a higher socio-economic status, at least in Baltimore this is not associated with the out-migration of existing residents. In Seattle, by contrast, we find evidence that as new well-educated residents move into a cultural district, residents with lower educational attainment move out in greater numbers.

Unfortunately, for civic clusters, the considerable social benefits of cultural districts do not translate into economic benefits for the residents. These areas—typically with significant economic and location disadvantage—do not share in the declining poverty, increased incomes, and improved housing markets enjoyed by more privileged districts. This gap between the social and economic benefits of civic districts poses one the most significant challenges for translating cultural policy into social policy.

Implications for Policy

What kinds of policy interventions are appropriate for different types of districts?

Differentiating types of “natural” cultural districts as we did in Chapter 7 has descriptive and analytical purposes. It allows us to give a more detailed description of the features of cultural clusters and to provide a framework for seeing their similarities and differences. In addition, the typologies provide a starting point for policy interventions that might benefit one district or another.

Ecology of “natural” cultural districts

It stands to reason that the composition of a “natural” cultural district would influence the relative effectiveness of different types of interventions. The types of incentives that might change the behavior of nonprofits are obviously different from those that would motivate commercial cultural firms. Similarly, independent artists would respond to some changes in the social and economic environment that would have little relevance for organizations.

Perhaps the most obvious distinction here relates to tax incentives. A number of states have developed mechanisms for establishing designated arts and entertainment districts. In Maryland, for example, such districts provide for three types of benefits:

1—property tax credits for new construction or renovation of certain buildings that create live-work space for artists and/or space for arts and entertainment enterprises;

2—an income tax subtraction modification for income derived from artistic work sold by “qualifying residing artists”; and
3—an exemption from the admissions and amusement tax levied by an “arts and entertainment enterprise” or “qualifying residing artist” in a district.¹

All of the benefits associated with Maryland’s districts are in the form of tax incentives. Clearly, for districts with a high concentration of tax-exempt arts organizations, these benefits are irrelevant. The artists’ benefits can be difficult to use because the artist must live in the district as well as sell as his/her work in the district.

Districts with a high proportion of commercial firms might be particularly dependent on the quality of city services. Sanitation, streetscape, zoning, license and inspection functions are notoriously uneven in many cities, yet they both communicate much about a district and influence investment decisions. For example, Philadelphia’s Callowhill/Chinatown North has recently attracted attention as a commercial cultural district, but the experience of walking through the area continues to be characterized by litter and dumping, uneven sidewalks, poor lighting, and barren streetscapes. An effort to establish a neighborhood improvement district in the area failed in 2011 but is likely to be revisited in the future.

What to do about artists poses one of the most difficult challenges. There is a widely held perception that artists play a transitory role in cultural district development. They identify undervalued non-residential space and turn it into working and living spaces. Real estate and development interests take note of their activity (“canaries in the coal mine”) and bid up prices that eventually drive the artists to relocate elsewhere. In Baltimore’s Station North district today, many residents and organizations accept this scenario fatalistically as the inevitable outcome of current “sweat equity” investment.

If arts districts are to stay artists’ districts, the key appears to be ownership. Cultural organizations and artists who are willing and able to purchase property can stabilize a district and insure their continued presence. Programs that prepare independent artists and nonprofit groups for property ownership in terms of both knowledge and credit could serve multiple roles in helping to sustain “natural” cultural districts.

Our findings on the sustainability of complex cultural districts also have implications for policy. Certainly, the findings in this report are preliminary and need to await further investigation before providing the foundation for actual interventions. As a starting point, however, policy makers could become more sensitive to the cultural ecology within which organizations operate. This study suggests that the success of cultural districts—and by implication the success of individuals and organizations within those districts—is a function of their ecology. Rather than applying organizational metrics to judging the likelihood of future success, funders and policy-makers may choose to encourage the cultural diversification of districts.

Economic inequality and location advantage

Categorizing cultural districts by their relative market and location position also poses a set of challenges for social policy. As we have noted, areas of the city with higher concentrations of cultural assets tend to be associated with a set of social and economic benefits. However, the character of these benefits is not uniformly distributed.

In contrast, civic clusters do not share market districts’ capacity to translate the social benefits generated by the arts into economic benefits. For example, between 2001 and 2008 in Philadelphia, two-thirds of market districts and one-half of high-market districts enjoyed substantial improvement in their housing markets. However, only 14 percent of civic cluster block groups saw their housing markets improve, just slightly above the figure for the rest of the three cities (10 percent).

Given the current state of the economy and policy-making, the easy path of cultural district development is through market mechanisms. If we could enjoy the benefits of creative placemaking simply by allowing markets to operate more efficiently—for example, by improving city services, promoting culture-based community development strategy would be easy.

However, these data suggest that advocates of creative placemaking may have a more difficult task than they imagine. Although we can demonstrate strong connections between the concentration of cultural assets and a wide variety of social benefits, economic spillover tends to be concentrated in places that are already advantaged. Thus, if we pursue strategies that promote creative placemaking purely as a market-based strategy, the outcomes are likely to increase the already-growing gap between prosperous and poor residents and between advantaged and disadvantaged parts of the city.

The analysis of market and civic districts does appear to remove one concern that has dogged cultural policy. In slow-growth cities like Baltimore and Philadelphia, there seems to be little evidence that the expansion of cultural districts promotes social displacement. As the data analysis in Chapter 7 shows, these districts appear to attract new residents with higher educational attainment. As a result, the composition of these districts changes over time, and the balance of older and newer residents shifts. But the influx of new residents does not seem to be associated with any detectable out-migration of lower socio-economic status residents.

The explanation is simple enough. Slow-growth cities have huge inventories of vacant residential properties and former industrial and commercial properties that can be converted to residential or work/live space. Cultural districts could experience many years of in-migration and population growth without using up the supply of underutilized property. Of course, there is the risk that the market could get out of hand and eventually lead to displacement. But there may be an even greater probability that redevelopment will proceed slowly and lead to the gradual improvement of these neighborhoods.
Seattle and other high-growth cities pose a different situation. In Seattle we find evidence that residents with lower educational attainment are leaving cultural districts as those with higher socio-economic status move in. Some of our informants suggest that this is the result of low-income homeowners, frequently older residents whose children have grown and left home, deciding to take advantage of the home equity they have acquired. Further research would allow us to verify the exact character of this displacement and to determine whether to see it as a “social problem” or not.

We can use this analysis to identify one more group of neighborhoods—those that share the advantages of market and high-market cultural districts but do not possess the same level of cultural assets. In many cases, these areas already possess more than the average number of assets, but not the critical mass necessary to transform them into “natural” cultural districts. A set of targeted interventions could enable these “near market” clusters to become cultural districts and potentially enjoy the associated social and economic benefits.

“Near market” districts in Baltimore. These districts share many of the characteristics of market districts, but do not yet have the same concentration of cultural assets.

In her classic work, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs noted that vital urban neighborhoods thrive on multiple types of diversity. Yet, these types of urban diversity—physical form, social composition, and street activity—are vulnerable.

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She warned that neighborhood diversity is subject to “self-destruction.” For Jacobs, preserving diversity is a key to maintaining resilient urban neighborhoods.

Among the forces that can destroy diversity, Jacobs noted, are “the tendency for both public and private money either to glut or starve development and change.” In particular, Jacobs drew the distinction between gradual money that allows a district to develop at a pace that does not destroy the diversity that allowed it to flourish and cataclysmic money that drives out diversity.

Jacobs’ insights—although a half-century old—are particularly relevant to today’s interest in creative placemaking. Many “natural” cultural districts are vulnerable. They can fail because they attract either too little or too much public or private investment. As with natural resources, they should be treated as vulnerable habitats that require stewardship.

Given the dominant political and economic forces facing many older American cities, it is likely that policy-makers will pursue short-sighted strategies that could undermine the forces of community regeneration. Yet, the evidence suggests that a longer-term strategy would provide benefits that are more widely shared by members of urban communities.

The short-term strategy is clear enough. Cities could focus on supporting and enhancing market and high-market districts, which already enjoy stronger economic status. The “near market” districts that enjoy the economic and location advantages of these areas but don’t yet possess the same concentration of cultural assets might also be targeted for special attention. Such investments would be more likely to deliver quicker pay-offs in the form of increased property values and tax revenues.

This approach fits into a variety of trends already present in contemporary urban public policy. It builds on the recent interest in drawing a “creative class” to cities as the key to increasing economic competitiveness. It is consistent with many philanthropic strategies, which equate nonprofits’ fiscal probity with social effectiveness. A short-term approach also fits into a general “winner-take-all” view of economic prosperity, a tendency that is more present in the arts and culture than in many other sectors.

The outcome of a market-based strategy would likely fit into our classic model of the transitory arts district. The diverse, funky districts that attract artists and other cultural enterprises will become targets for the cataclysmic money to which Jacobs’ refers. In some districts, high-end retail, condominiums, and entertainment venues will displace the real cultural assets. Cities will use the array of current policy tools—tax abatements, credits, and improvement districts—to improve some parts of the city, while a majority of neighborhoods languish.

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3 Jacobs, *Death and Life*, 316.

A longer-term strategy would build on the social and economic benefits that cultural engagement generates in all types of cultural districts, including civic clusters. It would define cultural engagement broadly to include conventional notions of high art as well as the popular culture and folk traditions of all groups that inhabit the contemporary city. Rather than using government and philanthropy to reinforce market forces, a long-view policy would compensate for market failure and promote social equity. Over time, the strategy would promote social inclusion and the productive utilization of all of the city’s fiscal, human, and social capital.

Civic clusters remain an easily overlooked element of the regional cultural ecology. These neighborhoods often face considerable disadvantages in terms of location and economic standing, but promote collective capacity in communities that lack it. We’ve seen how the arts resources of Baltimore’s Highlandtown-Patterson Park, while unable to translate the district into a creative class magnet, have had a profound effect on the civic culture of the district.

Norris Square, in eastern Philadelphia, provides another example of the challenges faced by disadvantaged neighborhoods. A group of women formed Grupo Motivos in the early 1990s to reclaim Norris Square Park from the drug trade. The women have created six community gardens that feature vegetables and flowers, murals, and cultural artifacts representing Puerto Rican and African cultures. To educate the second- and third-generation about their multi-cultural heritage, Grupo Motivos runs environmental education and cooking workshops. Facing daunting odds, the residents of the neighborhood have resuscitated the civic life of their community, through a combination of culture, horticulture, and community organizing. Yet, despite their success, the residents of Norris Square—like those of many civic clusters—have found it difficult to attract public and philanthropic support, because they are not seen as a “real” cultural district.

Our findings do not provide an authoritative endorsement of either of these approaches to creative placemaking. For cash-strapped cities, strategies that promise a quick fix are likely to carry the day. That victory, however, is likely to be pyrrhic for the cultural community, because it will undermine many of the conditions that have allowed the arts to flourish in urban neighborhoods and will identify the arts with strategies that promote exclusion and privilege over social inclusion and shared prosperity.

**Cultural space development**

One of the findings of our project has been that the trends affecting the cultural world in general are having a specific set of spatial effects. Here we focus on their implications for developing and managing cultural spaces.

Conventionally, issues about cultural space have been tied to the viability of cultural organizations. Established cultural organizations typically raised the funding and managed their own spaces. Although there are many examples of how this process diverted organizations from their central mission, developing its own facility was a way that an organization demonstrated that it had arrived.
Yet, in a world in which established cultural organizations have become an endangered species, the idea of one organization/one space no longer seems viable or even desirable. Increasingly, this suggests a separation of the tasks of developing and managing spaces and the withdrawal of most cultural organizations and projects from involvement in either.

Indeed, we may be witnessing an inversion of the one organization/one space model. Rather than each organization developing its own space as a way of demonstrating (hopefully) that it has become established and stable, the venues themselves may become the source of stability for the cultural world. Projects, individual artists, and smaller cultural groups may come and go (and come again), but the cultural facilities they use may provide the part of the system that remains relatively constant.

It’s interesting, for example, that much of the discussion of cultural space in Seattle has been stimulated by changes in spaces rather than organizations. The 2008 conversion of Odd Fellows Hall in Capitol Hill has stimulated ongoing discussion of cultural space policy, and the 2011 closure of 619 Western Avenue provoked an outcry and continues to have an impact on Pioneer Square, Chinatown-International District, and SoDo.

The separation of organizations from spaces may also make sense in terms of the social organization of many cultural sectors. In South Philadelphia, as noted in Chapter 5, performance and visual artists across disciplines appear to be seeking opportunities for collaboration with increasing frequency. Flexible, multi-use space makes more sense as shared space than facilities designed for a single organization.

Through our study of three cities, we have come to see that the shift from an organization- to a project-based arts culture is proceeding, but at different paces in different cities. In a way, the three-city study was an eye-opener. Philadelphia is still a city dominated by conventional nonprofits, as the Cultural Vitality Index commissioned by the City documented. Baltimore and Seattle, albeit in quite different ways, have moved further away from the conventional one organization/one space model and have provided us with a rich set of cultural space alternatives. Following are some examples.

- **Organization-based facility development with community access.** The success of the Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience to develop a magnificent space in the heart of Seattle’s Chinatown-International District appears at first glance to be a very conventional one organization/one facility development. Yet, The Wing made a conscious decision to incorporate community spaces—including a community hall, theater, library and heritage center—into the historic structure. As a result, the membrane between the organization and the community is more permeable. The facility provides space that can be used by other organizations with less capacity than The Wing.

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- **Multi-tenant facility with single arts organization as owner/developer/manager.** In Philadelphia, the Asian Arts Initiative (AAI) bought and began to develop its building during the course of our research. Its vision is for the facility to provide a home for a variety of arts and social action organizations and serve the role of an anchor institution in Callowhill/Chinatown North. The purchase and rehabilitation of the facility, for which it has been able to secure support from a variety of funders, has been a challenge for a mid-sized arts organization like AAI.

- **Cheap-space managed by a single landlord.** This is hardly a novel model, but one that continues to be attractive to emerging groups and artists. Buildings like Load of Fun in Baltimore, the former 619 Western in Seattle, and the Vox Populi building in Philadelphia always seem to be full. Obviously, they are the least stable type of cultural space, especially in districts that experience rapid growth over time. The experience of a company like Single Carrot Theatre (at Load of Fun, closed temporarily, Aug 2012) shows the utility of these spaces. Begun by a group of graduating theater majors, the company needed affordable space that would allow it to produce plays for a decidedly niche audience. It now has ambitions to broaden its audience and plans to move to a more suitable facility in the coming year.

    Seattle’s experience suggests that in hot real estate markets, the supply of these types of spaces is limited and dwindling. The recession slowed some real estate pressures and stimulated the Storefronts Seattle program, which makes commercial space available for limited time and low prices. One response to the drying up of conventional cheap space is “pop-up” spaces and galleries, often in artists’ homes. These are not substitutes for workspace but do suggest that the shortage of affordable space may stimulate reconceptualization of existing uses.

- **Upscale space managed by single landlord.** The research team encountered a variety of buildings in which a single landlord develops new arts spaces as part of a multi-use facility. The Wolf Building in Callowhill/Chinatown North, for example, is primarily a mixed residential and commercial building. The owner, an architect and developer, has decided to invest in converting the basement into a performance venue (Underground Arts). The case is instructive in terms of the motivation for this type of facility. The owner explained that with his son in theater, and given his lifelong interest in design and the arts, he sees having a performance space in his building as desirable. The question is whether this type of “psychological” subsidy is a reliable foundation for cultural space development.

- **Multi-tenant facility developed and managed by nonprofit entity.** Multi-tenant facilities, in which a nonprofit entity develops and manages the facility, are an increasingly popular response to changes in cultural ecology and real estate markets. In Baltimore, the CityArts building in the Station North district used historic preservation tax credits and low-income housing tax credits to develop affordable housing for artists and persons with disabilities. The 12th Avenue Arts project under development by Capitol Hill Housing (CHH) in Seattle will include two small theaters.
for local troupes; 88 affordable apartments; office space for CHH, a theater management group, and others; and community meeting and retail spaces. The project responds to the perceived decline in the availability of cultural space in Capitol Hill and has attracted a substantial amount of public subsidy from the state and local sources. Washington Hall, in Seattle’s Central District, provides an interesting contrast to 12th Avenue Arts. Its developers have a similar vision of a multi-tenant facility that would serve the needs of its primary tenants as well as the wider community. At the same time, because it is in the Central District, it has attracted fewer established tenants and less public support. The contrast illustrates the difficulty of realizing one of these developments without major investments of public or philanthropic subsidy.

Still, the benefits of nonprofit development and management should not be underestimated. The privately developed spaces discussed above can all be seen as “temporary” in one way or another. The cheap, low-quality examples are explicitly available only until a better offer comes along. The higher-quality examples may disappear if and when market conditions or the inclinations of the owner change. Although nonprofits have been known to change their missions regarding the availability of space for community use, they are more likely to remain in the public sphere.

Will a new paradigm based on separating arts-users from space developers and managers replace the one organization/one space model? Generally speaking, all of these models require considerable subsidy to develop and operate these facilities. Some of those subsidies are philanthropic, as in LINC’s Space for Change program, and others are public, as in the use of Low-Income Housing and New Market Tax Credit programs. The alternative to subsidy seems to be to combine the cultural uses of the space with some other revenue-generating use. Notable examples of this approach involve drinking, eating, or parking (gallery/bar, theatre/parking, dance/sushi bar). Another alternative—that we haven’t yet seen in action—would involve development of public spaces for multiple community uses. Of course, we have abundant examples of how this has worked in the past. In Philadelphia, the city’s recreation centers and branch libraries serve as sites and venues for a variety of cultural organizations and participatory groups. In most cases, the barebones City contribution is supplemented by nonprofit and individual contributions as well as volunteers’ time and talents.

Of course, the sacrifice here is in the quality of the space. The archetypal “church basement” is cheap, but the physical surroundings impose significant constraints on the creative process. Finding ways to develop spaces that are affordable and adaptable seems to be a major challenge for the design professions. In essence, we need a cultural IKEA that will take lessons from high-end design and use them in more affordable incarnations.
**Implications for Research**

This report has taken us from the discussion of historical patterns of inequality to the promise of new models of cultural organization and space. As with any emerging field, every question we answer generates a set of new questions. In this last section, we suggest some of the future lines of inquiry suggested by this study.

**Change in neighborhood cultural ecology over time**

One of the foci of the three-city study has been the life cycle and trajectory of “natural” cultural districts. Through our interviewing and fieldwork, we have been able to tell the story of how our seven case-study districts have developed, declined, and renewed themselves over time. For Philadelphia, we’ve offered a first-cut examination of the relationship between cultural district growth and the composition of the district. We found that complex districts appear to have more success over time than do districts dominated by a single type of cultural asset.

We plan to build on this preliminary work in both the short- and long-term. Over the next year, SIAP will undertake a more detailed classification of cultural assets, including more information on their discipline, institutional form, and size. This will allow us to develop more fine-grained ways of characterizing districts than we have been able to do thus far. This should be particularly important for single-asset clusters. The same data refinements should allow us to specify our outcome variables with more precision.

In the longer-term, it would be possible—at least to some extent—to construct similar data for the other cities in this analysis. Certainly, one take-away from this study is that the patterns we find in Philadelphia need to be viewed in comparative context. Although it would take considerable effort to construct comparable databases, it is probably worth the effort.

**New models of cultural production**

We argue in this report that a new paradigm is gaining ground in the arts. In place of the postwar institutional system in which philanthropy and government invest in an ever-growing nonprofit arts sector, we now see the emergence of a sector based on commercial and informal networked organizations, enterprises, and individuals that come together around time-limited projects. Although it has been anticipated for over a decade, it is only in the past few years that this transformation has become manifest.

We hypothesize in this report that the three cities are at different points in this transformation. Philadelphia—the city that we know most about—appears to be the slowest to change, as the size and importance of its nonprofit sector testify. Seattle is the closest to the new paradigm, with its huge population of artists, relatively modest middle-sized nonprofit sector, and focus on project-based arts production.

Over two years, we’ve been able to gain a sense of the history of how cultural districts play into this transition, but in the scope of things, two years is a relatively short time. Are we correct to imagine all cities moving in one direction, or are we seeing the
emergence of several competing models? It may be as hard to imagine Philadelphia stripped of its nonprofits, as it is to imagine their resurgence in Seattle.

The enduring bias of much cultural sector research to take the nonprofit organization as the unit of analysis will make it difficult to understand fully this transition. We have advocated an ecological model that stresses social and institutional networks as the key to understanding the new reality and “natural” cultural districts as the spatial manifestation of this network model.

Displacement versus community revitalization

Since at least the 1970s, arts-based revitalization has often been equated with gentrification and displacement. In her study of SoHo, Sharon Zukin posited a model in which the urban power elite uses artists as a means of clearing out obsolete uses and poorer residents for the purpose of revalorizing urban land. 6

Until now, however, the data on displacement has been less compelling. Rob Sampson’s recent book on Chicago demonstrates that though lower-income urban dwellers do move a lot, they usually end up in neighborhoods similar to the ones they left.7 But we have not had the data to test whether the presence of cultural assets in a neighborhood is associated with the out-migration of poor residents.

The annual American Community Survey summary files provide us with an opportunity to confirm or disprove the displacement thesis. Unfortunately, we have had only two files to work with, and the shift in census tract boundaries has made it more difficult to test. The recent summary file (released in fall 2012) should allow a more straightforward analysis of displacement in all of our cities. In addition, as the number of summary files increases, we will gain more confidence in the findings that emerge from their analysis.

Reconnecting the arts with culture

SIAP has always been committed to a broad view of the cultural sector that includes both mainstream arts and the whole range of cultural practices reproduced through the actions of urban residents. For shorthand, we can distinguish art from culture.

One surprise that has emerged from this study has been the degree to which art and culture are divorced at the community level. One side effect of the shift in paradigm mentioned above has been the decline of what we refer to as the community arts sector. One benefit of public and philanthropic policy during the 1970s to 1990s was the sustaining and expansion of community-based arts centers in urban neighborhoods. Community-based institutions were much more likely than mainstream arts to draw on vernacular and indigenous cultural traditions as a source for contemporary creative expression. In turn, they served to legitimate cultural traditions and encourage cross-


disciplinary modes of artistic expression. When SIAP first came into existence, it was the vitality of this sector and its impact on Philadelphia’s neighborhoods and region that drove much of our research.

Things have changed. Although arts funders have continued to support cultural equity, their focus tends to be on diversifying elite cultural institutions rather than feeding the grassroots. Meanwhile, the demographics of our cities are changing what those grassroots look like. Community arts centers were among of the first victims of a general trend in the nonprofit sector toward marketization and emphasis on budget restraint. During the past two decades, the number of cultural resources and rates of cultural participation in low-income neighborhoods have declined sharply.

We believe that the divorce of the arts from culture hurts the arts sector and undermines its ability to have social impact. As we’ve discovered, the “civic” clusters identified in Chapter 7 continue to influence non-economic dimensions of social wellbeing but cannot translate these benefits into economic gains for low-income neighborhoods. Given this reality, the heralding of the economic benefits of the arts for cities and the nation risks becoming just one more expression of the explosion of social exclusion that is undermining our civic culture.