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## Culture's Role in Community Revitalization in Philadelphia

Mark J. Stern

University of Pennsylvania, stern@sp2.upenn.edu

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## Culture's Role in Community Revitalization in Philadelphia

### Abstract

SIAP grew out of the belief that a better understanding of how the arts fit into urban social processes could provide a stronger foundation for policy making beyond a narrow focus on economic development. Its research to date can inform urban policy and community development strategies in several ways: highlight upcoming trends beyond “urban crisis”; measure the impacts of cultural engagement on urban neighborhoods; and document the mechanisms through which cultural sector works in urban communities.

Thus the arts and culture are not marginal but rather are at the center of the new urban reality—characterized by a mix of decline and revitalization. Looking forward, SIAP wants to document how cultural engagement—along with other forms of community involvement—fit into an evolving “new civil society.”

### Disciplines

Arts and Humanities | Civic and Community Engagement | Sociology | Urban Studies and Planning

### Comments

SIAP's Dynamics of Culture collection includes research and convenings undertaken from 2003 to 2005 with support by the Rockefeller Foundation.



Social Impact of  
the Arts Project

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University of Pennsylvania  
School of Social Work  
<http://www.ssw.upenn.edu/SIAP>

# Culture's Role in Community Revitalization in Philadelphia

Mark J. Stern  
Professor of Social Welfare and History  
Co-Director, Urban Studies Program  
University of Pennsylvania

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# THE ARTS AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The primary focus of arts and urban policy has been on economic development strategies:

- Developing cultural districts to create a tourist destination
- Creating a more attractive urban environment to attract corporate headquarters or the “creative class”

Although these strategies have merit, they do little to address the role the arts and culture play in urban residents’ everyday lives.

The Social Impact of the Arts Project (SIAP) grew out of our the belief that a better understanding of how the arts fit into urban social processes can provide a stronger foundation for policy making

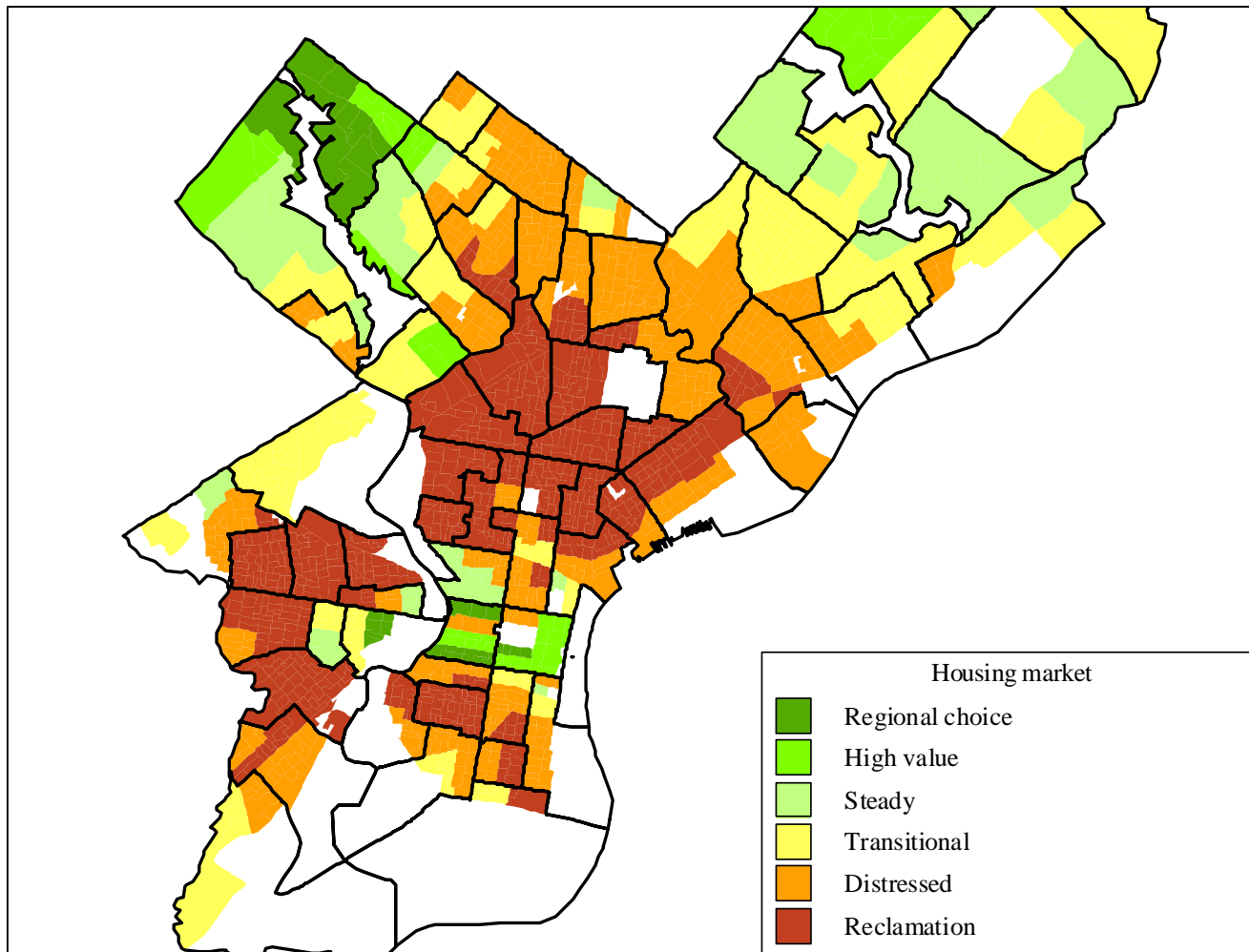
Today:

- What are the **current urban trends** relevant to the arts and culture
- What have we learned about the **impacts** of culture on urban neighborhoods
- What are the **mechanism** through which the cultural sector has this influence?
- How can a fuller understanding of culture enhance community development **strategies**?

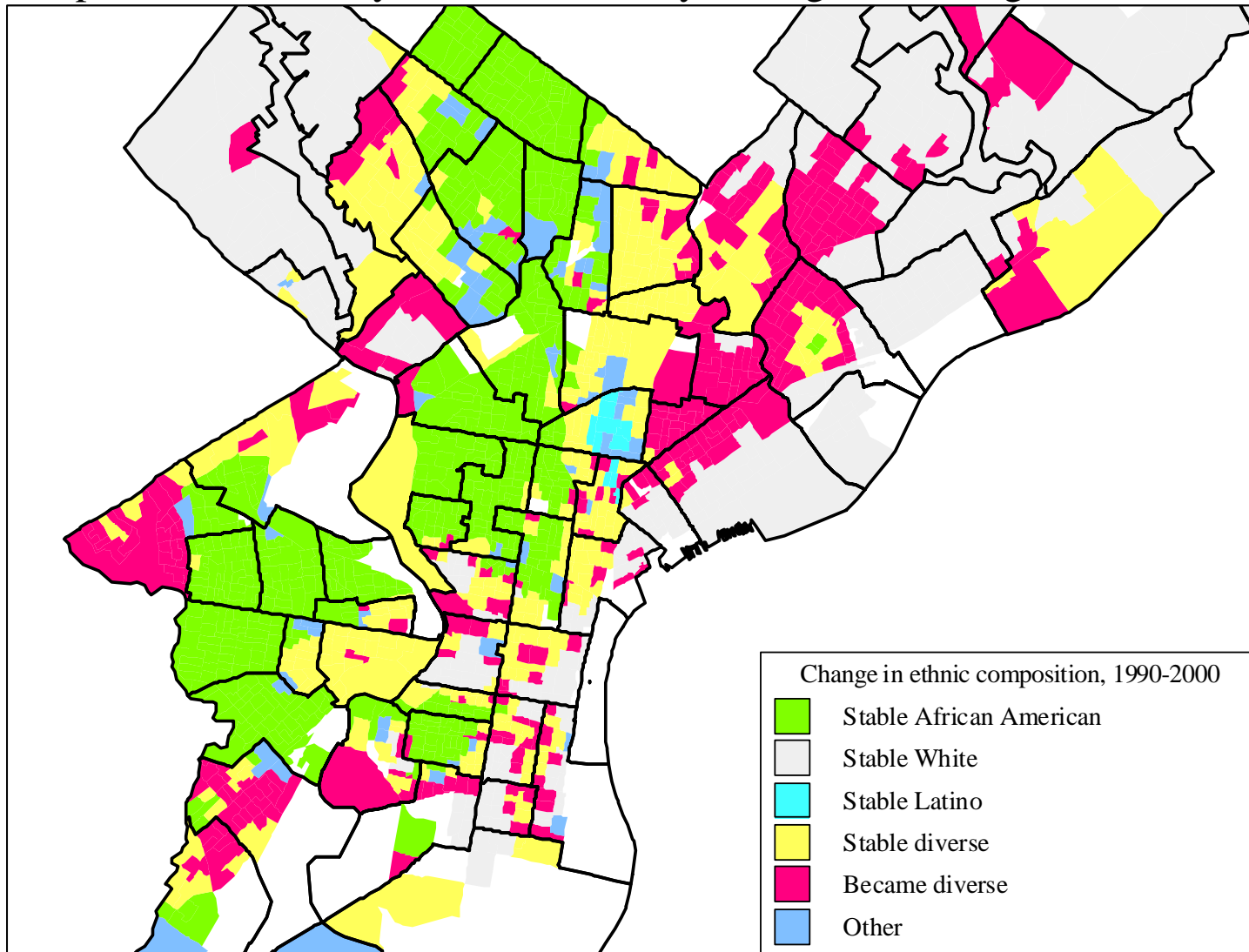
# CURRENT URBAN TRENDS

***Beyond “urban crisis”***—A new balance of decline and revival

Between 1990 and 2000, Philadelphia lost about more than 4 percent of its population and poverty rose from 20 to 23 percent. This is why the City’s Neighborhood Transformation Initiative found that 60 percent of Philadelphians live in a neighborhood that is either “distressed” or in need of “reclamation.”

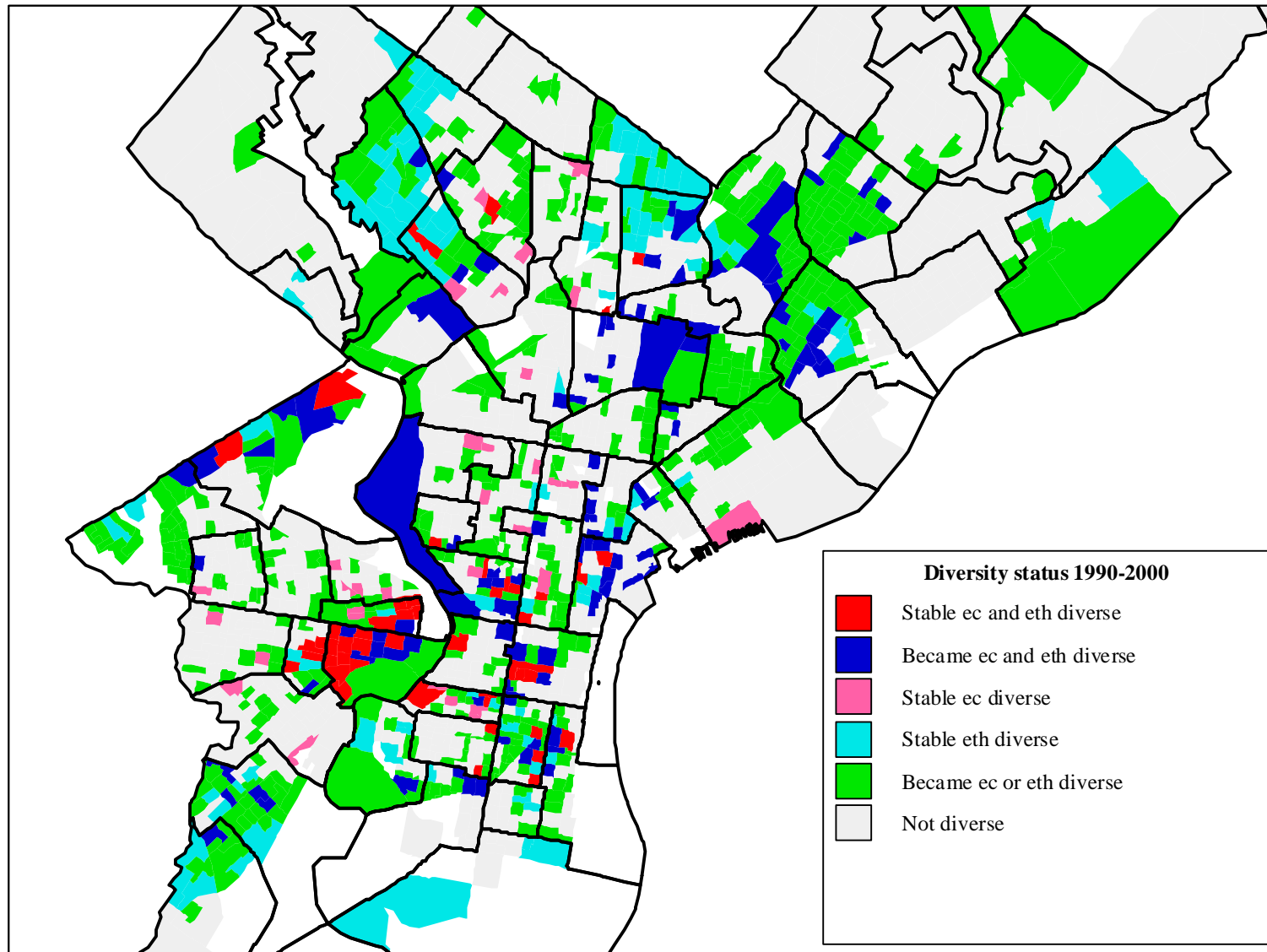


At the same time, Philadelphia's neighborhoods have become more ethnically and economic diverse. The idea of the urban crisis was connected to "city trenches"—a view of city life as composed of ethnically and economically homogeneous neighborhoods.



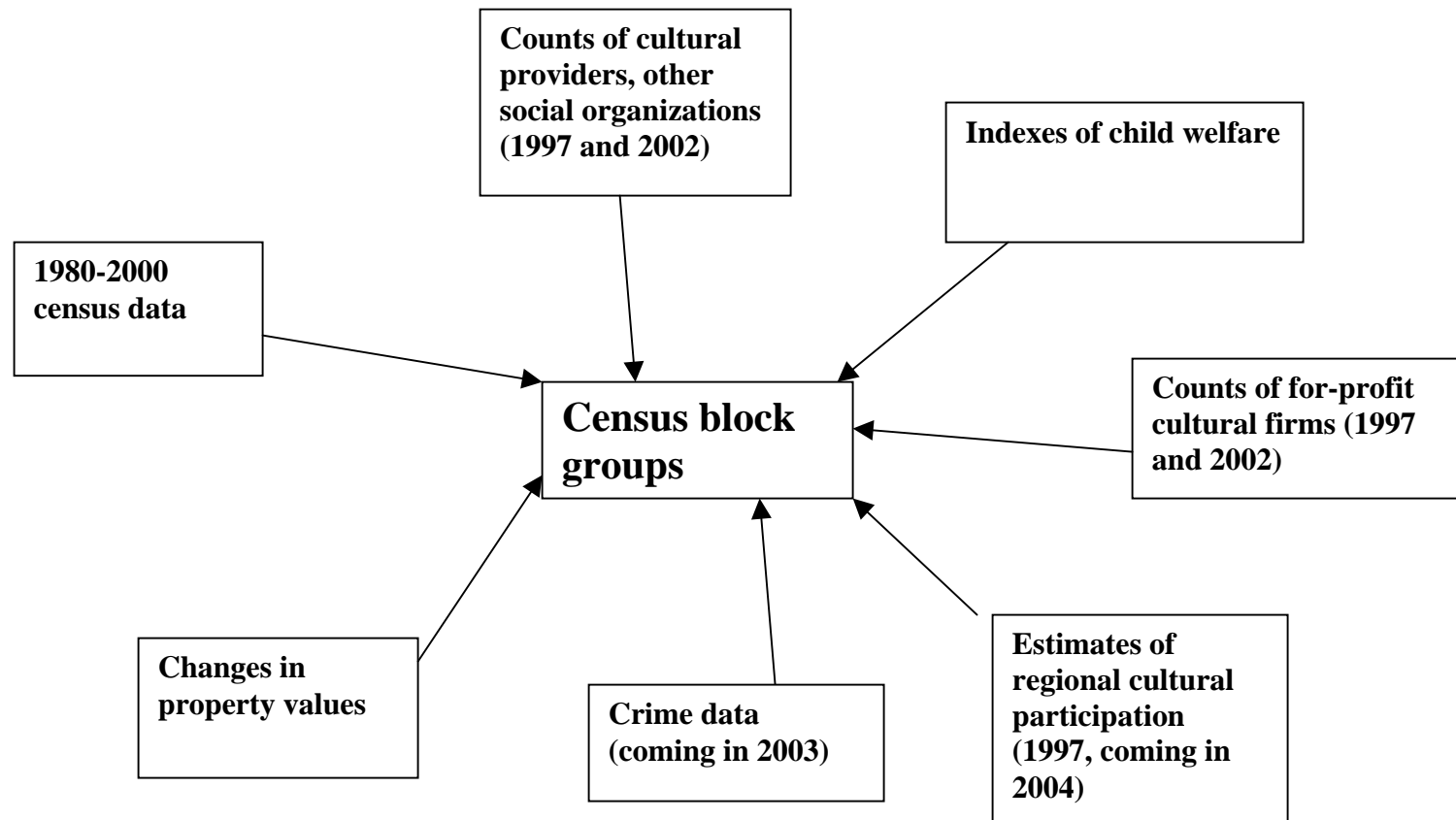
During the 1990s the percent of the population living in ethnically diverse neighborhoods increased from 21 to 38 percent.

The proportion of the population living in neighborhoods that were either ethnically or economically diverse increased from 26 to 40 percent and the proportion living in areas that were “doubly diverse” increased from 6 to 8 percent.



SIAP has developed a database that allows us to systematically examine the connection of cultural indicators to other measures of neighborhood well-being

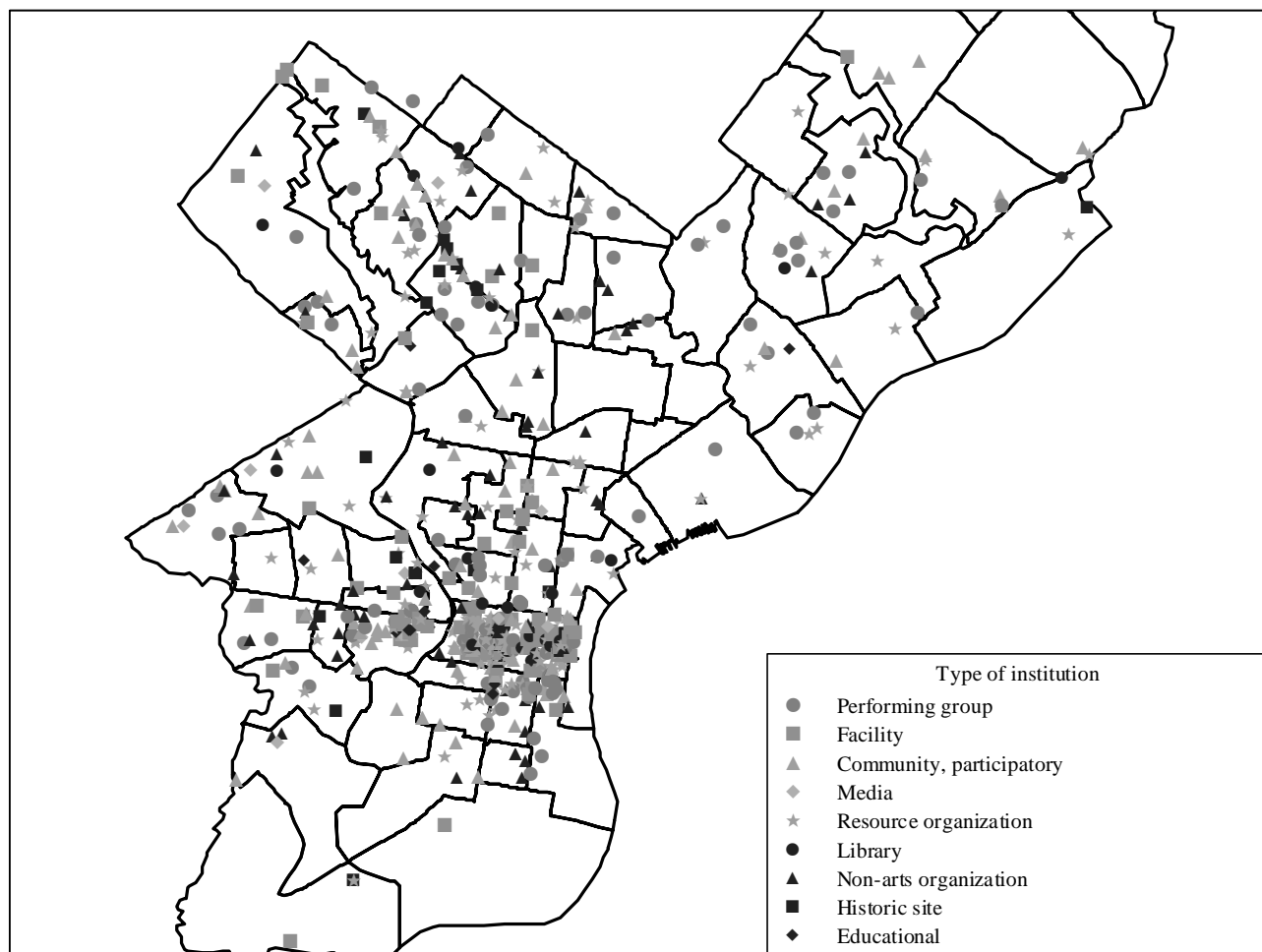
### Structure of the SIAP regional database



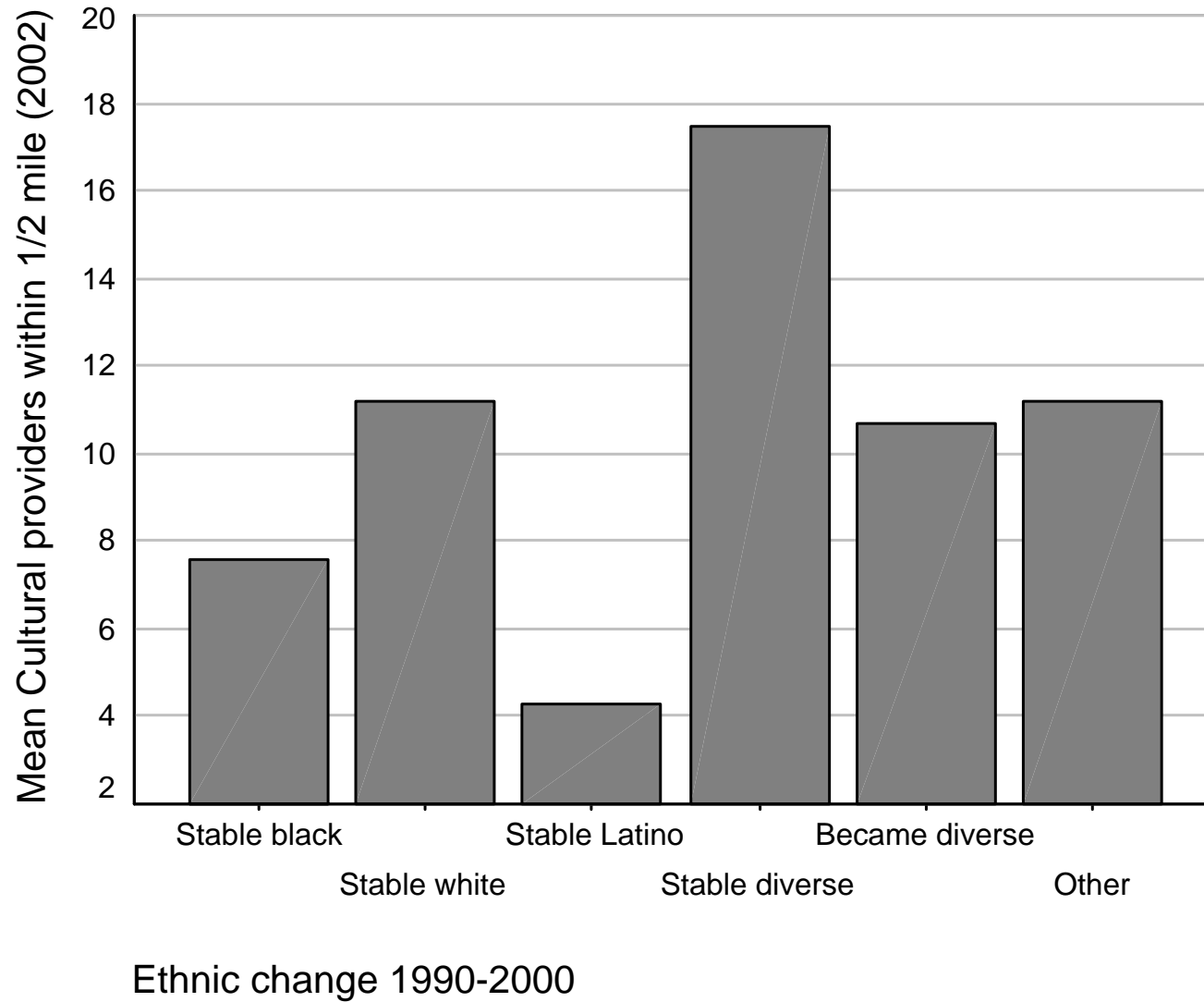


# IMPACTS

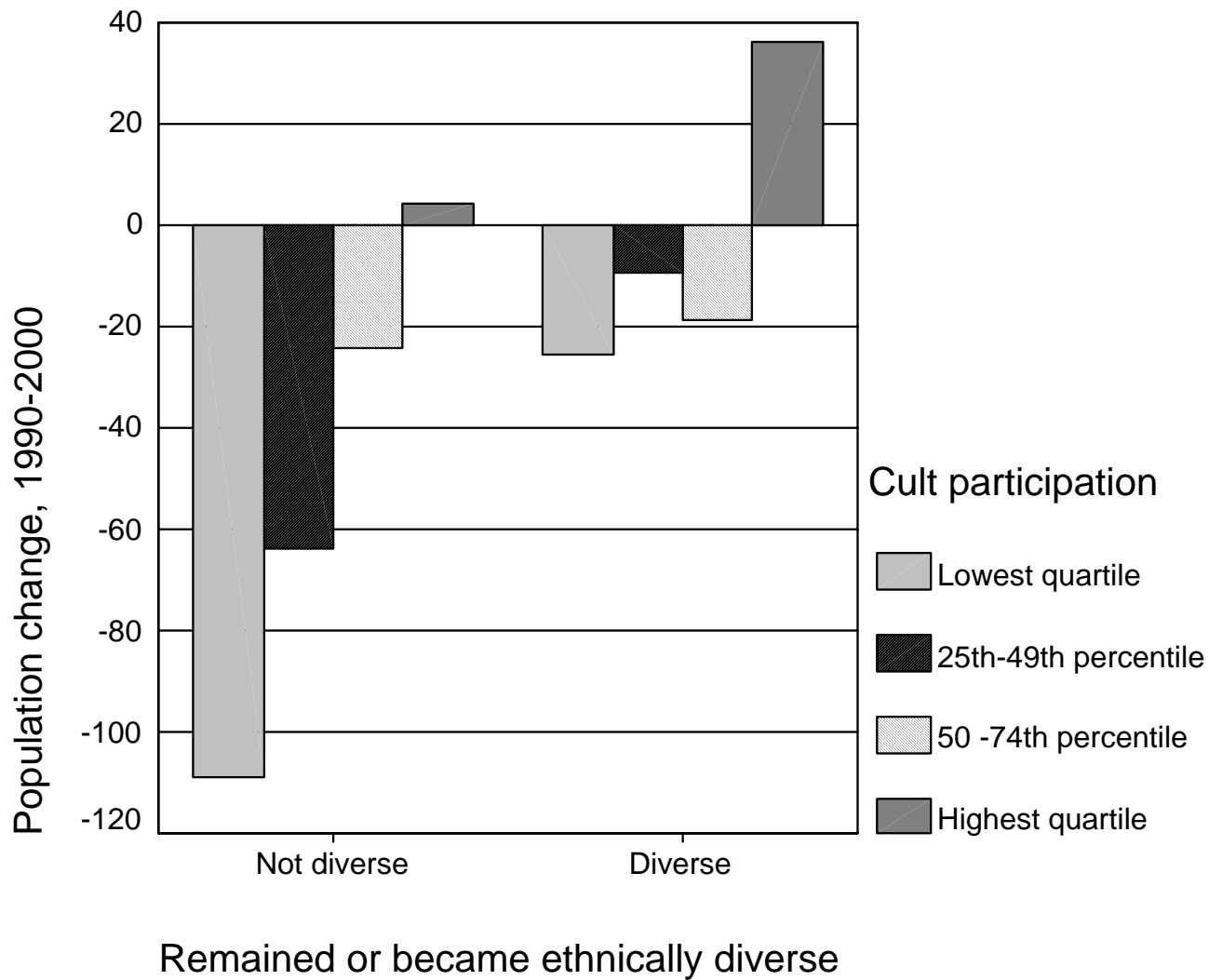
Impacts—The cultural sector is not confined to a few well-known Center City organizations. It runs the gamut from professional performing companies to community choirs, from artists' collectives to non-arts organizations that integrate culture into their programs. This diversity is one of the sector's great strengths.



**Impacts**—Cultural activity and diversity reinforce one another. Diverse neighborhoods with many cultural institutions tend to stay diverse.



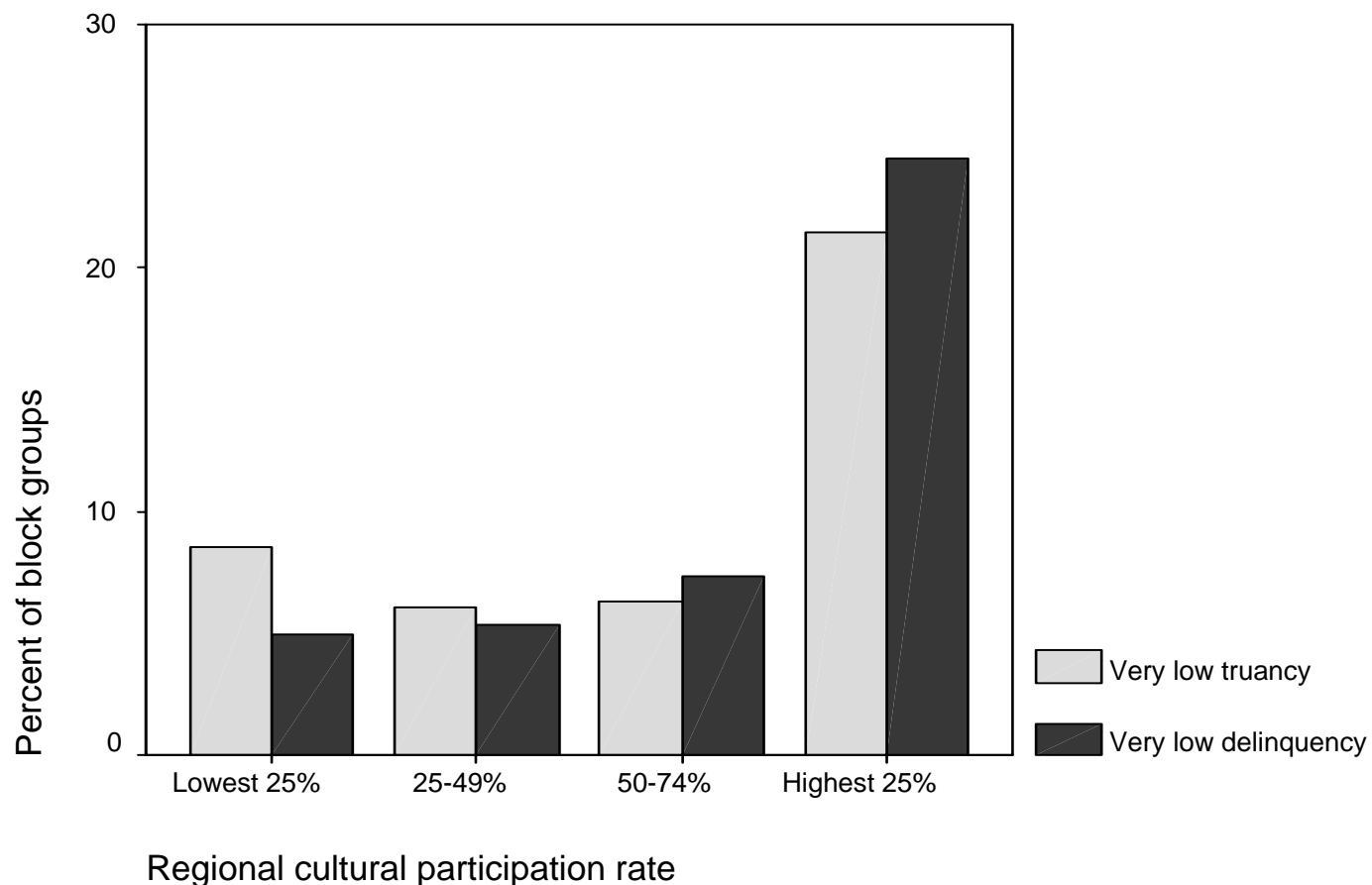
**Impacts**—Diverse neighborhoods and those with high cultural participation had the highest population growth during the 1990s.



Note: Philadelphia block groups

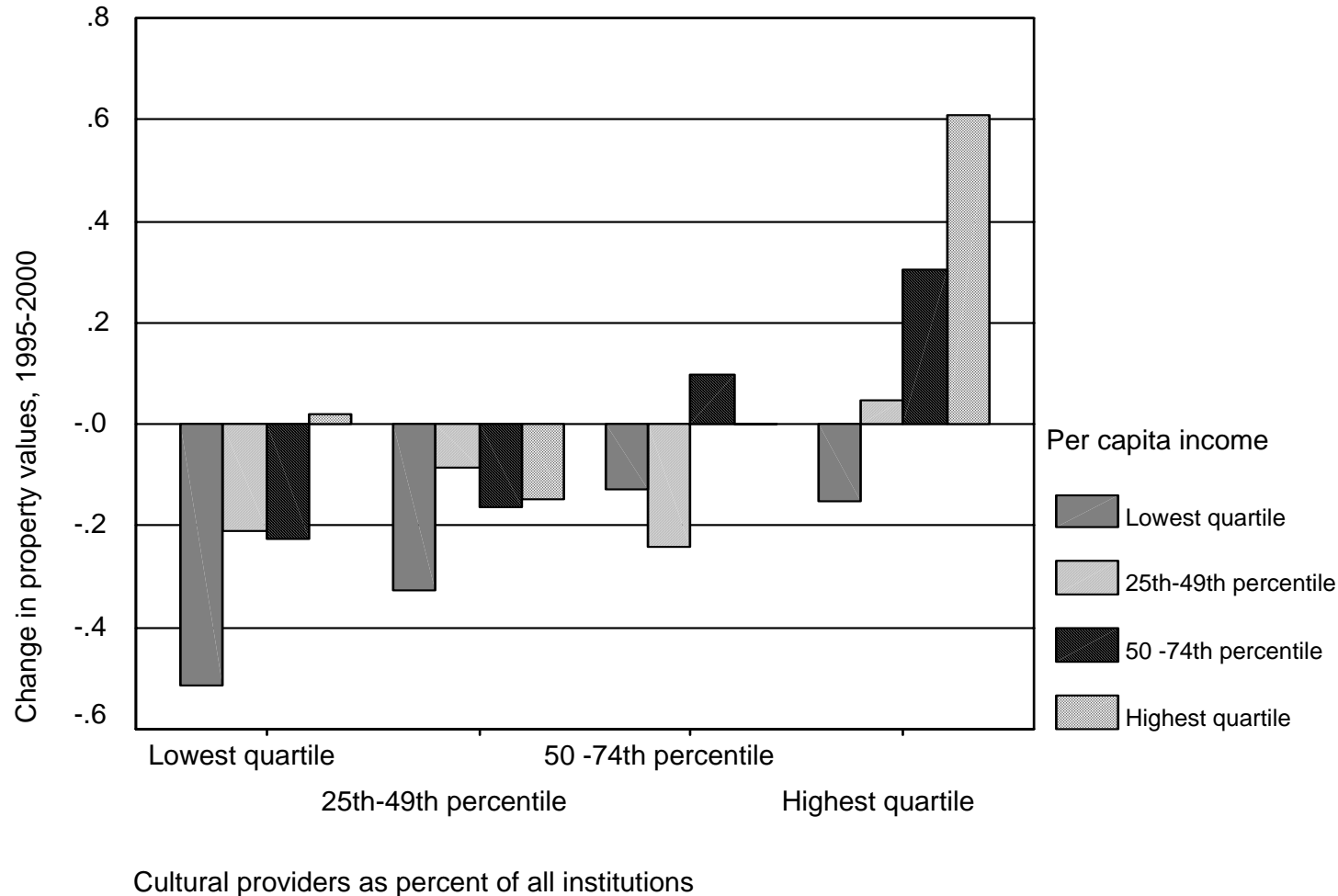
**Impacts**—Among poor neighborhoods, those with high cultural participation were more likely to have very low delinquency and truancy rates.

Economically disadvantaged neighborhoods, Philadelphia, 1995-99.



Note: Cultural participation data (1996-97), truancy (1997), delinquency (1995-99). Bars represent percent of all economically disadvantaged block groups whose truancy and delinquency rates were in the lowest quartile citywide.

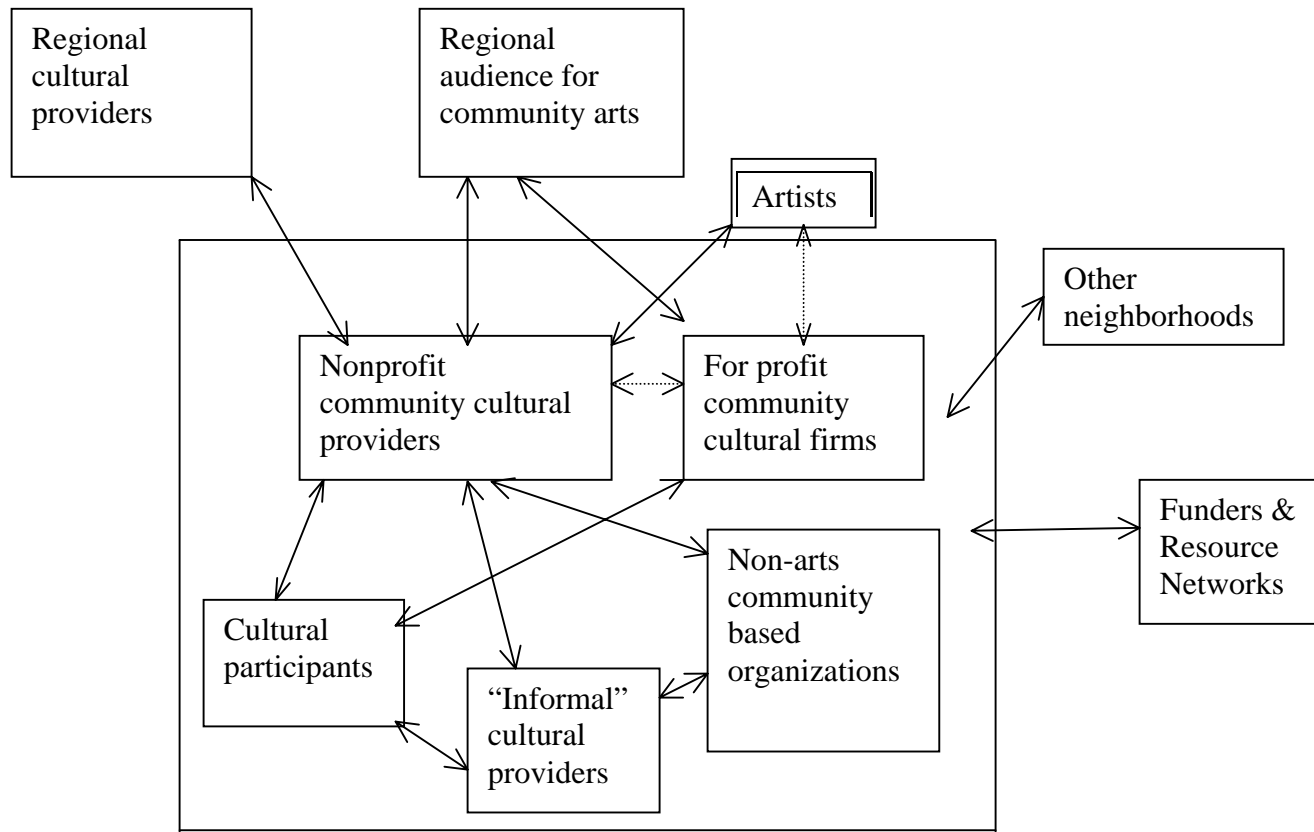
**Impacts**—Neighborhoods with many cultural organizations had higher than average increases in property values (median sale price) between 1995 and 2000. Residents of poor neighborhoods were as likely to benefit from this connection as those in well-off parts of the city.



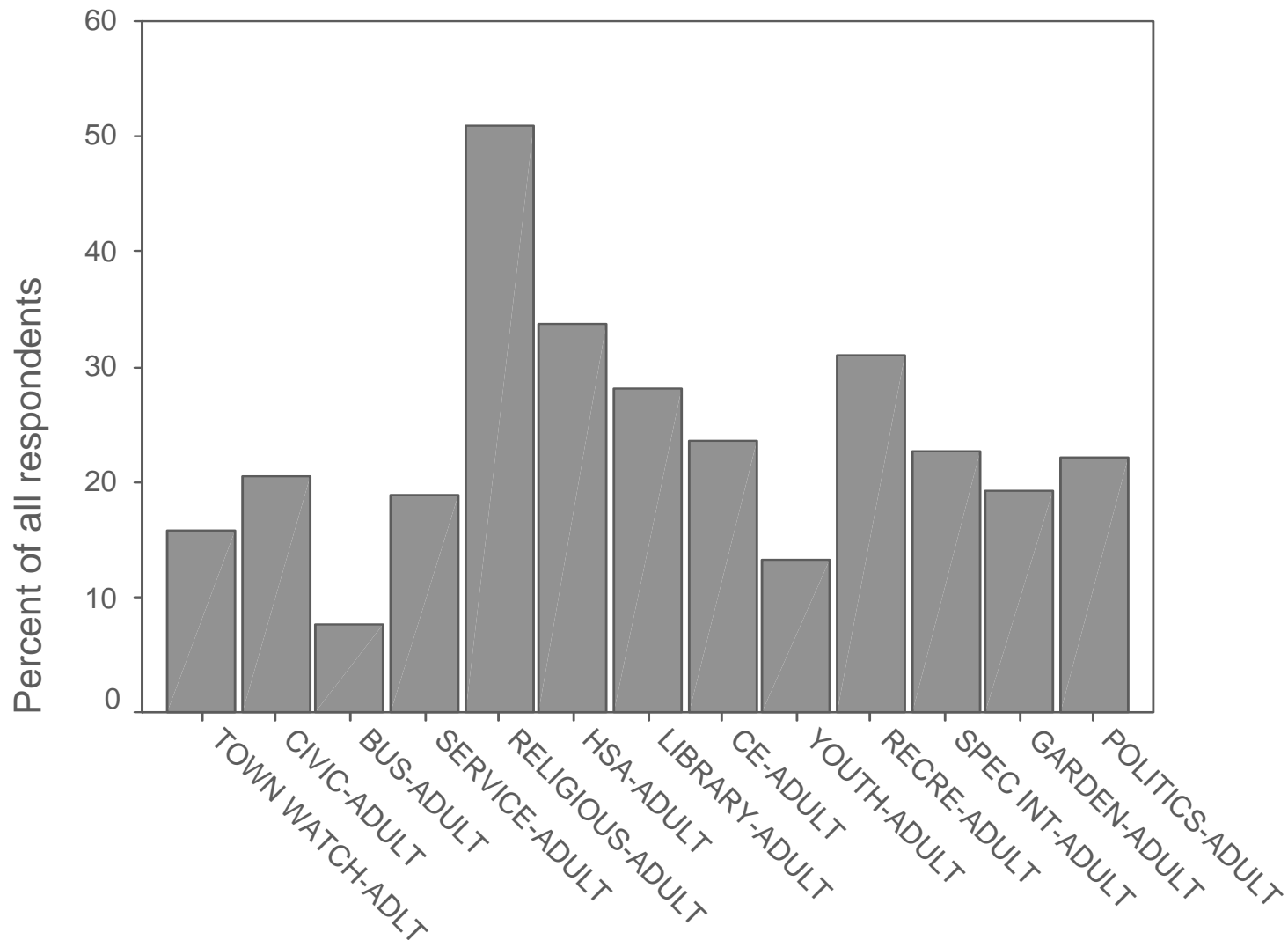
Note: Property value is change in median sale price of residential property 1995-2000. Zero is equal to the 50th percentile of the distribution and the scale measures standard deviations from the mean.

# MECHANISMS

Community cultural providers rely on *networks* of relationships to accomplish their work. These relationships form the community cultural *ecosystem* that includes a variety of “agents.” Thus, as small cultural providers do their work, they weave together disparate parts of their neighborhoods and the region.

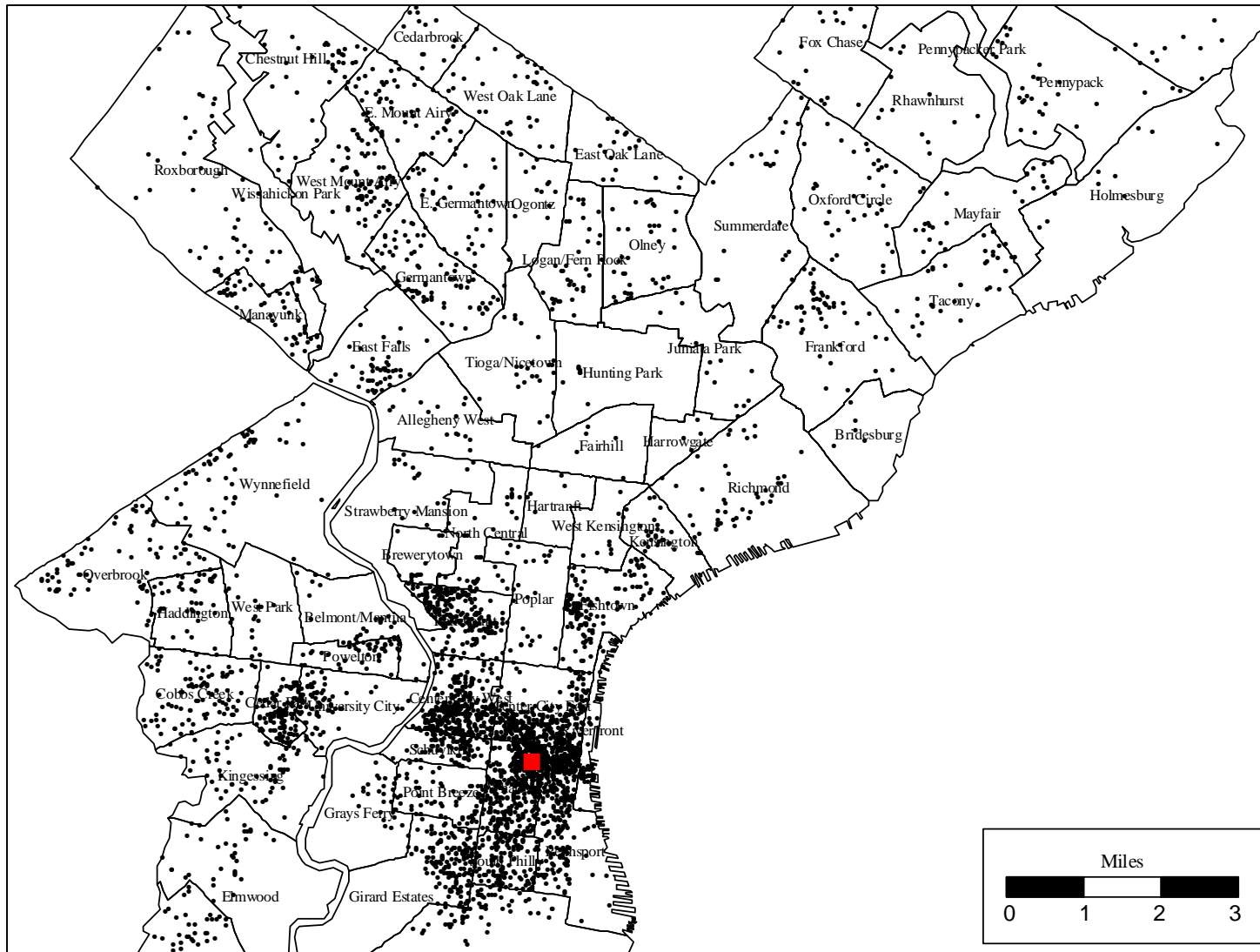


**Mechanisms**—Cultural engagement builds two types of enduring relationships. *Inside neighborhoods*, cultural participants are likely to engage in other types of civic activities. *Cross-participation* is critical to the enhancement of community civic capacity.



Source: SIAP community participation surveys, 1999

**Mechanisms—*Outside the neighborhood***, culture builds links across divides of ethnicity and social class. One of the Philadelphia’s hidden assets is the *regional audience for community arts*. Eighty percent of participants in community arts programs come from outside the neighborhood in which the program is located.

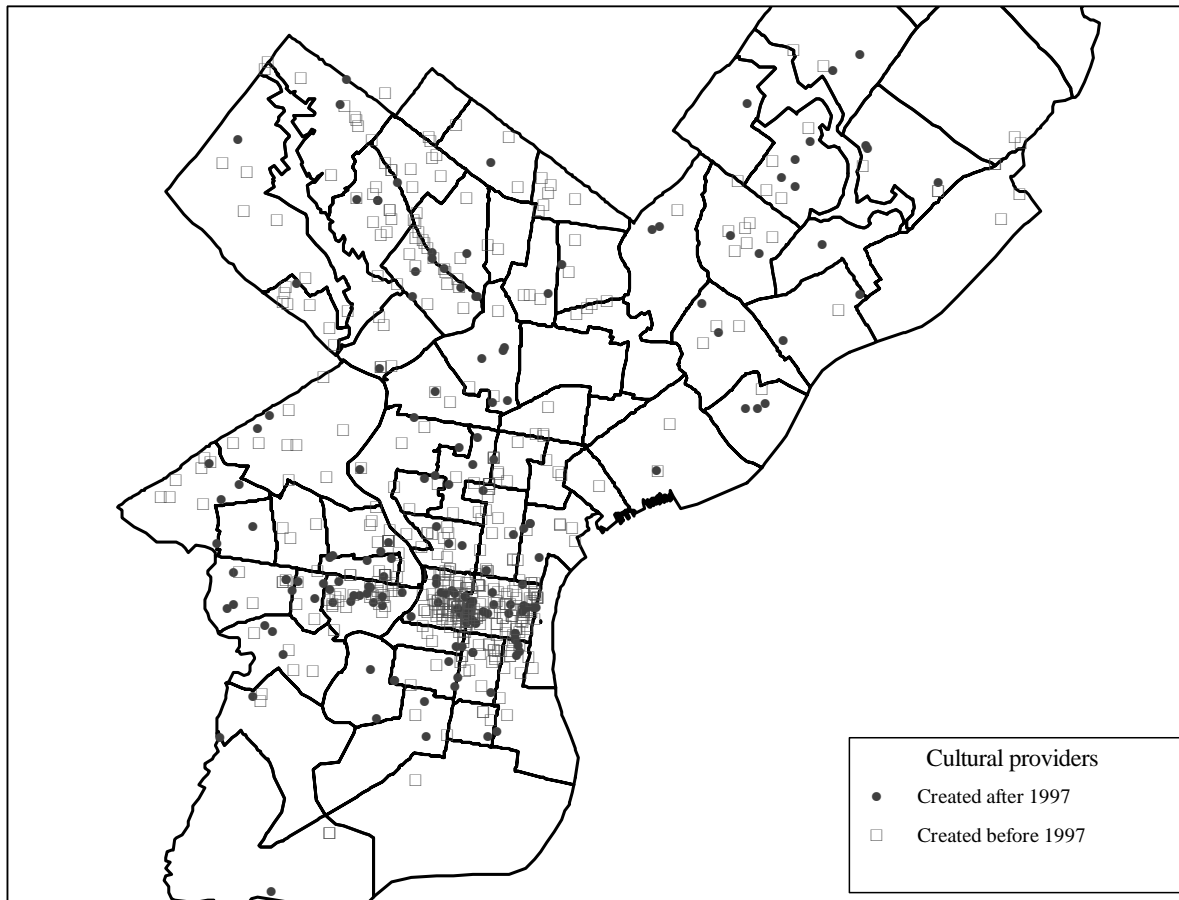


Dots represent participants in Fleisher Art Memorial’s programs during 2000.

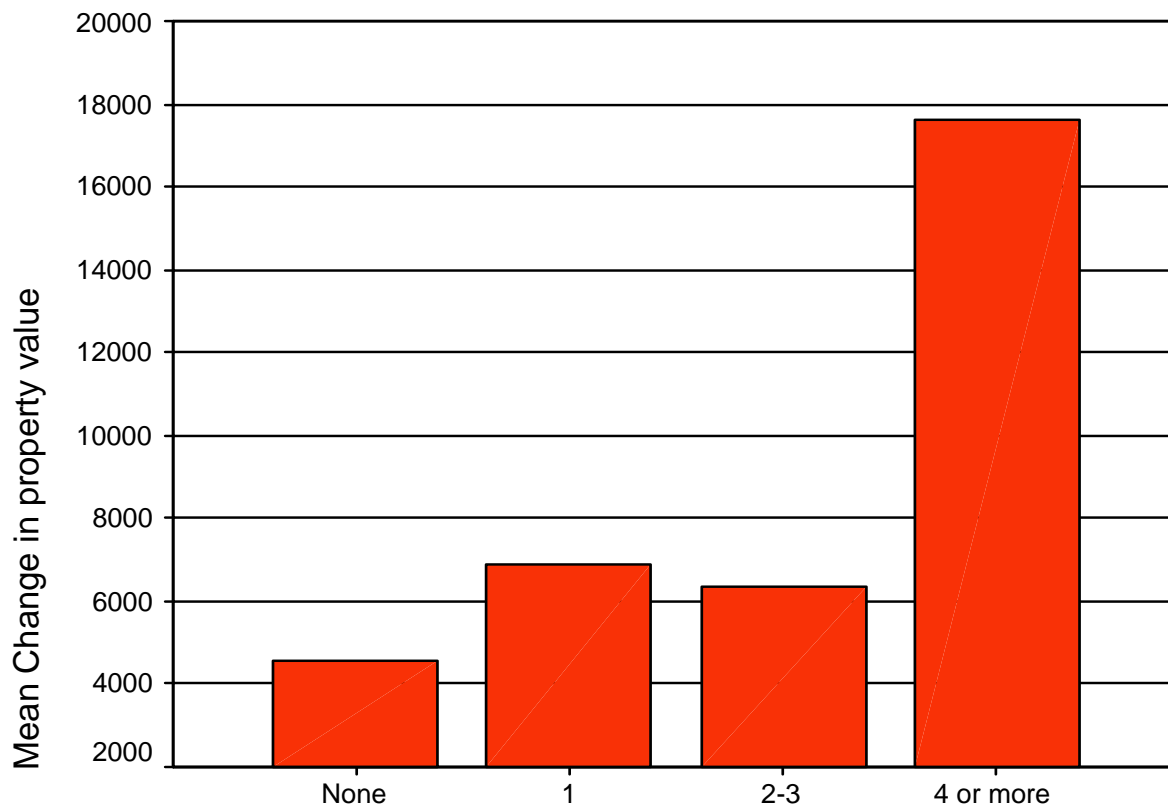


# DYNAMICS

The number of cultural providers in Philadelphia remained stable between 1997 and 2002 at approximately eight hundred. However, this apparent stability masked high turnover in the population of organizations. More than a quarter of all providers on the 2002 inventory appeared to have been established since 1997.



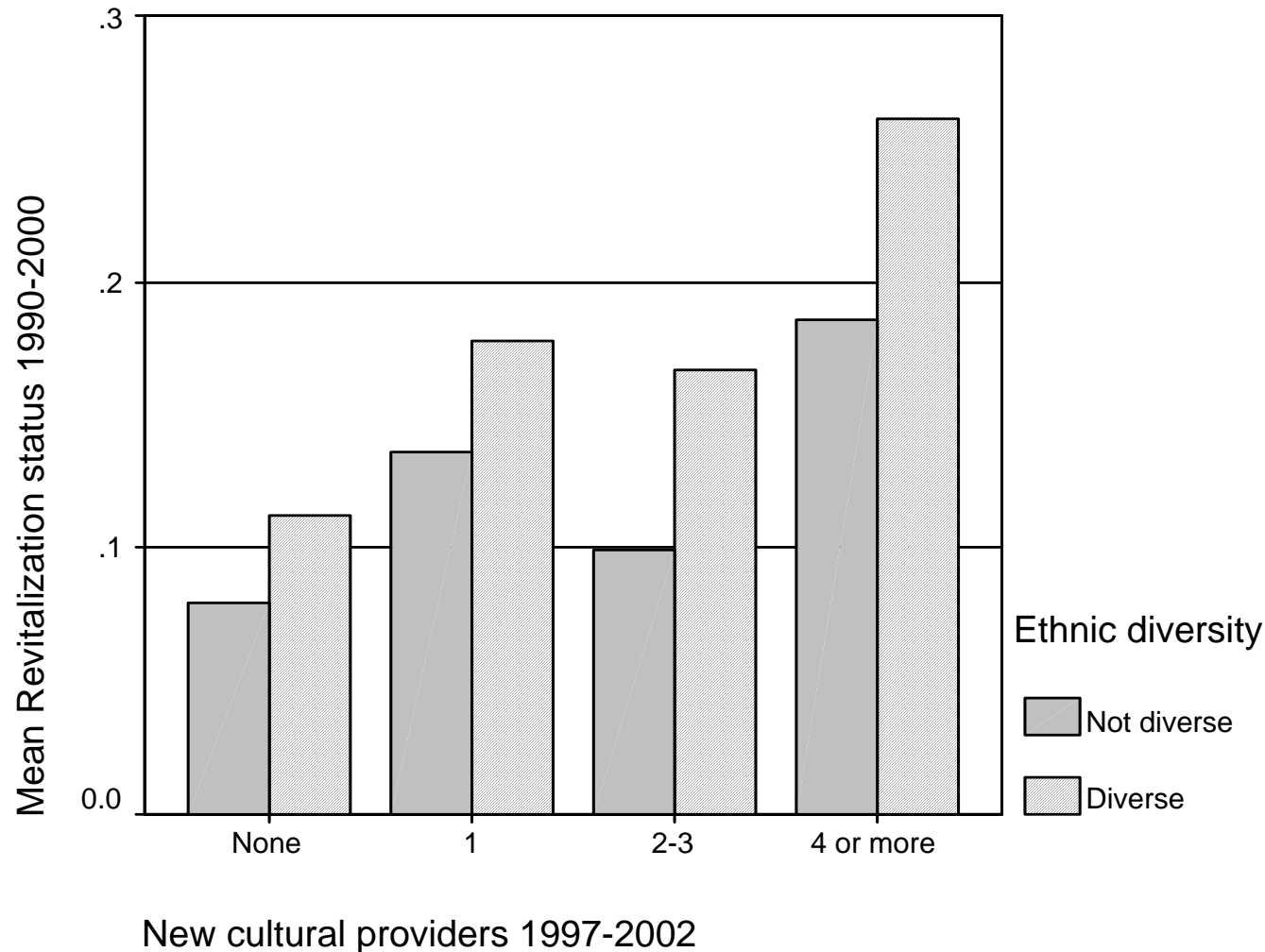
Dynamics: During the 1990s, the presence of cultural activities continued to have a positive impact on indicators of neighborhood well-being. Poverty rose less slowly, neighborhoods were more likely to experience both a population increase and poverty decline, and property values rose in neighborhoods with many new cultural organizations.



New cultural providers 1997-2002

Change in average sale price of residential property 1995-2000, by number of new cultural providers, 1997-2002.

**Dynamics:** Fourteen percent of Philadelphia’s block groups both gained population and saw their poverty rate reduced during the 1990s. By this definition, ethnic diversity and the emergence of new cultural organizations increased the chances that a block group would experience revitalization.

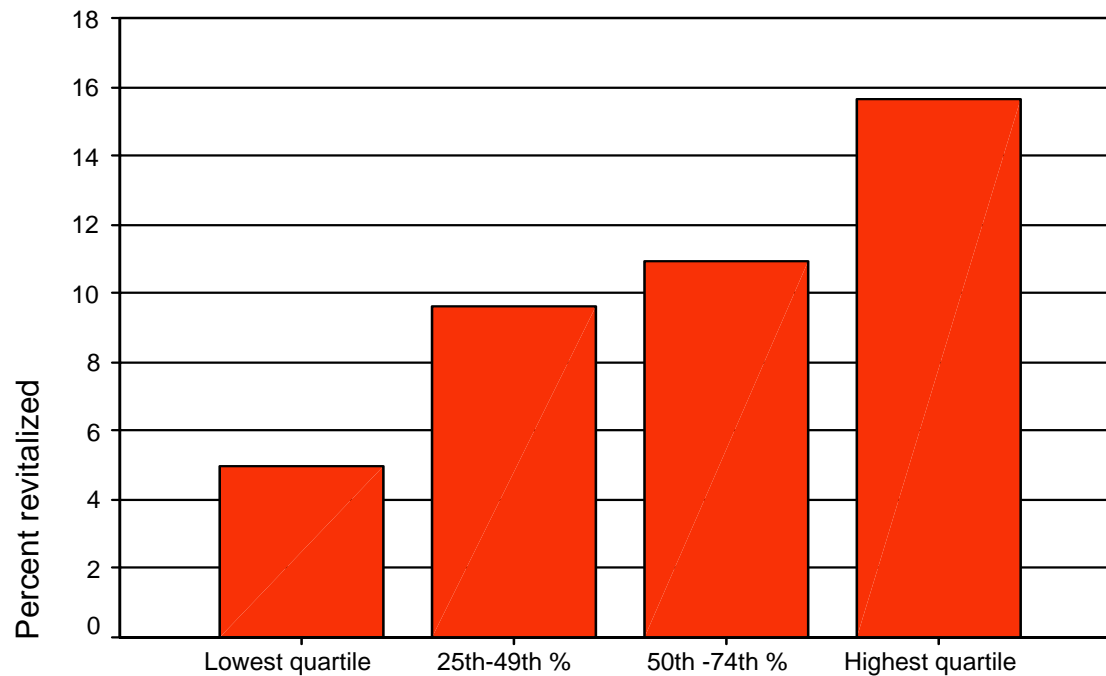


Proportion of block groups that had a decline in poverty and an increase in population, by diversity status and presence of new cultural providers, Philadelphia, 1990-2000.

## Implications for neighborhood revitalization—

Among the most at-risk neighborhoods, a significant number experienced population increases and poverty declines during the 1990s. Using the City’s definitions, the odds that a “distressed” or “reclamation” neighborhood would experience revitalization were strongly related to the presence of cultural institutions.

**Percent of block groups that experienced a decline in poverty and an increase in population, 1990-2000, “reclamation” and “distressed” block groups**



Cultural providers with 1/2 mi 1997 (quartiles)

Cases weighted by POP00

# New Civil Society

In collaboration with The Reinvestment Fund—the community development financial institution that conducted the NTI analysis—and Penn’s Urban Studies program, we have begun an initiative to integrate the “soft” side of community assets—civic engagement and institutional presence—into our analysis of community revitalization. One aspect of this initiative is to use SIAP’s methods to:

- Update our estimates of cultural participation
- Make estimates of community participation in other types of activities
- Develop a broader set of neighborhood indicators of well-being.

*The arts and culture are not a marginal civic phenomenon. They are located at the center of the new urban reality—characterized by a mix of decline and revitalization. Over the next several years, one of SIAP’s goals is to document how culture fits into urban social dynamics and to develop reliable data on the social impact of the cultural sector and other areas of community and civic involvement.*