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## Culture and the Changing Urban Landscape: Philadelphia 1997-2002

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## Culture and the Changing Urban Landscape: Philadelphia 1997-2002

### Abstract

This paper was an early product of the Dynamics of Culture project, undertaken to bring *time* into SIAP's analysis of the role of culture in urban communities. The author uses data on Philadelphia's changing urban context from 1990 - 2000 and changes in its cultural sector from 1997 – 2002 to assess the impact of culture on neighborhood wellbeing.

The research found that Philadelphia, unlike “world cities,” cannot rely on the market alone to generate the cataclysmic churning of its land market. By the same token, the city cannot count on a massive inflow of capital to support its cultural sector. Thus these processes in Philadelphia are unlikely to stimulate displacement or gentrification but rather tend to be more gradual and firmly embedded in the existing social structure, which allows a different set of social forces to take root in neighborhoods. On the one hand, culture stimulates a kind of “collective efficacy” (see Sampson and Earls) that encourages residents to address community conditions. At the same time, culture's association with diversity allows it to breach barriers of social class and ethnicity that other forms of civic engagement often leave in place. With the rise of the global city, flashy displays of the power of culture—the construction of fancy facilities, the creation of cultural districts, and the quest for the “creative class”—have attracted far more attention. Yet, for the majority of Americans who live in second- or third-tier cities, the modest benefits of cultural engagement—often in a church basement, recreation center, or converted loft space—are more likely to have an enduring impact on the quality of urban life.

### Disciplines

Arts and Humanities | Public Policy | Social Welfare | Urban Studies and Planning

### Comments

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Social Impact of  
the Arts Project

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**Working Paper #17**  
**Culture and the Changing Urban Landscape:**  
**Philadelphia 1997-2002**

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The 1990s were a decade of profound urban transformation. Economic globalization teamed with a variety of demographic trends to create a new urban social order. One consequence of this transformation was to accentuate the *hierarchy* of cities. Those places of central importance to the global economy—New York, London, Tokyo—are subjected to intense pressure as the needs of global capitalism for space and workers clashed with the mundane concerns of the locale-base social order—jobs, taxes, and quality of life. The unique position of “world cities” has preoccupied much urban sociology over the past decade.

However, in many respects, *global cities* are not the norm. Although, the fate of second- and third-tier cities may be uninteresting from a global perspective, a large proportion of Americans still live in these places. Although Chicago can claim “global city” status, Philadelphia is clearly part of the large group of big cities that are not critical nodes in the global economic order. In these cities, the forces of the global and local are less contradictory and the clashes of the new urban order are less intense.

Culture is clearly an important element of the social order of the global city. The international business class is matched by an international cultural class that mounts exhibits and displays its creations in New York, Paris, or Tokyo. This entwining of culture and capital exerts great pressure on space, leading to forces of displacement. Indeed, as Sharon Zukin contends in her study of SoHo, culture has often served as the stalking horse for urban displacement, clearing urban neighborhoods of their industrial past, so that they may reach their “highest and best” use.

We know much less about the role of culture in “not-world cities.” Just as the pressures of globalization are felt less keenly in these places, one would expect that the consequence of the world cultural order would be subtler. In reality, we have little empirical evidence on the role of culture in most American cities.

This ignorance, of course, has not prevented culture from becoming a bandwagon. Across the country, nearly a hundred cities—at last count—have turned to the arts and culture as a strategy for urban revitalization. For the most part, these places have followed the same script. Identify a downtown *cultural district*; provide it with tax breaks and other financial incentives, and wait for it to attract development and become a tourist destination.

Richard Florida has recently proposed a variant of the “culture as economic development strategy” argument. Florida contends that the key to cities’ economic performance in the post-industrial economy is the ability to attract and retain the “creative class”—a set of occupations that require high educational credentials and innovative decision-making. Florida uses national data to argue that cities with a greater concentration of cultural resources do a better job of attracting this class of workers.

It is too early to judge the economic success of these strategies. Yet, as a first step, it makes sense to gain a better understanding of culture’s social impact *without* conscious public action. For example, if it would be useful to understand how “natural” cultural districts work before we try to design them. Furthermore, if culture does stimulate economic revitalization, we need a better description of *how* this happens that is currently available.

The *Social Impact of the Arts Project* (SIAP) was founded to understand the connection of culture and urban society in Philadelphia. Although we have studied the entire cultural sector, we have focused a large part of our efforts on the community cultural sector because it is at the local level that cultural expression is least understood. Between 1994 and 2001, we focused on two tasks: examining a set of *correlations* between culture and other aspects of urban life across Philadelphia neighborhoods—what we call “impacts”—and undertaking detailed case studies of the paths through which cultural agents influence their neighborhoods—what we call “mechanisms.” In several cases, we have used comparative data on other cities—including Chicago—to see if Philadelphia was representative.

Our work has uncovered a variety of features that link the arts and culture to urban neighborhoods. Among our findings were:

***Social diversity and cultural expression reinforce one another.*** Neighborhoods that are economically and ethnically diverse are more likely to have higher concentrations of cultural institutions and participation than homogeneous sections of the metropolitan areas, even when other social variables are controlled. Indeed, many neighborhoods with concentrated poverty (over 40 percent of the population) also were home to many professional and managerial workers; these “pov-prof” neighborhoods had particularly high cultural participation.

***Cultural engagement has important spillover effects on neighborhoods.*** Philadelphia residents who are involved in the arts are more likely to pursue other forms of civic engagement and to view more positively the quality-of-life in their neighborhoods.

***There is a strong and demonstrable relationship between poverty decline and cultural engagement.*** During the 1980s, Philadelphia neighborhoods with a history of cultural engagement were more likely to have higher than average declines in poverty than other sections of the city. During the 1990s—using early 2000 census data—we have recently discovered that neighborhoods in which the arts and culture are central to community life were more likely to show signs of urban vitality, including increases in population and declines in poverty.

***Indexes of child welfare are closely tied to cultural engagement.*** Looking at the poorest and most socially isolated sections of Philadelphia, we found that those neighborhoods with high cultural participation were much more likely to have low rates of truancy and juvenile delinquency.

Yet, as strong as these findings are, our two most important achievements over the past five years have been to gain an understanding the mechanisms through which the arts and culture have these impacts. When we began our work, we saw the community cultural scene as made up primarily of nonprofit cultural institutions and individual participants. However, as our work progressed, it became clear that there are whole sets of ‘agents’ who are critical to the functioning of community culture but are largely invisible. We discovered, as well, that the system is more than the sum of its parts. If we view neighborhood culture as an *ecosystem*, the

relationships and networks are as important as the agents themselves.<sup>1</sup> Among the undervalued elements of the community cultural system are:

***Artists and cultural workers.*** With the exception of “founders,” artists have very limited roles in the operations of community cultural institutions. Because they are likely to work part-time or as a contractor, they do not have an institutional stake in the organization. From an institutional perspective, artists are marginal.

Yet, if we move cultural workers to the center of our canvas, they take on an entirely different role. In a recent survey of community-based artists, we discovered that they had worked for an average of five cultural organizations over the previous two years, serving a variety of roles, and working in many different parts of the city.

***For-profit cultural firms.*** Although the nonprofit designation is important to funders, it appears to matter little to other agents in the community cultural scene. We discovered that there were more for-profit dance “academies” than non-profit dance programs in Philadelphia—many in poor and isolated neighborhoods. Cultural participants and workers cross the nonprofit/for-profit boundary every day. Yet, this sector’s role in supporting artists and encouraging participation is largely undocumented.

***Ties to non-arts organizations.*** Just as the boundary between nonprofit and for-profit is blurred at the neighborhood level, so too is that between cultural and non-arts organizations. According to a recent study, one quarter of religious congregations in the Philadelphia area offer some kind of cultural program—above and beyond church choirs. In addition, the relationships between cultural providers and other types of community groups are critical to culture’s role in community-building strategies. The strength and character of artists’ and institutions’ connections to the “non-arts” world are largely invisible.

Understanding the variety of different agents in the community cultural scene and the complex networks through which they do their work fundamentally changes our view of how culture influences communities and how outside entities can intervene to expand opportunities and improve life in poor communities. If the community cultural scene is really an ecosystem, we should examine how information and other resources flow through these networks and how community cultural systems connect to the wider cultural world. In his classic study of *Art Worlds*, Howard Becker argued that culture depends on a complex system of social organization

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<sup>1</sup> We use the term “agents” to refer to the variety of institutions, social groups, and individuals who play an important role in the community cultural system.

for its existence. It is this complexity that should make us wary of policy options that reduce the arts and culture to a simplistic magnet for tourists or workers.

### *The Dynamics of Culture*

Beginning in 2002, with funding from the Rockefeller Foundation, SIAP began a new project called the Dynamics of Culture. Its core purpose is to bring *time* into our analysis of the impact of culture on urban places. This purpose breaks down into two tasks.

First, we wanted to get a better grasp of the roles of stability and change in the cultural system. As Paul DiMaggio has pointed out, stability has been the core concern of public cultural policy over the past generation. As DiMaggio put it, the goal of public policy was “encouraging small organizations to become larger and large organizations to seek immortality.” Yet, everything we know about culture speaks to the importance of flux and change. Especially at the community level, we felt that the preoccupation with stability might deform policy. To remedy this, we needed to get concrete evidence about the “vital statistics” of the cultural sector: How many new groups are “born” each year? How many “die”? What are the environmental conditions associated with high and low natality and mortality?

Second, we wanted to see how the *correlations* we have found between culture and wider urban processes change over time. In our previous work, we have used *spatial* differences as a means of examining the relationship of culture to other social conditions. Certainly, when historical data are lacking, using cross-sectional spatial differences is an acceptable way of investigating social relationships. However, in the last analysis, we can only understand how cultural expression and social conditions influence one another if we can observe these relationships over time. For example, in our previous work we have demonstrated a rather robust relationship between social diversity and cultural engagement, but we have not been able



to document whether diverse neighborhoods attract the arts or whether “natural” cultural districts attract a diverse population.

To pursue these goals, we have chosen to replicate the databases on cultural expression that we compiled during the 1990s; integrate 2000 U.S. census data; and comb the city for other evidence on neighborhood indicators that we could integrate into our database.

During the first year of *Dynamics of Culture* we have focused on two tasks:

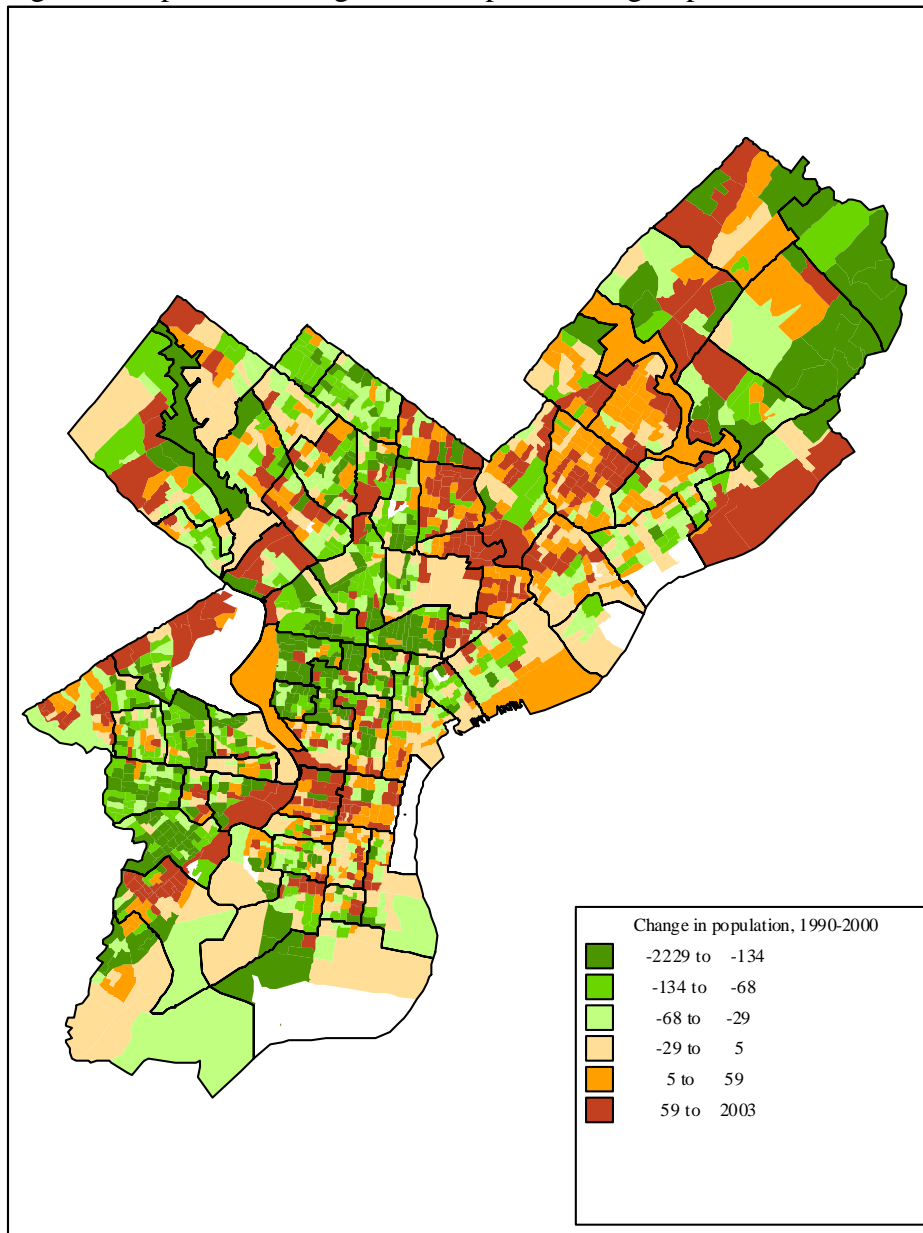
- Bringing the detailed results of the 2000 census into our database, and
- Developing 2002 inventories of nonprofit cultural providers, for-profit cultural firms, and other types of social organizations for the city of Philadelphia and for the entire metropolitan area.

This work has been progressing . . . *slowly!* The detailed Summary File 3 of the US census, which originally was scheduled for release early in the summer of 2002, did not emerge until the fall. In addition, the size and complexity of these data files slowed our work considerably. Although the creation of new inventories of cultural providers benefited from our past experience, this knowledgably was a double-edged sword. We had to create new databases and, simultaneously, try to improve the quality of our original inventories.

As a result, we are only beginning to reap the rewards of our latest efforts of data collection and integration. I will be sharing with your what are literally our first cuts on these new data. Rather than make the analysis seem smoother than it is, the next section of the paper consists of a set of tables, charts, and maps with captions that point to its basic patterns. The conclusion will then pose some working hypotheses for the next stage of analyses.

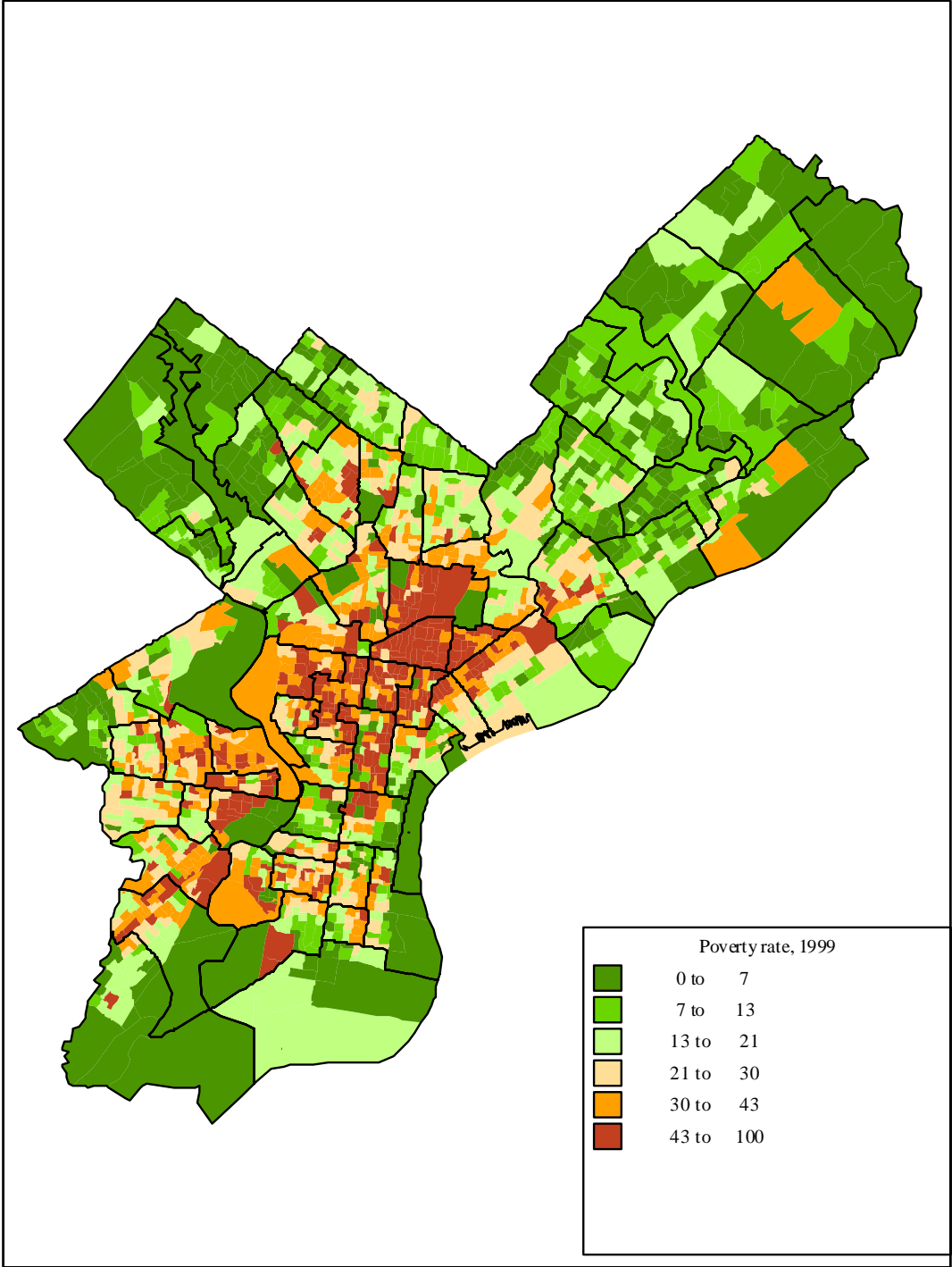
## 1. The changing urban context

Figure 1. Population change, Philadelphia block groups 1990-2000



*Philadelphia lost population during the 1990s, although the losses were smaller than anticipated. Center City experienced the greatest population growth, but a number of neighborhoods between North Philadelphia and the Northeast gained population as well. The poor African American neighborhoods of North Philadelphia and West Philadelphia lost a significant share of their population.*

Figure 2. Poverty rate, Philadelphia block groups, 1999



*North Philadelphia remained, by far, the poorest section of the city, although significant pockets of poverty are present in West Philadelphia, South Philadelphia, and Germantown.*

Figure 3. Change in poverty rates, Philadelphia block groups, 1989-1999

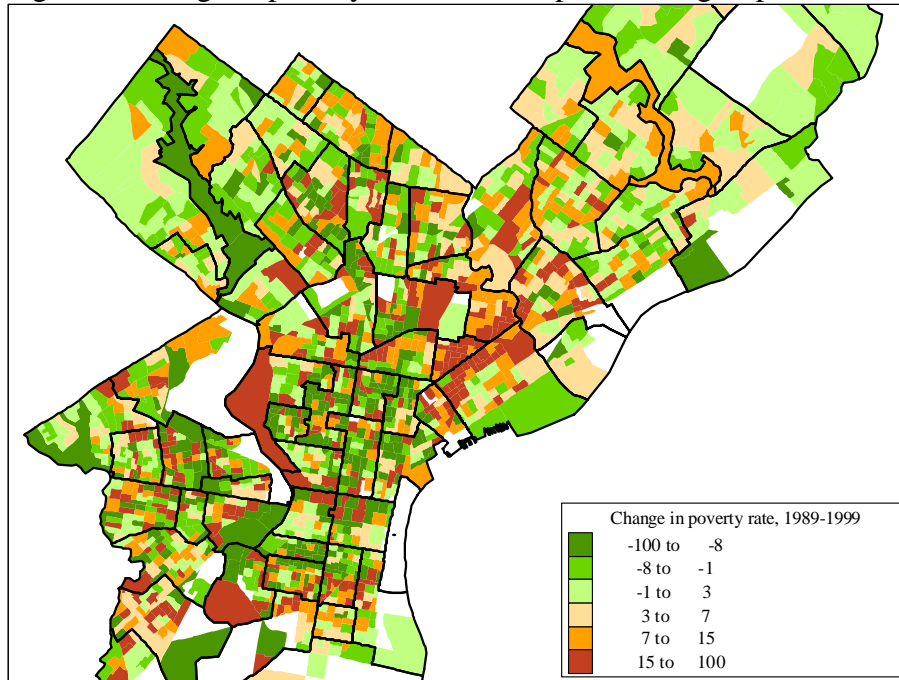
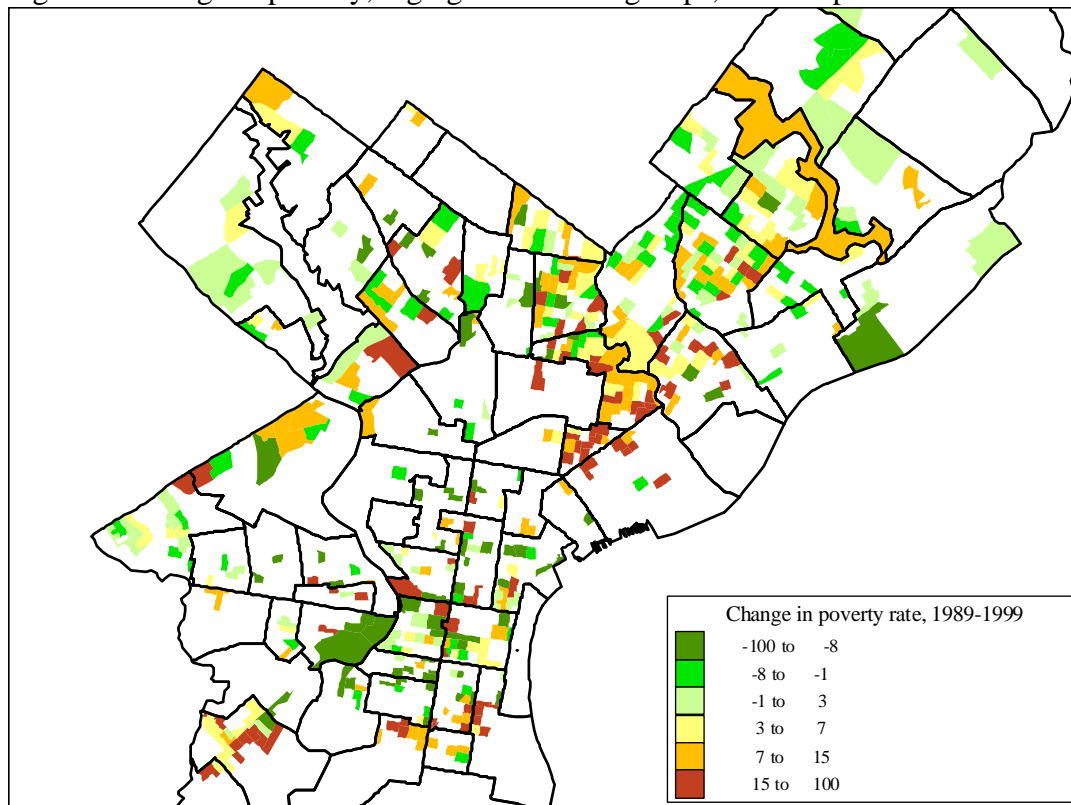


Figure 4. Change in poverty, high growth block groups, Philadelphia 1989-1999



*Although poverty remained high in North Philadelphia, as it lost population, its poverty rate declined. It appears that many poor former residents of North Philadelphia moved to the growing neighborhoods adjoining North Philadelphia. As a result, in these neighborhoods population growth and poverty increases went hand-in-hand.*

Figure 5—Change in ethnic composition, Philadelphia block groups, 1990-2000

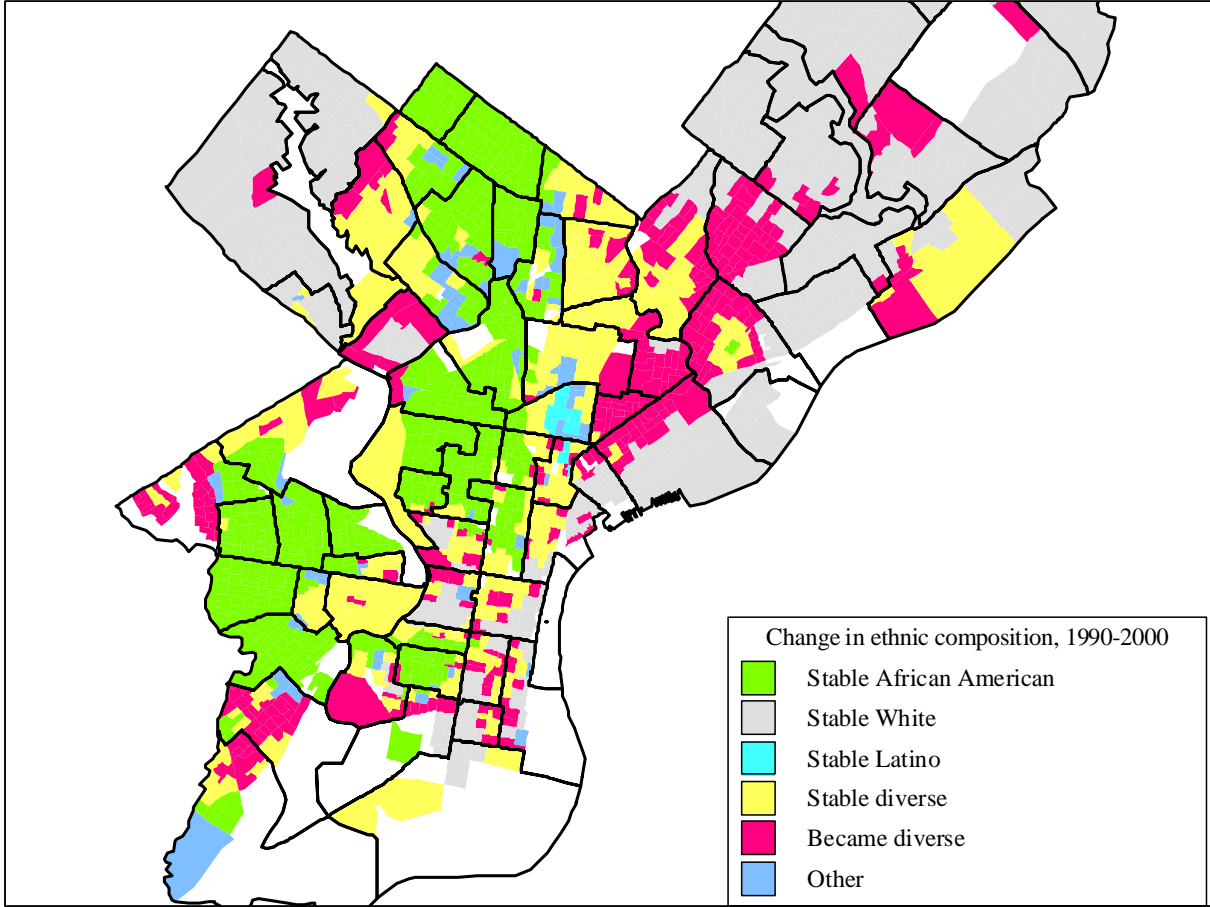


Table 1. Measures of economic and ethnic diversity, Population of Philadelphia block groups, 1990-2000

	1990	2000
<b><i>Ethnic composition</i><sup>2</sup></b>		
Black	32.7	30.9
White	44.8	30.2
Latino	0.8	1.1
Black,Latino	3.2	6.5
Black,White	10.1	14.5
Diverse, Asian 10%+	4.0	7.8
Other diverse	4.4	9.0
Total	100.0	100.0
<i>Total diverse</i>	<i>21.6</i>	<i>37.8</i>
<b><i>Economic status</i><sup>3</sup></b>		
Pov-prof	14.8	17.1
Concentrated poverty (40%+)	10.8	12.1
Above average poverty (20-40%)	19.6	16.5
Below average poverty	54.9	54.2
Total	100.0	100.0
<b><i>Economic and ethnic diversity</i></b>		
Ethnically and economically diverse	5.8	8.4
Economically diverse only	8.9	8.6
Ethnically diverse only	11.7	23.0
Not diverse	73.6	60.0
Total	100.0	100.0

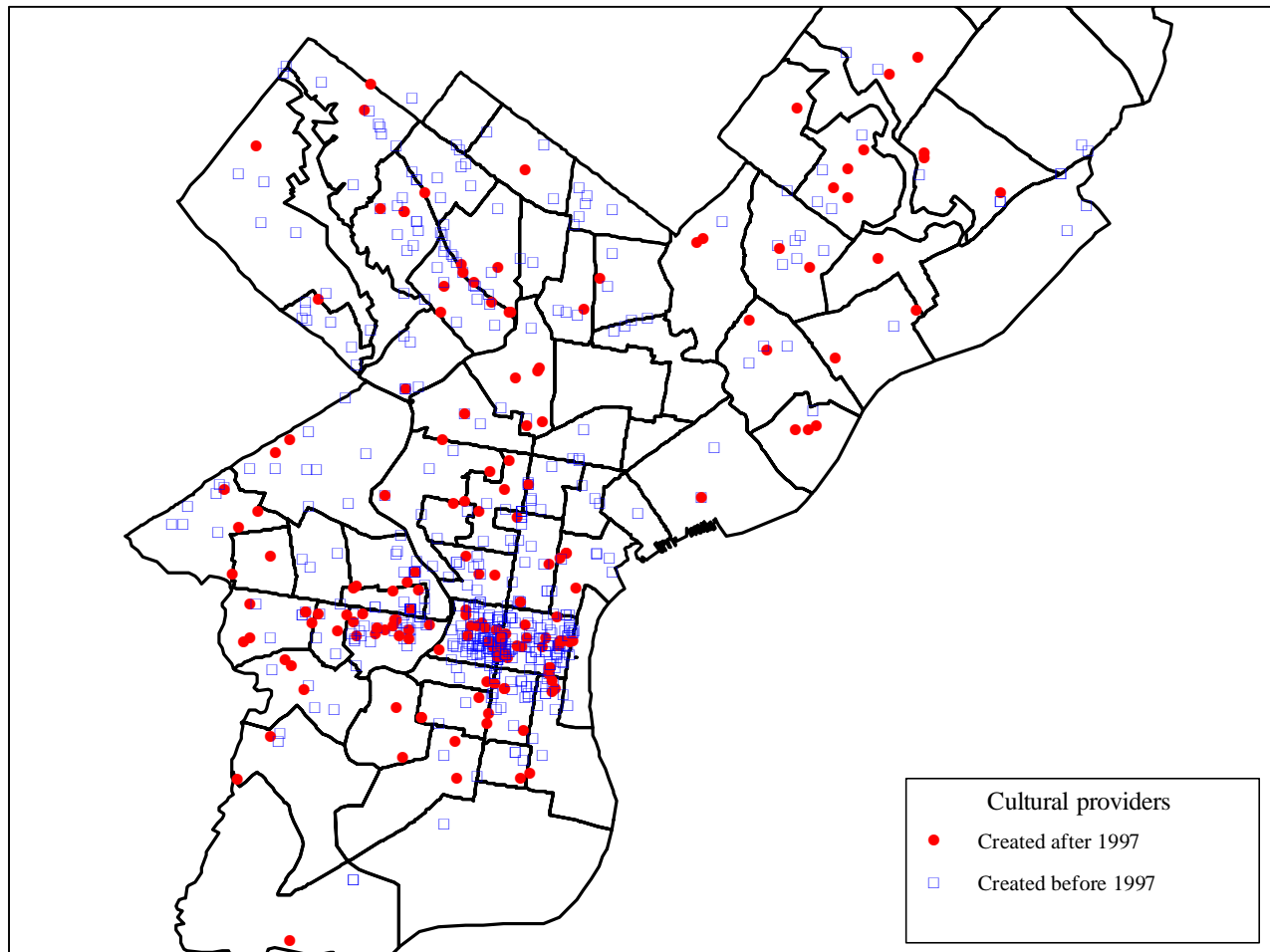
*Between 1990 and 2000 the proportion of Philadelphia residents living in an ethnically diverse block group increased from 22 to 38 percent. Economic diversity—what we call pov-prof—rose more modestly, from 15 to 17 percent of the population. Together, the proportion of Philadelphians living in a block group that was either ethnically or economically diverse rose from 26 to 40 percent, and the proportion living in a block group that was both economically and ethnically diverse rose from 6 to 8 percent.*

<sup>2</sup> African American, White, and Latino block groups had more than 80 percent of their population from the respective ethnic group.

<sup>3</sup> Pov-prof block groups have above average poverty rates and an above average proportion of managers and professionals in their labor force.

## 2. Changes in the cultural sector

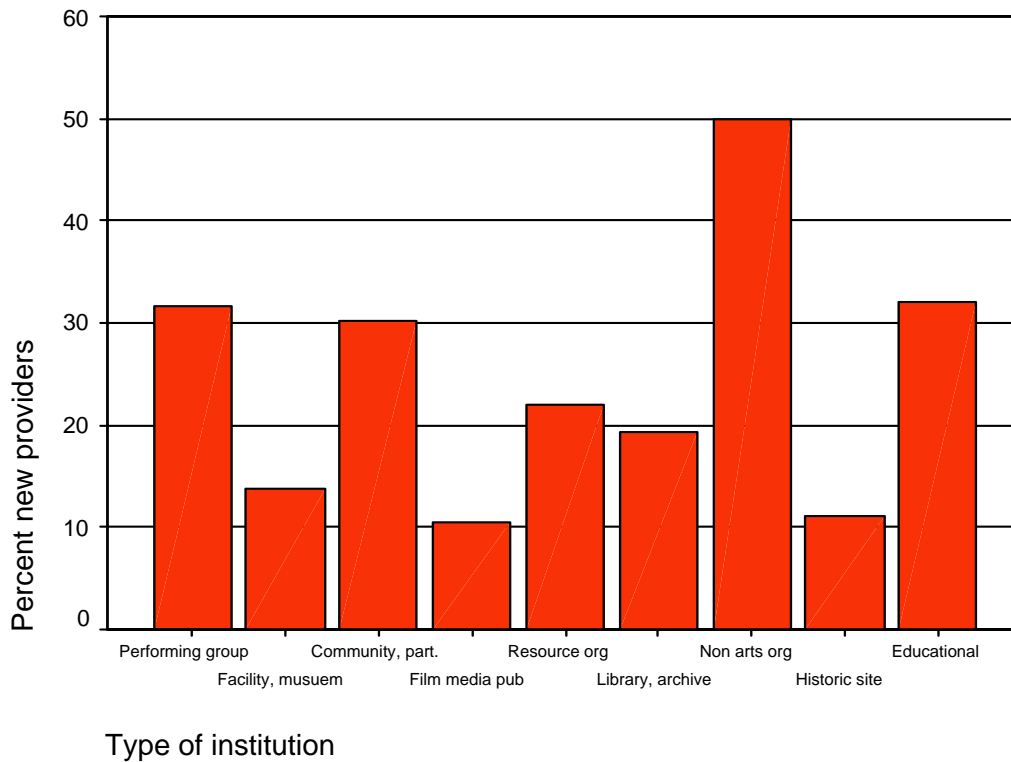
Figure 6. Cultural providers 2002, by presence on 1997 inventory



*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.*

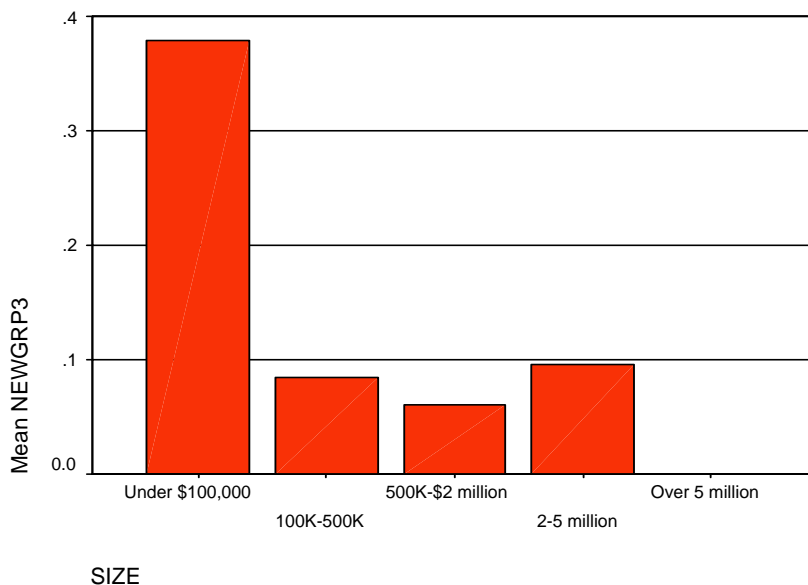
*What distinguished the new cultural providers?*

Figure 7. New cultural providers 1997-2002, percent within different types of institutions



*New cultural providers were more likely to be non-arts organizations with cultural programs, performing groups, community-based groups, or educational institutions.*

Figure 8. New cultural providers 1997-2002, by size of organization



*New cultural providers were overwhelmingly low-budget groups.*



*Where did cultural providers appear and disappear?*

Figure 9. Number of new cultural providers within 1/2 mile of block group, Philadelphia, 1997-2002

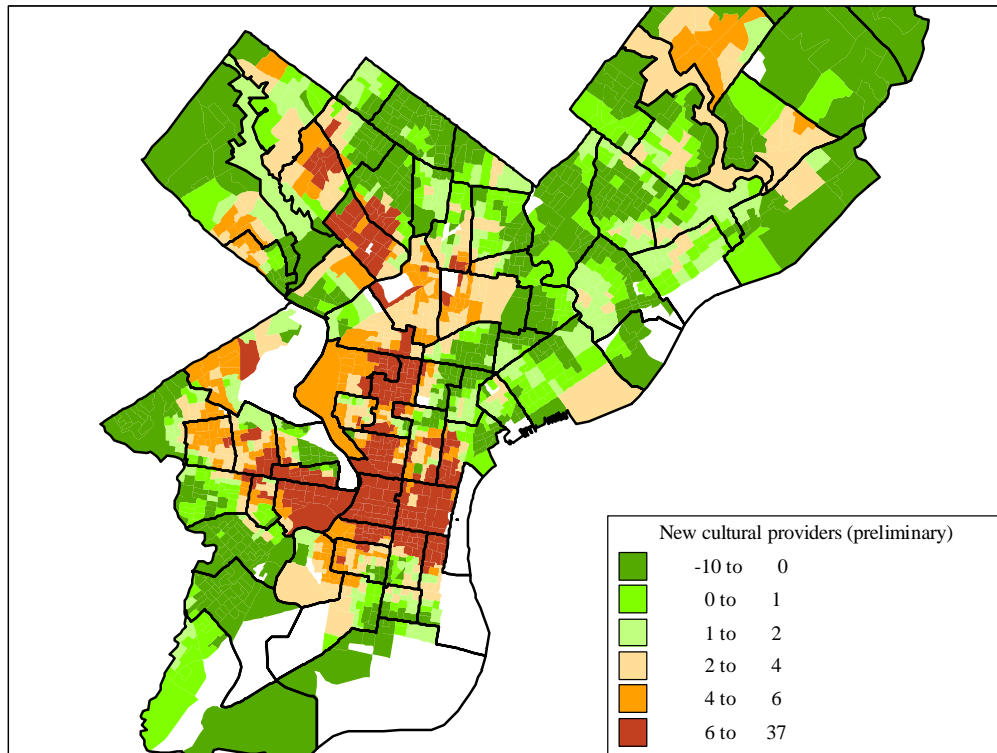
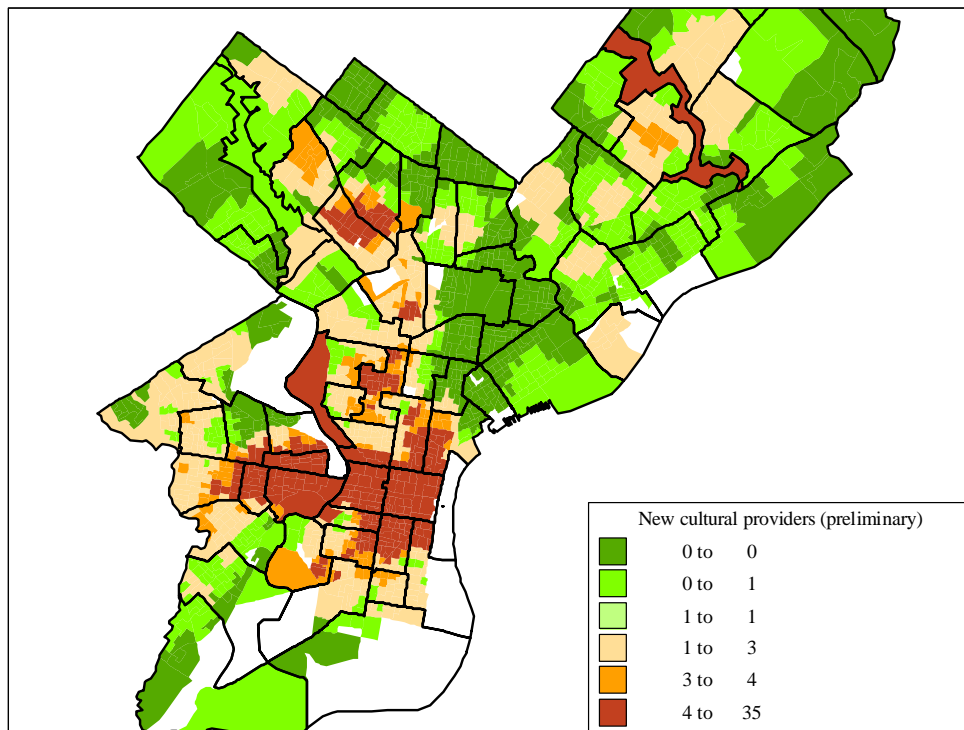


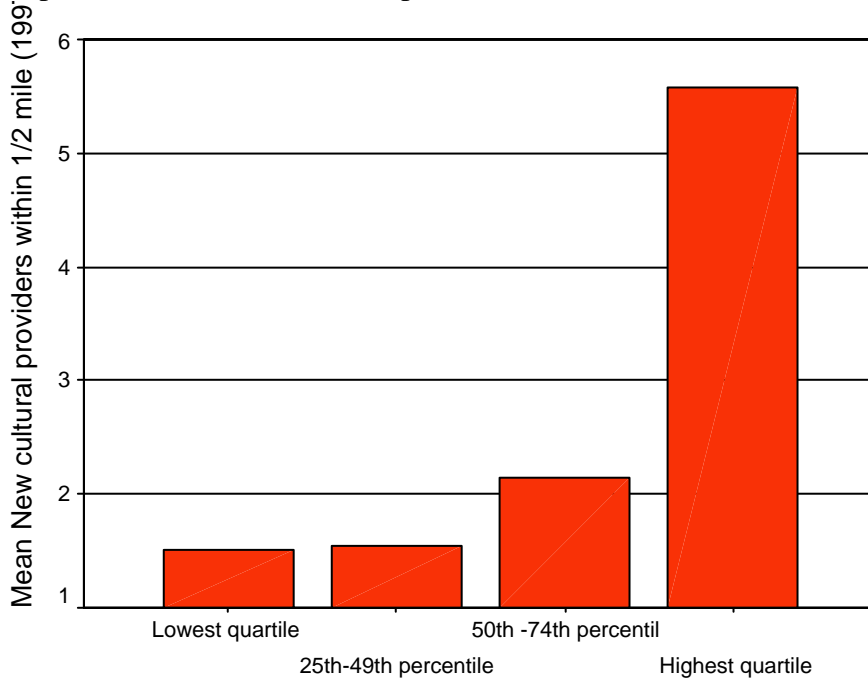
Figure 10. Cultural providers that disappeared within 1/2 mile of block group, Philadelphia, 1997-2002



*Although there was rapid turnover in the ranks of cultural providers, there was little net change, because the same neighborhoods that lost groups appear to have attracted new groups.*

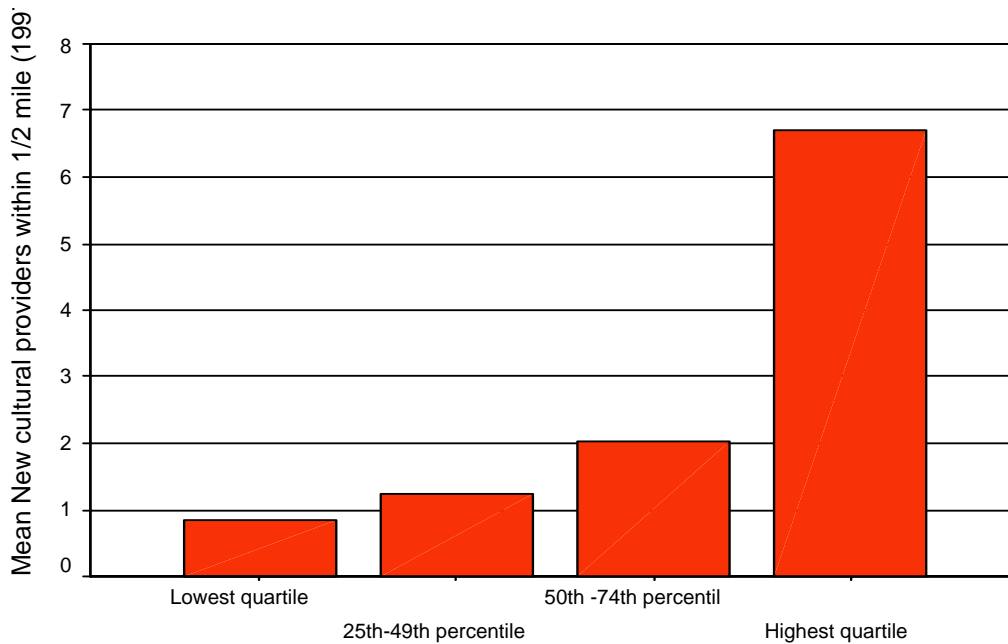
*What types of neighborhood were home to new cultural providers?*

Figure 11. Average number of new cultural providers within 1/2 mile, by regional cultural participation rate in 1997, Philadelphia.



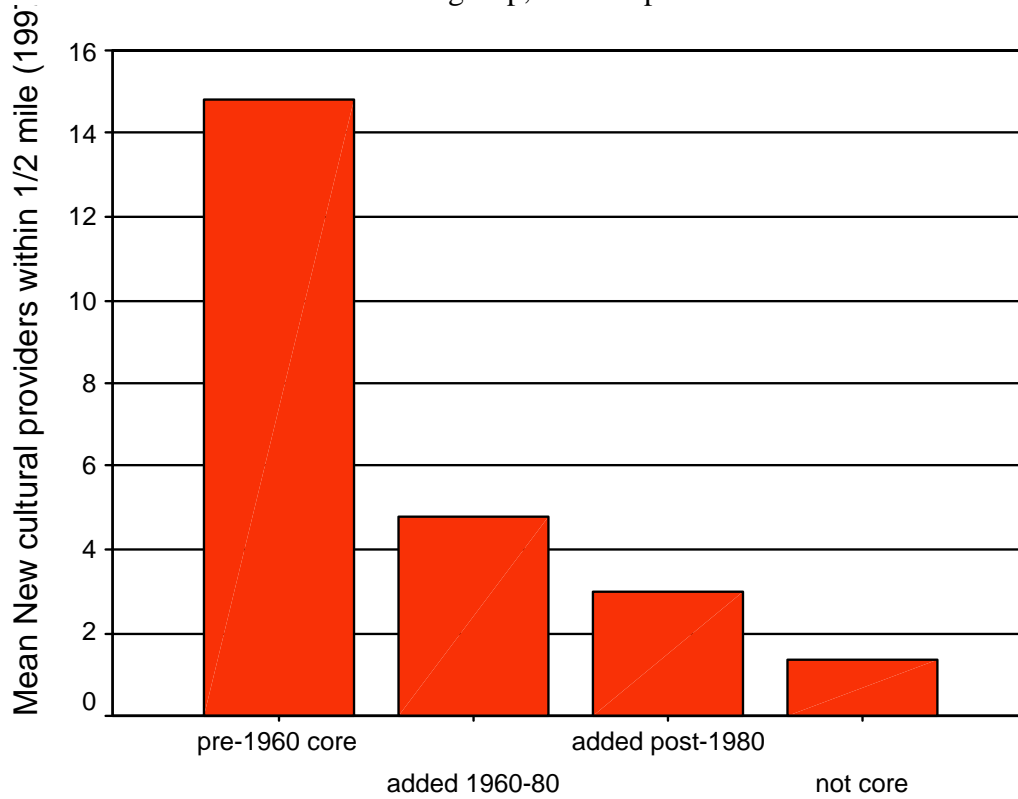
Regional cultural participation (quartiles)

Figure 12. Average number of new cultural providers within 1/2 mile, by cultural providers in 1997, Philadelphia



Cultural providers with 1/2 mi 1997 (quartiles)

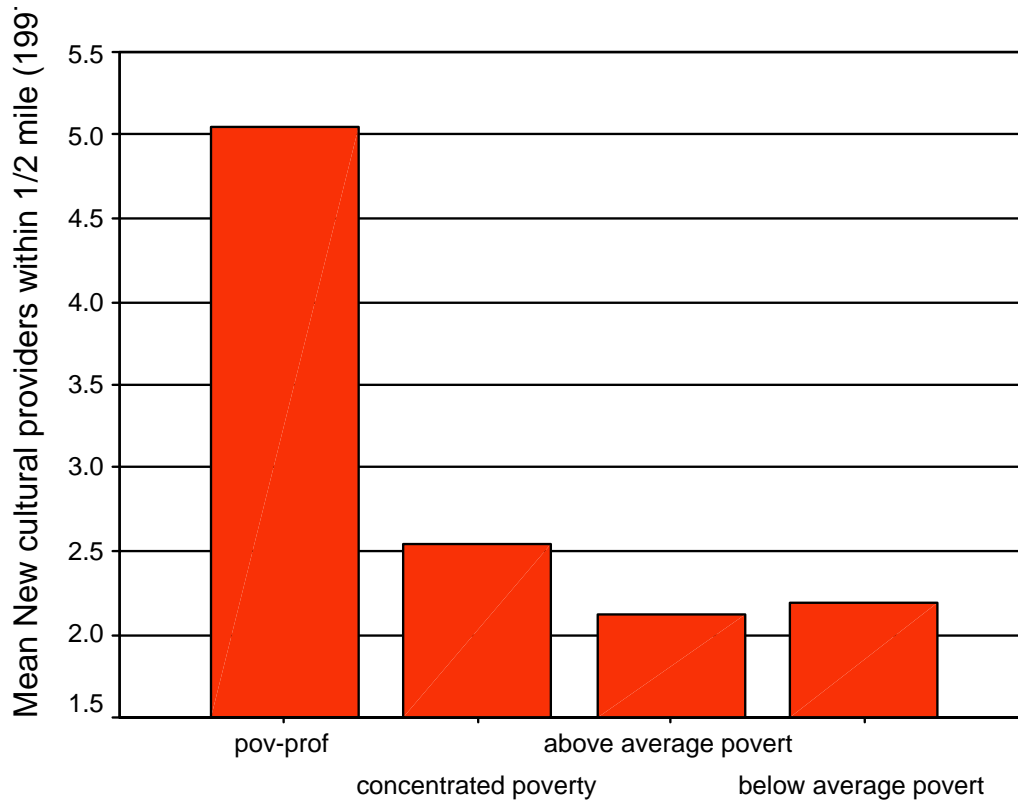
Figure 13. New cultural providers within 1/2 mile, by historical presence of cultural organizations within 1/2 mile of block group, Philadelphia



HISTGRP5

*New cultural providers emerged in neighborhoods that have historically been the home to cultural organizations and those with the highest rates of regional cultural participation.*

Figure 14. Number of new cultural organization within 1/2 mile, by economic status of block group, Philadelphia 1997-2002



Economic status 1990

*Economically diverse neighborhood remained the most likely location for new cultural providers and total providers.*

Figure 15. New cultural providers within 1/2 mile, by ethnic composition of block group, Philadelphia 1997-2002.

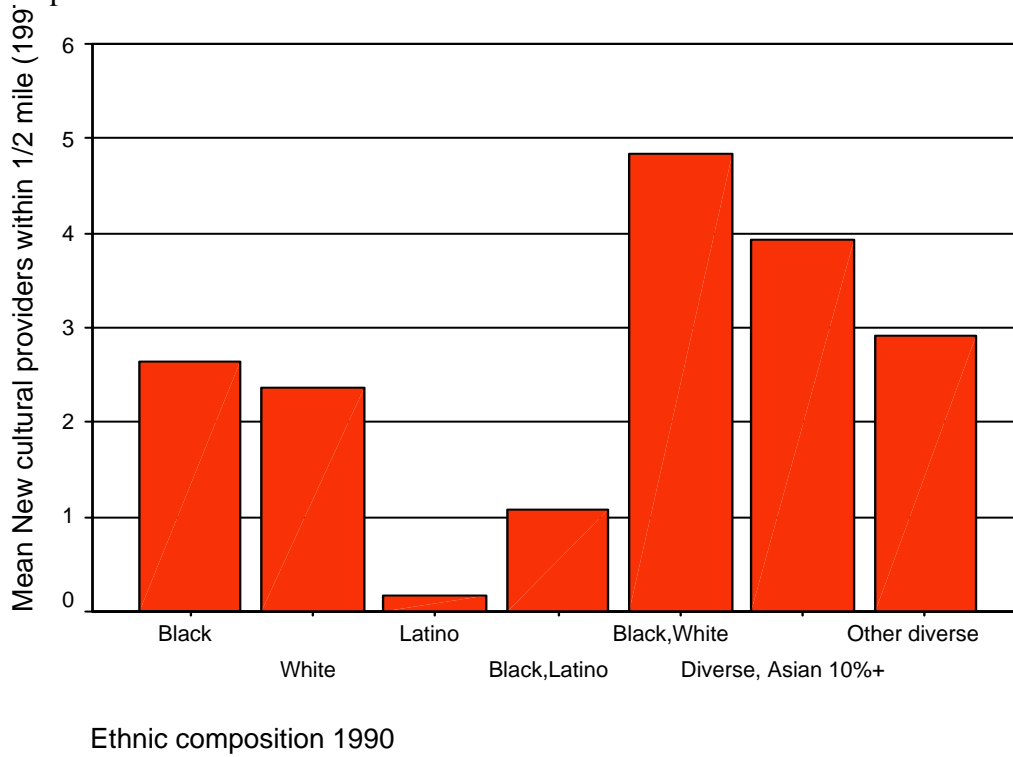
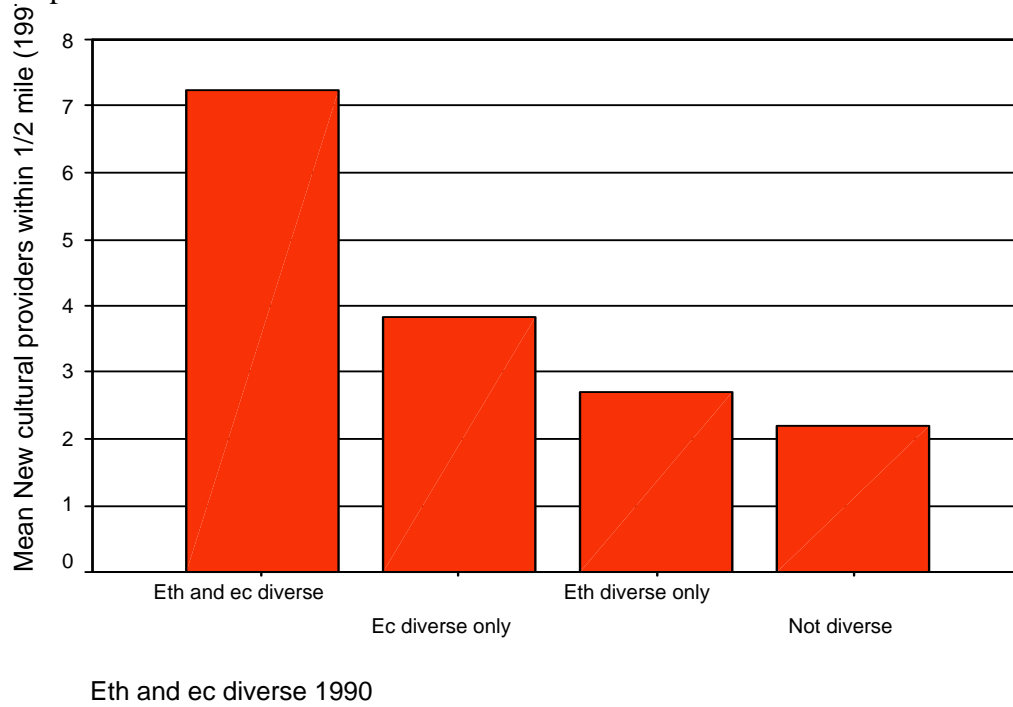
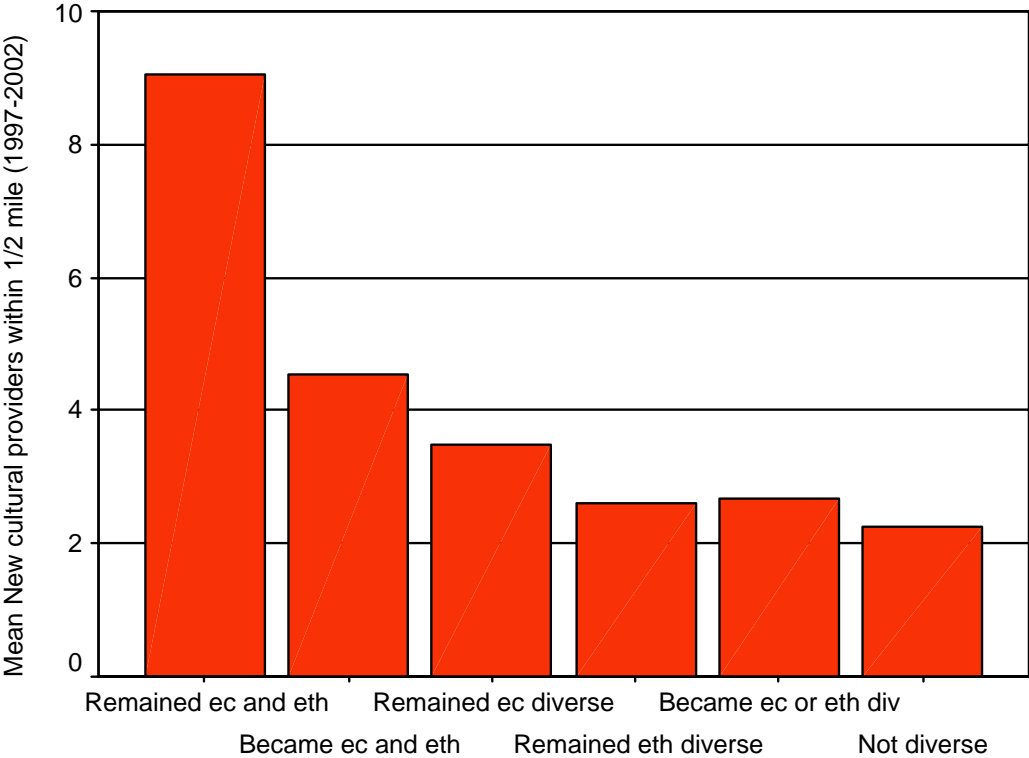


Figure 16. New cultural providers within 1/2 mile, by diversity status of block groups, Philadelphia 1997-2002



*Neighborhoods that were both economically and ethnically diverse were, by far, the areas of Philadelphia with the most new groups.*

Figure 17. New cultural providers within 1/2 mile of block group, by change in diversity status, 1990-2000.



**Change in diversity status**

*Neighborhoods that remained both economically and ethnically diverse during the 1990s attracted the most new cultural providers, while those that became economically and ethnically diverse during the decade attracted more than the average number of new groups.*

### 3. Urban impacts

Figure 18. 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.

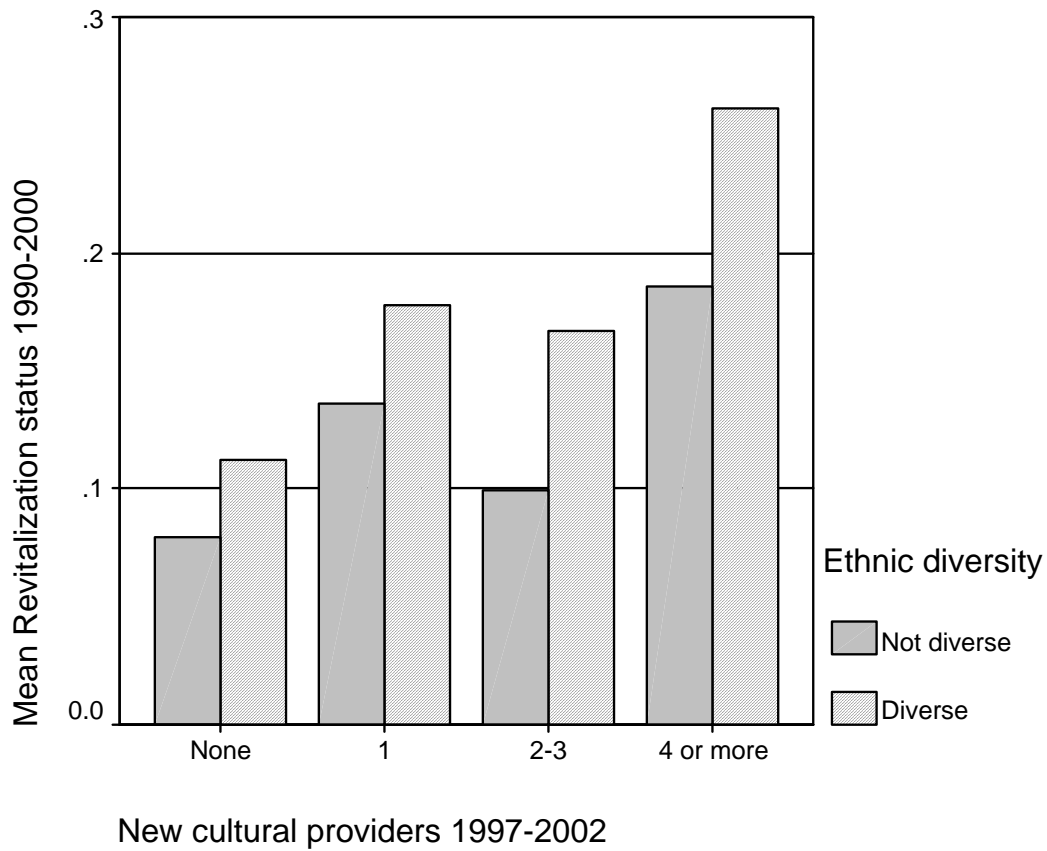


Figure 19. Change in poverty rate by number of new cultural providers, Philadelphia block groups, 1990-2000

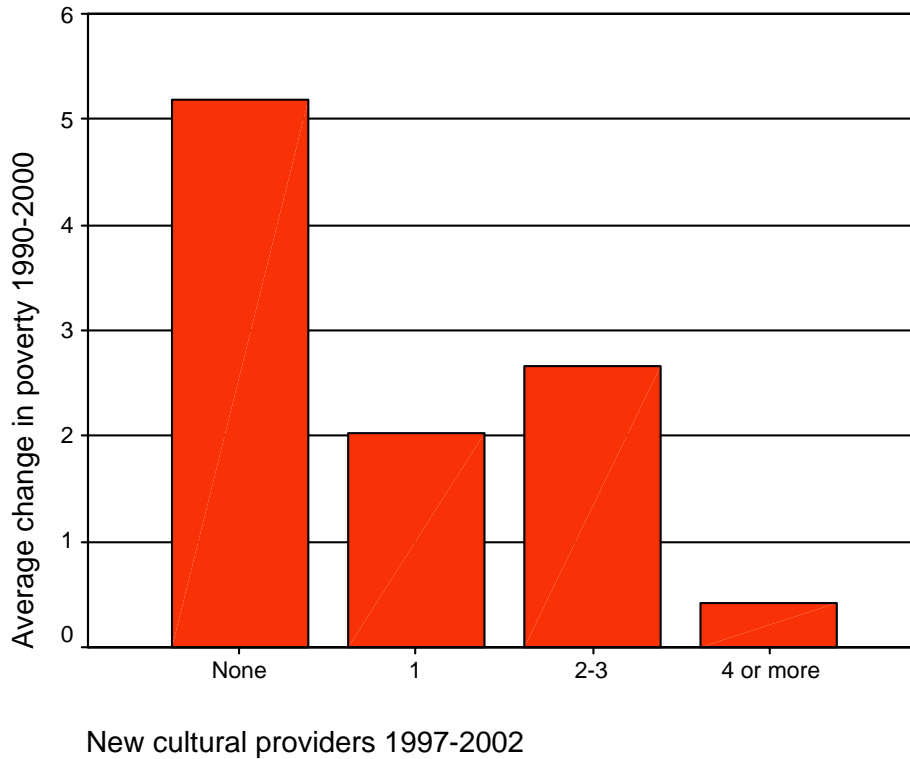
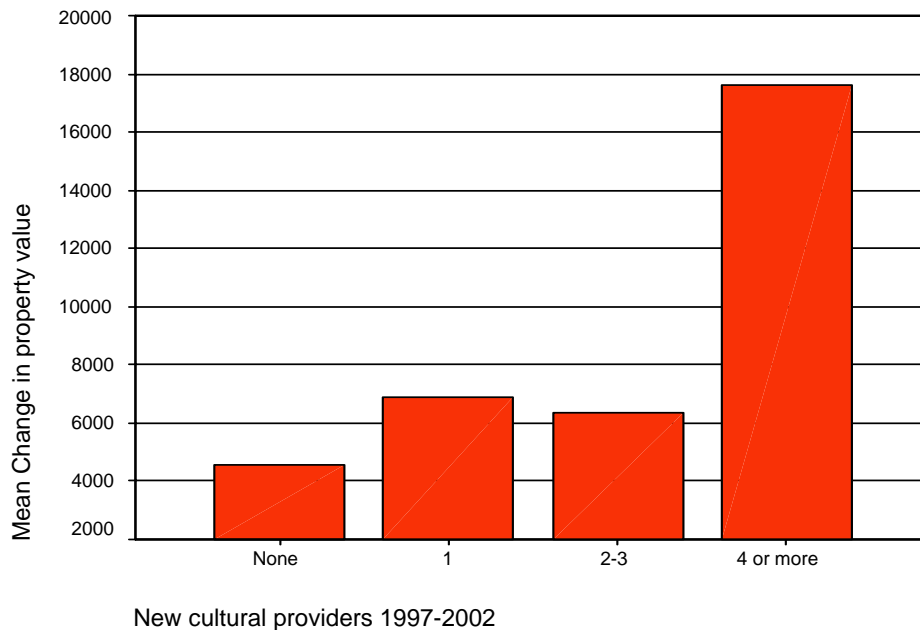


Figure 20 Change in average sale price of residential property, by number of new cultural providers, 1995-2000.



*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.*



## **Conclusion—The Reproduction of Culture**

Between 1997 and 2002, Philadelphia’s cultural sector experienced striking stability and change. The total number of cultural providers in the city remained virtually the same during this period. In 2002, the average block group had not seen a striking increase or decrease in the number of cultural providers.

Yet, this stability masked rapid turnover. Roughly a quarter of the cultural providers on our 2002 inventory were not present in the city five years earlier. Conversely, a quarter of the providers on our 1997 index could no longer be found in 2002. Although the confirmation of these results must await several more months of data cleaning and checking, our preliminary finding must be that the cultural sector is a product of a dynamic equilibrium in which the rapid birth and death of cultural organizations balance one another.

This stability was consistent citywide and within most neighborhoods. New cultural providers typically were located in the neighborhoods that had historically had the largest number of cultural providers. Neighborhoods with a history of cultural presence and diverse neighborhoods were those most likely to see the birth of new providers.

These patterns reinforce the *ecological* perspective that we have explored in our previous work. Many neighborhoods in Philadelphia contain a variety of elements that provide a fertile context for the growth of cultural expression. Existing cultural providers interact with an ethnically and economically diverse population to create a *milieu* that supports cultural expression. This *milieu* reproduces itself. Not only are organizations and people present in these areas, but also they encourage routinized patterns of behavior. Artists either live in these areas or travel there often. Existing cultural providers develop institutional networks that link them to one another and to other community assets. These networks facilitate the flow of information about resources that are necessary to old and new groups: artists, potential audiences, and sources of funding. In short, once a “natural” cultural district is established in a city, powerful

social patterns of behavior and affiliation coalesce around it. Strong cultural *milieus* tend to reproduce themselves.

The same cannot be said of the individual organizations themselves. Although we are less certain about our current estimates of “death” rates among cultural organizations, we see no evidence that locating in a cultural district improves a group’s survival rate. This suggests that while these cultural *milieus* provide the *opportunity* for the creation of cultural providers that their success depends on a different set of factors. One might hypothesize that many vital cultural enterprises might have a short life-expectancy tied to the nature of the projects themselves. Many artists’ workshops, creative collaborations, cultural initiatives of non-arts organization probably do not seek “immortality.” They may be born, grow, and die in a few years.

These preliminary data don’t support the idea that cultural vitality stimulates displacement or gentrification, at least in a “non-world city” like Philadelphia. The neighborhoods most likely to house the new cultural providers were neighborhoods that were diverse both at the beginning and end of our study. The 1990s were a period in which the spread of diversity, not the balkanization of the city, was the dominant trend. Although revitalization and culture were connected in the 1990s, just as they were in the 1980s, the data suggest that culture contributed to gradual, not cataclysmic, changes in urban neighborhoods. In Philadelphia, there is simply no evidence that cultural engagement led to gentrification.

Indeed, a quick review of the history of gentrification in Philadelphia suggests that its source lies elsewhere. As a non-world city, Philadelphia is awash in neighborhoods that seek to gentrify, but fail to do so for decades. I can attest that since I moved to Philadelphia in 1978, that a set of neighborhoods to the north and south of Center City have, sometimes noisily, claimed that they were about to “take off.” More often than not, gentrification in Philadelphia

has been the product of large institutions making decisions to remake neighborhoods more or less by institutional fiat. The outstanding example of gentrification in Philadelphia is the creation of “Society Hill” from the Seventh Ward (the neighborhood immortalized in W.E.B. Dubois’s study of the *Philadelphia Negro*). Although eventually Society Hill attracted a set of market forces that pushed up property values and pushed out residents of modest means, the bulk of displacement occurred because of old-style “urban renewal” as practiced by city, state, and federal political actors. The clearing of the old “Black Bottom” district in West Philadelphia was accomplished in a similar fashion to make room for the expansion of the University of Pennsylvania, Drexel, and associated institutions.

Put simply, Philadelphia, unlike “world cities,” cannot rely on the market alone to generate the cataclysmic churning of its land market. By the same token, the city cannot count on a massive inflow of capital to support its cultural sector. These processes in Philadelphia tend to be more gradual and more firmly embedded in the existing social structure.

The lack of cataclysmic growth flowing from cultural engagement allows a different set of social forces to set its roots in Philadelphia’s neighborhoods. On the one hand, patterns of civic engagement stimulated by culture create a kind of “collective efficacy” (to use Rob Sampson and Felton Earls term) that makes residents more willing to address other neighborhood conditions. At the same time, culture’s association with diversity allows it to breach barriers of social class and ethnicity that other forms of civic engagement often leave in place.

These modest processes of social engagement don’t necessarily happen in fancy facilities or in the glow of media coverage. They happen in church basements, recreation centers, and converted loft spaces. As a result, flashier displays of the power of culture—the creation of cultural districts, the quest for the “creative class”—have attracted far more attention. Yet, for

the majority of Americans who don't live in world cities, these modest benefits of cultural engagement are likely to have the most enduring impact on the quality of urban life.