



Social Impact of
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Cultural Participation and Distributive Justice

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Expanding cultural participation has been an important goal of cultural policy over the past half century. Both public and private cultural policymakers have viewed the expansion of cultural participation as desirable. For private interests—foundations and nonprofit cultural institutions—participation provides both a legitimation of their activities and a source of revenue. For those concerned with public policy, the expansion of participation is tied to the idea that a “good society” is one in which the opportunities for participation and the actual levels of engagement are high. Indeed, the recent interest in “social capital” has reinforced the idea that civic participation is likely to produce a variety of positive social outcomes.¹

In its work over the past decade, the Arts and Culture Indicator Project (ACIP) has taken a unique approach to the study of cultural participation and its social consequences. The ACIP framework gives prominence to cultural expression that occurs well beyond the usual venues of commercial and nonprofit organizations. For example, it gives prominence to “objects and activities, which are not typically considered art in mainstream venues, [that] are valued as such by residents. These may include gardens, graffiti, gospel choirs, and storytelling.” With respect to cultural participation, specifically, ACIP notes that:

Cultural participation/engagement takes many different forms. While cultural participation is typically understood (by researchers and many arts funders) as audience participation, it is important to recognize the multiple ways in which people engage in the arts, not only as audience, but as artists/creators, students, teachers, judges, advocates, donors, sponsors, etc.²

The implications of this perspective for research and policy making include an emphasis on overcoming historically-based exclusion. For example, many of ACIP’s local efforts have focused on giving voice to cultural expression in ethnic minorities and poor communities. ACIP has argued forcefully that cultural participation must be defined as more than buying tickets to established cultural events.

This paper builds on ACIP’s approach in two ways. First, we make explicit something that has been implicit in much of ACIP’s work: the consequences of cultural expression for *distributive justice*. While ACIP has argued that non-mainstream forms of cultural expression should be integrated into a full view of culture, we seek to give this insight a harder edge. Specifically, we ask what are the distributive consequences of cultural expression? Do all forms of culture have the same impact on inequality or do certain forms of expression tend to reinforce inequality while other forms undermine it? Second, we use evidence from the University of Pennsylvania’s Social Impact of the Arts Project

¹ Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

² ACIP website

(SIAP) to examine the ways in which different forms of cultural participation connect with indicators of social inequality.

We conclude that much of mainstream cultural expression actually reinforces social inequality. However, two parts of the cultural sector—the “alternative” regional cultural sector and the community cultural sector—show more promise in providing resources for historically disenfranchised populations and neighborhoods. We conclude that, if public support of cultural expression is justified on its promotion of social justice, these sectors provide the most effective means of addressing this goal.

1. Cultural theory and distribution

Although most discussions of cultural policy assume that cultural expression is “good” for society and should be encouraged, the much of contemporary cultural theory has suggested quite the opposite. Both economic theories of cultural participation and cultural capital theory argue that culture is isomorphic with existing social inequality.

Economic theories of Cultural Participation

Economic theories of culture treat cultural participation as a normal consumer good. Its fate is governed by the cost of supplying it and the relative demand for it. If it can be provided more cheaply, people will buy more of it; if people’s tastes for culture grow, they will buy more of it, even if it costs a lot.

In its most simplistic form, economic theories of culture have an obvious distributive bias. Given that “consuming culture” requires costs—both the direct costs of “buying” culture or the opportunity costs of choosing it over something else—those who are more advantaged will be in a position to buy more of it. If the world were a perfect market and cultural expression were simply a consumer good we would expect the well-off to consume a lot of culture and the poor to consume little.

In reality, things are a bit more complicated. Since Baumol and Bowen’s work in the 1960s, we have realized that much of the arts world cannot support itself economically; the costs associated with cultural production simply outstrip the public’s capacity and willingness to pay for the arts.³ This reality provided much of the impetus for the rapid expansion in the public sector’s investment in culture during the next two decades. Although this changing reality influenced the policy discourse, it did little to change the relationship of economic resources and participation.

Cultural Capital

Yet, most of the actual history of cultural funding makes little sense if we restrict ourselves to purely economic phenomena. In contrast to larger economic sectors that have been able to make a convincing case that the fate of the larger society is tied to their success—“what’s good for General Motors is good for the USA”—the increased public subsidy of the arts cannot be understood in simple economic terms.

³ William J. Baumol and William G. Bowen, *Performing Arts – The Economic Dilemma: A Study of Problems Common to Theater, Opera, Music, and Dance* (New York: The Twentieth Century Fund, 1966).

Here cultural capital theory—most often associated with the work of Pierre Bourdieu—provides a more convincing lens through which we can make sense of the history of the cultural sector. Bourdieu argues that different individuals and social groups mobilize a variety of different resources—‘capital’—in order to increase their chances for success in the game that constitutes society. While money capital and human capital—wealth and skill—are probably the most influential resources available, two others—cultural and social capital—play an important role. Cultural capital, then, refers to the extent to which individuals and groups use “taste” in order to assert superiority and increase social distance. “High brow” tastes, according to social capital theory, is one means of asserting or consolidating one’s social position.

Objectively and subjectively aesthetic stances adopted in matters like cosmetics, clothing, or home decoration are opportunities to experience or assert one’s position in social space, as a rank to be upheld or a distance to be kept.⁴

Thus, cultural capital is one tool used by the well-off to demonstrate their superiority and translate one form of capital—wealth—into a non-pecuniary status distinction.

Historically, the emergence of the nonprofit cultural organization, described by Paul DiMaggio, represents the dominant story of the 19th and 20th centuries. On the one hand, the emergence of the arts distanced culture from the market, requiring theater, opera, and ballet to render them incapable of making a profit. At the same time, nonprofit organizations represented an institutionalization of patronage in which well-off social strata provided the subsidy required to keep alive the newly market-incapable cultural organizations. The emergence of a “middle-brow” cultural sector that translated the inaccessible standards of “high brow” for an audience of middling means completed the construction of a stratified system of cultural consumption.⁵

Economic and cultural capital theories have dominated most formal consideration of the social consequences of the arts. Because both theories suggest that culture, at best, reinforces existing social inequality, it seems unlikely that the cultural sector as a whole could make a convincing case for its net social benefit. If culture’s case for public support is based on its distributive impact, economic and cultural capital theories provide little support for this case.

Democratic inclusion and social capital

Although economic and cultural capital theories are anti-distributive, there are a number of approaches to culture’s significance that do have distributive consequences. Progressive theories of democracy, for example, have historically asserted that self-improvement was a critical element of a good society. Much of the current discussion of culture in the educational system builds on this faith that culture has an edifying impact on individuals, and that the aggregation of these individual effects could lead to social

⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinctions: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 57.

⁵ DiMaggio, Paul, “Social Structure, Institutions, and Cultural Goods: The Case of the United States,” in Pierre Bourdieu and James S. Coleman, eds. *Social Theory for a Changing Society*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1991.

outcome. In particular, because education and self-improvement provide a means through which those of modest means can change their life-chances, democratic theories might have positive distributive outcomes. In more recent years, a number of *communitarian* writers, most notably Michael Walzer, have argued that giving voice to disenfranchised social groups is one means of expanding democracy's influence.⁶

ACIP's approach to culture and community provides one example of this link. In essence, ACIP argues that by spreading the net of cultural participation to include not both mainstream and *indigenous* cultural forms, that we can gain a fuller and more accurate appreciation of culture's reach. To the extent that these traditions have been excluded, we have deprived disenfranchised groups of their voice in democratic discourse. From this perspective, culture, because it is a key element of the voice of the powerless, is a critical means of overcoming oppression.

More recently, the new popularity of theories of social capital also provides a rationale for linking cultural participation to social well-being. Social capital theories hold that the networks formed through social interaction provide a resource people can use to accomplish their goals. In this respect, social capital is similar to cultural capital in that it can be "cashed in" for other outcomes. For example, membership in a particular church might lead to connections to help one find a job or other pecuniary and non-pecuniary resources. Although social capital theories split between those that emphasize social capital's potential to include and those that emphasize its potential for exclusion, both perspectives posit that individuals and groups with low economic resources have the potential to mobilize substantial social capital. For example Alejandro Portes, in his work on recent immigrants and their children, suggests that groups' ability to use social networks provides a counterweight to the role of market forces in determining their respondents' life chances.⁷

To the extent that social capital provides a resource for poorer social groups, it has implications for distributive justice. From a communitarian perspective, culture can serve to strengthen existing social bonds, taking sympathies that might be latent and turning them into a powerful social force. In addition, to the extent that culture allows one to move beyond one's own social group, it might lead to a broader sense of responsibility. In this sense, culture's emphasis on *bridging* social differences might provide a unique social resource to many groups.

In summary, current theories of culture's influence split on the issue of distributive justice. On the one hand, economic theories of cultural participation and cultural capital theory posit that cultural participation would closely follow other forms of social inequality. We would expect individuals who are better-off economically and social

⁶ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (London: Duckworth, 1985); Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice* (New York: Basic Books, 1983); Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

⁷ Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. (New York: Simon and Shuster, 2000); Alejandro Portes, "Social capital: its origins and applications in modern sociology. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 22 (1998): 1-23.

groups that have been historically dominant to have higher rates of cultural participation and more ownership of the institutions and content of the cultural sector. On the other hand, democratic theories and social capital theories suggest that the close association of social class and cultural participation is not inevitable. If we consider broader forms of cultural expression and participation, it is possible that culture could act as a counterweight to social inequality.

These considerations of the implications of culture for distributive justice provide a new lens through which to consider the findings of the Social Impact of the Arts Project over the past decade. Here we focus on a number of considerations:

- To what extent do levels of cultural participation correlate with measures of social inequality?
- Is “culture’s” impact uniform across all forms of participation? Do some forms more clearly reflect social inequality than others?
- What features of the social context are most influential on variation in cultural participation and what are their distributive consequences?

We turn now to the findings of SIAP and what they might have to say about the link between cultural participation and social inequality.

Cultural Participation in Philadelphia

The Social Impact of the Arts Project has focused its work on examining the ways in which cultural expression influence wider social conditions. As a result, we have given priority to methods that link cultural participation to the social context in which it occurs. In order to pursue this interest we used two complementary methods to triangulate the contours of participation.

Our first approach to the study of participation used cultural organization’s databases as a means of estimating regional cultural participation. We drew a sample of 25 regional cultural organizations and a smaller number of community cultural providers in the metropolitan areas and secured their participation databases. For some organizations, this consisted primarily of mailing lists, and for other organizations, lists of individuals who registered for classes or bought tickets, subscriptions, or memberships to the organization.

The data from these organizations were then geo-coded to identify the area of the city—specifically the census block group—in which the individual lived. Based on this procedure, we were able to calculate counts of the number of participants each organization had in each block group. In addition, this allowed us to aggregate data across all organizations to estimate *regional cultural participation rates* and to use data reduction techniques—factor analysis—to identify commonalities in the spatial distribution of different organizations’ participants. This led to the construction of a set of participation indexes of which our *mainstream* and *alternative* cultural participation indexes were most useful. The community cultural providers were aggregated into a separate index.

Because the institutional data is gathered for block groups, it does allow us to estimate the relative importance of neighborhood and individual influences on individual participation. To correct for this shortcoming, we turned to the more conventional approach to participation—individual surveys. Specifically, we used the 1997 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts, commissioned by the National Endowment for the Arts, to study variations in individual participation. However, in a break with previous studies, we used a special version of this file, provided to us by the NEA, which included the zip code of respondents. This allowed us to incorporate information from the census and from SIAP's cultural databases to examine the relative importance of individual and neighborhood influences on participation.

The two methods provided a fairly consistent portrait of cultural participation that underlined the central importance of ecological influences on participation. On the one hand, we discovered that there was a clear connection between “mainstream” cultural participation and measures of socio-economic status, a finding that reinforces the cultural capital and economic theories of cultural participation. At the same time, we discovered that there was a second dimension to regional cultural participation that was associated with social diversity and the concentration of cultural providers; this pattern supported theories of participation associated with the social capital approach. Most strikingly, in fact, is the finding that these ecological influences are as strong as the individual influences on cultural participation. *By ignoring neighborhood effects, previous research on participation has seriously overestimated the role of individual socio-economic status and underestimated the role of social context on variations in participation.*

We now turn to a more systematic presentation of the two elements of our data analysis before returning to the implication of these findings for understanding the social consequences of cultural participation.

Findings: Institutional estimates of cultural participation

Regional cultural participation

Aggregating information drawn from our sample of regional cultural providers shows how different the region's neighborhoods are in their involvement with the arts and culture. The median block group in the city had a participation rate of approximately 60 participants per 1000 residents or 6 percent. The high participation areas of the city had rates above 120 participants per 1,000 residents. At the other extreme, some sections of Delaware County, and much of the city had participation rates below 30 per thousand, less than half of the median for the metropolitan area.

Figure 1 provides a map of where in the metropolitan area cultural participation was concentrated. It shows that five sections of the metropolitan area were most prominent: Center City, suburban Montgomery County, Chestnut Hill/Mount Airy, East Falls and the Art Museum area. Most of West, South, and North Philadelphia, Delaware County, and lower Bucks County have relatively low overall participation. (Figure 1)

In addition to this overall measure of cultural participation across the region, we used factor analysis to identify specific dimensions in the distribution of participation. On the

one hand, this analysis asks if certain organizations have similar geographic patterns of participation and if these patterns are associated with specific social characteristics. This analysis identified two distinctive dimensions of participation: “mainstream” and “alternative” participation.

Mainstream cultural participation

Mainstream cultural participation represents our orthodox view of “high” culture. The groups that are most related to this factor tended to be large, Center City organizations like the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Opera Company, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. A number of smaller organizations—like the Please Touch Museum and the Philadelphia Singers—also drew their participants from similar sections of the metropolitan area. (Figure 2)

The mainstream cultural index closely paralleled the spatial pattern of total regional participation. Suburban Montgomery County and Center City are the sections of the city most correlated with this factor. In addition, Chestnut Hill and the Swarthmore section of Delaware County also are more likely to score strongly on this factor.

Alternative cultural participation

The second factor to emerge from the participation index was strongly related to cultural organizations with a more contemporary focus. The Painted Bride Art Center, one of Philadelphia’s leading venues for cutting-edge performances was strongly represented in this index, as were folk music series and a number of organizations with both a strong community and regional presence, like the Samuel S. Fleisher Memorial.

In contrast to our mainstream index, the alternative participation factor is strongly represented in the city of Philadelphia. In addition to parts of Center City, this factor is strongest in neighborhoods on the periphery of Center City to the north (Art Museum, Fairmount, Northern Liberties) and south (Queens Village, Bella Vista).⁸ Although many of the organizations related to the alternative participation factor are identified as African-American, these groups have high participation rates within the region’s more diverse neighborhoods. This factor has strong representation in sections of West Philadelphia, Point Breeze in South Philadelphia, and some neighborhoods in North Philadelphia as well as more ethnically diverse areas like Mount Airy, Germantown, East Falls, and neighborhoods near Center City. (Figure 3)

The regional audience for community culture

Our measure of community cultural participation is more limited than our regional participation indexes. Rather than being derived from a random sample of community cultural providers, it is based on providers located in a set of neighborhood case studies. Therefore, these data would overestimate participation in these particular neighborhoods. To compensate for this problem, we have used the data more selectively. We developed an estimate of “outside” community participation, i.e., the number of participants who were involved with a particular cultural organization who did not live in the neighborhood in which that organization was located. Although not perfect, this

indicator provides a reliable measure of what we call the *regional audience for community culture*.

Indeed, the size of this audience took us by surprise. Although we knew that community cultural providers attracted participants from outside their neighborhoods, we did not realize that these “outside” participants composed *the vast majority of their participant base*. Although many community cultural participants came from the neighborhood in which the cultural organization was located, a much larger proportion—roughly 80 percent—came from other parts of the city. Programs that focused on children were more likely to draw their participants from the immediate neighborhood, but even among these programs more than half of the participants came from other parts of the city (Figure 4).

What kinds of neighborhoods have high participation?

The three patterns of cultural participation identified by the institutional analysis—total regional participation, mainstream participation, and alternative participation—each had a distinctive social profile. Socio-economic status, social diversity, and the concentration of cultural organizations influenced each of these measures of participation in a different way.

The presence of local cultural organizations was strongly related to high rates of total regional participation. The correlation coefficient for the relationship of the regional rate and the number of cultural organizations within one-half mile was .59. Whereas the block groups with the fewest arts organizations had less than 30 participants per 1,000 residents, neighborhoods with the most arts groups had nearly 120 or four times as many participants.

Institutional presence was also an important predictor of “mainstream” and “alternative” participation. As with the raw participation rate, total number of organizations (.44) and number of arts and cultural organizations (.54) are the most strongly correlated variables in explaining the “alternative” factor for the “mainstream” factor, they are important but somewhat less powerful than socio-economic. Alternative regional participation and community participation had similar patterns; both were much higher in neighborhoods with many community cultural providers (Figure 5).

Our analysis gives qualified support to economic and cultural capital theories of cultural participation. Overall, regional participation was correlated with socio-economic status. For example, among the region’s block groups with the lowest per capita income, there were about 25 cultural participants per 1,000 residents. At the other extreme, among the richest block groups in the metropolitan area, there were nearly 160 participants per 1,000 residents. (Figure 6)

Socio-economic status had its strongest influence, however, on mainstream cultural participation. The correlation coefficient between per capita income and the mainstream cultural index was .62, well above the figure for total participation. In contrast, the correlation of per capita income with “alternative” and community cultural participation was quite weak, explaining less than one percent of the variation in that index. In other words, while one dimension of cultural participation—what we have called mainstream participation—was strongly associated with the wealth of a

neighborhood, alternative and community participation was related to other, more complex influences.

If mainstream participation was structured by social inequality, alternative and community participation were most strongly related to diversity. We distinguish three separate dimensions to diversity—economic, ethnic, and household—each of which was related to alternative participation. *Economic* diversity identified neighborhoods who residents had high educational and occupational backgrounds, but also relatively high poverty. A neighborhood was defined as *ethnically diverse* if no single major ethnic group—whites, African Americans, Latinos, or Asians—made up more than 80 percent of the population. Finally, *household diversity* reflected the frequency of what the Census Bureau defines as “non-family households” in a particular neighborhood.

The consistency of the connection between diversity and cultural participation is quite remarkable. For example, neighborhoods that were economically diverse in 1990—their poverty rate was above average and they had a higher than average proportion of their workforce in professional and managerial occupations—had much higher alternative participation than other parts of the city. In contrast, mainstream participation was strongly related to socio-economic status with lower-than-average poverty block groups having the highest scores on this index (Figure 7).

The analysis of ethnic patterns of participation reinforces the connection between diversity and alternative participation. Predominantly white neighborhoods had the highest scores on mainstream participation, with somewhat lower scores on total regional participation. Homogeneous African American neighborhoods scored low on all three indexes. However, ethnically diverse neighborhoods scored above average on total participation and much higher than other parts of the city on alternative participation (Figure 8).

The final dimension of diversity—household diversity—was measured by the proportion of “non-family” households in the population. This variegated category included single-person households, same sex households, and POSSLQs (Persons of Opposite Sex Sharing Living Quarters). Participation rates consistently flourished in these domestically diverse neighborhoods. In neighborhoods that scored in the top quartile on this measure of diversity, each index of participation was higher than average. Household diversity was particularly related to total participation and alternative participation (Figure 9).

Multivariate analysis confirms the role of institutional presence, socio-economic standing, and diversity in predicting neighborhoods’ participation rate. We estimated the impact of these characteristics on the likelihood that a neighborhood would have high cultural participation (comparing total regional, mainstream, and alternative participation). Our standard is a neighborhood with the following characteristics: predominantly African American, low household diversity, few cultural organizations, and low poverty. According to the analysis, this neighborhood had a 3 percent chance of having high regional participation, 2 percent chance of having high mainstream participation, and 8 percent chance of having high alternative participation.

Institutional presence, economic, ethnic, and household diversity each made a significant contribution to the likelihood that a block group would have high

participation. For example, if we control statistically for other variables, a neighborhood with few cultural institutions had only a 19 percent chance of having high regional participation, but if the same neighborhood was in the top quartile in number of cultural institutions, its likelihood of having high participation increased to 94 percent. By contrast, if the neighborhood had high poverty, while other characteristics remained constant, its likelihood of having high participation fell from 19 to 1 percent. Compared to white neighborhoods, areas with other ethnic compositions depressed participation, although for diverse neighborhood the difference (18 versus 19 percent) was not substantial.

Institutional presence had a strong and positive effect on all three regional of participation indexes. For high mainstream participation, controlling for other influences, number of cultural institutions increased the rate from 35 percent to 91 percent. For alternative participation, the difference was substantial as well—20 to 36 percent—although not as dramatic as for other forms of participation.

In contrast, the split between high socio-economic status and economic diversity was reflected the different forms of cultural participation. Compared to the most well off neighborhoods, poor neighborhoods—whether economically diverse or not—had much lower total participation and mainstream participation, but had roughly the same alternative and community participation. In contrast, alternative participation was significantly higher in economically diverse neighborhoods than it was in well-off neighborhoods, although controlling for other forms of diversity, economic diverse sections of the city did not have significantly higher mainstream participation than homogeneous white areas. Similarly, where ethnic diversity made only a slight contribution to total participation, the chances of a neighborhood having high alternative participation increased from 20 to 31 percent when it moved from predominantly white to ethnically diverse.

The social features associated with high levels of community cultural participation were similar to those we examined earlier. Civic infrastructure, socio-economic status, and diversity were all related to community participation. However, it more clearly conformed to the pattern of alternative participation than to the other indexes of regional participation we examined.

For example, where total regional and mainstream participation were positively correlated with high income neighborhoods, alternative and community participation were both lower in these areas. At the other extreme, where the relationship between mainstream and total participation and economic diversity was quite weak, alternative and community participation were strongly correlated with this factor. At the same time, community participation tended more strongly to be tied to people-of-color than regional participation. Community participation rates in white neighborhoods was lower than average while it was above average in other parts of the city. In particular, Latino and diverse neighborhoods had much higher rates of alternative and community participation than other sections of the metropolitan area. A multivariate analysis confirms that institutional presence and ethnic diversity were the strongest predictors of participation.

SIAP's institutional approach to measuring cultural participation demonstrates that the broader category of *participation* needs to be broken down into a number of

subcategories. First, regional cultural institutions break down into a set of clusters of organizations that draw on different audiences. As a result, the total participation index must be complemented by attention to what we have called mainstream, alternative, and community indexes of participation. Second, we have discovered that these different patterns of participation are reflected in the social and demographic characteristics of different neighborhoods within Philadelphia. Institutional presence—the concentration of cultural organizations within one-half mile of a block group—has a clear influence on all three forms of participation. In contrast, where socio-economic status was highly correlated with mainstream and total participation, economic, ethnic, and household diversity had a strong impact on alternative and community participation.

Participation surveys and neighborhood effects

One of the limitations of the institutional data approach to participation is that tells us little about the dynamics of individual cultural participation. We have discovered that there is a set of social features that characterize high participation *neighborhoods*, but we know little about how these interact with individual experience to produce those patterns.

In order to pursue this question more concretely, we turned to the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts for 1997. Thanks to help from the research office of the NEA, we were able to use a version of the SPPA97 that included the zip code of each respondent. This allowed us to link information on the respondent's immediate neighborhood to her individual information, allowing us to assess the relative contribution of individual and ecological influences on participation. In addition, we were able to use the survey to compare our findings on Philadelphia with three other representative metropolitan areas: Chicago, Atlanta, and San Francisco.

One of the major preoccupations with cultural research in recent years has been to explain the significance of culture to the larger society. Not surprisingly in a nation as wedded to individualism as the United States is, the bulk of work on developing such a framework has looked at the individual as the appropriate *unit of analysis* for understanding the impact of the arts. The *economic impact of the arts* literature has viewed culture as a set of individual consumption decisions around participation. Similarly, the fields of arts education and the arts and youth development have focused on the impact of cultural engagement on the individual cognitive and emotional development of young people. In both cases, the total impact of the arts is simply the sum of many individual impacts.

This individual bias—although consistent with Americans' prejudices—is out of step with recent trends in the social sciences. In recent year, sociologists have devoted increased attention to the role of context—communities and networks—in influencing social phenomena. William Julius Wilson, for example, is only one of many poverty researchers to examine the role of social and spatial isolation on the problems of the very poor. Robert Putnam, in an influential new book, has argued that social networks are the critical mechanism through which *social capital* is developed. Along similar lines, a number of scholars, including Robert Sampson and Felton Earls, have suggested that “collective efficacy”—a process through which geographic neighborhoods are transformed through the development of social networks—is the critical element in understanding a variety of child outcomes from physical health to cognitive development.

As Sampson has noted, a framework that focuses on the embeddedness of individual action in social contexts can avoid “the psychological reductionism that flows from the dominant theoretical and empirical focus on individuals.”⁹

The study of public participation in the arts is a perfect example of the focus on individual actions to the exclusion of the social context. The study of public participation has focused primarily on the role of individual demographic characteristics and the individual biography of participants to the exclusion of obvious contextual variables like the availability of cultural opportunities and the social milieu that encourage or discourage cultural participation. This individualistic bias, of course, has been reinforced by surveys of public participation in the arts (SPPA) commissioned by the National Endowment for the Arts over the past two decades. Although these surveys and the scholarship based on them has enriched our understanding of who is involved in the arts, the lack of ecological information has made it difficult for researchers to examine individual and neighborhood effects on participation in a balanced way.

Individual characteristics and cultural participation

As previous research would suggest, individual demographic characteristics had notable correlations with levels of cultural participation. Gender, ethnicity, education, and income all have significant correlations with individual participation.

The strongest and most consistent correlate of participation was education. Individuals with more than a bachelor’s degree attended an average of over 8 events in the previous year, more than four times as many events as a high school graduate (Figure 10). This same relationship of socio-economic status and cultural participation is reflected in the data on income. Across the four cities in this study, individual respondents with incomes over \$100,000 in 1997 attended about six events a year while those earning less than ten thousand dollars and those earning between forty and fifty thousand dollars attended 1.28 and 2.4 events respectively (Table 1). Gender, age, and ethnicity also were correlated with participation, although as we shall see, these relationships were not statistically significant when controlled for other variables. The multivariate analysis produced significant beta-weights for educational attainment (.31) and income (.17).

Taken together, only two of these influences were statistically significant across the four metropolitan areas. Educational attainment was most strongly correlated with cultural participation with a beta-weight of .31. Income was somewhat less strongly related with a beta-weight of .17

Ecological influences on cultural participation

The contours of individual participation, however, were changed quite dramatically when we considered ecological influences on participation. Based on our institutional analysis, we found that institutional presence, socio-economic status, and social diversity each had a substantial ecological effect on participation as reflected in the SPPA. For example, respondents who lived in a zip code with many cultural institutions attended nearly three times as many cultural events as those who lived in zip codes with few institutions. The

⁹ Robert J. Sampson, Stephen W. Raudenbush, “Systematic Social Observation of Public Spaces: A New Look at Disorder in Urban Neighborhoods” *American Journal of Sociology* 105:3(Nov 1999): 603.

relationship of institutional presence to participation was strongest in the two Sunbelt cities we examined. In San Francisco and Atlanta, people living in neighborhoods with the highest number of institutions attended nearly four times as many events as those in neighborhoods with the fewest institutions. However, even in Philadelphia, which had the *smallest* difference, respondents in zip codes with high institutional presence attended more than twice as many events.

Compared to institutional presence, the ecological influence of socio-economic status was quite modest. Across the four cities, respondents in high-income neighborhoods only attended about twice as many events as those in low-income neighborhoods (Table 3). This relationship held in three of the cities, but in Atlanta the relationship did not hold. There respondents in high-income neighborhoods actually attended fewer events than those in poor neighborhoods.

Disentangling the impact on diversity on individual participation was complicated. Because zip codes are quite large, it would be possible for an entire zip code to appear diverse even if it were quite segregated. For example, if half of a zip code were a segregated African American community and the other half were a segregated white neighborhood, it would appear “diverse” if we simply calculated the percent of each ethnic group in the zip code. To correct for this problem, we calculated the proportion of the population in a zip code that lived in a diverse block group.

By this measure, diversity certainly had a strong impact on individual participation. The strongest influence was on neighborhoods that were both ethnically and economically diverse (using the definitions described earlier). If a respondent lived in a zip code in which more than fifteen percent of the population was “doubly diverse,” they attended more than six events per year, compared to only 3 events for those in zip codes without any “doubly diverse” population. In each of the four cities, respondents in areas without any diverse block groups always attended fewer events, although the size of the effect varied across the four cities (Table 4). Economic diversity demonstrated a similar effect (Table 5).

The relationship of ethnic diversity to participation was not consistent across the four cities. Ethnic diversity’s impact was strongest in Atlanta, where the respondents in the most diverse neighborhoods attended six times as many events as those in the least diverse. In San Francisco, however, respondents in ethnically homogeneous areas actually attended more events than those in the most ethnically diverse zip codes. This result was undoubtedly related to the unique ethnic composition of the Bay Area where the size of the Latino and Asian populations means that the vast majority of the population lives in areas that—by national standards—are very diverse. In the older cities, the effect of ethnic diversity was clear, but relatively modest compared to that of economic diversity (Table 6).

Household diversity—the frequency of “non-family” households in a particular area had a strong and consistent effect on participation. Philadelphia, in fact, exhibited a weaker influence of household diversity than the three other cities. Across the four cities, however, respondents in zip codes that were most diverse on this dimension attended more than twice as many events as those in the least diverse areas (Table 7).

In short, evidence from the survey of public participation supported our conclusions drawn from institutional data about the influence of institutional presence, economic standing, and diversity on cultural participation. The unique addition of the survey data, however, is in gauging the relative influence of these social context factors and individual characteristics. To estimate this balance, we performed a multiple regression analysis that included both the individual and ecological factors. Because of correlations between the different ecological variables, we reduced them to two uncorrelated indexes, one that was weighted on economic standing and institutional presence and one that was correlated with diversity and institutional presence.

The only individual level variable that remained statistically significant in this analysis was educational attainment, which explained 8.5 percent of the variance in frequency of cultural participation. The two neighborhood factor indexes—socio-economic status and diversity—together explained 7.7 percent of the variance. When entered on their own, socio-economic status had a beta-weight of .23 and diversity had a beta-weight of .17 (Table 8). In other words, knowing the neighborhood in which an individual lived was nearly as good predictor of her cultural participation rate as knowing her individual characteristics.

Discussion

The Social Impact of the Arts Project's investigation of the social contours of cultural participation has yielded a number of methodological innovations and substantive findings with implications for our understanding of the social consequence of cultural expression.

Participation, we have discovered, is strongly associated with the social context of the participant. First, we found that participation's variation across the Philadelphia's metropolitan area is clearly tied to a set of social profiles. Second, these contextual variables are as strong as individual social characteristics like educational attainment and income in predicting the level of cultural participation. Taken together, these findings suggest that future studies need to be designed to allow the influence of social context to be estimated. In addition, our use of institutional records to measure participation allowed us to gain a much more fine-grained feel for the geography of participation than survey-based methods would allow.

Substantively, the study has both confirmed some features of previous work and raised a number of new questions about the social structure of cultural participation. Some of the findings provide strong support for cultural capital and economic theories of participation. One of the features of high-participation neighborhoods in metropolitan Philadelphia is high socio-economic status. Not only did one's individual education and income matter—a finding of previous survey-based research—but also regardless of one's socio-economic status, the standing of one's neighbors appears to influence participation.

The influence of socio-economic status, the study suggests, depends on the type of cultural organization one is considering. Our overall measures of regional participation and of "mainstream" cultural participation were much more influenced by economic standing than either alternative or community culture was. This stratification of

participation not only by discipline but also by type of organization is one important contribution of SIAP's work.

Although culture capital's partisans can draw some reinforcement from this work, the analysis raises some doubts of its reach. While cultural capital explains some of our results, there are others that go well beyond its framework.

Social capital, too, has an important role to play in the explanation of participation. First, the persistent connection between the concentration of cultural organizations and high cultural participation suggests that there is a positive spillover effect from local cultural participation to involvement in regional cultural organizations. Second, the consistent role of diversity in boosting cultural participation suggests that what Putnam has called "bridging" social capital—building networks that cross social and cultural barriers—is an important function of culture.

Yet, this connection of culture to diversity and bridging is not typical of all forms of cultural participation. Indeed, the association of total regional participation and mainstream participation with diversity is quite weak. On the other hand, alternative and community-based cultural providers participants are much more likely to come from diverse neighborhoods than from more homogeneous sections of the city.

These findings raise some important questions about the ways in which the debate over cultural policy and that over distributive justice might overlap. Neither those who see culture as contributing to the economic status quo nor those who see it as a potential source of social change can walk away from these findings totally happy.

Certainly, there is ample evidence here that cultural participation, especially mainstream cultural participation reflects and reinforces existing social divisions and inequality. At the same time, other forms of participation apparently cross these boundaries and help stabilize economically and ethnically diverse parts of the city. Furthermore, as we have explored elsewhere, what evidence we have supports the idea that poor neighborhoods with high participation and many cultural organizations do better on quality of life indicators.

In the end, the study suggests that studies—like ACIP—that have an interest in linking culture to issues of inclusion and social justice would do well to differentiate forms of participation. From a policy standpoint, certainly, the argument that "cultural participation" supports social justice does not seem justified. Rather, we need to ask what kinds of participation do so. Based on our Philadelphia results, it appears that alternative and community participation have a much better chance to have these positive social consequences than mainstream cultural institutions.

Obviously, social justice is not the only rationale for public support of the arts and culture. However, one contribution that research can make to the debate over public policy and culture is to bring more precision to estimating the outcomes of particular policies. The findings of this study suggest that if one's goal *is* to use culture as a way of addressing issues of social justice, that some forms of intervention are more likely to have an impact than others.

Figure 1. Total regional cultural participation

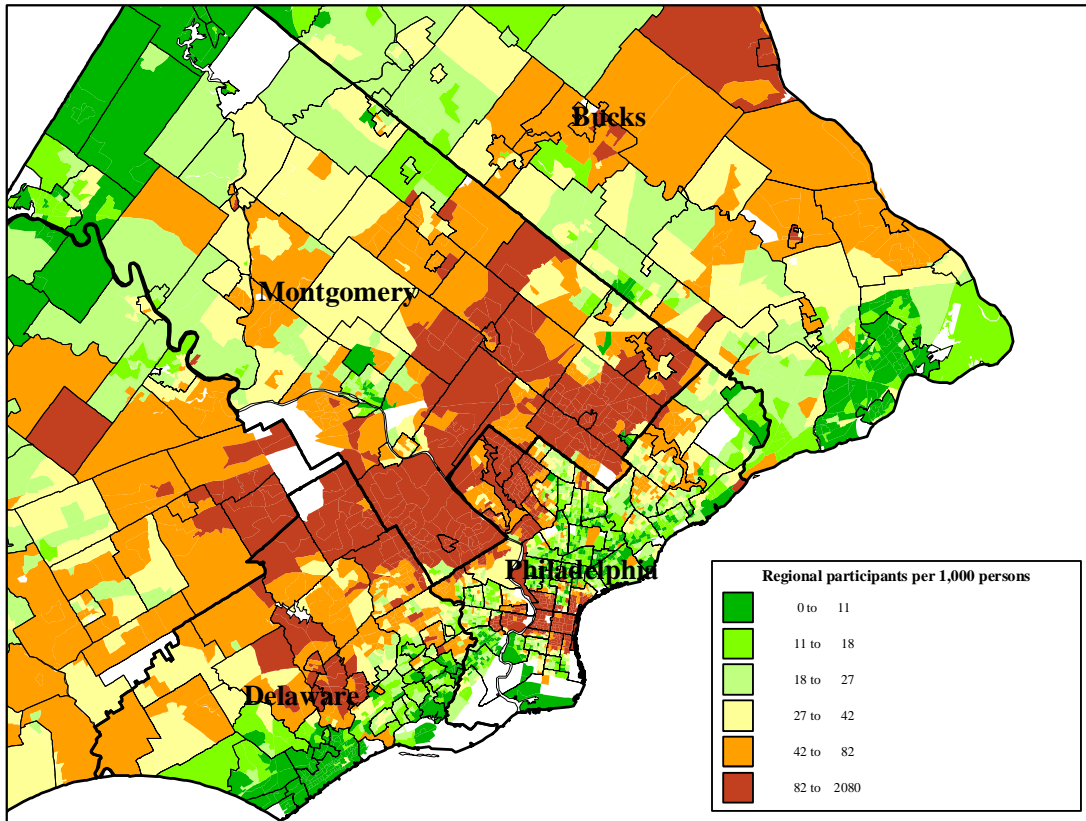


Figure 2. Mainstream cultural participation index

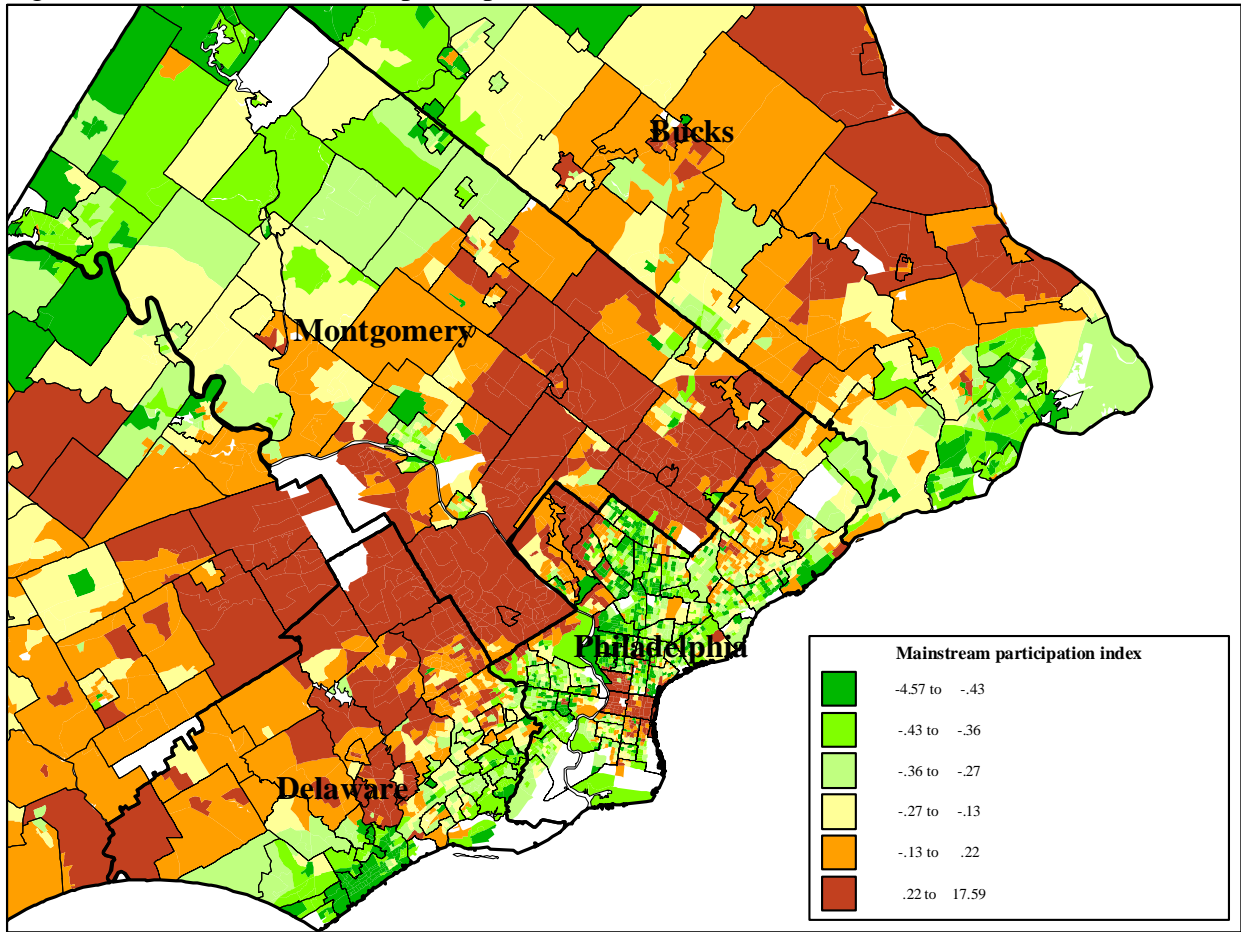


Figure 3. Alternative cultural participation index

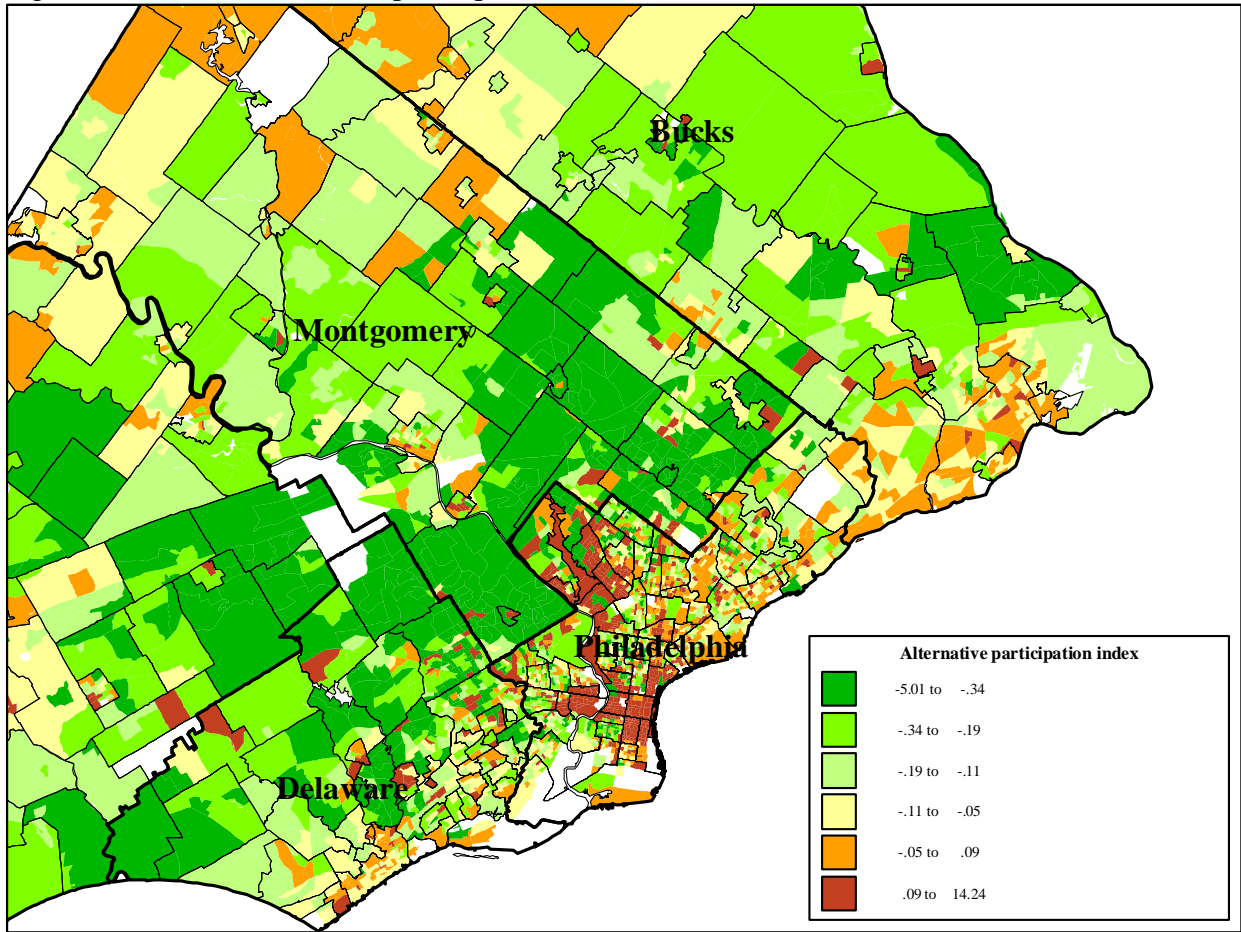


Figure 4. . Location of community cultural participants who attended event outside their immediate neighborhood

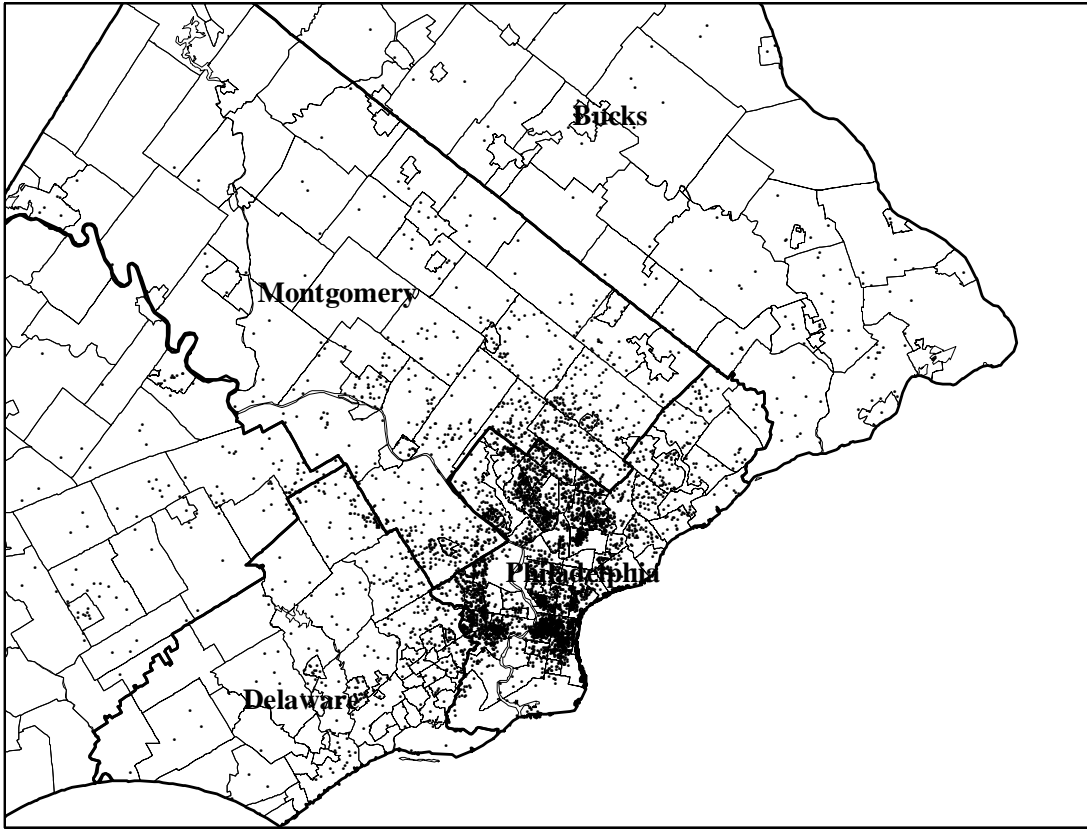


Figure 5. Cultural participation indexes by concentration of cultural providers in block group

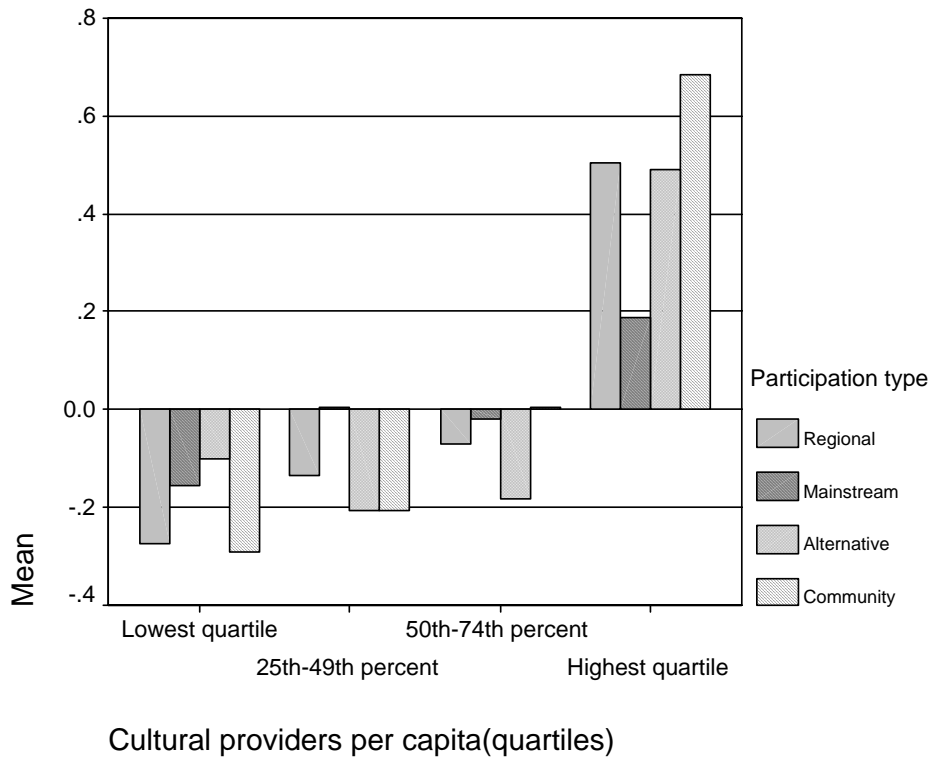


Figure 6. Cultural participation indexes by per capita income of block group

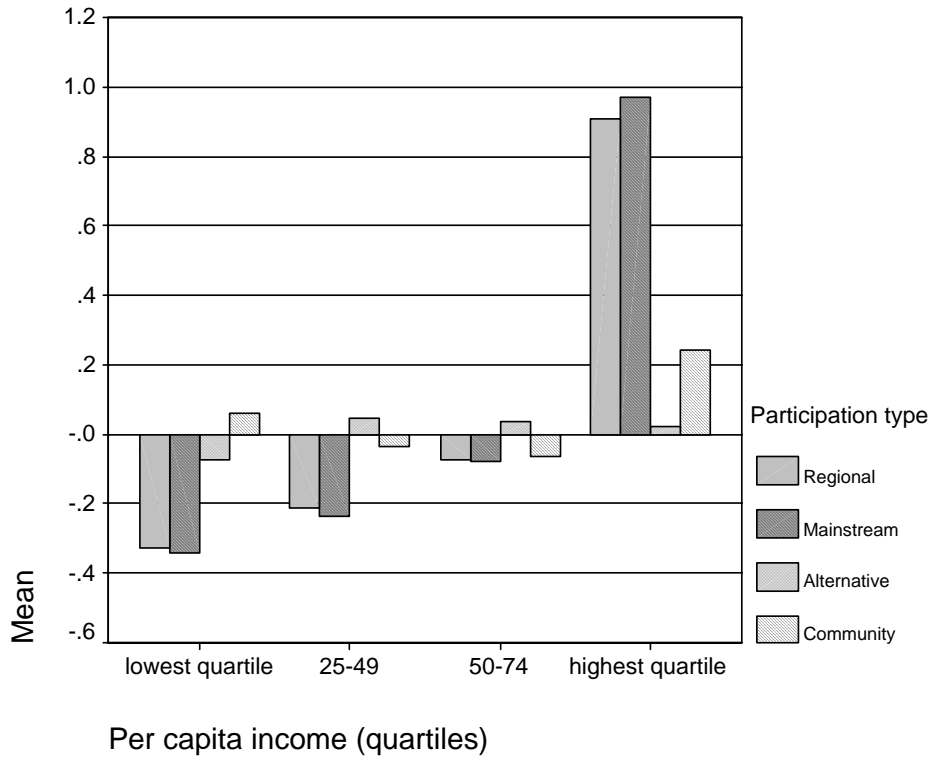


Figure 7. Cultural participation indexes, by economic diversity and poverty rate

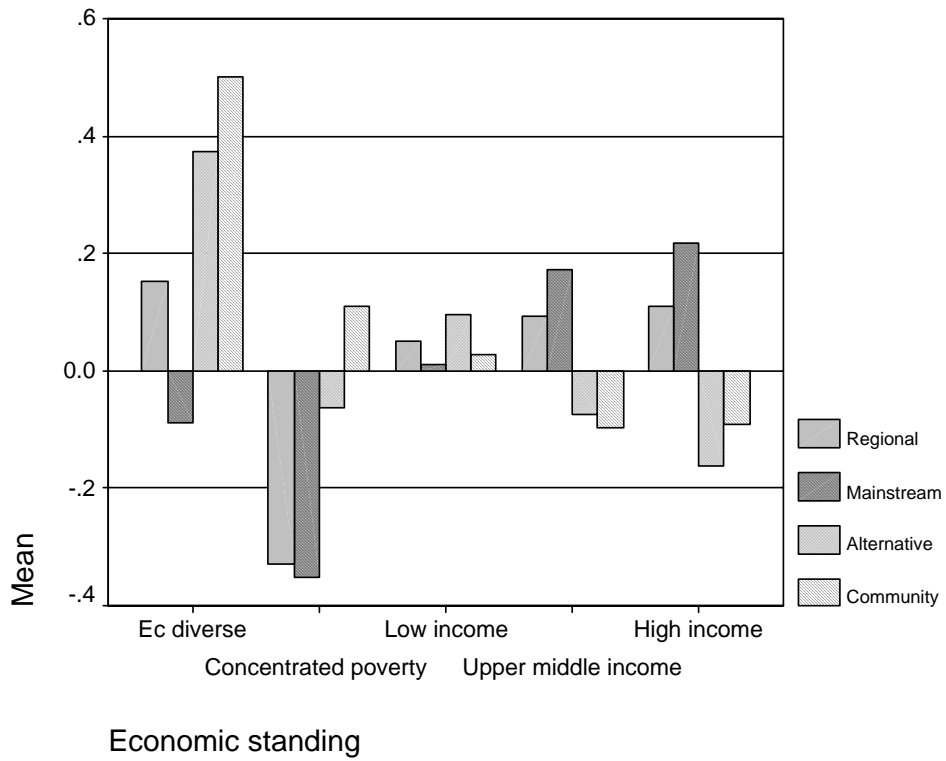


Figure 8. Cultural participation by ethnic composition

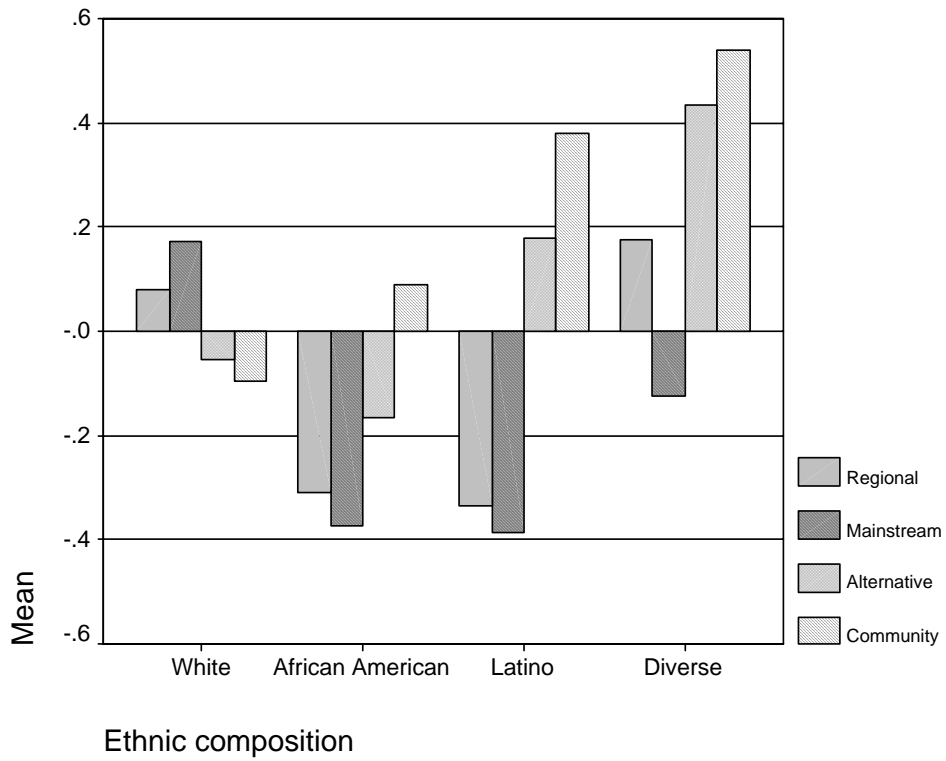


Figure 9. Cultural participation indexes by household diversity

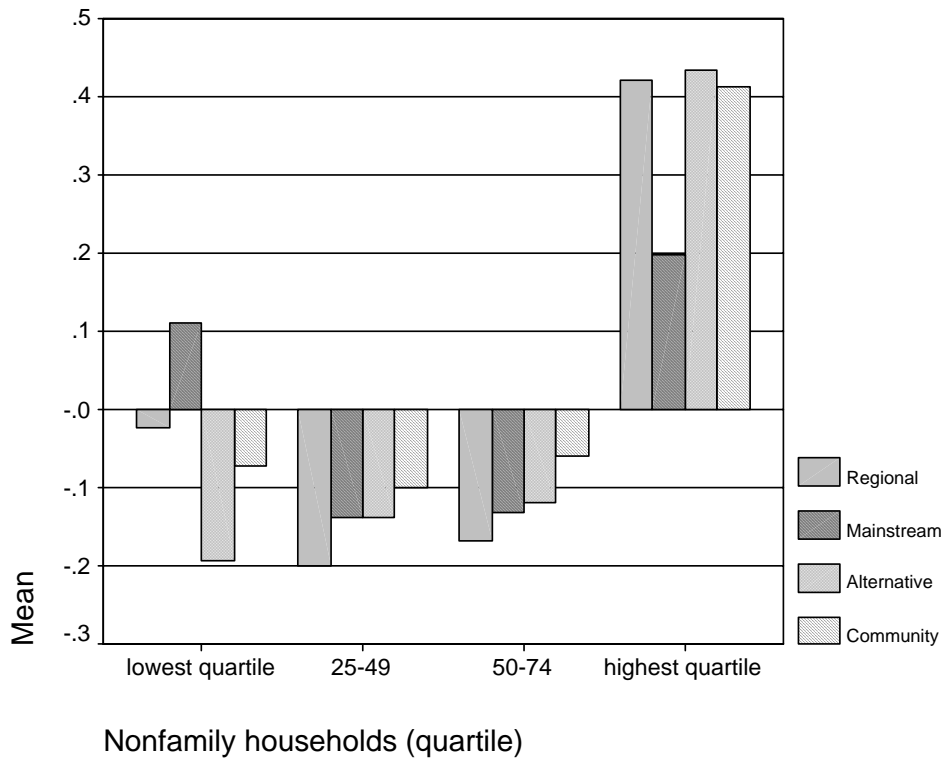
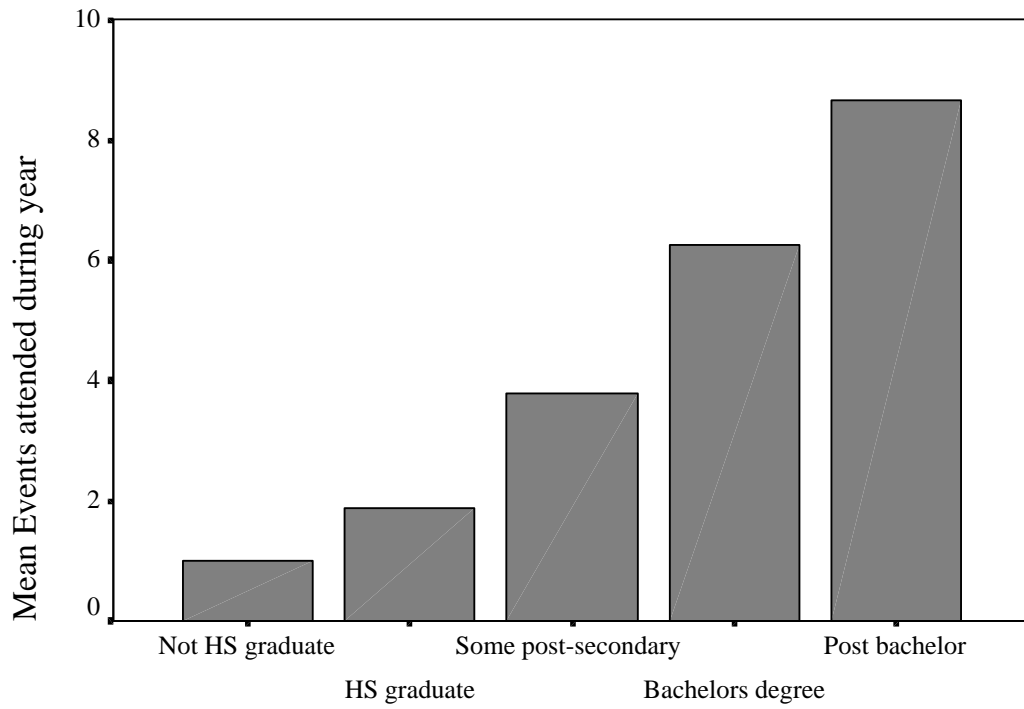


Figure 10. Events attended during previous year, by educational attainment of respondent, selected metropolitan areas



Educational attainment

Cases weighted by INTWAIT

Table 1. Average number of events attended in previous year, by family income of respondent

Events attended during year				<i>Chicago</i>	<i>Philadelphia</i>	<i>San Francisco</i>	<i>Atlanta</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>INCOME H26-HH</i>								
<i>INCOME-SPECIFIC</i>								
<i>CATEGORY</i>								
1.00	1	\$10,000 OR LESS	Mean	.5744	3.1673	1.5005	.5529	1.2803
			N	20	18	18	34	90
2.00	2	\$10,001 TO \$20,000	Mean	2.8192	2.2862	4.9732	1.2418	2.8203
			N	28	28	34	36	127
3.00	3	\$20,001 TO \$30,000	Mean	3.3533	1.6658	2.5550	3.2969	2.7342
			N	36	25	40	21	121
4.00	4	\$30,001 TO \$40,000	Mean	2.3420	2.7844	3.7396	1.3535	2.5430
			N	70	31	62	57	220
5.00	5	\$40,001 TO \$50,000	Mean	3.1264	.9860	3.6670	.6834	2.3740
			N	61	32	32	25	149
6.00	6	\$50,001 TO \$75,000	Mean	3.1804	4.5182	5.3730	6.0541	4.4671
			N	116	56	79	47	297
7.00	7	\$75,001 TO \$100,000	Mean	4.8484	2.2425	8.5527	4.3416	5.7104
			N	53	16	45	19	133
8.00	8	OVER \$100,000	Mean	5.6094	4.9533	7.4725	2.5883	5.9842
			N	45	27	68	17	157
Total			Mean	3.3684	3.0105	5.2045	2.4903	3.6652
			N	428	235	377	255	1294

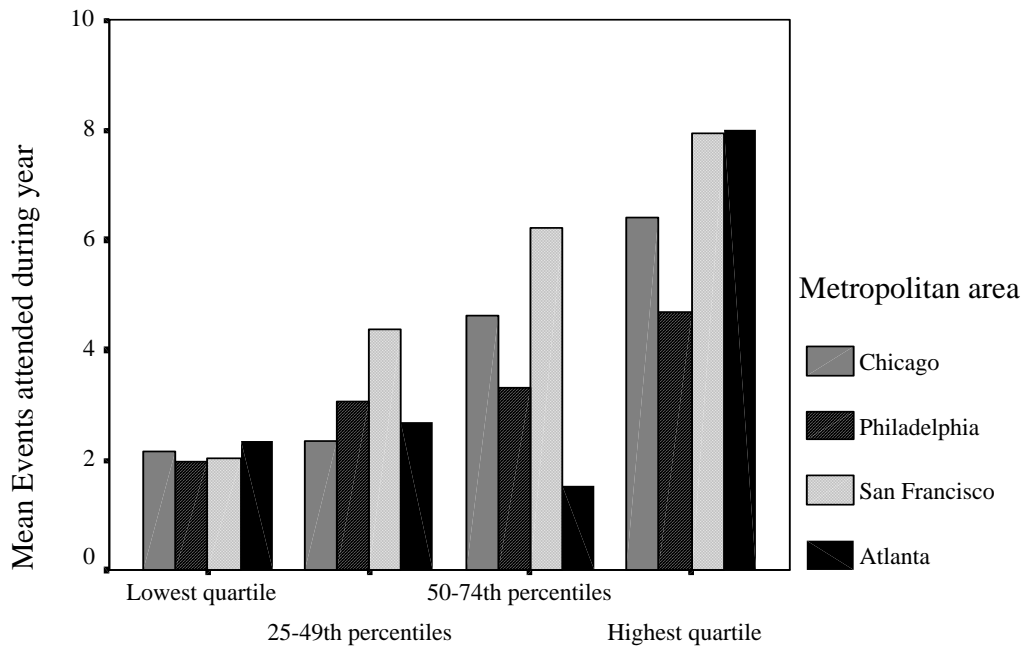
Table 2. Number of cultural events attended last year, by number of cultural providers per capita, selected metropolitan areas

Report

EXBNFRQ2 Events attended during year

<i>Cultural providers per capita (quartiles)</i>		<i>Chicago</i>	<i>Philadelphia</i>	<i>San Francisco</i>	<i>Atlanta</i>	<i>Total</i>
1 Lowest quartile	Mean	2.1644	1.9562	2.0174	2.3583	2.1418
	N	171	65	89	89	414
2 25-49th percentiles	Mean	2.3558	3.0498	4.3830	2.6876	3.2224
	N	111	96	114	36	357
3 50-74th percentiles	Mean	4.6328	3.3054	6.2283	1.5258	4.5332
	N	103	70	105	34	312
4 Highest quartile	Mean	6.4033	4.6823	7.9314	7.9923	6.8688
	N	73	45	112	12	242
Total	Mean	3.4421	3.1242	5.2873	2.6624	3.8600
	N	458	276	420	171	1326

Figure 11. Number of cultural events attended last year, by number of cultural providers per capita, selected metropolitan areas



Arts organizations per capita (quartiles)

Cases weighted by INTWAIT

Table 3. Number of cultural events attended in previous year, by per capita income of respondent's zip code (quartiles), selected metropolitan areas

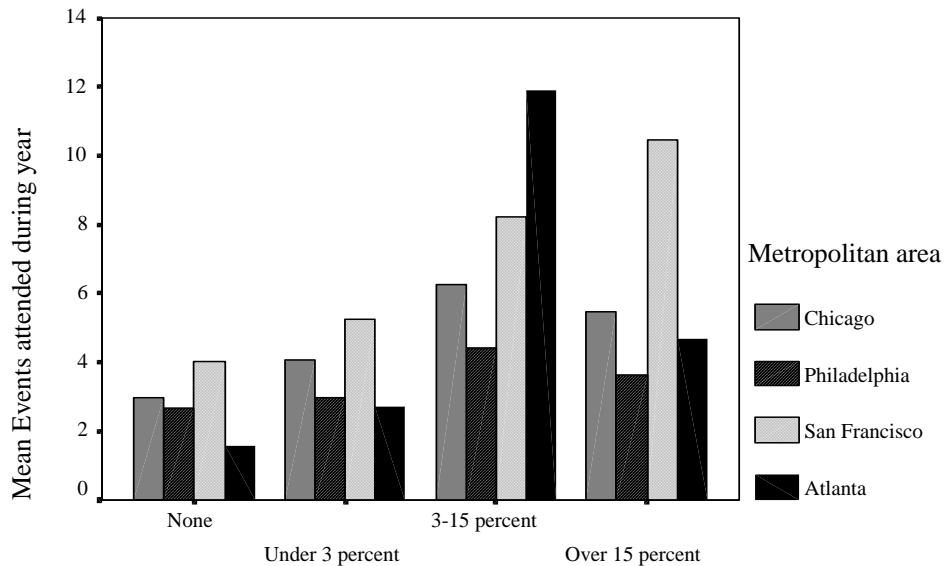
Report
EXBNFRQ2 Events attended during year

<i>NPCI Per capita income</i>		<i>Chicago</i>	<i>Philadelphia</i>	<i>San Francisco</i>	<i>Atlanta</i>	<i>Total</i>
1 Lowest quartile	Mean	3.1280	2.4172	3.3630	3.3115	3.0233
	N	135	82	64	48	330
2 25-49th percentiles	Mean	1.9910	2.6128	3.8012	.5586	2.5829
	N	113	85	102	30	330
3 50-74th percentiles	Mean	2.7929	3.0210	4.9533	3.1380	3.6380
	N	112	50	116	55	333
4 Highest quartile	Mean	6.2959	4.9275	7.6184	2.9322	6.2245
	N	98	59	136	37	330
Total	Mean	3.4390	3.1242	5.2969	2.6928	3.8662
	N	459	276	419	169	1323

Table 4. Events attended in previous year, by proportion of respondent's zip code population living in ethnically and economically diverse block groups, selected metropolitan areas

<i>Percent of population in diverse block groups</i>		<i>Chicago</i>	<i>Philadelphia</i>	<i>San Francisco</i>	<i>Atlanta</i>	<i>Total</i>
.00 None	Mean	2.9686	2.6890	4.0323	1.5948	3.0421
	N	347	162	270	127	907
1.00 Under 3 percent	Mean	4.0516	2.9953	5.2325	2.7114	3.9841
	N	63	45	58	26	192
2.00 3-15 percent	Mean	6.2518	4.4380	8.2074	11.8890	6.9395
	N	27	51	71	12	161
3.00 Over 15 percent	Mean	5.4486	3.6330	10.4654	4.6899	6.5765
	N	23	18	25	10	76
Total	Mean	3.4369	3.1242	5.2707	2.6127	3.8467
	N	461	276	424	174	1335

Figure 12. Events attended in previous year, by proportion of respondent's zip code population living in ethnically and economically diverse block groups, selected metropolitan areas



Economic and ethnic diversity

Cases weighted by INTWAIT

Table 5. Events attended in previous year, by proportion of respondent's zip code population living in economically diverse block groups

Report
EXBNFRQ2 Events attended during year

<i>Percent living in economically diverse block groups</i>		<i>Chicago</i>	<i>Philadelphia</i>	<i>San Francisco</i>	<i>Atlanta</i>	<i>Total</i>
.00 None	Mean	3.1263	3.1235	4.2198	1.6927	3.2422
	N	260	106	224	114	703
1.00 Under 3 percent	Mean	2.5807	2.5914	4.5512	.6251	3.0513
	N	80	50	80	24	235
2.00 3-15 percent	Mean	4.4233	2.8410	6.6304	8.9080	5.1029
	N	78	66	77	22	243
3.00 Over 15 percent	Mean	5.1312	3.9545	9.6487	3.5230	5.8311
	N	43	55	43	14	154
Total	Mean	3.4369	3.1242	5.2707	2.6127	3.8467
	N	461	276	424	174	1335

Table 6. Events attended in previous year, by proportion of respondent's zip code population living in ethnically diverse block groups

Report
EXBNFRQ2 Events attended during year

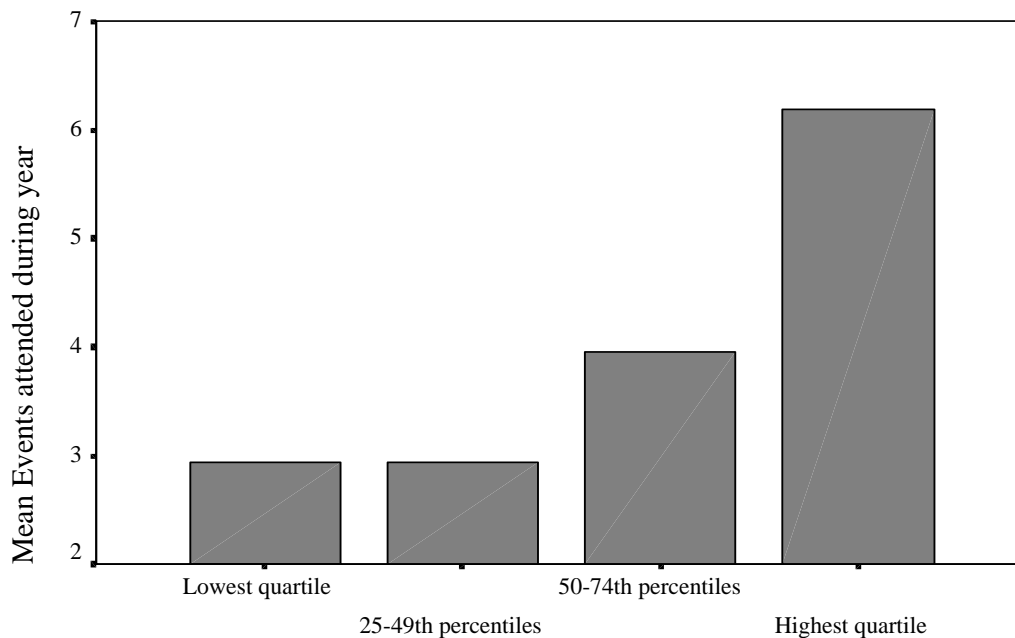
<i>Percent living in ethnically diverse block groups</i>		<i>Chicago</i>	<i>Philadelphia</i>	<i>San Francisco</i>	<i>Atlanta</i>	<i>Total</i>
.00 None	Mean	3.4010	2.6837	6.0389	.5008	3.3739
	N	78	64	30	13	184
1.00 Under 3 percent	Mean	2.8051	2.3967	6.5016	1.7993	3.1600
	N	68	52	34	36	189
2.00 3-15 percent	Mean	2.4987	3.2720	3.4806	3.2788	2.9285
	N	137	77	42	25	282
3.00 Over 15 percent	Mean	4.4085	3.7814	5.3265	3.1090	4.5759
	N	178	83	317	97	675
Total	Mean	3.4345	3.1242	5.2859	2.6624	3.8590
	N	460	276	423	171	1330

Table 7. Events attended during previous year, by percent of respondent's zip code population living in non-family households

Report
EXBNFRQ2 Events attended during year

<i>NPCTNFHH Percent of non-family households (quartiles)</i>		<i>Chicago</i>	<i>Philadelphia</i>	<i>San Francisco</i>	<i>Atlanta</i>	<i>Total</i>
1 Lowest quartile	Mean	2.8255	3.0245	3.1955	2.8292	2.9389
	N	199	60	93	59	411
2 25-49th percentiles	Mean	2.9582	3.1546	3.1131	2.2082	2.9395
	N	89	57	108	45	299
3 50-74th percentiles	Mean	3.9133	2.9997	5.5096	2.0818	3.9529
	N	103	119	100	21	343
4 Highest quartile	Mean	5.1345	3.5893	8.8034	3.2887	6.1888
	N	68	41	117	44	271
Total	Mean	3.4390	3.1242	5.2969	2.6928	3.8662
	N	459	276	419	169	1323

Figure 13. Events attended during previous year, by percent of respondent's zip code population living in non-family households



Percent of non-family households (quartiles)

Cases weighted by INTWAIT

Table 8. Regression analysis, individual and neighborhood effects

	<i>Individual effects only</i>	<i>Neighborhood effects only</i>	<i>Individual and neighborhood effects</i>
R-square	0.085	0.078	0.129
Adjusted r-square	0.085	0.077	0.127
F	147	62	71
Educational attainment	0.292		0.239
SES /cultural provider factor		0.228	0.148
Diversity/cultural provider factor		0.165	0.168