
Mark J. Stern and Susan C. Seifert
Social Impact of the Arts Project
University of Pennsylvania
October 2009
Social Impact of the Arts Project (SIAP)

- Study of cultural sector and its impact on communities in metropolitan Philadelphia since 1994
- Develop empirical methods to examine links between cultural engagement & neighborhood revitalization
- Model of cultural sector as an ecosystem that is central to the “architecture of community”
Defining cultural clusters

- Agglomeration of arts activity common to urban communities
- Concentration of cultural resources—nonprofit orgs, businesses, artists, and participants—in a particular neighborhood
- Unlike planned cultural districts, cultural clusters—aka/”natural” cultural districts—emerge as a result of grassroots efforts of creative producers and consumers.
- Cultural cluster is special type of social network in which geographic propinquity is a critical feature.
Data and methods

Collected systematic data in Philadelphia region on *cultural assets*:

- Nonprofit and informal cultural groups: *identified 1,200 nonprofit cultural providers*
- Commercial cultural firms: *about 4,000 businesses ranging from galleries and music stores to dance studios, art supply, and bookstores*
- Resident artists: *identified over five thousand artists*
- Cultural participants: *compiled from 75 regional cultural organizations on over 200,000 individuals*

Developed geographic database through the integration of cultural indicator data at the block group level

Created a single *Cultural Asset Index* by combining four sub-indexes; produced a CAI score for each block group for 1997 and 2004

Collaborated with The Reinvestment Fund to link with its neighborhood indicator database
Key findings

- The Cultural Asset Index is a predictor of neighborhood revitalization.
- There is a threshold effect. At a critical level of density, the chance of revitalization increases dramatically.
- Social networks are the link between cultural engagement and neighborhood economic vitality.
Geography of cultural assets: cultural assets are concentrated in neighborhoods across the Philadelphia region.
Characteristics of cultural asset concentrations

- **Diversity**—consistent relationship between social diversity and the arts. Heterogeneous communities (social class, ethnicity, household structure) tend to have higher concentrations of cultural assets (Philadelphia, San Francisco, Atlanta, Chicago)

- **Income**—neighborhood socio-economic status (SES)—participants and commercial culture associated with high SES; but concentration of nonprofits in low-SES neighborhoods comparable to high-SES

- **Distance from downtown**—Center City dominates region on all indexes, but city neighborhoods have higher concentrations than suburbs of nonprofits and artists
Cultural clusters and neighborhood economic development

- Philadelphia is a no growth, high poverty city
- Since 1980 neighborhood revitalization correlated with cultural assets agglomeration

During the 1990s block groups with many nonprofit providers were four times as likely to see population increase and poverty decline than those with few.
According to The Reinvestment Fund’s Market Value Analysis, city neighborhoods with high levels of cultural assets were much more likely to experience significant improvements in their housing markets between 2001 and 2003.
Cultural Asset Index 1997 “predicted” residential sale price increase 2001 - 2006

Neighborhoods with high cultural asset index scores in 1997 saw their residential sale price increase nearly twice as fast between 2001 and 2006, even taking other possible influences into account.
Cultural Asset Index threshold effect

- What does the 85th percentile mean in real terms?

  Philadelphia block group values (1997) (N=1293):
  
  - 42 nonprofit cultural providers (within ½ mile)
  - 6 commercial cultural firms (within ½ mile)
  - 67 resident artists (within ½ mile)
  - 115 cultural participants (per 1,000 residents)

- Even modest concentrations of cultural assets were associated with significant housing market improvement in early 2000s.
Preserving communities: economic revival without widespread displacement

Cultural clusters were no more likely to undergo ethnic transition than other parts of the city.
Explaining culture’s impact

- Strengthen social capital and local civic engagement
- Build bridges across barriers of social class, ethnicity, and geography

Eighty percent of community cultural participants cross neighborhood boundaries to attend events.
Social networks: building community capacity

- The arts and culture are one way that neighbors build connections.
- Cultural participants are more likely to be involved in other community activities and to share a positive view of their neighborhood.
- Ultimately these connections become an asset that the community can use to address common challenges.
- “Collective efficacy”—the increased willingness of neighbors to address their problems—has been an effective force in addressing violence, truancy, delinquency, and other social problems.
Can we measure “collective efficacy”? 

Higher levels of collective efficacy may account for the strong relationship between a neighborhood’s cultural asset score in 1997 and trends in serious crime between 1998 and 2006.

Source: SIAP, Cartographic Modeling Lab
Implications for research, policy & planning

Methodology—Cultural Asset Index:

- innovative method of integrating data on cultural activity into a geographic information system
- can be integrated with data commonly used by planners in community and economic development analysis
- from correlation to causation?—time series allows look at cultural assets at Point A with neighborhood changes at Point B; if a causal relationships exists, we know which way it flows

Further research needs:

- refinement of statistical tools to monitor life history of clusters
- longitudinal data with individual and neighborhood indicators
- qualitative study of how clusters emerge, decline, or thrive
What we don’t yet know: types of cultural clusters and their life histories

- Consumer districts: attracting audiences and shoppers (planned cultural districts, cultural quarters)
- Producer districts: integrating arts and design professionals and support services
- Civic clusters: maximizing community and cultural engagement
Framework for place-making: the cultural ecosystem and the architecture of community

The creative sector makes critical contributions to the four dimensions of the “architecture of community”

- Social capital—ties between community members
- Public assets—investments in infrastructure and place-making
- Market relations—generating investment and business activity
- Flows of information, capital, and people across the region—bridging divides that isolate distressed neighborhoods

A three-tier strategy for cultivating cultural clusters:

- **Social investment:** Every neighborhood can be a cultural cluster: the spillover effects of cultural and creative engagement justify investment in civic infrastructure.

- **Workforce development:** Connect young adults with creative industries with cultural clusters as points of entry—a way to link people with places.

  Need policy frame of creativity as a product of social organization, not of genius or creative class, with broad spectrum of jobs and skill needs

- **Place-making:** Neighborhoods with critical mass of cultural and other assets can be cultivated and linked as cultural hubs:
  - Improving quality and reliability of city services and public spaces
  - Flexible instruments for targeted grant-making and investment
For more information:

Social Impact of the Arts Project
University of Pennsylvania I School of Social Policy & Practice
www.sp2.upenn.edu/SIAP
E-mail: seifert@sp2.upenn.edu