

Urban Development and the Politics of a Creative Class:  
Evidence from the Study of Artists

Ann Markusen  
Professor and Fesler-Lampert Chair in Urban and Regional Affairs  
Director, Project on Regional and Industrial Economics  
Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs  
University of Minnesota  
301 S. 19th Avenue, Room 231  
Minneapolis, MN 55455  
USA

612-625-8092 W  
612-925-1727 H  
612-625-6351 Fax  
markusen@umn.edu

<http://www.hhh.umn.edu/projects/prie/>

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## Abstract

In this paper, I critique the notion of “the creative class” and the fuzzy causal logic about its relationship to urban growth. I argue that the creative class bunches together, purely on the basis of educational attainment, occupations that exhibit distinctive spatial and political proclivities and with little demonstrable relationship to creativity. I use a case study of artists, one element of the purported creative class, to probe this phenomenon, demonstrating that the formation, location, urban impact and politics of this occupation are much more complex and distinctive than suggested in Richard Florida’s *Rise of the Creative Class* (2002). Artists’ spatial distribution is a function of semi-autonomous personal migration decisions, local nurturing of artists in dedicated spaces and organizations, and the locus of artist-employing firms. Artists, an occupation with very high rates of self-employment, boost regional growth by providing import-substituting consumption activities for residents and through direct export of their work. Their contribution to attracting high tech activity is ambiguous – causality may work in the opposite direction. Artists play multiple roles in an urban economy--some progressive, some problematic. I argue that artists as a group make important, positive contributions to the diversity and vitality of cities, and their agendas cannot be conflated with neo-liberal urban political regimes. I show the potential for artists as a political force to lead in social and urban transformation and the implausibility of their common cause with other members of Florida’s creative class, such as scientists, engineers, managers and lawyers.

In early 2003, Richard Florida, author of *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002), lounged in an arm-chair on stage at the University of Minnesota, having a heavily marketed “Great Conversation” with University President Robert Bruininks. Towards the end of the discussion, Bruininks posed one of a series of questions that my graduate student Martina Cameron and I had written at the President’s request: just what do you see as the political role of the creative class? Will they step up to the plate and help lead this society in a better, fairer direction? Florida was stumped.

In this paper, I show why the creative class is a fuzzy concept and why it is nearly impossible to conceptualize a common class interest for its purported members. I summarize recent scholarly work demonstrating that the creative class as used by Florida boils down to people in occupations defined by high levels of higher education and that other claims he makes—that high tech activity is drawn to diverse cities, for instance—are unsubstantiated. I argue that talent, skill and creativity are not synonymous with higher education.

I then explore the nature of one so-called creative class constituency – artists – as urban residents and political protagonists. I show that artists are differentially distributed among larger cities and that this distribution is a function of artists’ preferences for places to live, local efforts to nurture artistic development and livelihoods and concentrations of artist-employing industries such as media, advertising and publishing. Artists contribute to regional economic development both by directly exporting their work and by providing import-substituting activities for other regional residents. I show how three types of artistic space in cities (clubhouses, live/work and studio buildings and smaller performing arts spaces) provide artists with networks and access that they would not otherwise have. These spaces contribute

to the artistic pool by home-growing local artists as well as attracting and retaining them in the regional economy.

Many artists, despite their solitary work habits, participate actively in politics, voting in high numbers and using their skills in visual and performance pieces in political campaigns. It is believed that they vote “left” in very large numbers. Artists are often supported by elites, through direct patronage or foundation-channeled grants, but are nevertheless frequently opposed to the latter’s values – aesthetic and political. They remain a powerful source of articulated opposition to societal status-quo and a major force for innovation. In the built environment of the city, they play multiple roles in stabilizing and upgrading neighborhoods and are sometimes caught up in gentrification.

In closing, I call for greater attention to specific occupations as collective actors in urban development and to the ways that these interact with industries and politics. Managers, lawyers and accountants, also members of Florida’s creative class, play very different political and economic roles in a city from those I have explored in the case of artists. Although I have not been able to compare artists with these occupations in this paper, I hope that other researchers will take up this challenge. Similarly, blue and pink collar occupations that Florida categorizes as non-creative should be investigated for their contributions. Advocates of “the creative city” should be asked to define their terms and articulate the precise groups and behaviors, including political, that they claim are innovative and generative of urban development. Exploring the politics of new and enduring occupational groups in metropolitan areas is a worthy subject and in need of the best in economic geographic scholarship.

## I. A Critique of Creativity and the Creative Class

Richard Florida's *The Rise of the Creative Class*, was largely dismissed by academics for the first couple of years after its publication, largely because the analysis in it is weak and deliberately packaged in a popular vein. Florida's central claim is quite ambitious and radical:

My work is based on a relatively simple underlying theory – that human creativity has replaced raw materials, physical labor and even flows of capital as the primary generator of economic value, and that a new class structure is emerging as a result of that basic economic transformation (Florida in Lang et al, 2005: 218).

The concerted marketing campaign that accompanied the book has been very successful in disseminating its main themes – that a new creative class has overtaken the former triad of blue-collar, white-collar and wealthy classes; that “creatives” are drawn to cities with amenities, including a diversity of population; and that the preferences of “creatives” in turn help to explain high tech location and differential urban growth. These concepts, all of them fuzzy at best or mis-specified at worst, are variously appealing to chambers of commerce and mayors and other civic boosters and to an artistic community that was routed politically by conservatives in the 1990s and feels invisible. In the last year, a number of excellent studies have challenged the central themes of Florida's formulation. I review briefly several of the most important of these and add my own critique of Florida's notion of a “creative class” and its application to cities.

To begin with, creativity is a quite fuzzy concept (Markusen, 1999). Everyone, even children, know the term, but it can mean any number of things. Take Florida's use of it. By using Census definitions based on training-related criteria, he conflates creativity with high

levels of education. He does not seem to understand the nature of the occupational statistics he uses, despite the fascinating scholar/policymaker studies of the 1990s, when the official Census occupation taxonomy underwent scrutiny and redesign. The new occupational titles implemented in the late 1990s remain tightly tied to educational content, despite a desire to base them on what people do rather than what they know (Capelli, 1995; Cunningham, 1995; Hecker, 2001).

Florida's creative class groupings are based on major occupational groups – he does not look inside each of these to see what they contain. Business and financial occupations, for instance, includes claims adjusters and purchasing agents. Managers include sales and food service managers and funeral directors. Computer and mathematicians include actuaries and tax collectors. Engineers include surveyors and drafting technicians. Health care practitioners include dental hygienists and dietary and pharmacy technicians. These occupations may indeed be creative, but so are airplane pilots, ship engineers, millwrights and tailors, all of whom are uncreative in Florida's tally. The discussion of the creative class is fudged yet more by Florida's selective use of interviews and anecdote to suggest behaviors and preferences that are not representative of the class as a whole. Such conflating is similar to what C. Wright Mills (1951) did in his classic *White Collar: the American Middle Class* (Lang and Danielsen, 2005).

The conflation leads policymakers and journalists to wax enthusiastic about the creative class with wildly different visions of its constituents—a recent example is a popular article on “New York's Creative Class” that confines the class to the same artistic categories that I use in my study (Beveridge, 2004).

Because of his use of Census occupational codes with their indiscriminate acceptance of all workers covered (or not covered) in each, Florida's regressions showing urban high tech growth as a function of the presence of the creative class simply capture high human capital as measured by educational attainment. (There are problems with Florida's measure of high tech urban activity, too—see Chapple et al, 2004). Glaeser (2004) shows that when educational attainment (years of schooling) is entered into regressions using Florida's data, the positive and significant influence of Florida's super-creative core, patent variable and gay indices are all eliminated and turn negative and statistically insignificant.

Florida's contentions about the intersection between the creative class, diversity and urban space are also much at issue. By using metropolitan areas, Florida is able to ignore the important spatial distribution of people by residence and workplace throughout the city (Chapple in Lang and Danielsen, 2005: 207). At the sub-metropolitan level, members of the highly educated occupations, including some in Florida's super-creative core – engineers and scientists, managers and business operations specialists – disproportionately work and live in suburbs where homogeneity and low density are highly valued. In Atlanta, for instance, Florida's creative class lives north of the city and I-285 (Sawicki, in Lang and Danielsen, 2004: 217). Other writers vying with Florida (and writing popularly) place the creative class solidly in MacMansions and near the golf course (Brooks, 2002).

Florida's glib treatment of diversity is particularly troubling. He uses same-sex male households reporting as partners (and thus presumably gay) in the Census to proxy diversity. Both Clark (2004) and Glaeser (2004) find this gay index highly correlated with educational attainment, and the relationship is thus mis-specified. But for most Americans, the term diversity encompasses race, ethnicity, immigrant presence and economic class mix. Florida

acknowledges that African-Americans do not appear well-represented in his creative cities, but does nothing to address this. Good work remains to be done to test whether the creative class is indeed found in spatial proximity to other diverse constituencies.

The direction of causality claimed is also controversial. Although Glaeser argues in an earlier work that there is a demonstrable causal link from human capital to urban development (Glaeser and Saiz, 2003), others argue that it could go the opposite way – that successful regions may draw and hold human capital (Malizia and Feser in Lang and Danielsen, 2005: 207, 212; Hill, 2005). Others are skeptical of Florida’s contention that creative people decide on their locations independent of job offers or industrial structure (Hill, 2005). Educational attainment and age distinguish the more mobile members of the working age population from others, and this subgroup may be responsible for discretionary migration trends and urban growth differentials without requiring the apparatus of a creative class (Cortwright in Lang and Danielsen, 2005: 215). My work on artists, reviewed below, supports Florida’s assertion of semi-independent locational preferences among selected groups of workers but rejects any simple direction of causality for urban growth outcomes.

An adequate critique, however, must address Florida’s seriously flawed conceptual treatment of creativity. Human creativity cannot be conflated with years of schooling. People at all levels of education exercise considerable inventiveness. Home care workers figure out ingenious ways of dealing with testy and disabled clients. People schooled on the streets can orchestrate brilliant petty crimes. Repair people and technicians find remarkable ways of fixing machines and improving their design. Some occupations with extensive educational requirements place people in extremely routine jobs--accounting, editing, and technical work in the law and sciences. Studies of emerging occupations often find no relationship between



educational level and innovativeness – this was true of computer software in the late 1970s and early 1980s, for instance (Hall et al, 1983). It is simply incorrect and indeed dangerous to label people in large lumpy occupations as creative and others—all production and service workers, for instance—as not creative.

Overall, the creative class and by extension, creative city, rubric is impoverished by fuzziness of conception, weakness of evidence and political silence. There is little in the dialogue so far that tells practitioners or readers how creativity works, what distinguishes it from non-creative activity, and how creative occupations and skills are formed. Training and career circumstances of lawyers versus engineers versus artists are wildly different, with implications for their location and political heft. Lawyers, for instance, tend to be quite spatially tied to the states in which they pass the bar and within these, to downtowns that host the courts and to county, state and federal capitols where laws are fashioned. Engineers are much more dispersed – many have migrated to heavily defense-underwritten centers of high tech industry in the Gunbelt, including Silicon Valley (Markusen, Hall, Campbell and Deitrick, 1991; Ellis, Barff and Markusen, 1993) and tend to prefer suburban or ex-urban locations, where R&D laboratories are disproportionately sited. Corporate lawyers are conservative while trial lawyers are liberal; engineers tend to be moderate to conservative; and artists more liberal. In fact, there is really no “class” here at all as defined by criteria of class interest, outlook, or social patterning of behaviors (Clark and Lipset, 1991, 2001).

Because the causality is so confusing and class members so conflated, policymakers don’t know what to make of creative class arguments either. Most mayors waving the banner of creativity use it to showcase their anchor arts institutions and make claims about urban amenities, mostly directed at tourists. But if there is no cohesive, mobile group of creative

professionals driving urban development, urban leaders must fine-tune their policies to diverse interests. No simple strategy will suffice. We return to this theme in closing.

A virtue of Florida's work is that he does not rest on an abstract creativity notion but identifies it as embodied in certain occupations. (Would we believe a book entitled "The Rise of Creativity" anyway – do we really think the act of creation is on the rise?) The occupational approach, long given short shrift by urban and regional development scholars despite Thompson and Thompson's (1985) pioneering work, has begun to be explored as an important lens for examining regional development (Feser, 2003; Markusen, 2004). Schrock and Markusen (2004) argue that occupation ought to be co-equal with industry in analyzing regional economic structure and location decision making, creating a "stereo lens."

To the extent that creativity is embedded in workers who make independent location decisions, which is plausible, it is best studied occupation by occupation. In what follows, I do this for artists, an occupation I use as a case study of creativity and its urban impact. I use secondary data to chart the spatial distribution, between regions and within metropolitan areas, of artists and their migration patterns, and primary data from hundreds of interviews of Minnesota artists to probe their spatial preferences, urban activism and community-building. It is beyond the resources at hand to compare these with other "creative class" occupations, but I offer this case study as a model for such future comparative work.

## II. Artists as Urban Workers and Residents

The formation, role and politics of a segment of Florida's creative class can be modeled by examining the functioning of one group, artists, that most everyone would agree belongs in any grouping of creative occupations. The following analysis uses the 2000 Census PUMS data set, a 5% sample that links occupation with migration behavior and socio-economic characteristics, to look at the recent changing distribution of artists in the US among larger metropolitan areas and within the Minneapolis/St. Paul (Twin Cities) metro area. Causal questions regarding why artists migrate, where they choose to live between and within cities, and how they relate to their communities are studied with data from interviews with more than 200 Minnesota artists over the period 2002-5 and a large (over 1200 responses) web-based survey of Minnesota writers in 2005 (see Markusen and Johnson, 2005). I embed these dimensions in a qualitative account of the changing funding and labor market for artists in the US between 1980 and the present, drawing on others' analysis.

Artists as researched here encompass four sub-groups – writers, musicians, visual artists (including film-makers and photographers), and performing artists (including actors, directors, choreographers, dancers), a group whose employment (including self-employment) amounted to something over 838,000 in the US in 2000. Although musicians are performing artists, they are classified separately by the Census, because their training and working conditions are quite distinctive. The definition, consonant with US Census and Bureau of Labor Statistics codes, underestimates of the numbers of people engaged in artwork by not including art teachers or art administrators. If included, the total would be closer to 1.3-1.4 million, a total used by advocacy groups like the Americans for the Arts. Our definition mirrors that generally used in social science research on artists. It does not include architects and designers. Many others engage in artwork as an avocation or as part of community

cultural activities and do not report their occupation in the Census as artist. (For insightful discussions of and debates about operational definitions of artist, see Wassall and Alper, 1985; Mitchell and Karttunen, 1992; Karttunen, 1998; and Filicko and Lafferty, 2002).

To explore the boundaries of this group and the extent to which they differ from other members of the putative creative class, I make a number of observations about the way they work and earn a living and analyze their patterns of spatial distribution. These suggest that, in addition to demand from artist-hiring commercial sectors, artistic concentrations are the product of conscious locational choice on the part of artists and of local efforts to promote artistic development. I address briefly the socio-economic and spatial differences among artistic subgroups within urban economies, aiding a more complex political appreciation for their role.

Artists are more apt to be self-employed than workers in the labor force as a whole (Table 1). In the United States, the shares of the self-employed among those reporting “artist” as their major or secondary occupation in 2002 varied from a high of 68% for writers, 50% for visual artists, and 39% for musicians to 24% for performing artists, compared with 32% for designers, 22% for architects, and 8% for the workforce as a whole. Such self-employment is a function of high levels of contractual and contingent work in arts and non-arts industries but also of the ability of many artists to directly market their work to consumers (art fairs, sales via the web, commissions) or through intermediaries (e.g. galleries for visual artists, National Performance Network for performing artists).

High levels of self-employment make plausible some of the claims made for creative class members – that they are more footloose and apt to choose a place to live before committing to employment or marketing efforts. Many artists live in one city but market their

work more broadly, adding to the economic base of a region without their contributions measured in conventional arts impact assessment (Markusen and King, 2003). Performing artists travel to give concerts in other locales. Visual artists sell their work at juried art fairs around the country or via the web. Writers and filmmakers make arrangements with publishers and distributors to market their work globally in books and magazines, film, video and television. Compared with performing artists, visual artists and writers, who in general work alone, find it easier to avoid the largest, most expensive and arts-specialized cities. They are freer, too, to live in relatively rural surroundings. Many of the points made about artists and arts spaces in what follows are applicable to smaller cities and even tiny towns, but the analysis is confined to larger cities where the empirical evidence is easier to assemble (Markusen and Schrock, 2005).

Artists have comprised a growing occupation in the US over the past three decades, which helps explain their greater significance for urban development. Beginning in the late 1960s, a concerted effort by the Ford Foundation to fund artists individually and through non-profit organizations, linked with the creation of the National Endowment for the Arts and a growth in regional corporate funding for the arts, enabled more artists to build careers by combining grants with earned income (Kreidler, 1996). Because much of the NEA funding was passed through to state arts boards and often to regional arts boards within states, artists decentralized from the commercial arts and entertainment centers of New York and Los Angeles during the 1960s to the mid-1980s (Heilbrun, 1987). In larger cities, new repertory and smaller non-profit theaters diversified offerings away from traveling Broadway shows; smaller museums and galleries sprouted; and clubs and centers for artists by genre emerged (Markusen, Johnson and Connelly, 2005).

In the 1990s, the arts ecology in larger American cities was thrown into disarray following controversies over the character of publicly-funded arts and artists programs, crippling the NEA and precipitating extensive soul-searching on the part of artists and arts advocacy organizations. As a result of the late '80s stock market crash, the disappearance of many regionally-headquartered corporations through mergers, and corporate re-ordering of priorities, corporate and individual giving that made its way to artists also fell. In the early 1990s, when the right wing Republicans like Jesse Helms attacked the NEA for funding the edgy and (to some) offensive work of artists such as Robert Mapplethorpe and Karen Finley, the arts community failed to successfully unite to support freedom of expression. In retrospect, many concluded that NEA and state arts funding, managed through peer panels, detached artists from direct engagement in their communities and publics and created a sense of entitlement among artists that ill-prepared them for the political attack and the lean public funding times to come. Others noted that the art community had become too dependent on non-profit funding streams and dismissive of the for-profit arts (Ivey, 2005; Jacobs, 2005)

The setbacks of the 1990s can be read in the slowing of growth in the ranks of employed (including self-employed) artists in the 1990s (Table 2). After increasing in number by 53% in the 1990s, the number of employed artists grew by just 10% in the 1990s (compared with a national employment growth rate of about 16%). Over this decade, artists re-concentrated in three “super-arts” metros—Los Angeles, New York and San Francisco. The shares of artists among the employed in each rose sharply, widening the gap between the three as a group and the second-tier arts-specialized metros of Washington (DC), Seattle, Boston, Minneapolis/St. Paul, and San Diego (Table 3). Commercial employment in media, arts, advertising, arts tourism and, in the case of San Francisco, the dot.com phenomenon

(which later collapsed) became important magnets for artists as public and corporate funding for artists plummeted (Markusen, Schrock and Cameron, 2004).

Urban economies both attract and “home grow” artists. Artists move between cities, within cities, and between cities and rural areas at relatively high rates. They are also differentially nurtured by educational institutions and cultural organizations across localities, producing skewed spatial distributions. The attractive forces are complex, including agglomerations of artist-hiring employers in media, advertising and arts and entertainment industries as well as amenities such as lower costs of living, recreational and environmental amenities, rich and innovative cultural conventions. Our research on artists’ migration patterns to cities like Minneapolis/St. Paul confirms that artists make carefully reasoned and researched choices between alternatives such as New York and smaller arts-rich cities that trade off access and being where the action is with livability, artistic networks and philanthropic support (Markusen and King, 2003; Markusen and Johnson, 2005).

Migration patterns in the latter half of the 1990s favored the three arts super-cities (Table 4). From 1995 to 2000, more than two artists moved into the Los Angeles metro area for every artist that left. Boston and Minneapolis, cities with high concentrations of artists, experienced modest net out-migration. That Minneapolis/St. Paul continued to add artists to its employment ranks during the decade suggests relatively high rates of “home growing” of artists, in turn reflecting an unusually rich system of artist-centric organizations and spaces in the region (Markusen and Johnson, 2005).

Artists gravitate toward residences in the denser, more central urban neighborhoods within metropolitan areas than do residents as a whole, often to seedy, transitional neighborhoods (Lloyd, 2002, 2004). Using location quotients, we show this pattern for the

Twin Cities in Figure 1. Performing artists – actors, dancers – are more inner city-centric than musicians, writers and visual artists, but all artists are more central city-oriented than are other occupations. Central cities offer access to art schools, performance and exhibition spaces, affordable live/work and studio space, training institutions, clubhouses (see below) and amenities from night-life to recreational opportunities. Younger artists are more drawn to very close-in neighborhoods, where the ratio of men to women artists is higher, and they are more apt to rent than own. Artists overall are more apt to be white than the workforce as a whole, and they have extraordinarily high levels of education as a group. While their individual incomes may be low, many live in households with quite high incomes (Markusen and Johnson, 2005).

How do these insights into urban artistic pool formation jibe with Florida’s creative class claims? These inter-metropolitan, intra-urban and socio-economic characteristics are quite consonant with claims that Florida makes for discretionary “creative class” locational choice semi-independent of employers, perhaps more so than for any other occupational group. Artists are good candidates, then, for studying the occupation’s formation as a component of the urban workforce and for examining the political role that artists are currently playing in urban economic and spatial transformation.

However, the relationship between artists and high tech-driven urban growth is far from clear. Along with other forces, the presence of artists may attract certain kinds of workers and employers to cities—which kind and where is an empirical question. But artists do not, as we have seen, cluster in regions that are necessarily high tech or rapidly growing. Slow-growing Chicago, the metro with the most high tech industry jobs in the US (Chapple et al, 2004), hosts only average concentrations of artists, while fast-growing metros like Atlanta



and Dallas have modest or below-average concentrations (Table 3). Florida's logic suggests that metro growth is a function of innovative, high tech expansion that is in turn a function of the location of a creative class that is drawn to cities by amenities. Concentrations of artists do not seem to be chiefly attracted by amenities—many choose to live in the most expensive, congested cities. Of course, the concept of amenities is itself multi-dimensional and shaped by preferences that vary by age, occupation and other traits. What does seem clear is that high tech activity is not particularly attracted to pools of artistic talent—Silicon Valley, the capital of high tech, has below average concentrations of artists. This is even more striking at the sub-metropolitan area, where high tech businesses tend to locate on the periphery. Perhaps the causality runs in the opposite direction: successful high tech centers generate wealth that is partly converted into arts patronage. Much of the extraordinary regional non-profit funding for the arts in the Twin Cities comes from wealth generated from a single pioneering technology corporation, 3M (Markusen and Johnson, 2005).

### III. Cultural Activity and Patronage as Import-substituting

Scholarship on the role of the arts and culture in urban economies continues to assume an economic base framework for analyzing urban growth. Florida's work implicitly assumes that urban growth is driven by innovative activity that generates exports and incomes that in turn finance local consumption and amenities. The arts and artists are seen as contributing to regional growth and income to the extent that they draw tourists from other regions, help non-arts businesses recruit employees and generate direct sales and incomes through the sorts of

individual exporting activities depicted in the last section (Markusen and King, 2003; Seaman, 1987; Shanahan, 1980). If the arts are simply consumed locally, they are not seen as bringing net growth to the region, and their activities are constrained by the size of the overall export base. A similar argument has been made about sports events – that if local fans did not go to the stadium, they would spend their incomes on some other form of local recreation or entertainment (Noll and Zimbalist, 1997).

However, although arts patronage of urban in all but the very largest cities may be chiefly a local consumption and investment activity, it can operate as a source of secular growth by substituting for imports. Few people fly to Seattle, Portland, Minneapolis/St. Paul, Boston or Washington DC to go to a major theater or museum, even if its façade has recently been redone by a world-famous architect. However, when people visit on business or to see their families, they often patronize cultural events. Hosts use visitors as the excuse to finally visit the Guthrie Theater or Walker Art Center. If these institutions were not there, people might go to the Mall of America instead. The higher the visibility of artistic activity in a region, the more the population will alter spending patterns to patronize artists and art events. Such expenditures are channeled away from suburban shopping malls, where they would go principally to low wage retail workers and owners external to the region. Furthermore, spending on performing and visual arts—highly localized and labor intensive activities—results in higher multiplier effects within the region, especially since artists show high propensities to re-spend their income on tickets to performances and purchases of art and literature. In complementary fashion, if locally-generated wealth is recycled in the region through high visibility contributions to arts infrastructure and foundation arts portfolios, an urban growth increment ensues. In the Twin Cities, high concentrations of artists are found in

tandem with relatively high rates of arts participation and arts funding (Americans for the Arts, 2002; Kopczynski and Hager, 2004).

Promotion of the arts, then, can serve as an import-substituting activity that helps counter the leakage of incomes and savings out of the region. I am not arguing that state and local politicians understand this when they pursue cultural investments and strategies. Their enthusiasm for stadiums, which generate much less in terms of a local dividend, is evidence to the contrary. The size of this import-substituting effect depends very much on the types of urban investments in arts and cultural infrastructure that are made, a point I return to below in discussing contentious politics around urban cultural policy.

#### IV. How Artists Organize: Networks and Places for Artists

Raw agglomerations of artists and members of related occupations do not ensure that synergies develop among them or that their ranks will grow over time. Nearly invisible in the Florida and other accounts are the spaces and organizations that form the infrastructure for artists to develop their creativity and careers. These include the large, mainstream museums, theaters and other artist-employing and presenting organizations, including for-profit firms in the arts and unrelated industries. But they also include multiplicities of smaller spaces, some permanent, some temporary, where artistic work is developed and exhibited and where artists learn much of what they need to evolve. I briefly characterize three types of artist-centric spaces that perform this role in cities and some smaller towns. While other venues are also important – art fairs, schools and training institutes – these spaces, I argue, are particularly

important in fostering an independent political voice for artists. The profiles in this section are based on intensive work done in Minneapolis/St. Paul interviewing creators, managers and users of such spaces (Markusen and Johnson, 2005).

#### A. Artists' clubhouses

Artists' clubhouses comprise artists' gathering spaces that offer conversations, classes, mentoring, shared work-space and tools, and where exhibits, readings, and performances take place (Markusen and Johnson, 2005). Clubhouses involve dedicated space that is available for ongoing visits, where membership and access to many events is available to all comers, and where other artistic functions are available on a more selective, often openly competitive basis. In large urban regions like the Twin Cities, the depth and variety of artistic practice enables the emergence of clubhouses organized around specific genres. Clubhouses include the Loft Literary Center, Playwrights' Center, SASE (Self-Address Stamped Envelope), Textile Center, Independent Filmmakers Project, Minnesota Center for Photography, Northern Clay Center, Center for the Book Arts and Highpoint Center for Printmaking. They offer artists opportunities to take and give classes, observe top people in their fields (often from outside the region) at work and giving talks about work and careers, use well-equipped studio space, interact with other artists and, in the case of composers and playwrights, with the performers of their creations, and compete for grants, residencies and mentorships. Young and beginning artists report that it is the exposure to other artists and the insights received from listening to them talk about their own career challenges that most often inspires them and helps them make major leaps forward in their own work and to dare to build careers around it. Critique, whether experienced as listening to others exchange thoughts about work

or getting direct feedback from a teacher, mentor or colleague, is also accessible and highly valued.

Large metropolitan areas also harbor clubhouses that serve artists within a specific neighborhood and/or focus on a particular community group, and stretch across genres. Twin Cities' examples include Homewood Studios, in a northeast Minneapolis African American neighborhood, offering meeting and studio space only to neighborhood artists; Intermedia Arts, which concentrates on residents and artists within a five zip code area on the poor south side; and Interact, a clubhouse for artists with disabilities.

Twin Cities' clubhouses have been underwritten by public and private sources, including city loans and donations of city-owned land and buildings, Neighborhood Reinvestment Program funds, Foundation investments and grants, and state/regional arts board's funds. In addition to fostering better quality work and encouraging artistic careers, clubhouses offer an extraordinary and ongoing forum for the evolution and sharing of political views and practice on the part of artists. Because they are not confined to a single cultural district (Figure 2), they contribute to a mosaic of distinctive neighborhoods reminiscent of Jane Jacobs' (1961) celebration of New York City's SoHo, Little Italy, Chinatown and Greenwich Village.

#### B. Artists' live/work and studio buildings

Many larger cities and some smaller ones host former industrial buildings that have been converted into artists' studios or live/work units. Sometimes these contain hundreds of studios and dozens of live/work units. Buildings in St. Paul include the large Lowertown artist live/work cooperatives – the Northern Warehouse and Tilsner, and the ethnic

neighborhood-based Frogtown Family Lofts. In Minneapolis, several large former breweries have been transformed into studio buildings – the California Building and the Grain Belt Brewery are two examples. The initiators of such transformations are often artists themselves or non-profit developers such as Minneapolis-based Artspace Inc. Many such conversions involve the use of low income tax credits, historical preservation tax credits, city loans and land or building write-downs.

Artist live/work and studio buildings put artists into close living and working proximity with each other. Ideas and feedback circulate among informal friendship networks. In those that are co-ops, joint management responsibilities help to strengthen these ties and exposure. Group art “crawls,” where studios and apartments are opened up to the public for viewing and sales and performances once or twice a year, help to augment artists’ incomes. Some buildings have cafes and collective galleries where artists congregate and talk shop or show their work. These settings encourage the exchange of professional and political information among artists and raise their collective visibility in the neighborhood and city.

### C. Smaller scale performing arts venues

Every city has some array of performing arts spaces – theaters, dance and music venues – where creators (choreographers, playwrights, composers) and performers rehearse, interact, and present to audiences. Because these genres generally involve collective and “real time” enterprises (the art form is not storable the way books, paintings and films are), shared spaces are more important to them but less apt to be accessible in clubhouse formats where all comers are welcome. Performers must compete to be in companies and productions and must hustle gigs, creating looser and more fragmented networks. These are also genres that pay

relatively poorly. It is challenging to form and support clubhouses. The Minnesota Dance Alliance, which at one time operated such a space, sputtered and disappeared for chiefly financial reasons—dancers and choreographers are notoriously young and poor, and the organization had a difficult time serving both groups.

Performing arts spaces provide the opportunities for an important segment of artists to learn their craft and network. The Twin Cities host fifty-five theater groups, somewhat less than half of which own or rent space, and at least a dozen dance companies, some of whom work in and around the historic Southern Theater in an older, run-down area of town. Rehearsals provide an important learning space, especially for dancers who routinely take classes as a way of staying in shape. Encouragement and critique follow performances in the hallways and dressing rooms.

Many of the performing arts spaces in the Twin Cities are dispersed among inner city residential neighborhoods, often using obsolete buildings such as abandoned garages or even recycled porn theaters. In some cases, city funds have helped renovate and secure the space. In others, foundation arts programs and state and regional funds help to support ongoing programming. Some segments of this world are wholly private, for-profit enterprises, particularly the bulk of pop and rock music venues. As with clubhouses and artists' live and work buildings, performing arts venues provide another layer of urban spaces where an occupational politics can be shaped and debated.

Such spaces/venues/centers can make a substantial difference in the ability of a region and neighborhood to home-grow, attract and retain artists. They raise the quality of artistic output and the ability of artists to build careers in the art world. In turn, this nurturing of artists may strengthen regional and neighborhood economies in ways that magnify their

contribution to equity, stability and diversity. Such spaces are a relatively under-appreciated element in the urban economy that deserves to be studied and appreciated.

## V. Artists and the Urban Cultural Policy

Controversy surrounding Florida's work includes speculation about its political appeal to urban elites, businesspeople and politicians. This is not surprising, given the fuzziness of Florida's definition of and silence on the politics and collective interests of a "creative class." Others have articulated why it appeals to elites (e.g. Peck, 2005). In general, artists and arts organization managers are enthusiastic about Florida's work, even though many admit they have not read it. It makes them visible and gives them a new claim for public legitimacy since the 1990s crisis. But while elites use the Florida arguments to argue for the large arts anchor institutions in cities, most artists understand the negative effects that arts trophy-focused expenditures and strategies will have on lower income communities and on the diversity of artistic venues and funding streams. Their visions of urban space celebrate a Jacobs-like mosaic of neighborhoods each supporting one or several smaller arts spaces. In this section, I reflect on artists' politics and their impact on urban form and cultural policy.

Artists may enjoy limited and indirect patronage from elites, but as a group, they are far more progressive than most other occupational groups Florida labels as creative. While elites tend to be conservative politically, artists are the polar opposite. Artists vote in high numbers and heavily for left and Democratic candidates. They are often active in political campaigns, using their visual, performance and writing talents to carry the banner. Many



sociologists and social theorists argue that artists serve as the conscience of the society, the most likely source of merciless critique and support for unpopular issues like peace, the environment, tolerance and freedom of expression. As Minneapolis artist Wendy Morris, dancer, arts administrator and consultant, puts it in reflecting on the creative class debate:

Richard Florida's "model" offers the sweet, seductive illusion that we're all one big creative-class family. As artists, it is alluring to be included and recognized as having value for a change.

But as an artist, I think that I, and most of my colleagues, assume that the status quo of this society is simply not okay. Something is poignantly flawed in this human condition, and the social structures of our culture exacerbate those innate flaws. By making our artistic work, we can at least get to a deeper level of truth, or else a more direct experience of life, if not transformation. Like many artists, I don't trust the status quo. I believe that the greatest threat to our wellbeing is to not acknowledge the complex, ambiguous truths we live within.

To me, if there is a "creative class," it is the people who are inventing strategies and means to humanize our society through the work we do—people who share an intention to create a more just, equitable and sustainable social and physical environment. I find it harder and harder to imagine creativity as distinct from social responsibility.

In salvos fired across the creative class ramparts, artists are sometimes caricatured as inner city and diversity enthusiasts iconic of but indistinguishable from the rest of the creative class (Florida) or as unwitting, individualized dupes of barely disguised neo-liberal reshaping of cities locked in competition with each other and abandoning progressive and inclusive agendas (Peck). Neither of these stylized portraits probe artists' roles in struggles over urban form and social welfare. Artists as political actors are more self-conscious, critical and activist than either of these dualities suggests. Of course, not all artists – particularly not artists! – move in lock step. But based on our Twin Cities interviews, I offer the following characterization of the general political tenor of the artistic community and its stakes in and advocacy for particular urban initiatives.

Urban cultural strategies and investments vary from large, Lincoln-center type destination showcases to more dispersed, smaller-scale, community-embedded artistic facilities and programs. Many artists and smaller arts organizations deride the Minneapolis' Convention Center's attempt to market the city's four new world-class architect-designed (Michael Graves, Frank Gehry, Cesar Pelli, Jean Nouveau) flagships – the Guthrie Theater, the Children's Theater, the Walker Art Center and the new public library – to national and international press and tourism industries. Artists are trying to develop their own effort to market the cities' theaters, dance troupes, and dozens of galleries and art crawls as the real arts draw of the region and to fill more seats with local residents. The current “neighborhood” Mayor of Minneapolis, pressed into service at New York and local press conferences, wandered from the script to say that folks should come to see the big four but stay to experience the rich and diverse panoply of smaller arts centers.

Most artists in the region do not have a stake in the large arts portals. Actors and entire performances are often brought in from outside the region, and the work that the museums showcase is rarely local. Some artists appreciate that such exposure helps to raise the quality bar for aspirants who cannot afford to travel to see work done elsewhere. But for the most part, artists are adamant in their support for more decentralized, neighborhood-based theaters, galleries and other artist-centered spaces. They believe these are under-supported, especially given that they generate edgier work by local artists, people of color and other under-represented groups (people with disabilities, gays/lesbians/bi and transsexuals, immigrants). Currently, their efforts to create and organize support for the mosaic vision of urban arts are finding resonance in the arts funding community. Funders are asking artists who comprises the community that they see themselves serving. They are encouraging

communities to bring arts projects in for funding, asking them to address artistic quality and content (Bye, 2004). Artists and art funders alike are rethinking what they consider to be art. Hip-hop, rock and pop, mysteries, romance novels, spoken word, Native and immigrant traditional arts, folk art, and textile art are treated with greater respect.

Urban scholars have sometimes pilloried artists as agents of gentrification (Zukin, 1982, Deutsche and Ryan, 1984). Artists are involved in the process of neighborhood turnover and redevelopment. They often move into abandoned or cheap buildings, invest sweat equity to fix them up, stabilize neighborhoods by their presence on the streets and bring business to local retail stores. Or they may rent or buy housing or workspace developed by others, displacing poor or minority residents or retailers. Sometimes they are victims of gentrification themselves, as land and building prices escalate, and they are forced out. Zukin (2001) argues that an artistic mode of production has emerged, in which increasingly entrepreneurial artistic enclaves are used methodically by developers to manage profitable turnover in neighborhoods.

The significance of artists in this process depends a great deal on the local environment and state of the economy. Where housing prices are high and rising, such as Manhattan for nearly thirty years, the sequential arrival and departure of artist is more notable (Zukin, 1982). In roomy metros like Minneapolis/St. Paul and stagnant urban or small town environments, it is harder to argue that new artistic spaces are displacing anyone. Work in Philadelphia suggests that where no larger dynamic is pressing on housing and land prices, the entry and presence of artists into stable low-income neighborhoods does not set off a process of gentrification (Stern, 2003). In Minneapolis, the decades-long presence of several

converted breweries with in excess of 500 studio units for artists has not destabilized a persistent working class and immigrant community northeast of the center of the city.

Blaming artists for gentrification seems off the mark. Artists may be used by developers, even willingly, but they are not the architects or chief supporters of private property and land use practices that favor single site transformations of land use against community wishes. It is not their wealth that sets off, markets and completes the process of neighborhood gentrification. In the crucial zoning and economic development decisions that shape this process, artists are not the protagonists and lobbyists. That some may benefit from it is no different from many other non-artists caught up in the dynamic. High profile instances of gentrification that involve (and later displace) artists should be contextualized within the overall distribution and presence of artists in cities to gauge the overall impact of artists as residents.

It is important to remember, too, that many artists are of the community in which they live, including many artists of color and immigrant artists. Many are also poor. Their relative poverty along with their need for artistic space drives them along the sweat equity route. Many artists play active roles in their neighborhoods, in working with troubled youth, in visiting prisoners, and in staging and coaching community arts fairs and performances. Artists often explicitly see themselves as a public conscience and as responsible for using their talent in ways that critique power and inequality and advance community.

Artists as a group are also staunch defenders of broadly progressive and inclusive social programs, such as social safety nets, minimum wage, well-funded public education and universal health insurance. A current effort in the state of Washington by Artists' Trust, an artists' organization, is making the case of insurance for artists and hoping to use it as a

wedge to extend health insurance to all uninsured. Artists are prominent in tolerance campaigns, especially around GLBT issues. More white and male than workers as a whole, especially at higher income levels, artists and arts organizations still have quite a long way to go on diversity. Some theaters, galleries and clubhouses are explicitly devoted to people of color or particular communities, and these are becoming stronger and more visible elements of the urban cultural mosaic.

This inductively-drawn portrait suggests that artists as a political interest group have very little in common with most other occupations in Florida's misnamed creative class. It is rather amusing to think of the vast bulk of artists as making common urban or economic cause with bankers, lawyers, real estate developers and nuclear scientists. The creative city, if there is such a thing, is surely an arena for contentious politics over the character of the city and for whom it works. Artists on balance play a progressive role in this drama.

## VI. Conclusion: Why Disaggregating the Creative Class Matters

Why does it matter that the "creative class" rubric lumps together many disparate occupations with different spatial tendencies and political stakes in urban development? Challenged by world economic integration and its disruptive ability to redeploy capital, commodities and labor, governors, mayors and city councils worldwide are begging for insights into how urban development can be channeled and the lives and prosperity of their constituents improved. The creative class argument has fed into an earlier "creative city" dialogue (Landry et al, 1996; Landry, 2003) that shares some of its conceptual fuzziness .

What American mayors of large and small cities seem to have gleaned from this work is a renewed appreciation for the role of the arts in urban development and for the significance of amenities. Unfortunately, because the “creative” literature is so anecdotal and lean on analysis, they are often at a loss to know what to do with such intelligence beyond using it as window-dressing for tourism marketing and downtown development strategies.

Who are the creative agents of economic development in cities? If artists play a unique role and are key to attracting other skilled workers, should public resources be devoted to individual grants for artists and to the types of artistic space profiled here? If, alternatively, other creative class occupations – lawyers, accountants, business managers – are the key growth inducers, what kinds of policies should be adopted to recruit and retain them? If certain occupational groups are both footloose and important catalysts to development, policymakers need to know the specifics – which groups, where do they live, what are the criteria by which they make their locational choices, what kinds of employers are drawn in their wake, who are their competitors? How do the key groups organize themselves as an occupational or interest group, what are their issues, and where are the policy entry points in this process?

Even when policymakers have sound research that enables them to understand their own talent targets, how do they know to which facility investments, infrastructure, programs, city planning techniques and cultural policies they should devote scarce resources to achieve growth, revitalization and equity goals? Leading protagonists in the debate over urban creativity have devoted little attention to the productivity of alternative tools for shaping the character of cities. A great deal of excellent work has been done by urban scholars, particularly Susan Fainstein and her colleagues (Fainstein, 1994; Judd and Fainstein, 1999;

Hoffman, Fainstein and Judd, 2003) in understanding the politics of the urban redevelopment process and who the players are, and in studying tourism as a cultivated sector within the contemporary urban environment. But this is an exception – much of the urban redevelopment process remains poorly understood and woefully short on evaluative research on outcomes.

In this piece, I have critiqued the creative class concept, arguing against the metric used to define it, the lumping together of many disparate occupations, and the causal urban growth differentials attributed to it. I have used a key group – artists – to examine its strengths and failings and to suggest that occupations included in the “creative class” have very different urban preferences, politics, and impacts on urban form and community life. I have suggested that the attractiveness of certain cities to artists is not the result of atomistic responses to amenities but is shaped by investment decisions that cities, states and funders make in artistic space and organizations. While only a case study, the work on artists, with its quantitative and qualitative methods, could serve as a model for research on the many other occupations that make unique contributions to urban form, semi-independently of the cultural industries that have received so much attention (Hesmondhalgh, 2002; Power and Scott, 2004; Markusen and Schrock, 2005).

Table 1. Self employment trends, artistic occupations, United States, 2002

Occupational Title	Total Employment	Self-employed	% Self-employed	Primary job	Secondary job
Visual artists	307,254	155,159	50%	129,109	26,050
Artists and related workers	148,682	80,022	54%	70,731	9,291
Arts directors	50,664	27,139	54%	23,988	3,151
Fine artists: painters, sculptors, illustra	23,192	12,866	55%	11,372	1,494
Multi-media artists & animators	74,826	40,017	53%	35,371	4,646
Photographers	130,442	68,432	52%	54,024	14,408
Camera operators, TV/Video/Motion pi	28,130	6,705	24%	4,354	2,351
Performing artists	176,463	42,724	24%	38,174	4,550
Actors	63,033	10,992	17%	9,754	1,238
Producers and directors	76,125	24,995	33%	21,683	3,312
Dancers & choreographers	37,305	6,737	18%	6,737	0
Dancers	19,992	3,854	19%	3,854	0
Choreographers	17,313	2,883	17%	2,883	0
Musicians, singers and related	215,425	83,121	39%	56,770	26,351
Music directors & composers	54,271	21,354	39%	14,584	6,770
Musicians & singers	161,154	61,767	38%	42,186	19,581
Writers & authors	138,980	94,377	68%	80,509	13,868
<b>Total, arts occupations</b>	<b>838,122</b>	<b>375,381</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>304,562</b>	<b>70,819</b>
Designers	531,921	168,806	32%	132,827	35,979
Commercial & industrial designers	51,823	16,088	31%	12,659	3,429
Fashion designers	14,844	4,353	29%	3,425	928
Floral designers	103,993	33,832	33%	26,621	7,211
Graphic designers	211,871	67,422	32%	53,052	14,370
Interior designers	60,050	19,325	32%	15,206	4,119
Merchandise displayers, window trimm	77,221	23,881	31%	18,791	5,090
Set and exhibit designers	12,119	3,905	32%	3,073	832
Architects	136,378	29,678	22%	23,809	5,869
Architects, ex. landscape and naval	113,243	24,253	21%	19,457	4,796
Landscape architects	23,135	5,425	23%	4,352	1,073
<b>Total, all artistic occupations</b>	<b>1,506,421</b>	<b>573,865</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>461,198</b>	<b>112,667</b>
<b>Total, all occupations</b>	<b>144,013,600</b>	<b>11,451,600</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>9,926,000</b>	<b>1,525,600</b>

Source: Markusen, Schrock and Cameron, 2005. Data from Bureau of Labor Statistics, National Industry-Occupation Employment Matrix. <http://www.bls.gov/emp/empoids.htm>



Table 2. Size, growth rates, of employed artists, selected metros, 1980, 1990, 2000

	2000	% Change 1990-2000	% Change 1980-1990
Atlanta, GA	14808	53%	64%
San Francisco-Oakland, CA	25263	20%	39%
Los Angeles-Long Beach, CA	79781	20%	52%
Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN	12155	13%	63%
Portland, OR	6630	10%	66%
Seattle, WA	11030	9%	52%
Cleveland, OH	5667	7%	28%
San Diego, CA	10330	4%	73%
New York-Northeastern NJ	77216	4%	33%
Miami, FL	7033	3%	42%
Boston, MA	16884	2%	73%
Chicago, IL	26901	1%	50%
Orange County, CA	10656	-5%	87%
Washington, DC/MD/VA	22925	-6%	70%
United States	881,841	10%	53%

Sources: Census 2000 5% PUMS dataset, Integrated Public Use Microdata Sample, Minnesota Population Center, University of Minnesota.

Artists are defined as the 1980, 1990, 2000 Census codes: Authors (285/183), Musicians and Composers (275/186), Performing Artists (270, 274, 271/187,193), and Visual Artists: Artists and Related Workers (260/194,188). These data cover only employed artists. Major changes in coding schemes between 1990 and 2000 resulted in our including photographers and portions of the category camera operators with visual artists in 2000. See Markusen, Schrock and Cameron, 2004, Technical Appendix.

Table 3. Artistic Specializations, Selected Metros, 1980, 1990, 2000

	1980 LQ	1990 LQ	2000 LQ
Los Angeles, CA	2.39	2.31	2.99
New York, NY-NJ	2.60	2.42	2.52
San Francisco-Oakland, CA	1.79	1.60	1.82
Washington, DC-MD-VA-WV	1.76	1.63	1.36
Seattle, WA	1.59	1.40	1.33
Boston, MA-NH	1.51	1.49	1.27
Orange County, CA	1.15	1.26	1.18
Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN-WI	1.20	1.27	1.16
San Diego, CA	1.24	1.15	1.15
Miami, FL	1.35	1.09	1.15
Portland, OR-WA	1.18	1.24	1.09
Atlanta, GA	1.31	1.08	1.08
Chicago, IL	1.03	1.09	1.04
Cleveland, OH	0.82	0.83	0.79

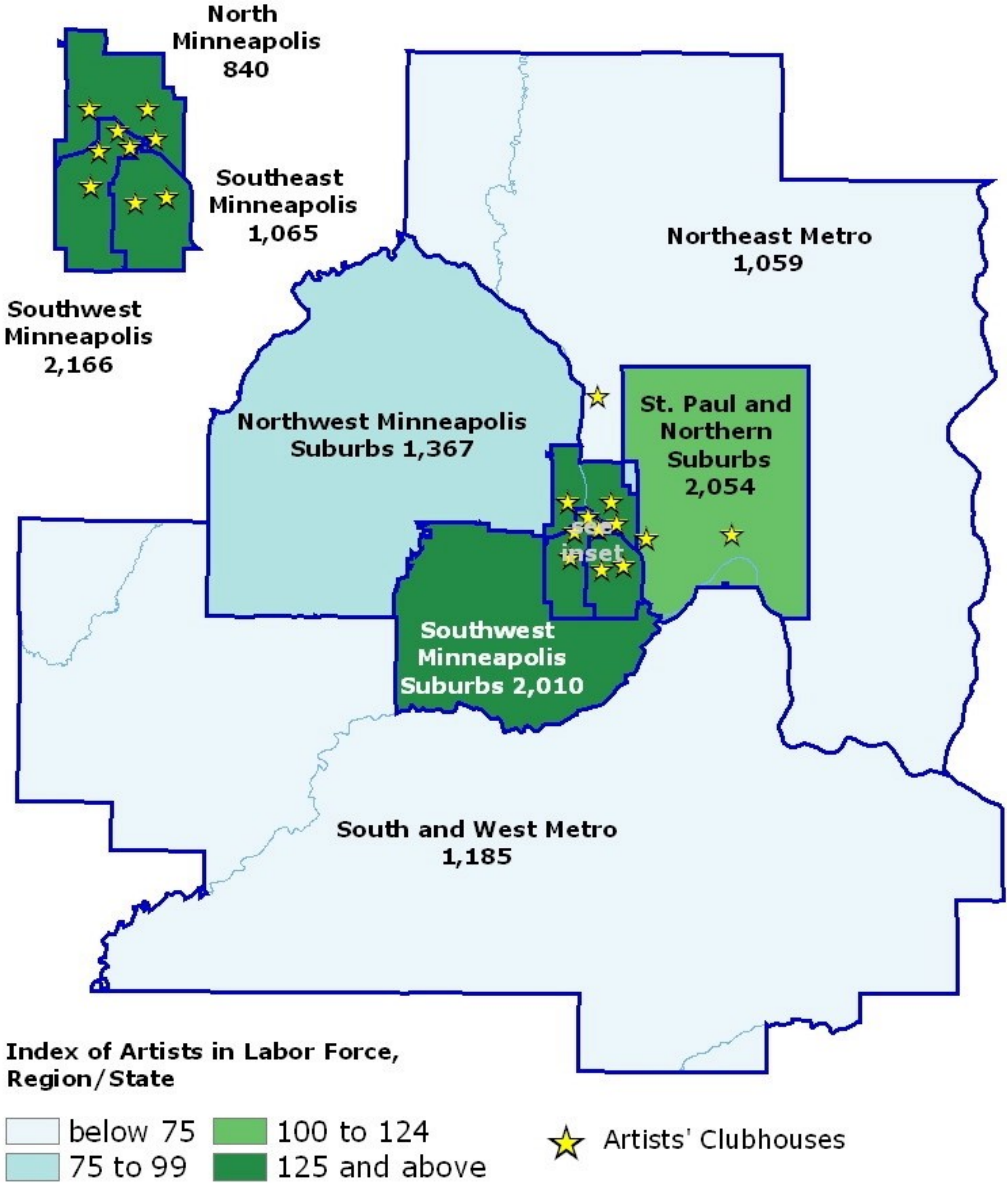
Sources: Markusen, Schrock and Cameron, 2004. Data from Census 1980, 1990, 2000 5% PUMS dataset, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, Minnesota Population Center, University of Minnesota. Indices cover employed artists as defined in Table 1.

Table 4. Migration of employed and unemployed artists by metropolitan area, 1995-2000

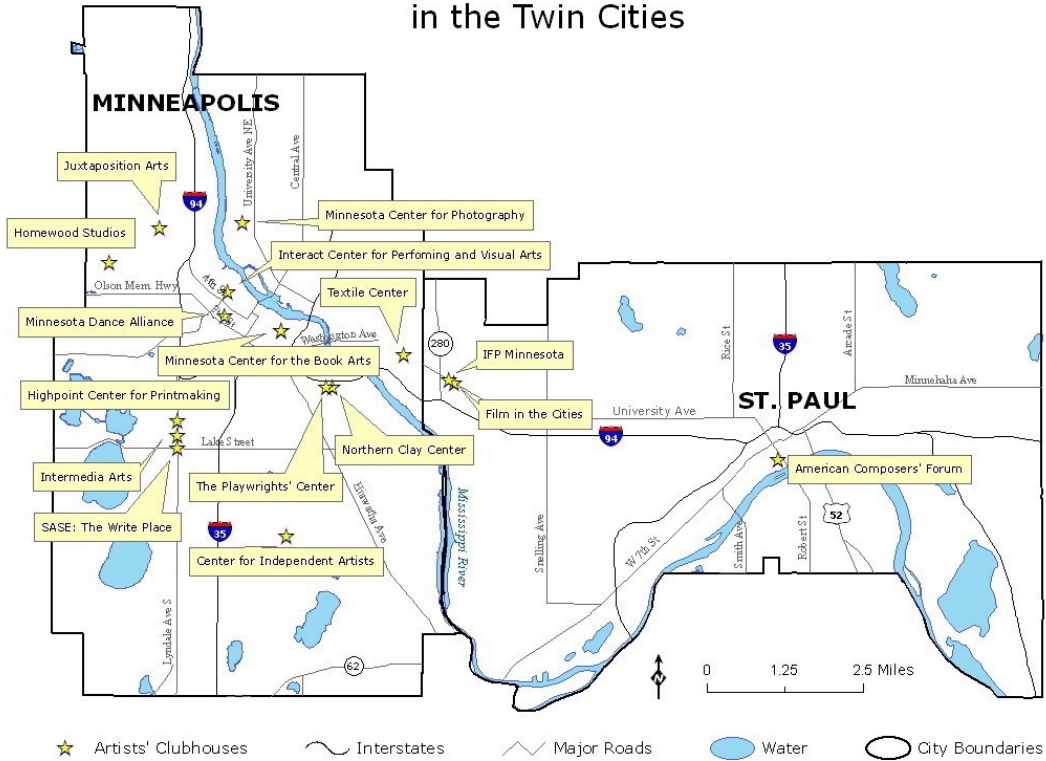
	In/out migration ratio	New artists as % of total	Moved into metro	Moved out of metro	Artists 2000
Los Angeles, CA	2.16	22	19250	8918	88325
Portland-Vancouver, OR	1.48	24	1634	1105	6876
Orange County, CA	1.47	26	2814	1914	10881
New York/Bergen, NY-NJ	1.45	21	17653	12164	82267
San Francisco-Oakland, CA	1.37	28	7258	5285	26071
San Diego, CA	1.25	24	2680	2144	10961
Atlanta, GA	1.22	26	3971	3255	15282
Washington, DC-MD-VA	1.14	24	5436	4749	23016
Seattle, WA	1.11	22	2482	2244	11428
Boston, MA	0.98	24	3770	3847	15552
Minneapolis-St Paul, MN-WI	0.97	16	1994	2047	12275
Chicago, IL	0.83	16	4379	5288	27612
Cleveland, OH	0.53	12	669	1255	5805
Houston, TX	0.37	21	2008	5388	9725

Source: Markusen and Schrock, 2005. Calculated from Census 1980, 1990, 2000 5% PUMS dataset, Integrated Public Use Microdata Sample, Minnesota Population Center, University of Minnesota. These figures include unemployed as well as employed artists, i.e. all those in the labor force and are thus somewhat larger than the artist totals for 2000 in Table 2.

# Artists in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Region Labor Force



## Artists' Clubhouse Locations in the Twin Cities



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