"Dancing in the Street?
Reframing Arts and Culture for the 'New' Downtown"

Elizabeth Strom
University of South Florida

Presentation to the Wake Forest University Social Science Research Seminar
February 16, 2012

Introduction

My research, broadly stated, concerns the role of arts and culture in urban, and specifically central city redevelopment. Now, research that proclaims the affinity between major cultural institutions and urban centers does not at first glance seem to represent the cutting edge of scholarly research. After all, is there anything new about the tendency to build our largest arts organizations where people, wealth, and infrastructure are concentrated? We can go back hundreds of years to note that centers of creativity and learning have long been found in cities. Indeed, it is the odd gallery or performing arts center built in rural isolation; the lone visual artist living in the suburbs; the rare contemporary writer who does *not* live in Brooklyn -- that begs explanation. So, at first glance, when an unprecedented central city cultural building boom emerged in US cities in the 1990s, and as cities from Chicago to Pittsburgh to Paducah, KY championed artist housing initiatives, there was perhaps little remarkable – simply another chapter in the history of the cultural life of cities.

But upon further consideration, the urban cultural explosion of the past two decades is not so self-explanatory. First, the dominant urban narrative of the post WW II period has been one of deconcentration and decline (Garreau 1992, Beauregard 2003) A host of social and economic activities that had long seemed thoroughly imbedded in cities became dispersed.

Corporate headquarters, large retailers, and professional sports franchises all found they could thrive in the suburbs, and suburban job growth continues to outpace employment expansion in central cities. Why haven't cultural activities followed suit? To be sure, one finds many new, smaller arts organizations emerging in suburban population centers, but for the most part the most significant high art institutions and largest concentrations of those engaged in the arts have stayed put, in many cases modernizing or expanding their facilities in place, but very seldom following metropolitan area residents and businesses to the urban fringes. There's no definitive geography of cultural institutions so our support for this claim is merely anecdotal (see Strom 2002 for a list of recently built urban cultural institutions in 65 cities as an example). But we can document the concentrations of those identified as artists, or working in arts industries, and here we see that the clear dominance of cities like NY, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Boston and Minneapolis as "hotspots" for those employed in the arts (Markussen and Schrock 2006).

So, why don't arts institutions and artists act like just about every other institution and leave the still-congested, high tax, hard-to-find-parking, obsolete housing stock, central city? It turns out that explaining what *hasn't* changed (the urban concentration of artistic activity) we need to understand what *has* changed (the economic base of cities; the function of the downtown; the economic and social position of the arts, among other things). This working paper ties together my previous research, all of which has considered some dimension of this "reframing" of the city, the arts, and the relationship between those two.

1. **Shakespeare of Suburbia?**

First, let's consider why arts institutions and artists have not decentralized. (As my interest is primarily in urban development and urban institutions, this is an admittedly cursory consideration.) Performing arts and, to some extent visual arts, are among a handful of economic

sectors that require face to face contact between producers and consumers. (When I first began studying this topic, I wrote that medical care, some personal services, and education are others, but the proliferation of online education opportunities, and even remote diagnosis, if not treatment, has made that list even shorter). To be sure, the decentralization of population; the accessibility of remote areas through the automobile, and competition from decentralized media like film, television and more recently the internet have altered the dynamics of cultural consumption, but anyone who wants the immediate experience of seeing a live performance or viewing an exhibit must go to its location. The economics of culture are such that many events have a limited potential audience drawn from a broad area, making a very central location, accessible to the most people, important. Less tangibly, if live performances are to compete with broadcast alternatives, they must offer a unique experience, which I would argue would include the sophistication of an urban location. Putting on expensive clothes so you can drive to the performing arts center next to the Sears at the Mall just doesn't seem to justify the $100 ticket prices. When Newark's New Jersey Performing Arts Center opened in 1997, its president refused to construct a tunnel connecting the adjacent underground parking garage to the building, requiring visitors to exit the garage and cross an expansive plaza outside the theater. He wanted patrons to have the experience of flocking onto the brightly lit plaza with hundreds of other guests, the city's skyline blinking around them, believing those moments of urban spectacle to be part of why people went out for the evening.

Like arts venues, individual artists need to be centrally located as well. This may seem counter-intuitive – why would a young artist, awaiting her first success, pay New York City or Boston rents when she could reduce her living expenses dramatically in a less central location? But artists are remarkably clustered; recent studies indicate that artists need to be near other

artists; near the agents, producers, and other facilitators who might provide their entrée into their fields; near potential customer and patrons. Artists thrive when they can create informal networks, fostered through attendance at events, which is impossible to do from a distance. (Florida 2002, Drake 2003, Currid 2007).

2. Let's Put on a Show! (and then measure its economic impact…)

So, artistic producers, like most producers who need face to face contact with consumers, have long located in cities. And the presence of culture, both popular and high culture, have been seen as contributors to the urban quality of life, among the reasons offered for the urbanization of populations at the turn of the last century (Still 1974). But artistic efforts were never considered as a key economic output of the urban economy: grand art museums and world class symphony orchestras of the industrial era were built to show off wealth, not to generate it. In Europe, they represented the affluence of the monarch and the aristocracy; later, in the US, the success of the local bourgeoisie first in accumulating capital, and next in transforming raw material wealth into good taste. Such revered institutions as New York's Metropolitan Opera, for example, were created to display the wealth of newly rich industrialists (Burrows and Wallace 1999); the patrons of Chicago's now renowned art museum and symphony sought to assert their cultural parity with Boston and New York (Horowitz 1976). If late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century patrons could appreciate the potential benefits that accrued to those who built cultural centers, however, for those founding nineteenth-century museums and concert halls—in contrast to today's cultural entrepreneurs—economic gain remained subtext. Reporting on the opening of the (at that time very modestly housed) Newark Museum in 1909, the local press proclaimed, "The city is rich! A part of the wealth of its citizens should be invested in paintings,

sculpture and other art objects" (Newark Museum 1959, 7). Businessman and arts patron Joseph Choate, speaking at the Metropolitan Museum's opening, stressed the museum's function as an uplifting source of beauty and urged men of wealth to "convert pork into porcelain, grain and produce into priceless pottery , the rude ores of commerce into sculpted marble, and railroad shares and mining stocks . . . into the glorified canvas of the world's masters" (Tomkins 1970, 23).

Today, the relationship between the city's economy and its cultural institutions is understood very differently. Kicking off a fund-raising drive for the expansion of the Newark Museum—the same museum celebrated as a symbol of local prosperity in 1909—New Jersey Governor Tom Kean touted the museum and other urban cultural assets as "catalysts of rebirth," "creating the kind of public image needed for growth and new jobs" (Courtney 1984). Even artists themselves are seen as money-generating resources: For example, a South Beach developer, whose real estate holdings have benefited tremendously from the "discovery" of Miami by the fashion and arts industry, is now underwriting much of the cost of a new, tuition-free, graduate arts program intended to get artists to "stick around" because "'fertilizing the creative class is good economic development policy'" (quoted in Sokol, 2008).

Behind this transformation, of course, is the decentralization of economic activity. First factories, and then back office jobs, and even corporate headquarters no longer seek urban locations as a matter of course; for many, the lower land and labor costs of suburban, rural, or overseas locations lure jobs out of the city. The spatial shift of employment in some sectors, and in some metropolitan areas has been very dramatic. As the locus of economic activity has shifted out of the urban core, place-based interests, including mayors and other urban business stakeholders, have come to see artistic production and consumption as a more valuable asset, and

have often pushed for new cultural developments with the explicit goal of encouraging new investment and creating jobs.

Documenting the potential impact of the arts on a city's economy has become a standard policy making tool. So, for example, the Port Authority of NY/NJ notes that the arts industry, in 1992, generated over $9 billion of economic activity for the region, employing 107,500 people and generating $325 million in tax revenues (Port Authority 1993). Ninety percent of this activity occurred within New York City. Of course New York is unique as a center of cultural production and consumption, but other cities and their arts institutions can also their economic bona fides. The national advocacy group Americans for the Arts maintains has staff and web tools dedicated to calculating the economic and employment impact of arts activities; one can pay to have them prepare reports by cities, regions, or Congressional districts (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/01/24/detroit-art-and-culture-economy-art-serve_n_1228205.html). State and local arts agencies often do their own calculations (http://creativestatemi.artservemichigan.org/overview/reports/; http://www.mncitizensforthearts.org/learn/artsresearch/driving-force/), and individual institutions sometime commission studies to show their own impact, or the impact of a particularly noteworthy blockbuster event (McDowell 1997).

One might think that artists and arts institutions would bristle under the mantle of acting as "economic engines." And to be sure, many such institutions acknowledge the tensions between striving for excellence and cutting edge innovation in their fields, and mounting "blockbuster" programs that will attract visitors and, even better, tourists. (An executive at one symphony once told me, laughing, that her city's tourism and economic development office would be thrilled if she could program Beethoven's 9th Symphony every night, but if she'd be pilloried by her musicians). But savvy arts administrators have in fact learned to champion these numbers, and indeed many pay for studies of their own economic impact as a way to generate grants from public and philanthropic funding sources. It often pays off for them, too. Several of the arts institutions I studied, including those in Newark and Philadelphia, received sizable capital grants from state economic development offices, and important private donations from philanthropists more interested in urban boosterism than in opera. And keep in mind that the 1990s were marked by a long assault on American arts by members of Congress who turned artists like Robert Mapplethorpe, Andres Serrano, and Karen Finley into poster children for conservative causes. Surely arts administrators were happier to talk about "economic multipliers" than about "Piss Christ." By playing the "economic development" card, cultural institutions can get the sort of funding reserved for projects associated with "job creation" and "investments", rather than settle for the residual dollars falling to projects seen as merely uplifting and educational.

3. The museum and the "100% corner"

We can see the impact of the city's changing economic function, and the increased value of culture to the urban economy, when we look specifically at city centers, or "downtown" areas. In the 19th and early 20th century city, the downtown represented the hub of economic activity. This

is where one found the highest value businesses able to pay the highest possible rents – the banks; highest cost office space; highest volume department stores. Even if cultural production and consumption were traditional *urban* activities, it would be rare to find these located in heart of the city's business district. Museums were frequently built at the edge of the urban core, often taking advantage of park settings; concert halls, theatres and later movie theaters, with smaller footprints, might be closer to the center of economic activity.

But the urban core has changed dramatically in the last 40 years. downtown is no longer the center of the region's economic life. The traditional CBDs are no longer necessarily their region's largest office markets or their largest employment nodes. In most metropolitan areas, the majority of jobs are found well outside the traditional CBD (Glaeser and Kahn 2001). And only a few downtowns continue to dominate their metro area office markets. In the cities studied by Lang (2003), traditional downtowns contained about one-third of the area's office space. He and other sources (see, for example, Central City District 2006) note wide variation between more centralized MSAs (New York, Boston, San Francisco, Pittsburgh and Chicago are examples) and the most decentralized areas (Las Vegas, Phoenix, Miami and Houston) where CBDs may contain less than 20% of the region's office space (Center City District 2006). Both Lang and the Central City District find that the downtown share of the office market is decreasing over time. For example, Philadelphia contained just 27% of its region's office space in 2005, which was down from 41% in 1993 – a reflection of the much faster pace of growth in its suburbs (Center City District 2006).

CBD office space had also, traditionally, been the most expensive in the region (indeed, urban economic theory's "bid-rent curve" assumes that the highest land values will always be at the center (Alonso 1960). That has also changed. Quite often, newer, peripheral office

developments are pricier than the average center city building. The most expensive offices in Atlanta are found in the Buckhead neighborhood (within the city limits, but miles from the downtown); the Philadelphia region's costliest offices are on the suburban Main Line (Center City District 2006).

Arts and cultural activities are no longer priced out of the downtown; in fact they are beckoned in. Philadelphia's Avenue of the Arts, along Broad Street, was once the city's commercial hub, with numerous banks and high rent offices. With an infusion of millions of dollars of city and state economic development funds, it now boasts the Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts and several theatres alongside the 155 year old Academy of the Arts. In Charlotte, the iconic "Trade and Tryon" intersection is home to the Blumenthal Performing Arts Center; half a block away sits the new downtown branch of the Mint Museum of Art. Baltimore's France-Merrick Performing Arts Center is housed in the retrofitted Eutaw Savings and Western National Bank buildings, and a centrally located Woolworth's in Asheville is now a collection of artist stalls. Urban boosters hail these downtown cultural developments as signs of urban rebirth, but in fact they can also be seen as evidence of downtown's economic decline – the idea that the "highest and best use" of the "100% corner" (Fogelson 2001) is a nonprofit arts institution suggests that downtown's role in the city's geography of production has changed dramatically.

4. New urban landscapes = new narratives and organizations

So, while the presence of arts and artists in cities is old, the incorporation of the arts into the fuel for the city's economy is new. That new relationship has brought with it new language and new organizational arrangements. Today, states and cities often use the term "creative

industries" to label a cluster of economic sectors than may include the fine arts, but also commercial arts, video production, and a host of related areas. States such as Massachusetts and cities such as Denver and Plano, Texas have established "creative industries" coordinators. When the city of Philadelphia re-opened its shuttered Cultural Affairs office it was renamed the Office of Arts, Culture and the Creative Economy. Even cities and states without specific creative industry offices have become cognizant of the potential for such synergistic efforts. The City of Austin offers loan guarantees to private lenders willing to extend credit to for-profit or non-profit "creative" businesses promising to create jobs.

The simultaneous reshaping of urban development practice and the reframing of cultural policy have led to the creation of a new, emerging policy community, one that marries the arts with urban economic renewal. This fledgling policy community has its own organizational infrastructure at the local, state and national level, as well as a new way of thinking. At the state, national and local level, economic development promoters (public agencies, quasi-public authorities, and business groups such as Chambers of Commerce) have embraced arts projects as part of their agendas, at times adding new staff and new programs to encourage the development of cultural projects. Evidence for these changes is garnered from periodical literature, interviews, and a survey of the websites and annual reports of economic development groups. Together, this body of research shows the extent to which the promotion of culture has become the business of economic developers. At the same time, arts advocacy groups at all levels have adopted economic benefit arguments, in many cases sponsoring research to generate the data to support such arguments. Place-based development interests and arts advocates have increasingly come together in both long-term and ad hoc alliances, creating joint lobbying efforts and research projects.

Such alliances are even more striking at the local level. In cities, economic developers aware of the potential benefits of arts investments, and arts advocates eager to earn broader support for their projects, work together regularly and systematically. In some cities, the marriage of these two policy areas in manifested in a number of working groups or task forces drawing on personnel from both sectors. In others, entirely new organizations have emerged with the explicit goal of further economic revitalization through cultural investment. Such organizations may take the form of cultural tourism initiatives, cultural district coordinators, or the like, but they similarly bridge the once disparate worlds of art and commerce. Indeed, in some cities the organizational infrastructure of "culture as development" is sufficiently developed as to say that it represents a new policy network, with its own discourses, shared norms and training, and policy goals.

5. Arts and cities: a happy ending?

Although I've never intended this to be a normative research project, I've given some thought to whether this "arts as economic development" approach is a beneficial one. Should we be critical of this phenomenon? Perhaps it is harmful to arts institutions to have their mission compromised by distinctly non-artistic imperatives? Maybe city officials should be trying to find more productive uses for those vacant downtown banks? And what are the opportunity costs of the $30 million the state of NC gave for the construction of Charlotte's Blumenthal Center or the $93 million in state economic development funds for Philadelphia's Kimmel Center – could those investments been made in sectors whose economic impact on the city, and in particular on the neediest parts of the city, would have been greater?

Certainly, I'm skeptical that the economic impact numbers touted by arts advocates have real, tangible meaning. For one, many of these studies fail to use rigorous econometric measures

– they don't ask whether the money spent in these cultural institutions might have been spent elsewhere, for instance, acting as though any dollar spent in or by their organizations is unique. Also, many of these studies fail to contextualize the economic impacts of the arts. A recent Seattle Museum Picasso exhibit was said to generate $66 million in state and local impact (http://www.seattleartmuseum.org/pressroom/prRelease.asp?prID=220), but a well attended four day medical convention probably has a similar impact over a much shorter time period. Analysts studying the economic impact of the arts for the NEA made this sobering observation in their 1981 study: a decently performing neighborhood McDonald's probably has a similar economic impact as all but the most visited arts institutions (Cwi and Lyall 1977). Touting public support for the arts as a direct economic stimulus, then, seems to be a weak argument.

On the other hand, we can't always capture the ways that arts and artists add value to other things. What is the economic impact of artists making loft living "cool" and therefore creating a demand for 100 year old obsolete manufacturing buildings? What is the economic impact of our willingness to pay $20 for a Cezanne baseball at a museum store? A major developer is teaming with NJPAC to create a mixed use high rise project adjacent to the theater, a rare new investment in the city. This is coming 15 years after the center opened, but there's absolutely no way you'd have the potential for this development without NJPAC.

When cities like Pittsburgh, Scranton and Peekskill subsidize artist housing, they are hoping to gain much more than a few dozen well-housed artists, and even more than the removal of a derelict building. Rather, city officials gamble that these small investments will have clear ripple effects: that a few dozen artists will make these spaces less marginal, and that several years or decades later their investment in artist housing will have paid off in new, private investment in the surroundings. For example, a village official in Patchogue, NY, a less prosperous town near

affluent Long Island beach communities, supports the development of subsidized artist housing in the town center, according to a newspaper account, because "affluent art collectors will stop by, acquire art, shop downtown and visit restaurants" (Winzelberg 2008). In other words, artists may themselves be poor, but they act as "rich people" magnets.

Future research can further unpack the old-yet-new relationship between arts institutions, artists, and cities. For example, while I'm skeptical about claims that, say, public dollars invested in a cultural institution will have some notable effect on an area's economy, there are more subtle ways to measure the potentially positive impacts of arts investments on cities. One can study such projects on the micro level, looking at upgrading and regeneration in the blocks surrounding such investments, where the impact is most likely to be felt. Examining the relationship between popular, elite, and indigenous cultures and how they impact local economies and local built environments can be of interest, as can studies that probe links between arts industries and other forms of production. Applied research projects might seek to guide cities, and especially smaller cities, toward the sorts of cultural investments most likely to yield dividends; continued study of the organizational links between arts institutions and other urban leaders could also prove fruitful.

Parts of this paper have drawn liberally from my earlier work:

Elizabeth Strom, "Artist Garret as Growth Machine? Local Policy and Artist Housing in US Cities." *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, March 2010.

Noam Shoval and Elizabeth Strom. "Inscribing Universal Values into the Urban Landscape" *Urban Geography* v. 30, no. 2, 2009.

Elizabeth Strom, "Rethinking the Politics of Downtown Development." *Journal of Urban Affairs*, v 30 no 1, 2008.

Elizabeth Strom and Angela Cook. 2004. "Old Pictures in New Frames: Issue Definition and Federal Arts Policy." *Review of Policy Research* 21, (4) 505-522.

Elizabeth Strom. 2003. "Cultural Policy as Urban Development Policy" *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 9 (3), 247-263.

Elizabeth Strom. 2002 'Converting Pork Into Porcelain: Cultural Institutions and Downtown Development, *Urban Affairs Review*, vol. 38 (1) 3-21

Elizabeth Strom, "Let's Put on a Show! Performing Arts and Urban Revitalization in Newark. *Journal of Urban Affairs,* v21 no. 4, 1999.

References:

Alonso, W. 1960. "A Theory of Urban Land Markets." *Regional Science Association Journal* 6: 149-58.

Americans for the Arts. 2008. "Creative Industries: Business and Employment in the Arts." www.americansforthearts.org

Beauregard, Robert A. 2003 *Voices of Decline: The postwar fate of US Cities.* New York: Routledge.

Burrows, E. G., and M.Wallace. 1999. *Gotham: A history of New York City to 1898*. New York and Oxford, UK: Oxford Univ. Press.

Cameron, S and J. Coaffee. 2005. "Art, Gentrification and Regeneration -- from Artist as Pioneer to Public Arts" European Journal of Housing Policy 5 (1), 39-58.

Center City District. 2006. *State of Center City 2006.* Philadelphia

Courtney, M. 1984. Newark museum revives growth plans. *New York Times*, 8 April, B1, 4.

Currid, E. and J. Connelly. 2008. "Patterns of Knowledge: The Geography of Advanced Services and the Case of Arts and Culture." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 98, (2) 414-434.

Currid, E. 2007. "How Art and Culture Happens in Urban Economies: Implications for the Economic Development of Culture"; *Journal of the American Planning Association* 73 (4), 454-467.

Cwi, D. and K. Lyall. 1977. *Economic impact of arts and cultural institutions: A model for assessment and a case study for Baltimore*. Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts

Drake, G. 2003. 'This place gives me space': place and creativity in the creative industries *Geoforum* 34,(4), 511-524

Fischler, M. 2007. "Portrait of a Village as an Arts Haven." *New York Times* 6 May, Section 11, page 8.

Florida, R. 2002. *The Rise of the Creative Class*. New York: Basic Books.

Fogelson, R. M. 2001. *Downtown: Its Rise and Fall, 1880-1950*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Garreau, J. 1992. *Edge Cities: Life on the New Frontier*. New York: Anchor Books.

Glaeser, E. and M. Kahn. (2001). "Job Sprawl: Employment Location in US Metropolitan Areas." Brookings Institution, May.

Horowitz, H. L. 1976. *Culture and the city*. Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky.

Lang, R.E. 2003. *Edgeless Cities*. Washington: Brookings Institution Press.

Ley, D. 2003. "Artists, Aestheticization, and the Field of Gentrification." *Urban Studies.* 40 (12), 2527 – 2544.

McDowell, E. 1997. Tourists respond to lure of culture. *New York Times*, 24 April, D1, 4.

Markusen, A and Schrock. 2006. "The Artistic Dividend: Urban Artistic Specialisation and Economic Development Implications" *Urban Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 10, 1661–1686.

Newark Museum. 1959. *The Newark Museum:Afifty-year survey*. Newark: Newark Museum.

The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey and the Cultural Assistance Center. 1993. *The arts as industry: Their economic importance to the New York–New Jersey metropolitan region*. New York: The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey.

Tomkins, C. 1970. *Merchants and masterpieces*. New York: E. P. Dutton.

Sokol, B. 2008. "Miami Art Machine." *New York Magazine* 27 April.

Still, B. 1974. *Urban America: A History with Documents*. New York: Little, Brown.

Winzelberg, D. 2008 "Artist Colony Proposed for Patchogue." *Long Island Business News* 25 April.

Zukin, S. 1982. *Loft Living*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.