Making Places or Making Waves:
Cultural district policy making considerations for the public good

A Thesis

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Joshua Coy, B.A.

Arts Policy and Administration Graduate Program

The Ohio State University

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Master’s Examination Committee

Dr. Wayne P. Lawson, Advisor

Dr. Candice Stout
Abstract

Recent theories in creative class and placemaking in the new millennium have changed the ways we talk about space, communities, and what role public arts agencies take in order to best support them. This thesis reviews models of public advocacy decision making and how they effect outcomes; explores theories and research in creative communities and cultural development strategies; and investigates creative placemaking and cultural district initiatives at various levels of public funding agencies in order to explore how these policies effect people and their communities.
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Vita

March, 13 1974
Born
Youngstown, Ohio

1997....................................................B.A. Theatre
Westminster College New Wilmington, PA

2012-2014 ............................................Lawrence and Isabel Barnett Fellow
The Ohio State University
Columbus, OH

2012-2013...........................................Delegate, The Council of Graduate Students
The Ohio State University
Columbus, OH

2012-2015...........................................Senator, University Senate
The Ohio State University
Columbus, OH

2013....................................................Vice President, The Council of Graduate Students
The Ohio State University
Columbus, OH

2013-2015...........................................President, The Council of Graduate Students
The Ohio State University
Columbus, OH

2014-2015...........................................Chair, Graduate Compensations and Benefits Committee
University Senate, The Ohio State University
Columbus, OH

Field of Study

Major Field………………..Arts Policy and Administration
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Preface

“You know you’re in a great place when your surrounded by all different sorts of people but still feel like you belong” -Cynthia Nitikin, Project for Public Spaces, 2013

The “creative class,” is a phrase that first hit the popular vocabulary in Richard Florida’s now famous The Rise of the Creative Class: And How it's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life (2002). Create the right environment, and your city can attract and soon be overflowing with creative professionals - the kind that appreciate and bring art, beauty, fashion, intellect, and money (this last factor being an extremely important element) to help bolster sagging local economies. This class... where do they originate? They are nearly all college educated and, while some work in very clearly defined arts based disciplines, basically anyone who uses their mind in a creative manner can lay claim to being a valuable part of the equation.

I’d been out of academia for awhile by the time this creative class theory drew my attention. I can’t say exactly where I first heard of it, but having moved to the rapidly evolving capital city of Columbus, Ohio, I’m certain it was in relation to the local downtown revitalization efforts at the time. I personally wasn’t always completely enamored with the changes to the environment I saw around me since, in some cases, districts I have previously enjoyed for the culture and diversity appeared to be shifting to
a new service model of luxury retail and entertainment. I waited to pass judgement, but kept my eyes and ears open to the ever quickening pace of changes in the city around me.

And there certainly has been an enormous amount of physical and cultural change over the numerous districts proximate to the downtown area of Columbus in just eight short years since my arrival. One thing that I have carefully noticed throughout this evolution is the language of Florida peppered throughout that process. Developments both private and public have been altering the fabric of city neighborhoods, and people and places seem to me to be less diverse and in more and more similar groupings. In the process some districts have been completely face lifted to the point of being nearly unrecognizable from recent history, while others continue to evolve and lay claim to being the next big thing in town.

One of my primary concerns as these developments occur in my periphery has been the fight for my own district to remain self organized and avoid the pitfalls of having the eye of development cast its gaze upon us. As the city has changed, my neighbors and I have noted a large amount of sameness to the formula being applied across the city. Build fast, build cheap, build condos... as many as humanly possible, you’d think, based on the steadiness in which they’ve arrived. The creative class needs to live somewhere, and the most profitable choice appears to be in glorified apartment living with a downtown view. Meanwhile real estate prices and rents rise, and artists and small time entrepreneurs are forced to relocate. There has not been much talk of what happens to the people and places that existed in these locations before policymakers created situations that may have caused this displacement. Are the decisions to promote cultural
areas and the types of investments happening within arts districts helping create more opportunities for arts and culture, or are they transforming areas that actually remove the kinds of communities that made them attractive in the first place, I wondered?
Chapter One: Introduction

Problem: The Parsons Project

This influx of development hit closest to home in the late winter of 2014. I live just outside of the district known as Olde Towne East (OTE), on the near east side of downtown Columbus (see Fig 1). This district is best known for older, architecturally interesting homes, a diverse mix of young professionals, small families, and older long term residents. Many are drawn to the neighborhood’s reputation for a gritty and unique flavor (if they weren’t already long time residents), or also as transplants from the nearby Columbus College of Art and Design. It became nationally notable via 2003’s documentary Flag Wars, which followed residents for 4 years as an influx of gay professionals entered the neighborhood and began gentrifying it. Regrettably, housing code violations were used at the time to remove minorities from this historically black district due to inability to maintain the upkeep on their homes. The very public criticism of this activity seems to have had a positive effect on the community, however, and it was able to retain its diversity as a result of self reflection and efforts by various community organizations.

The latest development in question surrounded a push for rezoning of a large parcel of land in prime real estate along the small, but vibrant commercial strip in the
district. This area runs along Parsons Avenue from Bryden Road on the south to Broad Street (Rt 62) at the north end. (Fig 2) This retail and arts corridor is marked by several small galleries, restaurants, shops for coffee, wine, beer, and tobacco pipes, a barber, and several art producing studios. In effect, it is its own small naturally occurring arts district that has grown through the sweat and labor of a few dedicated entrepreneurs.

The conflict was simple. The local neighborhood association had worked with the city previously to craft a neighborhood plan for the district in 2005, shortly after Flag Wars brought to light many of the equity issues at play (the planning committee even included a member of the community that was prominent player in the film, a local African American artist and gallery owner). This plan made a point to encourage further investment in retail along Parsons and any new development needed to fit in with existing architecture. The developer’s plan, however, called to build a highly dense grouping of luxury style condos in a vacant lot on Parsons(see figure 2), at a height much taller than the rest of the district, with architecture that the neighborhood did not feel meshed well with existing forms, and it also sought to change the zoning from mixed use to solely residential. An added sticking point was that the Ohio Department of Transportation currently has plans to demolish two businesses on the west side of Parsons across from the development in 2016 and reroute the street to a new frontage artery being built along Interstate 71, effectively cutting off the retail section from speedy traffic and possibly resulting in a more walkable, pleasant retail strip,

In order to try to work with the developer, many residents (myself included) began to work on a grassroots level plan to affect change. We spoke at neighborhood
association meetings, area commission meetings with the developer, and eventually in two public meetings with the Columbus Board of Zoning which were both standing room only. One local entrepreneur and artist took it upon himself to call for residents of the district to meet on the street for a group photo of those in opposition to the plan, and well over a hundred showed.

The result? Despite having a plan that residents had worked with the city to craft in 2005 making it clear what was expected for this commercial strip of land, specifically calling for an increase in retail space, and with massive public outcry and long public hearings, the Board of Zoning unanimously voted in favor of the developer. Arguments by the developer that luxury condos would actually bring more business to the area, even

![Figure 1: Map of Olde Towne East and Downtown Columbus (Google Maps)](image)
if the project would lack its own retail space at the ground level, appeared to be more influential than the communities arguments. The rental price point alone was nearly double compared to the average of the surrounding area, yet the Zoning Board appeared to be swayed by the possibility of economic growth over strong community input in opposition.

The entire neighborhood was crestfallen. It seemed that deep pockets and political connections had won the day, and the area would go the way of other more commercial areas surrounding downtown, losing its culture and spirit in favor of a generic formula for attracting creative young professionals. [I’m happy to report that the lot in question remains vacant to this day. The developer seems to not have ultimately had the capital to produce the desired product. However, the zoning was changed in favor of what the developer initially wanted, so now any other investor could feasibly come along and build anything they like within those parameters with zero public input.]
Being intimately involved in this process and having paid attention to other such small and large developments across the central city, my interest was piqued in the methodology that had been used to push for this project; the lack of influence the local citizens ultimately had over their own neighborhood; and how selectively the city itself uses creative class arguments when it suits the project. Neighborhood friendships and networks have always been a vital part of my own growth as an artist and individual, and I didn’t want to see such a flourishing area as OTE be torn asunder by possible future outside investors interested only in maximizing profits in the current district du jour. I began to study city planning more closely, and juxtaposed against current trends in arts administration, I found I had many questions left unresolved.
Research Interest

Ultimately, these questions led me to research cultural district advocacy in greater detail and also sparked an interest in what arts councils are doing in the realm of neighborhood development; how their efforts may fail or succeed for the communities they serve based on their understanding of the trappings of city planning vs the historical use of arts councils as granting organizations for artists and the high arts, generally. Arguments founded upon creative class theories seem to have deeply injected themselves into arts policy, and it was unclear to me if this was helping or hurting populations that weren’t powerful enough to fight the tide.

However, since The Rise of the Creative Class was published, Florida has certainly undergone a great deal of scrutiny and criticism. One recent article, How the Rise of the "Creative Class" Is Actually Screwing Creative Americans states “the theory of creative class has fueled rapid gentrification and inequality, and created a widening chasm between the worlds of the so-called "creative class" and that of the service sector. Rather than the two worlds being intertwined and fueling one another, there now exists a tremendous gulf between the two, one that threatens healthy urban growth as well as creative potential.” (Kustanczy, 2015) If this statement is true, than many major recent decisions in strategic planning and granting activity by arts councils may have actually helped to achieve the exact opposite effect desired, possibly pushing artists out of neighborhoods where they produced the product that gave the districts uniqueness in the first place.
Gentrification displacing artists has always been an issue, even in places known to be cultural capitals, like New York City. Areas such as Soho are well used examples of how artists help to revitalize formerly industrial areas, but then must compete against investors for the right to remain as rental prices skyrocket in conjunction with popularity. In the December 4, 1978 issue of the New Yorker, a comic by artist Everett Opie shows a potter at the wheel while his wife is packed and apparently leaving for good. The caption reads “I’m leaving you Howard. I’ve followed you from the West Village to the East Village to SoHo to NoBo to BeloHo, -but Hoboken is too much.” In a strange coincidence of art surpassing reality, in the same article cited above, Kustanczy’s interviewee, Scott Timberg, while criticizing the results of supporting Floridian theories, remarks: “The fact people like me can't afford to live in Hoboken, New Jersey, anymore is nuts — it wasn't all that long ago it was affordable; now you have hedge fund guys buying it.” It seems almost as if artists and creative entrepreneurs have been forced into the role of nomads or share croppers; as soon as they blaze one path and stake claim to a new potential homeland, they are forced out by the railroad of investment capital.

Despite this known issue of displacement, and the continued criticism of Florida, a new version of economic and cultural development has taken hold in arts policy that addresses the desire for arts councils to be engaging creative communities and drawing attention for these areas as economic drivers for cities, Creative Placemaking (Markusen and Gadwa, 2010). This emerging theory on cultural development has assumed a place of influence at the highest level of arts policy, the National Endowment for the Arts. If economic impact and private development focused policies continue to steer the ship of
arts funders and cultural institutions, what will come of naturally occurring arts districts, artists, and the primarily middle class communities that support and nurture them?

Statement of Purpose

Therefore, this research seeks to investigate the role of arts councils (public funders) in activities surrounding the development, growth, and sustainability of natural, perceived, or planned arts districts (the public good). How local granting organizations encourage, market, and support their activities in the pursuit of creating or fostering communities of culture and arts has a very large effect on the actual producers of art, the historic first line of investment for these agencies. As public entities, such activities have serious possible outcomes for public good and are funded largely by public means, so arts councils need to be certain that the claims being made regarding the possible economic benefit of such activities are sound and well researched and that, at minimum, they are doing no harm.

This investigation will be accomplished first through a review of the literature surrounding decision making processes and theories of public advocacy, especially from the perspective of city planning. Understanding how knowledge and power impact public policy making shines a light on what agencies choose to label as important, and how short comings in these actions can lead to unintended consequences of inequity. Such issues are relevant to the discussion as artists and arts based communities are at the mercy of stronger forces due to either class based issues (as in naturally occurring cultural neighborhoods) or beholden to other policies agencies and funders (as in the subsidized high arts, often downtown centered institutions).
Next I will examine the literature surrounding arts policy in discussions of the nonprofit arts and urban revitalization, common arguments for the financial support of subsidized arts and culture, theories in development strategies in cities that affect cultural districts, forms of cultural districts and critical issues that affect their branding and possible gentrification, and finally, popular theories in creative class arguments that have dramatically increased the attention on cultural districts as possible economic redevelopment drivers. By investigating these issues, I hope to frame the current state of arts policy and prepare to use this information to study the way it is being used in various levels of arts organizations.

**Research question**

This research seeks to explore the following questions:

*Is the language arts councils are using to justify support of the arts (economic impact, creative class, etc) serving the development of sustainable arts and culture districts that support the needs of artists and communities (as many organizations claim), or are these arguments ultimately justification for economic development of cities that profit private entities and political purpose, possibly to the detriment of the artists and communities?*

To this end, I will explore how various levels of arts funding agencies use language, funding, and popular theories to drive decision making on their investment strategies and public policies, if the claims they make regarding cultural development and economic impact are sound, and what the possible impact on the communities they serve might be.
Methodology

The interpretive framework that best represents my philosophical assumptions is pragmatism, in which “the important aspect of research is the problem being studied and the questions asked about this problem. Pragmatist researchers look to the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of research based on its intended consequences—where they want to go with it [and] agree that research always occurs is social, political, or other contexts.” (Cresswell, 2007 p.28) This statement reflects back on my previous research questions nicely, and much of what will be investigated herein is reliant on the various different contexts in which policy is being practically applied at the time, and what the intended consequences are as a result. Pragmatists “will use multiple methods of data collection to best answer the research question, will employ multiple sources of data collection, will focus on the practical implications of the research and will emphasize the importance of conducting research that best addresses the research problem.” (Cresswell 2007, 28-9) Of particular concern to me are the practical implications of the research, as Cresswell mentions, since I seek to identify if key policies are resulting in equitable outcomes.

The most logical approach to inquiry under this framework and considering the questions and topic at hand is case study. Collective case study, specifically, where “one issue or concern is selected, but the inquirer selects multiple cases to illustrate the issue,” (Cresswell 2007, p.99) and “the question being asked is about a contemporary over which the investigator has little control,” (Yin, 1994 p.15) and “purposefully selects multiple cases to show different perspectives on the issue.” (Cresswell, 2007 p.99) My intention is to study the ways in which public arts funding agencies at the federal, state,
and local levels are choosing to promote cultural development strategies. An analysis of themes will take place after the collection of multiple forms of data, and ultimately interpreted to determine the meaning of what has been investigated and incite discussion of the lessons learned. (Cresswell, 2007)

**Significance to the field**

This research seeks to add to the available literature by improving the understanding of how public arts administrators, other public policy actors, and private entities (through isomorphic activity) have developed similar language and decision making processes when advocating for the strategic efforts to help revitalize urban environments though cultural development strategies. If public arts administrators, through efforts either intentional or not, have taken on characteristics of industries and political actors that do not serve to sustainably support the constituencies of public arts funding agencies (which is ultimately the entirety of the communities they serve), then they may not be acting in the public good. If this is so, then a shift may need to take place in arts policy, and new language will need to be developed that reframes the arguments for support of arts and culture that is more inclusive of the changing environments of cities, communities, and all classes of culture.
Chapter Two: Literature Review of Planning Advocacy Theory

In investigating how the strategic planning around creative districts affects people, places, and economies, it is first instructive to review the current dominant theories in public advocacy from the perspective of city planning theory. The history of planning itself is extremely useful in understanding the pitfalls and successes between theory and practice, as well as the inherent biases and, at times, fundamentally negative and/or racist ways in which planning has been implemented to keep one population under control of another. While planning has been used to improve and create efficiencies on the physical environment over time, and to attempt to remedy certain social or economic ills, it has not always resulted in positive outcomes. Policies such as “redlining” (the process of using zoning to corral minority cultures and reduce opportunities for entrepreneurship) or the allowance of restrictive covenants that keep minorities from legally purchasing property are just two such examples of shameful practices that were in use even in our very recent history.

For the purpose this research, however, I will look to keep the review of city planning to the major means of advocacy theories most often cited in the late 20th century until today, in order to align more closely with arts policy following the creation of the National Endowment for the Arts in 1965 and the emergence of the field of arts policy as a whole. Later, I will then review literature on how public arts administrators
utilize their role as advocates for cultural districts and how they interact with public policy similarly through their agencies to affect public good. In doing so, threads of similarities can be seen between the two that may be instructive on what is most useful.

The primary theories for advocacy in city planning fall into four general categories: Rational/Incremental, Advocacy/Equity, Communicative, and Sustainable Development.

**Rational Planning (including Incrementalism)**

As public planning has grown over the course of several centuries, it has had a difficult task to keep pace with the needs and desires of the population. Up until the late 1950s, the dominate theory in planning (and in much of public policy, for that matter) was that of rationality. Many of the issues at hand were large in scale: sewage systems, roadways, water/electric delivery, and generally managing the physical environment as populations grew and migrated across the continent rapidly. Philip Berke (2002) notes that “the early response by planners to these challenges was to embrace rationalism in the form of general systems theory and scientific method.” (p.23) He goes on to indicate that this ideally followed a linear model of strategy that began with goal setting, objective naming, information gathering on all alternatives and possibilities, and finally selection of a limited number of possible strategies that maximized goal achievement at the smallest public cost. However, as nicely couched as this method would appear on the surface, Burke claims it really only was valuable in few instances, such a large scale transportation efforts, and ultimately never was realized as fully useful because it often
existed outside of the political process, which, once engaged, often changed much of what was intended by planners due to pressures outside of the rational decision process.

Pure rationality is the assumption that you are working from a position of perfect knowledge and with expected perfect outcomes. In Charles Lindblom’s classic article on public policy *The Science of “Muddling Through”* (1955) he states, “although such an approach can be described, it cannot be practiced except for relatively simple problems and even then only in a somewhat modified form.” (p. 80) Time and money are finite in the public realm, and political or legal restrictions limit the extent to which policy makers can expend energies, therefore the actual form of rational planning that takes place most often is a more pragmatic, or incremental, one.

Lindblom almost joking points out that, while the rational model of planning is often taught in academic institutions, “public administrators who handle complex decisions [are] in the position of practicing what few preach.” (p. 80) What might be taught in academia regarding public policy, and even what may look to the outside world as a very rational, scientific method, is actually in practice nearly impossible to recreate as such, and instead is quite messy. Planners, politicians, every stakeholder involved in the process along the way has differing value systems, and even in simple matters or very specific objectives “there remains considerable room for disagreement.” (Lindblom, 1955 p.81) As such, “administrators often are reduced to deciding policy without clarifying objectives first.” (Lindblom, 1955 p.82) He goes on to argue that the policy with the broadest public support will most likely win out, and there is not enough time in the day for a busy planner to dissect every possible permutation to discover the most efficient
choice, so ultimately the practice of “muddling through” takes place. Planners will often land on the policy that most closely resembles what is already taking place. There is little room for major shifts in the political atmosphere of planning activities, and many planning agencies are inherently weak in political capital.

Another concern with rational planning is the relationship between power and rational models. A key component of the decision making process is the data, or knowledge, from which one is basing the policy goals. In *Bringing Power to Planning Research*, Bent Flyvbjerg describes the conflict between what is seen as equitable and who controls access to the knowledge that ultimately will decide direction. In the case he studies, an attempt to redesign a downtown retail corridor of a Scandinavian city to make it more user friendly to public modes of transport faced many roadblocks because those with the most power (in this case, the Chamber of Commerce), decided what knowledge mattered in order to protect their business interests. In Flyvbjerg’s words: “I have seen knowledge being marginalized by power and power producing the knowledge that serves it purposes best. I concluded that the knowledge about the phenomena that decide whether economic, social, geographic, or other knowledge gets to count as important is at least as important as the knowledge itself.” (p. 294) He later finds that there is a “blind spot” in the relationship between rational models and power and that while the assumption is that “power is brought to bear on a problem...after we are knowledgable about it... in reality however, power often ignores or designs knowledge at its convenience.” (p.294) While rational incrementalism has been acknowledged and studied in the time since Lindblom identified it, the relationship between rationality and
power remains asymmetrical, with powering having “a clear tendency to dominate rationality in the dynamic and overlapping relationship between the two.” (Flyvbjerg, 2002 p. 305) One of the most important actions, Flyvbjerg argues, is who is considered a stakeholder in the first place, and allowed to participate in the decision making, as this by itself is a highly charged political act, and governments should be proactive in making sure that motivations are open and actions democratic in determining those able to have a seat at the table.

What is significant to note here for arts administrators is that the rational model, despite its flaws, remains a dominant force in policy making. While public agencies in the arts may attempt to merge their own goals with those of other proximate agencies, or even the private sector, they need to be cognizant of the weaknesses that may exist in the strategic goals of these other actors, and investigate the processes by which determinations have been arrived (as well as the trappings of this mode of advocacy, in order to avoid operating in such a manner in-house). While collaborations are often seen as a positive amongst governmental agencies, do the actual value judgements align and are the outcomes sought truly indicative of the stakeholders the different organizations represent? Who has contributed or controlled the knowledge bases that were used to arrive at the specific objectives, and have democratic, open procedures been use to include those communities that will be acted upon by the policies devised? In order to ensure that arts administrators are representing their respective constituencies, they need to be prepared to both question the process in which cities are arriving at goals for their communities, their own internal methodology, and also educate themselves to be
prepared to contribute to the conversation in a productive and well researched manner from multiple perspectives.

**Advocacy and Equity Models of Planning**

A second theory of planning centers around planners not only becoming more aware of these concerns inherent in the rational model, but attacking them head on. Paul Davidoff’s *Advocacy and Pluralism in Planning* (1965) is likely the best know article on this subject. Written at a time when social justice was an increasingly important part of the American psyche (and, notably, the same year as the formation of the NEA), Davidoff makes it clear that as social and political values become more liberal, populations will also become more urban in the future, and the planners role cannot solely be that of a technician any longer. They must be willing to directly address their own inherent biases that can not be separated from those decisions made in the course of their work.

“Appropriate planning action cannot be prescribed from a position of value neutrality, for prescriptions are based on desired objectives” and “values are inescapable elements of any rational decision making process,” so “values held by the planner should be made clear.” (Davidoff, 1965 p.331)

Not only should their values be evident, but planners ought to also be able to advocate on behalf of many plans, engage in the political process, and encourage other plans from other (possibly opposing) public agencies. “The right course of action is always a matter of choice, never of fact,” (p. 332) he continues, and planners have been put in the precarious position of being all things to for all people as the primary agency charged with creation of unitary plans for communities that are themselves extremely
diverse. Having not the expertise or time to possibly cover every angle of differing views, planners should work to encourage greater participation in the process and alternative options from other interests groups, and be prepared to defend their own or those of populations that do not have the power to represent themselves. In this manner, planning agencies would have to ultimately produce a high quality product, operating under the assumption that others would be expected to bring competing plans from additional perspectives. Conversely, this also places responsibility on other such actors (that may have been critical of planning departments) to “put their money where their mouth is,” so to speak, and produce a better option if they think they can.

But in Davidoff’s mind, planners also have a responsibility to educate themselves outside of their own area of study to a greater detail, and he calls upon educational institutions to expand courses in liberal arts and for planners to become more holistic in their knowledge of the social and economic needs of the city. He concludes, “as a profession charged with making urban life more beautiful, exciting, and creative, and more just, we have had little to say. Our task is to train a future generation of planners to go well beyond us in all its ability to prescribe to the future of urban life.” (p.337)

A further parsing of advocacy planning can be seen in the well documented cases of Norman Krumholz in Cleveland, Ohio. In the late 60s through the late 70s, Krumholz’s planning department recognized that minority communities were being exploited. Communities that were not able to adequately organize themselves and the political climate in general was too weak to effectively influence change due to severe socio-economic inequities. Through several case studies in *A Retrospective View of*
Equity Planning (Krumholz, 1982), he cites professional behavior, good communication, and much effort in the realm of consensus building as the means to their success. However, he even doubts himself that the activist, risk taking, and more redistributive characteristics of his agency at the time had any serious effect on the planning profession. He argues that most planners are bureaucratic, middle class, operate narrowly, continue to rely on incrementalism, and seek status and secure careers over risk taking with unpopular decisions. However, he arrives at 8 conclusions that are possibly useful to not only the world of planning buy any public policy realm:

(The following list is a summary of Krumholtz, 1982 p.173-173)

1. Advocacy or Equity Planning is a means to addressing root causes of the ills in American cities, poverty and segregation. The problems in cities are not primarily physical, but social.

2. Planning has been too timid as a profession and will never know how much can be done until they further evolve.

3. Clearly defined goals are the key to activist roles.

4. Equity planning objectives requires planners not just give lip service to good data, but that they make it a priority.

5. Effective planning in this role requires long term investment of time and energy.

6. Recommendations must be taken outside of the planning agency into the political and public realm for scrutiny.

7. Agencies that commit to an activist role, and support their staff, will never wont for lack of high quality applicants.
8. The planner must have hope that change can happen and that their contribution matters.

While Krumholz may not have considered his agency’s contribution to the field to be overly significant, I find these conclusions to be powerful and transferable to arts organizations. One that is especially intriguing, is the notion that an agency that takes risks might also reap the rewards of attracting a higher quality of similarly thinking employee.

However, there are some added critiques of the advocacy models that also must be considered. Despite the fact that Davidoff’s model actually argued for pluralistic planning, according to June Manning Thomas, “advocacy planning soon came to suggest planning for the powerless” and “disenchantment with citizen participation grew” as “middle class populations were adept at using participation as a way to protect their own interests.” (Thomas, 2012 pgs. 370, 374) “For practical reasons, advocacy planning did not always work for lack of a permanent organizational vehicle and lack of funding, as well as other problems of implementation.” (Thomas, 2012 p.375). Pierre Clavel (2007) parses this further, arguing that both elite structures of power and grassroots organizations are now highly fluid in nature and difficult to pin down with regularity, while the business elite has found stronger means of influence simply by redistribution of capital.

In order to be effective, he argues, planners must be aware of changes in group identity, as well as helping groups to formulate and understand their own identities. This involves studying “the basic self identification of communities…the processes by which these identification change...[studying] the local economy through more technical processes…
[and looking] honestly at the information available from interviews showing where the community stands with regard to the technical work of planning.” (Clavel, 2007 p. 148)

Perhaps due to the proximity in time in which it was devised, near to the growth of the major push for arts support in the U.S., there is much in advocacy planning that feels as if it lives in the same world of arts policy. This will be discussed further in a future chapter, but based on the longer professionalized history of planning, its possible that there are valuable lessons to be learned here that can be related to arts administration activities today. While the term arts advocacy is often used in the field, it is important to recognize that there is no one community that can be advocated for en masse. And those that do exist are ever changing and must be studied regularly, from outside and within. Additionally, different forms of power and capital can be brought to bear by well organized groups that have greater experience at participation, but do not necessarily represent the ideal policy direction simply because they are influential.

**Communicative Planning**

In a third method, Judith Inness (1998) describes that in communicative planning “information gradually becomes imbedded in the understandings of the actors in the community, through processes in which the participant, including planners, create meaning. As the policy actors...communicate and agree on new issues and data, there actions change, often without any moment of conscious decision.” (p. 53) While a great deal of money may be spent on the demand by organizations to collect information, she argues, there are plenty of instances where policy makers simply ignored said information. This is easily done because most constituencies understand that even
experts disagree, and they do not begin with the same value premises (as discussed previously), so arguments often contain selective material, therefore nearly anything can be cast aside. “When information is most influential, it is also most invisible. That is it influences most when it is part of the policy participants’ assumptions and their problem definitions, which they rarely examine.” (p. 54) So, in this manner, information is used as a framing device that limits the options available, she contends, behaving more like a lens than as findings to be investigated.

The author continues that shared knowledge only occurs when there is much discussion about the meaning, accuracy, and implications of information (consensus building, as in equity planning). This can involve long term discussions with experts to present findings with all relevant stakeholders in attendance, and, while implications of information may change, consensus is a possibility. Citing several cases, she notes that in using the communicative planning model, “the policy result became a forgone conclusion in the process of formulating and agreeing on the information” as attitudes were changed simply from the process itself. (p. 58) And information can be delivered in more than just technical means, it can also be experiential, narrative, visual, or intuitive.

To evaluate if policy actors are adhering to a communicative model, there are several steps one should take, according to Innes (p.60):

1. All stakeholders must be at the table, equally informed, and equally empowered.

   Power differences from outside contexts may not influence who is able to speak.

2. The discussion must allow all claims or assumptions to be tested

3. Discussion carried on for good reasons (i.e. good arguments only)
4. Participants can test speakers claims by questioning

   a. Sincerity or honesty,
   b. Credentials or experience,
   c. Comprehension (no jargon),
   d. and Accuracy based on some method of verification, scientific or otherwise.

While this policy would seem to have some benefits, it appears overly wieldy and difficult to manage for any but the most highly functioning agencies on a regular basis. Despite its well intentioned methods, I question the ability to manage whether or not such claims as the equity concerns at the table are truly possible in most cases. Ultimately, “the communicative model offers no guidance on empowerment. If less powerful groups do not have the capacity to influence policy implementation after they leave the negotiating table, consensus based agreements may be altered and unfairly implemented to preserve the interests of those in power.” (Berke, 2002 p.25) And, use of this method can actually serve the opposite purpose of ensuring affluent actors ways of life are preserved to the detriment of other less powerful.

As another option, John Forester (1996) claims that consensus is better built by the use of mediated negotiation. He argues that this is the most effective means by explaining “we facilitate a dialogue to promote understanding. We moderate a debate to assess the stronger argument. But we mediate a negotiation in order to avoid a lose-lose, tragedy of the commons like trap, and agree upon action together.” (p.211) While I agree with Innes’s description of the power, or lack thereof, of technical information, and the importance of acceptance of varying kind of non technical data to the conversation, I see
Forester’s use of mediation more useful in planning activities that may include neighborhood development, where stakeholders may hold greatly varying levels of influence and citizens may be suspicious of intentions.

**Sustainable Development**

A final area of planning theory that can be influential is based upon criticism of the previous three. Philip R. Burke in *Does Sustainable Planning Offer a New Direction for the Future?* (2002) summarizes previous models lack of results by arguing “the contemporary political culture of American communities is dominated by fragmentation and gridlock. Local people have the power to stop actions but give little attention to solving problems, especially problems that extend beyond borders of individual neighborhoods. Although the intent of participation is to serve a civic purpose, the efforts often fail because of parochialism and lack of a holistic and inclusive view that embraces the civic vision for the common good. Local planning is well situated to help reform self serving unsustainable behavior because it represents the the local part of thinking globally and acting locally.” (p. 25)

The goal of sustainable development, according to Burke, is equality and fairness from generation to generation. This first step involves the ability of the system to reproduce (or, revitalize) repeatedly over time while maintaining the health of the socio-economic environment. Planners and communities must work together to “foresee and shape the scope and character of future development, identify existing and emerging needs, fashion new or amend existing plans and policies to ensure that those needs will be met and that communities will be able to continuously reproduce and revitalize
themselves.” (Burke, 2002 p.31) An additional critical part of this process is long term monitoring and evaluation to determine if policies, projects and management is working.

A second important element is that of balance. This involves the exploration of values; economic, social, spatial, or otherwise. Burkes cites an example of having residents draw out the map of their neighborhood, paying particular attention to those things that gave their area identity, and finding that these areas of shared public image were often agreed upon.

The third and final component is linking local to global concerns. He posits that “communities that achieve and retain improvements in quality of life must not diminish the quality of life in other communities, now and in the future. [Communities must] reach beyond their individual interests in future development to account for global (and regional) needs.” (p.32) Communities must minimize the extent to which they allow government and individuals externalize socio-economic and environmental costs to the detriment of others. Burke ultimately concludes that this framework of sustainable development can change the practice of narrow special interests from controlling local participation to a model of greater inclusiveness.

The Right to the City

These models of planning theory all share a similar purpose. To operate in the most effective manner (even if in practice they aren’t equally successful) and with the inherent desire towards fairness. “To do so, we need to move beyond existing models of collaborative planning [i.e. advocacy planning], or communicative action, with their
emphasis on rational discourse among stakeholders, to a model with more transformative potential.” (Sandercock, 2000 p. 206)

Ultimately, “the question of what kind of city we want cannot be divorced from the question of what kind of people we want to be, what kind of social relations we seek, what relations to nature we cherish, what life style we desire, what aesthetic values we hold. The right to the city is, therefore, far more than a right of the individual or group access to the resources that the city embodies: it is a right to change and reinvent the city more after our hearts’ desire. It is moreover a collective rather than an individual right, since reinventing the city inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power over the processes of urbanization. The freedom to make and remake ourselves and our cities is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights. How best then to exercise that right?” (Harvey, 2012 p.4)
Chapter Three: Literature Review of Arts Policy Theories of Cultural Communities

Having considered how decisions are made in the course of city planning, and public policy in general, it is now instructive to review what arts administrators and other actors see as the definitions of creative and cultural communities, how economic impact arguments of the creative sector are used in tandem with urban revitalization efforts, and the ways in which they seek to grow, foster, and maintain such districts through their efforts.

Nonprofit arts and urban revitalization

As national and local economies have struggled with recession and reinvention in recent years, much pressure has been levied on these cultural districts to help carry some of the burden associated with reinvigorating depressed economies. “Not every city can be home to a concentration of a commercial entertainment industry. But every city can, and is, home to a particular mix of creative industries and cultural heritages. In other words, each local creative economy can become ‘a culture of cultures’” (Wyzomirski, 2008 p.200) As cities look to draw from this cultural capital, how do public arts funders and the organizations they support effect change in the urban environment and neighborhoods in which they live, work, and interact?

In Converting Pork to Porcelain (2002) Elizabeth Strom notes the symbiotic nature inherent between cities attempting to attract business and professionals in order to
improve downtown economies, and the needs of the cultural institutions that are often located in downtown corridors. The “cultural building boom” she claims, is the merging of three trends: supporting the development of cultural institutions “to attract businesses with quality of life amenities,” the need of these same cultural institutions “to seek broader audiences and exploit more commercial, income generating strategies” for their own economic purposes, and the fact that these goals are now closer within grasp because “the boundaries between high culture...and popular culture have blurred.” (Strom, 2002 p. 6) In this sense, public arts funders may, to some degree, be allowing the tail to wag the dog by working heavily on economic impact based arguments in order to grow largely downtown corridors so the institutions they support will gain some financial and workforce relief, and the funders, in turn, will have a larger tax base from which to appropriate greater budgets.

She goes on to note previous negative gentrification efforts surrounding the high arts (as in the development of Lincoln Center displacing poor residents) were still primarily focused only on the built environment, not driven by the larger economic growth factors that could be derived from cultural investment. Today’s cities are in competition from a workforce that are willing to move based solely on cultural attractions, she argues, rather than specific employment opportunities, while taxes may be less of a concern for residents over the possibility of large scale cultural institutions and entertainment options, and marketing and branding efforts have seized upon this notion to attract tourism. “They seek to remake the city, or at least the most visible part of the city, to conform to the expectations of the affluent consumers they want to attract” and “the
arts compromise a wealth generating economic sector, one in which urban areas retain a competitive advantage.” (Strom 2002, p.7) Existing in this more competitive, tourism and economic magnetism based environment “in which entrepreneurship and marketing are held to be the key to their survival, arts organizations have themselves been transformed.” (Strom 2002, p.9)

But why have arts funding agencies agreed to engage in these activities alongside the politically driven goals of other public agencies? Strom (2002) breaks this down into five motivating factors. The first is based upon the values of board members of arts organizations themselves. Often comprised in large percentages of the leaders of business and industry in a locale, these boards may see the use of arts organizations as a vehicle to attract and retain their own workforce, so attention must be paid to how organizational priorities are being steered based on the composition of board members. Secondly, arts organizations need their audiences to come to them, and they are unlikely to do so if the areas surrounding the service providers are seen as unsafe or are retail/cultural silos. Investment by developers in areas surrounding arts institutions can have an attractive spillover effect for these organizations, even if the ultimate composition of who may be likely to attend due to a change in the physical environment is a more elite population. Thirdly, cultural institutions rely heavily on tourism, and the perception of downtown areas as attractive and welcoming to outsiders has a great deal of influence on whether or not citizens will travel to the cultural providers, a similar argument to the preceding point. Fourth, a large pool of volunteers is often required to deliver service, so the likelihood that residential areas may be developed in proximity to institutions and the
eventual population size of the area comes into play as a sustainable necessity for them. And, finally, wealthy individuals often focus giving in hometowns...if a prominent local business was to fail due to downturns in the health of the local economy, the arts organization stands to lose out on valuable philanthropic giving.

By making these factors important in their decision making, and emphasizing their willingness to support local urban revitalization efforts, “arts administrators have been able to gain access to new [private] funding... sources that are more interested in urban revitalization than art.” (Strom, 2002 p. 11) Building off of Dimaggio and Powell’s (1983) discussion of isomorphism (the tendency for organizations working in tandem to take on the characteristics of the other), Strom argues that the “organizational field of cultural production and consumption can perhaps be expanded to include not just arts organizations and their funders but also the local officials who are involved in developing and marketing the city’s cultural offerings.” (Strom 2002 p.16) Arts funders and presenters taking on the characteristics of other political entities, private corporations, or powerful philanthropic givers, all of whom might be more concerned primarily with the branding of location for economic purposes, can have a troubling effect on their strategic goals and public service they offer.

Concerns about such a shift include the fact that efforts to attract visitors primarily for the purpose of privatized entertainment venues can be undemocratic, the redistribution of public wealth for such a purpose can short change the actual urban residents whose tax dollars are in play, and cultural institutions, as subsidized non profit entities, could never actually prove a profitable return on investment if a cost benefit
analysis was to be undertaken. And, Strom goes on to point out that these activities can create large shifts in the purposes of cultural institutions, as attention drifts to fundraising for large scale physical building of space may be to the detriment of programing, education services, or scholarship, and to the neglect of smaller organizations that are less able to compete. In discussing the changing nature of *Cultural Capital* (1999), economist David Throsby points out that such “neglect of cultural capital by allowing heritage to deteriorate, by failing to sustain the cultural values that provide people with a sense of identity, and by not undertaking the investment needed to maintain our stock of intangible [emphasis added] cultural capital, we likewise cause cultural systems to break down, with consequent loss of welfare and economic output.” (p. 9)

**Economic impact and subsidized arts**

The notion that arts and cultural institutions can have economic impacts on communities stems primarily from the National Endowment for the Arts advocacy for establishment of local cultural policies. “Federal support for developing the capacity to use economic impact of the arts information and arguments was a key component of the local advocacy activity” in the late 70s into the 80s. (Wyzomirski, 2008 p.201) This justification was most often explained by an economic multiplier that estimated impact, primarily confined to large nonprofit cultural institutions, and impact studies themselves were then most often used to argue for further funding of said organizations in a kind of economic feedback loop. (Wyzomirski, 2008) In addition, Wyzomirski points out that these impacts studies often had no use in the larger realm of public policy, nor were they often used by funding agencies to make decisions on sponsorship. She argues that now a
consensus is building that includes the for-profit commercial industries combined with the historically subsidized non profit cultural industries in the public policy realm as one industry.

However, whether or not the subsidized arts should be included in this definition of the creative industries is questionable from a public policy perspective, especially when funding agencies look to prioritize goals. In *The Arts and Urban Revitalization* (2008), Ruth Ann Stewart notes that while the subsidized arts can play a critical role, they are not themselves positioned to be “engines of urban revitalization.” According to her, this is due to a number of factors: one, nonprofits typically have few employees and modest salary levels; two, in many cases the good and services these organizations pay leave the city in which they were generated (i.e. touring shows/performers, traveling exhibitions, etc); three, they are by their nature a subsidized business and, four, as a nonprofit they are not returning the investment via taxable income back into the systems that feed it. Creative for-profit industries are nearly an exact opposite model, so policy decisions that combine these two industries into one with the assumption that their goals are the same because they may share similar presentation, could be very misguided.

Agreeing with Strom’s (2002) earlier findings, Stewart also recognizes that the use of an arts multiplier and continued arguments of economic impact may not only be wrong headed, but also may not serve the constituencies arts funders most need to address. “Arts advocates are urged to deemphasize the direct, indirect, and induced economic activity in favor of the more qualitative values unique to the creative process. Relieved of weighty economic expectations and appropriately embedded in the larger
strategic vision, arts can then play a central role in a city’s revitalization plan.” (Stewart, 2008 p.115) “Artists are also making the case that if they are to survive and flourish in the city, their needs for affordable and appropriate live/work space, beneficial zoning laws, tax incentives, health benefits, access to suppliers, distributors, markets, and audiences must be recognized as core elements of revitalization efforts.” (Stewart, 2008 p.120)

In other words, arts funders and institutions need to look closer to home, at the producers and audiences they ought to be supporting first, and creating an environment that allows these populations to flourish and grow, and that this in turn will create the natural draw that will spur revitalization. The subsidized arts provide social capital, but are not economic engines. “Artists and arts businesses do, however have the ability to enhance local economies and transform neighborhoods, but not without regulatory practices to address market forces that have the potential to strip cities both of their creative infrastructure and of the middle class families who prize urban life and are the backbone of arts audiences.” (Stewart 2008, 125) “City officials and the arts community... have a major public policy challenge: to dispel the perception...that arts based revitalization is class bound and only for elites. It’s the government’s role to play the honest broker and represent the public interest even in matters of beauty and art.” (Stewart, 2008 p. 126)

**Intrinsic benefits of the arts**

In other words, the true economic impact of the arts for communities is intrinsic, not instrumental, one of the key problems with current policy approach as discussed in
Gifts of the Muse (McCarthy, Ondaatje, Zakaras, Brooks, 2005). The authors recognize that, as touched on earlier, instrumental arguments tend to be weak, lack specificity, and do not consider opportunity costs. In addition, the flip side of the coin is that “intrinsic benefits are the principle reason individuals participate in the arts, and the intrinsic effects can produce public benefits of their own.” (McCarthy et al, 2005 p.68) Current arguments for funding rely on the notion that the purpose of public funding is to support the nonprofit (typically high) arts. This supply side argument can be seen as inequitable as the tax revenue used to fund it is collected by all, but the usage generally skews to the more affluent populations.

The authors point out that the important factor is instead building demand for the arts based on the inherently intrinsic properties of cultural enrichment. A broader view of the arts is required, in their opinion; one that recognizes that the arts can positively benefit people and communities in ways that are private and personal, that are both instrumental and intrinsic, and produce a range of benefits to the public as a whole. (McCarthy et al, 2005). Furthermore, in order to realize these benefits, arts involvement must be sustainable. Factors they cite that are critical to this process are gateway experiences that allow people to immediately benefit from the arts, the quality of the arts experiences, and the individual’s transformation from a passing participant to active involvement.

Based upon these recommendations, the authors suggest that policy should be geared to creating more opportunities for people to experience art based on the notion that it is a public good, rather than an economic driver. Individuals are not moved by
arguments regarding the health of the nonprofit arts sector, but rather are motivated to support the arts based on the quality of the actual arts experience itself. Finally, the authors recommend the arts community “develop language for discussing the intrinsic benefits [of the arts], address the limitations of the research on instrumental benefits, promote early exposure [particularly community based programming, and] create circumstances for rewarding arts experience.” (McCarthy et al, 2005 p. 72-73)

The overall growing criticism of the very rational economic impact arguments to justify public support of the arts seems to be creating a new, more sustainable and equity based view of arts planning, and new ways of thinking about how arts and cultural organizations can positively deliver public good. But have other policy actors followed in course, and how do broader views and policies on what makes a “cultural district” affect the communities of citizens and artists in the city?

**Cultural districts and development strategies**

While arts administrators and the academy have begun to acknowledge the need for a change in the basic arguments for support of arts and culture, other municipal governance bodies still are operating from a rational perspective that continues to use primarily economically driven policies. In *Cultural Development Strategies and Urban Revitalization* (2007), authors Grodach and Loukaitou–Sideris point out that global innovations, deindustrialization of cities, increasingly educated populations, and a growth in the service industry, have made cities begin to look internally for means of economic generation. Cultural development strategies are one means of becoming more competitive regionally with other localities that may draw much needed human capital
away if they are seen as more progressive and interesting places to live and work. They group the three major strategies of development as Entrepreneurial, Creative Class, and Progressive (see Fig 4).

**Entrepreneurial Strategies** “all but eschew social goals in favor of enhancing economic growth.” (Grodach and Loukaitou–Sideris, 2007 p. 352) Local governments operating in this fashion cater to business with various economic incentives, tax rebates, and marketing the city as a playground for professionals. Cultural institutions and developments are used primarily for place branding and marketing, and lack any real focus from public officials on what their actual impact is on the local population. Building and investments primarily cater to the affluent or visitors, while the cost of major construction (such as arenas and stadiums) often is born by the tax payers. Critics

![Figure 4: Cultural Development Strategies (Grodach and Loukaitou–Sideris, 2007 p353)](image-url)
argue that this strategy is akin to selling off the city to the highest bidder. Meanwhile neighborhoods and cultural programs that do not tie directly into the economic benefit plans are not funded well, and cities are encouraged “to measure the success of cultural activities according to economic standards rather than wider public benefit.” (Grodach and Loukaitou-Sideris, 2007 p. 354)

*Creative Class* strategies cater directly to the kinds of cultural amenities needed to attract professionals in the “creative class.” “Cultural activities are the primary element of the creative city because they provide opportunities for consumption, leisure, and the means to reinforce the cosmopolitan identity of the creative class.” (Grodach and Loukaitou-Sideris, 2007 p. 354) The thought process here is that economic benefits will trickle down to the service industries, which primarily benefits an elite class. And, although diversity, environmental cleanliness, and arts access are central to this strategy, the desired outcome is ultimately to create a experiential environment that suits the creative class standard of life. Gentrification and displacement of lower class populations are typical negative externalities associated with this model.

*Progressive Strategies*, conversely, focus on the broader public good, measured in socio-economic equality, standards of living, and citizen participation. “Progressive cultural strategies seek to widen access to participation in the arts, support local cultural production, and utilize the arts to strengthen community identity and to revitalize disadvantaged neighborhoods.” (Grodach and Loukaitou-Sideris, 2007 p.355)
In a survey of 29 major US cities, the authors find that the dominate strategy is actually an entrepreneurial one. Cities favor the less complex model of centrality of cultural offerings over the support of neighborhood communities, have an emphasis on large facilities and events over smaller community based efforts, economic goals trump social with access to the arts being a low priority, and though large flagship developments were reported in many cities, even then it was acknowledged that their ability to encourage investment or revitalization was questionable. (Grodach and Loukaitou-Sideris, 2007) Overall, economic priorities dominated in cities with cultural development strategies, progressive strategies were marginalized, and creative class strategies were only most evident in cities already highly associated with this specific population (i.e. Portland, for example).

In Community and Nostalgia in Urban Revitalisation: a critique of urban village and creative class strategies as remedies for social ‘problems’ (2006) the authors reflect on entrepreneurial strategies of development further, “This reconfiguration of the state in the city masks a deeper moral imperative underpinning the entrepreneurial turn in planning: one that downplays citizenship and collective identities, and in turn emphasizes capitalist ideologies, encourages people to become entrepreneurial, commercially minded subjects, and which promotes private-sector solutions to social problems...rather than prioritizing the well-being of residents, entrepreneurial policies recast cities as players in attracting highly mobile capital.” (Barnes, Waitt, Gill, and Gibson, 2006 p. 337) “Entrepreneurial urban policies often contradict notions of place and identity stemming
from working-class consciousness and fail to value cultural diversity.” (Barnes et al, 2006 p. 338)

**Natural cultural districts**

In *The Evolution of Arts and Cultural Districts* (2008) Ann M Galligan acknowledges a difference of definitions of what exactly classifies as a cultural district: the easily recognizable and usually centrally located first wave districts (with sub division such as high arts based, entertainment based, and/or improvement districts), or the more neighborhood based, self directed second wave district (individual artists, small business, no large cultural anchors). Another way of labeling these second wave districts is as “‘natural’ cultural districts-geographically defined networks created by the presence of a density of cultural assets in a particular neighborhood... that sets it apart... [as] a spur of cultural production.” (Stern and Seifert, 2007 p.1)

According to Stern and Seifert, these naturally occurring districts must be cultivated. Consumers of arts and culture are now “omnivorous,” with little concern of the differences between high and popular culture. While the health of the arts sector has previously always been linked to the health of nonprofit organizations, these “informal” arts sectors are now equally as important in their cultural neighborhoods as are the high arts in their institutional clusters. These natural cultural districts are also most often ethnically, economically, and domestically diverse, in fact, the more categories of diversity, the higher the density of cultural assets are present. Cultural expression develops in these communities both as a product of cooperation and competition, something any performing artist that has been a part of a company can recognize. The
ecosystems of these natural districts also give them a level of sustainability likely not to exist in other planned developments. “Recognizing the importance of natural cultural districts to the metropolitan arts world turns our understanding of cultural planning and policy on its head. The goal of policy and planning should be to nurture grass-roots districts, remove impediments that prevent them from achieving their potential, and provide the resources they need to flourish. These self-organized districts are a gift to the city; we need policies to assure that the city take advantage of them.” (Stern and Seifert, 2007 p.5)

They continue by arguing that “the conflict between downtown and neighborhood development is a false choice. The link between business success and social inclusion is not simple philanthropy. Diversity breeds creativity. It is the success of the creative sector in crossing boundaries and overcoming historical patterns of social exclusion that provides its vitality. Inevitably, the search for economic success for the creative sector must pass through social engagement.” (p.10) Challenges to the sustainability of these districts are ultimately a lack of support and resources to remain sustainable and the possibility of external forces (such as developers with no ties to the neighborhood and operating from a perspective of reaping profits) gentrifying the area. The authors conclude that these self directed districts need cultivation and further research is required.

Marketing of cultural districts

Another area that requires further attention is the way in which cities market their cultural districts. Especially when considering these natural districts, policy makers must be more culturally sensitive in their branding and marketing for the purpose of attracting
outside visitors or investment. Public arts funding agencies often act as intermediaries between cultural districts and tourism, as cheerleaders for the city, and a pseudo media outlet for those looking for interesting arts and culture experience. They must resist the urge to frame these naturally occurring districts as another means of economic driver for their statistics. “Policy-makers should not simply be exploiting cultural resources as tools for achieving non-cultural goals, but should let their own mindsets and assumptions be transformed by contact with the rich and ever changing detail of local culture.” (Bianchini and Ghilardi, 2007 p.285) The authors “culturally sensitive approach” includes the following:

1. “Place branding and marketing should be more holistic, interdisciplinary and lateral,

2. Place branding and marketing should be more innovative, original and experimental. This suggests the need for an R&D approach, with a more extensive use of pilot projects, and greater consultation on the possible strategies to be developed,

3. Place branding and marketing should be more critical, challenging and questioning. The objective of these strategies should not be to construct a fake consensus by glossing over or denying the existence of real conflicts,

4. Place branding and marketing strategies should be more people-centered and humanistic, by celebrating and giving voice to the imagination and the desires of different individuals and communities of interest within the city.

5. Lastly, place branding and marketing should be more ‘cultured,’ knowledgeable, and critically aware of traditions of cultural expression, by being rooted
in research on the history, on the socio-economic realities, on the internal and external image, and on the cultural life and cultural representations of a particular locality.” (Bianchini and Ghilardi, 2007 p.285)

Such an approach echoes earlier calls for further sustainability for natural cultural districts and a separation from those “first wave” districts that may serve more as entertainment and tourism attractions.

Business improvement districts

One public policy that has become common across the country that arts administrators need to be wary of when it come to the marketing, branding, and interventions of a cultural district are business (or special) improvement districts. In The Mauling of Public Space (2004) Margaret Kohn weaves a cautionary tale of how cities are relinquishing their control over cultural areas to private quasi governmental agencies in exchange for a reduction in cost for infrastructure and security to the overseeing municipalities.

The shopping mall boom of the 80s created the semblance of public spaces in the mask of a retail consumption environment, becoming the dominant entertainment location for many citizens across the country. Meanwhile, the rights of private property actually control these spaces and citizens do not retain same civil rights they might otherwise in a public space, whether they recognize it or not. In many places where people congregate regularly “public sidewalks and streets are practically the only remaining available sites for unscripted political activity... the last domains where the opportunity to communicate is not something bought and sold... the only place that that
many Americans now encounter strangers is in the shopping mall. The most important public place is now private. And probably not by accident.” (Kohn, 2004 p. 273)

Moving on from the example of shopping malls, she then tackles the growing specter of the business improvement district, or BID. These areas are geographically connected sections of a city in which property owners are levied a tax or fee in exchange for additional sanitation, landscaping, or security services. These services are most often controlled by private, not public actors. They are attractive to local governments because they are a source of extra revenue, and to business owners because it allows them greater control over their environment. “With budgets in the tens of millions of dollars, these publicly regulated, private governments are reshaping the political landscape of downtown... in effect a centralized management structure that allows dispersed downtown retailers to imitate and incorporate successful elements of the mall.” (Kohn, 2004 p. 283) With the majority of their budgets dedicated to security, BIDs “can exercise far reaching governmental powers against individual property owners in order to transform an existing neighborhood into a ‘managed environment.’” (Kohn, 2004 p. 284)

These private organizations not only allow private business greater access and powers in the political process, but also are not subject to the same regulations as public actors (such as the police) in regards to constitutional rights. The author concludes that BIDS are not democratic by granting certain property owners more power over other citizens, do not have to adhere to civil liberties of residents, and exacerbate issues of inequality in exchange for branding certain areas of the city for policy makers. “It is not surprising that the wealthy and powerful would prefer to govern themselves without
interference from everyone else. What is surprising us that democracy is willing to let them.” (Kohn, 2004 p. 287)

These BIDs are becoming an increasingly familiar occurrence in the same areas often seen as arts and culture districts (as I will touch on in further detail in a later chapter). Arts administrators need to familiarize themselves with the pitfalls of such policy, and work with and for communities to help avoid such interventions whenever necessary, especially in naturally occurring neighborhood districts. Cultural institutions in downtown districts would also be wise to question the need for such private governance in areas that are often already heavily patrolled and serviced by other public agencies, such as police and infrastructure agencies. It’s true that BIDs offer to clean up the city in all a way that would seem to benefit the five motivation factors mentioned by Strom (2002) earlier (need for a safe environment to attract tourists, volunteers, etc), but arts and culture districts require the freedom that comes when they are not under the watchful eye of private security forces, too.

_Gentrification of cultural districts_

In _The life cycle of New York's creative districts: Reflections on the unanticipated consequences of unplanned cultural zones_ (2011), authors Zukin and Braslow weave a cautionary tale of how there are unintended consequences to naturally occurring districts that are not protected by sustainable advocacy and/or the addition of regulatory practices to guard the less powerful artists and middle class citizens that typically form them. They argue that the basis of much cultural policy cities have put forth over the past decade has been rooted in the creative class theories of Richard Florida (2002). “But the creative
class as Florida defines it embodies many of the tensions between using culture for both social inclusion and economic growth, for this key human component of cities’ new cultural policy includes bankers, lawyers, and engineers on the one hand and artists, writers, and musicians on the other.” (Zukin and Braslow, 2011 p.131) In opposition to Strom’s (2002) earlier claims, they argue “there is little evidence that members of the creative class migrate for amenities rather than jobs (Hansen & Niedomysl, 2009; Musterd & Murie, 2010), especially after they reach the age of thirty.” (Zukin and Braslow, 2011 p.132) Creative class policies are ultimately based on land values, as those who can afford to lay claims to place based on cultural amenities are in a position to displace those who do not have the financial means. “Spaces identified with taste communities like the creative class are closely connected with the ebb and flow of capital investment, government policies, media representations of spaces and lifestyles and, of course, the social and cultural formation of tastes. As a result, a district that begins by protecting space for creative producers risks becoming a space for creative consumers.” (Zukin and Braslow, 2011 p.132)

Artist, entrepreneurs and small business owners are the drivers that create the impression that an area is unique. “One artist living in a neighborhood may be regarded by neighbors as an eccentric character; fifty artists hanging out at an art gallery or a bar make the neighborhood’s reputation.” (Zukin and Braslow, 2011 p.136) Also critical is the way in which the media interjects itself and draws attention to these naturally occurring spaces, and this trend has only been exacerbated in the internet age. Blogging, social media announcements of popular informal arts activities, reviews of local cultural
entertainment, only help to speed up the process by which attention is drawn to the next
new, big thing, and capital investment is bound to take notice and act. The authors note
that the producers themselves help drive this press for the finding of the new. “The
intrinsic attractions of art and creativity are only one side of the picture. More important,
the necessary links between gritty artists’ districts and upscale residential neighborhoods
are provided, both intentionally and not, by the entrepreneurial activities of creative
producers, the media images of new styles of consumption that these entrepreneurs
enable, and the aggressive assertion of “difference” which becomes a building block of
‘distinction”’ (Zukin and Braslow, 2011 p.134)

Using the example of SoHo, the authors point out how a naturally occurring
district can be overtaken by more powerful forces. SoHo lacked protections that would
have enabled the cultural producers that evolved the area into an attractive cultural place
to remain when cultural consumers, in the form of more affluent elite class, began to
migrate into the district and increase property values that were not sustainable for the less
well off artists and bohemians. “The lack of explicit support for either forming or
maintaining creative districts strongly indicates that they are not the ultimate focus of
public officials’ concern. Instead, the object of their industrial and land use policy is to
prepare the ground for private sector real estate developers.” (Zukin and Braslow, 2011 p.
133)

Ultimately, the authors conclude “Local governments, artists, and researchers who
wish artists well should be wary of creative districts. Public officials, real estate
developers, professionals, and cultural producers have different stakes in the creative city
scenario. For the most part, *creative producers* are a low income group. Though their tastes are similar to those of some lawyers and media stars, their economic status is closer to that of workers and migrants. But the social construction of an artists’ community conflicts with the social reproduction of their low-income neighborhood, not least through the development of consumption spaces that cater to a higher-income taste community. Low rents and political freedom are what artists and workers need. Naturally occurring creative districts—and planned creative districts as well—must be committed to these goals if they are to support creative production in the long term.” (Zukin and Braslow, 2011 p.139)

*Creative Placemaking*

An additional theory of cultural community development has emerged on the heels of Florida in the past several years and has grown in popularity, mostly due to a large push for support form the National Endowment for the Arts. *Creative Placemaking* (2010), was commissioned “for The Mayors’ Institute on City Design, a leadership initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts in partnership with the United States Conference of Mayors and American Architectural Foundation.” (Markusen and Gadwa, 2010) This white paper had a large influence on future NEA investments, with a new program *Our Towns* implemented in 2011 based primarily on the information provided by the authors. (This specific NEA policy implementation will be investigated further in a following chapter)

The authors open up this brief with claims that are quite wide in their breadth of service and outcome, and I believe deserve to be read, at least in part, verbatim: “In
creative placemaking, partners from public, private, non-profit, and community sectors strategically shape the physical and social character of a neighborhood, town, city, or region around arts and cultural activities. Creative placemaking animates public and private spaces, rejuvenates structures and streetscapes, improves local business viability and public safety, and brings diverse people together to celebrate, inspire, and be inspired. In turn, these creative locales foster entrepreneurs and cultural industries that generate jobs and income, spin off new products and services, and attract and retain unrelated businesses and skilled workers. Together, creative placemakings’s livability and economic development outcomes have the potential to radically change the future of American towns and cities.” (Markusen and Gadwa, 2010 p.3)

In this opening statement, there are key buzzwords that point out the strategic direction of this policy likely falls within an entrepreneurial development strategy, one also likely to be widely accepted by the mayoral audience initially in attendance, as the literature previously studied has already indicated that the majority of US cities are pursuing such development efforts. (Grodach and Loukaitou-Sideris, 2007) The words indicate a focus on public/private partnerships that use creative activities in cultural neighborhoods to “improve local business and public safety...generate jobs and income...spin off new products and services...retain unrelated business and skilled workers...[to obtain] economic development outcomes.” (Markusen and Gadwa, 2010 p.iii) The basis of this theory appears to be almost wholly for the purpose of local economic development, drawing primarily from arts impact arguments previously discussed as
weak, and loosely repackaged in language that is highly reminiscent of creative class theories (Florida, 2002)

The authors argue that economic development is speeded up as localities are able to capture larger shares of local expenditures, on the assumption that the citizenry is not leaving to experience cultural activities elsewhere, but overlooking the possibility of increased tourism as the result and what populations are actually able to afford such arts appreciation. Many of the arguments are centered around driving the economy in downtowns to avoid losing income to suburbs, for instance, and identifying “artists and designers [as] an entrepreneurial asset ripe for development.” (Markusen and Gadwa, 2010 p.3)

They claim that the successful projects they cite “each has garnered private sector business support and buy-in” and that “this new sensibility aspires to make places attractive to entrepreneurs, skilled workers, and new and existing residents.” (Markusen and Gadwa, 2010 p.4-5) The authors use SoHo as an example of success (!) and use Time Square’s recent revitalization as an example of diversity, failing to dig deeper to discover that while “the [New York] City government has created special districts to protect cultural production in two districts [in Times Square,]...residential conversion of factory and office buildings for non-creative residents has steadily encroached—or been officially encouraged—despite the special designations.” (Zukin and Braslow, 2011 p. 133) Additional strange claims are made, such as “resident artists, often traversing the neighborhood at all hours, make the streets livelier and safer.” (Markusen and Gadwa, 2010 p.7) And, in opposition to Stewart (2008) openly argue “the arts and cultural sector
is the nation’s most under-rated economic engine, producing millions of well-paying jobs.” (Markusen and Gadwa, 2010 p.8) In warning of possible gentrification, the authors offer no real remedy, other than to suggest that creative pacemaking can happen too quickly, or low income residents “are sometimes at risk.” (p.17) The overriding theme is that collaboration with the private sector, including bankers and real estate developers, is meant to maximize the economic profit from the creative industries where they exist, in cultural districts, either planned or natural.

Possible most telling of all, after many pages of flowery claims of transformative and economic benefits for cities, the authors admit “it proved difficult to locate data that revealed the impact of creative placemaking on resident and business income, livability, and city government revenues and services... [and] while we were able to document the composition and sum of expenditures on a placemaking initiative, it proved more difficult to determine the costs and benefits of that initiative compared to other uses of the same human energy and financial resources.” (Markusen and Gadwa, 2010 p.23)

Even with so little data to back up the authors claims, and with admittedly old fashioned notions of economic impact dominating the paper, the NEA used this development strategy to jump start a new major granting program, Our Town, that is based primarily on creative placemaking, and no doubt has an influential effect on the state and local public arts councils that look to the federal granting organization for inspiration. It is this most recent development in arts policy that will play a critical role in the case studies I will investigate in the next chapter.
Summary of the literature

My thesis intends to look at the dominant arts and public policies that have direct effects on the cultural districts that so define the production of art and the livability of cities.

In these readings I have investigated theories in public policy advocacy, specifically from a city planning perspective, that have a great deal of effect on the successful outcomes of intended goals. The current most popular theories of advocacy are rational, communicative, advocacy/equity, and sustainability based. Juxtaposed against the readings in arts policy, we can see how many of the trends in cultural district development continue to make mistakes in equity by operating from a rational perceptive of economic impact arguments and tend to not address the overall sustainability of the communities that get acted upon, or the ultimate sustainability of the cultural environment. While these weaknesses do seem to be clearly understood by the academy, they are not necessarily being put to practical use in the field by public administrators in arts funding organizations. Pressures from political actors and the private sector have a large part to do with these trends, as they ultimately operate from a position of power and choose what knowledge matters. (Flyvbjerg, 1996) Additionally, while weaknesses in the creative class argument (Florida, 2002) seem to be well known at this point, a reframing of a similar theory entitled creative placemaking (Markusen and Gadwa, 2010) has now been accepted by the most influential public arts funder in the country, the NEA, and may help perpetuate stagnant assumptions of policies that may continue to push arts producers to the margins of the city and expedite gentrification of middle and lower class naturally.
occurring cultural districts. These districts instead require support from cultural and public agencies to help foster more sustainability, as they are incredibly important for diverse populations of citizens and artists, and spur creative production in unique and inspiring ways. Doing so may require arts administrators to begin to change their thinking of the paradigms in arts policy they have become comfortable with, reframing their arguments for support and development, and creation of a new language to promote arts and culture that is not solely based on economic impacts.
Chapter Four: Case Study of Creative Placemaking and the NEA

The cases studies contained within this chapter will attempt to investigate the research question queried in Chapter One. I will research various forms of data (funding data, language taken from missions statements and personal interviews of policy actors, connections between levels of public policy agencies, etc) in order to draw connections between the purpose of the support of the arts amongst arts councils at the federal, state, and local levels, and how their policy decisions speak to their goals and how they affect the communities they serve.

To reiterate the research question:

*Is the language arts councils are using to justify support of the arts (economic impact, creative class, etc) serving the development of sustainable arts and culture districts that support the needs of artists and communities (as many organizations claim), or are these arguments ultimately justification for economic development of cities that profit private entities and political purpose, possibly to the detriment of the artists and communities?*

**Revisiting Creative Placemaking**

Before investigating the funding agencies, it may be useful to return to the policy paper that created the impetus for the NEA to begin a new cultural development strategy in the first place, and to dig deeper. In a piece published in the Summer 2012 issue of
Grantmakers in the Arts entitled *Creative Placemaking 2.0*, one of the original co-authors Anne Gadwa Nicodemus reflects on the two years since the paper was presented. She admits to often being asked to explain the concept further, to concerns and nervousness by grantmakers who seek a greater level of substantiation, and criticisms of it being a passing fad that is merely a reframing of creative class theories. She reflects that the push for a new program began in 2009, with then NEA Director Rocco Landesmen, who worked with “better funded federal agencies to pound the table about how the arts can catalyze strategic, cross-sector partnerships and advance missions in education, health and human services, housing, rural development, and transportation.” (Gadwa Nicodemus, 2012) The initiative was a result of work that “drew inspiration from the Social Impact of the Arts Project (University of Pennsylvania), the Arts and Cultural Indicators Project (Urban Institute), and the Reinvestment Fund’s “creativity and neighborhood development” community investment strategies. Working through the Mayors’ Institute on City Design (an NEA leadership initiative in partnership with the United States Conference of Mayors and the American Architectural Foundation).”

In a 2009 Grantmakers in the Arts conference, then NEA Chair Rocco Landesman is quoted saying, “The days of the defensive NEA are over...We have a plan and we’re going to advocate for it. Any plan that addresses economic growth and urban neighborhood revitalization has to include the arts.” (McQueen, 2013)

The ultimate result has been a major initiatives spearheaded in creative placemaking by the NEA, Our Town (to be discussed in further detail later in this chapter), and the creation of ArtPlace. Gadwa Nicodemus clarifies further that the two
function “as parallel efforts, in communication but on separate tracks, ArtPlace and the NEA’s Our Town have risen to the top as the main funders and policy shapers of the burgeoning creative placemaking field,” with ArtPlace receiving “sizable amount of dollars” to the sum of $26.9M in 2011 and 2012 alone, much of which came from several of the nation’s top foundations. While not a governmental organization, ArtPlace uses funding dollars (that might have been distributed to other arts organizations) in creative placemaking efforts that are similar to the work being done at the NEA with Our Town. Denoting just how closely the NEA and ArtPlace share visions, ArtPlace’s current Executive Director and Director of Research Studies both previously held high-level administrative positions at the NEA.

**Defining Creative Placemaking**

The definition Gadwa Nicodemus gives of Creative Placemaking (2010) is the same one she helped co-author and the one the NEA continues to use:

“In creative placemaking, partners from public, private, nonprofit, and community sectors strategically shape the physical and social character of a neighborhood, town, tribe, city, or region around arts and cultural activities. Creative placemaking animates public and private spaces, rejuvenates structures and streetscapes, improves local business viability and public safety, and brings diverse people together to celebrate, inspire, and be inspired.”

However, she then notes the definition used by ArtPlace is slightly different,
“ArtPlace believes that art, culture and creativity expressed powerfully through place can create vibrant communities, thus increasing the desire and the economic opportunity for people to thrive in place. It is all about the local.”

In this definition, she explains, defines less of the “how” in order to purposefully remain more flexible, and with the primary focus being on the operative word “vibrancy.” The field remains an evolving one (and she gives additional examples of other agencies that have crafted their own versions of definitions), and “that funders and practitioners are making it up in real time. We’ve entered an exciting period of experimentation.” (Gadwa Nicodemus 2012)

“Creative Placemaking has an outcomes problem”

Also in 2012, an article titled Creative Placemaking has an Outcomes Problem was authored by Ian David Moss that points out not only issues in the model’s claims and difficulties with evaluation, but also interesting connections amongst professionals in the field. He points out that the collaboration with the Reievesment Fund and SIAP mentioned earlier were first commissioned by Joan Shigekawa as Associate Director of the Rockefeller Foundation and later used as the impetus for the creative placemaking initiative when Shigekawa was Landesman’s Senior Deputy at the NEA. In addition, at the time of Moss’ article, the Director of ArtsPlace was Carol Colletta, who was heavily involved in the push for Florida’s creative class strategies in a real world settings as co-organizer of the 2003 Memphis Manifest Summit.
Overall he indicates that there are many similarities between creative class literature and what is being espoused as the possibilities in creative placemaking.

“Despite all of the attention paid to this issue in the past year and a half, despite all of the new money that has been committed to the cause, creative placemaking still has an outcomes problem.” (Moss, 2012)

One example he gives is listening to an exchange take place during a webinar on plans for a Community Indicators Study for the NEA’s Our Town Program:

“When, prompted by researchers who were listening in on the call, the NEA’s Chief of Staff, Jamie Bennett [now ArtPlace’s current 2015 Director], asked the Deputy Director of NEA’s Office of Research and Analysis about causation vs. correlation, this is the exchange that resulted:

_Bennett:_ …Are you going to in some way be able through this project to prove [for example] that arts had a direct impact in causing the crime rate to go down?

_Shewfelt:_ A lot of the language I’ve used today has been very carefully chosen to avoid suggesting that we are trying to design a way to specifically address the causal relationship between creative placemaking and the outcomes we’re interested in.”

Furthermore, Moss goes on to detail how the current Indicator system may actually be useless to to determining outcomes: **(emphasis added)**
“As a matter of fact, the NEA has chosen to forgo a traditional evaluation
of the Our Town grant program in favor of developing the aforementioned
indicator system. The project will no doubt result in a lot of great data, but
**essentially no mechanism for connecting the Endowment's investments
in Our Town projects to the indicators one sees.** A project could be
entirely successful on its own terms but fail to move the needle in a
meaningful way in its city or neighborhood. Or it could be caught up in a
wave of transformation sweeping the entire community, and wrongly
attribute that wave to its own efforts. There’s simply no way for us to tell. I
hate to be the bearer of bad news, but we can’t accomplish the goal of
“advancing understanding of how creative placemaking strategies can
strengthen communities” without digging more deeply into the causal
relationships that the NEA would prefer to avoid.”

ArtPlace, too has similar problems with purpose and outcomes, according to Moss. In
explaining the impacts ArtPlace intended to seek to potential applicants, then Director
Coletta is quoted as saying:

“**with ArtPlace, we aim to do nothing less than transform economic
development in America…to awaken leaders who care about the future of
their communities to the fact that they’re sitting on a pile of assets that can
help them achieve their ambitions…and that asset is art.**”

And defined their primary goal of “vibrancy” as:
“attracting people, activities and value to a place and increasing the desire and the economic opportunity to thrive in a place.”

Moss would argue that the goals of these programs are not only unmeasurable, but unreasonable.

Additionally, “then there’s the challenge of figuring out what “the needle” [even] is.” (Gadwa Nicodemus, 2012)

I would point out that much of the language used is again surrounding economically based returns. There is not much mention of increasing well being, or connectedness of people, for example, but instead large claims that indicate a desire for monetary gains. Not only does the direction of both of these major programs seem somewhat aimless in these claims and conversations, but I’m not sure communities of citizens, or the artists themselves, would ever want to be referred to as a “pile of assets” just awaiting someone to act upon them.

There is a great deal of collaborative action happening (possible due to Landesman’s theatric background), with many foundations, funders, a multitude of federal agencies, and quasi governmental actors at the table (as in the Communicative Model), and what seem to be grandiose claims regarding the return on investment for developmental goals that appear to benefit city’s most in the realm of economic reinvestment (Rational Model), but little talk about the people (Equity), or maintaining naturally occurring districts (Sustainability). Shades of Lindblom’s (1955 )“administrators... reduced to deciding policy without clarifying objectives first” seem evident.
As discussed in Chapter Two, these models of advocacy do have their weaknesses, as is who hold the power and the knowledge... and the grantees, are definitely in a difficult position to keep up with this emerging theory and report back.

Gadwa Nicodemus, to her credit, recognizes these issues.

“The tensions between self-interest, advocacy, and field building also strain objectivity. If grantees are forthcoming about challenges and botched efforts, they fear future funding will be on the line. As champions of a new policy initiative, the NEA and ArtPlace also face pressures to “spin” impacts in the most positive light... The pressure to demonstrate outcomes could also drive shortsighted or inequitable investment choices. Grantmakers and civic leaders justifiably want to allocate limited resources wisely — the most bang for their buck. But will the need for “quick wins” mean that areas with the most severe challenges (those with great potential but longer-term payoffs) are passed over?”

(Gadwa Nicodemus 2012)

The pressure to win grants when the pot is full is very real for arts organizations, but the staffing levels are low and the ability to do long term research are just not always realistic. But, meanwhile, the granting organizations (NEA and ArtPlace) have created pressure to live up to their own hype, while not actually laying the framework for good mechanisms to prove their claims, and this could trickle down to how the grantees present the outcomes of the investments made in order to please the grantors and continue highly needed funding streams.
However, Gadwa Nicodemus goes on to claim:

“Economic arguments couched in terms of vibrant communities resonate more with people than dollar impacts and jobs created. Creative placemaking often “brings diverse people together to celebrate, inspire, and be inspired,” but physical and economic revitalization outcomes also appeal to those who don’t agree that the arts’ and culture’s intrinsic value makes them deserving of broad-based support.” (Gadwa Nicodemus 2012)

This has a ring of doublespeak in how it is presented. Here she is ultimately saying that using the language of creative placemaking, terms like “vibrancy” are used to brush over economic terminology and attract people on the ground, but that while creative placemaking makes claims to do a number of significant things surrounding this vibrancy issue, its ultimately the physical and economic outcomes of the arts that makes them worthy of support to more affluent populations, the one who have the financial backing to make big differences. So, a promise of “vibrancy” is key to winning over people, but economic results are really where the rubber meets the road. I find this statement from a co-author, two years after the fact, to be extremely telling of the underlying inherent weaknesses of the initiative. Creative placemaking reframes the argument for support of cultural districts into entrepreneurial strategic development terminology, a strategy that sounds suspiciously identical to the one discussed in chapter 3 as widely used by mayors across the county, the very population that was the initial audience for the presentation of the paper.
Continuing on who holds the power Cynthia Nikitin writes for the Project for Public Spaces in 2013 that if creative placemaking is solely project, design, artist, or development led, then gentrification is the likely outcome (emphases added).

“If vibrancy is defined explicitly as an “unusual” condition, it furthers the idea that Placemaking is geared toward the production of specific kinds of spaces and amenities, rather than toward the enabling of citizens to use their public spaces to highlight their neighborhood’s unique strengths, and effectively address distinct challenges. Gentrification, which is often blamed on honest attempts to create more vibrant, livable places, is what happens when we forget that vibrancy is people; that it cannot be built or installed, but must be inspired and cultivated.

We do not work for better public spaces so that people will have somewhere to sit and eat gelato; we do it so that they will have somewhere to sit and talk with their neighbors. Whether or not that conversation is about art (or politics, or food, or education, or sports…) is beside the point. Ultimately the true sense of a place comes from how it makes the people who use it feel about themselves, and about their ability to engage with each other in the ways that they feel most comfortable.”

Case studies in Creative Placemaking(2010) and BIDs

Gadwa Nicodemus’ admission that the language usage had different intentions in order to couch the economic benefits to different populations reminded me of how business improvement districts are pitched to local communities as a positive for local
growth and development, but with underlying private development motivations. Out of curiosity, I went back and compared the case studies used in the original Creative Placemaking (2010) paper and cross referenced them with their locations in the cities in which they took place, and if the communities they claimed to be revitalizing already had a BID in place. (see Fig. 5)

[It is important to note that the community development work in these case studies took place over varying lengths of time (some decades before the authorship of the paper) and, though they were used as support for the creative placemaking argument, were not part of any specific creative placemaking model at the time. The BIDs in question also may not have been in place when the arts based initiatives were undertaken in some case, either, the data is based solely on what BIDs are in place in these neighborhoods at the present time. See Appendix A] The results were interesting.

Figure 5:BIDs and Creative Placemaking (2010) case study locations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>BID</th>
<th>Total # of BIDs</th>
<th>Type of Placemaking Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cleveland</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Gordon Square Arts District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Jose</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Creative entrepreneur project and festivals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buffalo</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Artspace Buffalo Lofts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seattle</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>“City of Music” branding initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arnaudville, LA</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Project support for various arts based activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portland</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Public Art</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In all but the smallest locations, BIDs were in fact positioned as actors in most of these same communities. Paducah, KY with a population of 26,000 and Arnaudville, LA with less than 2,000, both did not have BIDs, but the activities that took place did have connections with other local government actors, such as Chambers of Commerce and private bankers. In every other case, however, BIDs were present. Chicago leads with an enormous total of 53, but keep in mind that there are various different models at play here, with one large BID sometimes covering entire downtown districts (such as Phoenix or Providence), or others like Cleveland that have 5 major in central downtown locations
and at least 3 others on the periphery of downtown, and possibly more into municipalities outside of the City of Cleveland.

In the case of Cleveland, the development in Gordon Square has happened over time, but a BID is a recent addition. According to Cleveland.com, a developer in another neighborhood is recently planning to renovate the historic “Sedlak” building soon envisioning “artisan space and studios.” Other intentions include upscale residential apartments in hopes of encouraging others to invest with nearby arts and culture districts as a model, and is also supporting a new BID for this area to improve safety.

Safety and security seem to be one of the key arguments that go hand in hand when merging BIDs and arts districts. In an article written by developer Jim Mark in Oregonlive.com, he espouses the virtues of Portland’s BID for eradicating issues of homelessness, petty crime, and graffiti when it was created 20 years ago, and was only the second BID in the country at the time. He warns that the city would be a mess without it, but many of the services provided (garbage clean up, security, etc) seem like they ought to be publicly managed, not privately run. In fact, in a comment to the article by (presumed) citizen Larry Norton, makes very cogent points and vents frustration with the BID:

“Much of what the PBA [Portland Business Alliance] provides are services that ought to be provided by the city... downtown is the responsibility of the city as a whole not just that of the downtown property owners and managers. The PBA security force... have no more power in dealing with miscreants than any other person on the street. The BID is
not some voluntary composition of businesses. It is city imposed taxation on businesses within defined downtown boundaries. The key, though, is that control is in the hands of the larger businesses via the PBA. There is little, if any, evidence that supports the value of PBA to an improved downtown.”

Safety in fact plays a prominent role of the the economic revitalization arguments of the Creative Placemaking (2010) paper, as well, with several claims that it has a direct affect on local business viability and livability as a result. In a 2014 article, author Sheila Regan looks back at some of the Real World Impacts of Creative Placemaking in MSP and the claims made by the authors that an increase in public safety is one of the benefits. She cites Mike Hoyt, a cultural community liaison in Chicago, who points out when looking at crime statistics

“There are a bunch of different factors playing against each other,” he says. For example, a $250,000 grant is a drop in the bucket compared to the cost of 10 new stoplights in the area or other infrastructure improvements. “It's really difficult to draw a straight line from funding for an arts project to a decrease in crime,” he says.”

Grant cycles operate at a much faster pace than community change, according to Regan, and the kind of changes being claimed do not happen overnight:

“measuring the impact of arts activities in a community can be difficult, in part because the indicators usually have more to do with economic data than with ‘people data.’”
While it may be difficult to measure the public safety impact of arts activities, it certainly could be an expeditious and more successful endeavor with a BID acting in tandem with private developers and businesses to ensure the security of an arts district fits into an economic revitalization plan that attracts additional outside investment. The relationship between the gentrifying forces, BIDS, and the attractiveness of growing arts districts is something not discussed in the literature regarding creative placemaking, and may require deeper investigation.

*The NEA and Creative Placemaking*

The National Endowment for the Arts was formed by an act of Congress in 1965. Since that time it has worked to fund and promote the creative arts for the citizens of the United States. “The National Endowment for the Arts is an independent federal agency that funds, promotes, and strengthens the creative capacity of our communities by providing all Americans with diverse opportunities for arts participation.” (arts.gov)

In its first year of funding, 1966, the NEA received nearly $2.9M. Peaking at nearly $176M by the early 90s, political forces working to censor art and culture (commonly referred to as the “culture wars”) severely cut funding to the organization in 1996 to below $100M. Since that time, the NEA has not recovered to funding levels above those of the early 80s. Currently, the appropriations for both 2014 and 2015 were each $146M. In 1983, the funding level was nearly $144M which, if adjusted for inflation, would equal nearly $345M today.¹

¹(CPI source: [http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm](http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm))
In addition, the NEA shares a percentage of its funding with the state arts councils nationwide, a portion that also grew larger out of the culture wars in an effort to redistribute funds away from the federal level to the states. Today that percentage is at 40%, which would therefore leave the NEA with $87.6M of the original $146M appropriated to cover operating costs and disperse as grants. In both 2014 and 2015, roughly $5M of the NEA’s budget is earmarked for the creative placemaking Our Town program.

**Our Town**

*Does anybody realize what life is, while they're living it, every, every minute?*

- Thornton Wilder, *Our Town*

With its namesake drawn from the lovely play by Thornton Wilder, no doubt another Landesman influence, the NEA creative placemaking initiative Our Town is described a supporting “creative placemaking projects that help to transform communities into lively, beautiful, and resilient places with the arts at their core...supporting local efforts to enhance quality of life and opportunity for existing residents, increase creative activity, and create a distinct sense of place.” (arts.gov will be the source of most of the quoted material in this section, when direct authorship is known, or a specific research paper is quoted, it will be cited as such)

Project support is offered in two areas:

*“Arts Engagement, Cultural Planning, and Design Projects: These projects represent the distinct character and quality of their communities. These projects require a partnership between a nonprofit organization and*
a local government entity, with one of the partners being a cultural organization. Matching grants range from $25,000 to $200,000.

Projects that Build Knowledge About Creative Placemaking: These projects are available to arts and design service organizations, and industry or university organizations that provide technical assistance to those doing place-based work. Matching grants range from $25,000 to $100,000.”

In each case, the NEA defines the key to successful placemaking as a partnership between a nonprofit (with at least a 3 year history of programming) and a local government organization, one of whom must provide the leadership for the project. The top official at the government agency in the partnership must provide a written statement of support for the project. Additional partners are encouraged, but the minimum consists of these two types of organizations. All projects do require 1 to 1 matching (in other than federal dollars), and can include in-kind donations. Funding is not for operating support or individual artist grants.

The overarching intended objective of the initiative is described as “Livability: American communities are strengthened through the arts.” Success is defined as (emphases added):

“Successful Our Town projects will impact livability by affecting community priorities such as public safety, health, blight and vacancy, environment, job creation, equity, local business development, civic participation, and/or community cohesion.

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The anticipated long-term results for Livability projects are **measurable community benefits**, which include:

- Growth in overall levels of **social and civic engagement**.
- New avenues for expression and creativity.
- Design-focused changes in policies, laws, and/or regulations.
- Job and/or revenue growth.
- Positive changes in migration patterns.

In order to ensure applicants will follow through with measuring the benefits of their project, the NEA makes it clear that they will be expected to anticipate the intended results, and provide evidence of the actual results at the close of the project. Its acknowledged that some benefits may take longer than the length of the project itself, and what evidence is available appears to be acceptable, including if the project was deemed a failure. In this case, the NEA makes it clear that it will not affect future funding, but that failure can be an expected part of the growth of the initiative.

In a 2012 article for Create Equity entitled, *Fuzzy Concepts, Proxy Data: Why indicators won’t track creative placemaking success*, white paper co-author Ann Markusen picks apart the issues with how the NEA intends to track the success of Our Town grants. She discusses the evaluative measures being put in place by the NEA (and ArtPlace) that have been the source of much consternation and anxiousness by the grantees and applicants. She compare the needs of creative placemaking grantees to small firms being guided by venture capital. In these cases, secondary data is not good enough; instead close monitoring, mentoring, guidance and evaluation over time is key,
with failure also always a possibility, but only worthwhile if you are able to takeaway lessons from it. She notes that the cases used in the white paper from 2010 seldom succeeded in even 5 years, with many going into decades to show successes. (Though, regrettably, there is little mentioned by her on the time needed for proper investment in Creative Placemaking strategies in the same 2010 white paper)

One reason for a shift to performance indicators? “Pressure from the Office of Management and Budget, the federal bean-counters, is one factor. In January of 2011, President Obama signed into law the Government Performance and Modernization Act (GPMA), heavily emphasizes use of performance indicators for all agencies and their programs.” (Markusen, 2012) While even massive scientific agencies like NASA have managed to fund projects with out such indicators, and “evaluation by external generic indicators fails to acknowledge the experimental and ground-breaking nature of these creative placemaking initiatives and misses an opportunity to bolster understanding of how arts and cultural missions create public value.” Markusen, 2012)

In a journal article entitled, *Our Town: Supporting the Arts in Communities Across America*, Chu and Shupbach detail what the program looks like in December 2014. At that time, since its inception 256 grants had been awarded for a total of $21 million across the country. They go on to note that the attraction is high, as “every year, the Our Town budget is only sufficient to fund approximately one-fifth of the applications received, the average grant size is $75,000... [and,] as of 2014, 246 partners are involved in 66 projects funded by Our Town grants, averaging 15 partners per project.” (Chu and Schupbach, 2014 p.68)
To help both promote the project and give examples and insights the NEA has created an online storybook for Our Town that is quite impressive and inspiring. (http://arts.gov/exploring-our-town/) Seventy one projects are currently documented in beautiful color photography and with detailed breakdowns of the project objectives, process, and the impacts. Its hard to not be excited about the projects when see through such great marketing and what seem to all be visionary examples of community building. But how do you tie a mural project in a neighborhood into job and crime indicators and ever expect to find a valid correlation?

Chu and Schupbach state that Our Town grants are “anchor investments... a catalytic investment tool.” they then go on to explain that the grants help “communities form coalitions between their elected leadership and other key civic leaders. These grants create an opportunity for artists and arts organizations to connect with various development areas including public health, housing, economic development, and even agriculture, thereby bringing these stakeholders together for their community’s benefit.” (Chu and Schupbach, 2014 p.65) This effort is much less than the stated broad policy goals iterated in the application process. An “investment” of developing collaborations amongst policy actors, sure, but there is much less in the text of this article that details how communities are to be changed except through small investments and many agencies and private sector partners communicating and working with each other.

Referring back to their own guidelines the authors say that the research shows that “broad partnerships are necessary to achieve good project outcomes; political support is essential; all communities have unique “arts assets” and projects should be tied to local
assets and knowledge; and arts-based activities must work in concert with other community development efforts, plans, and goals.” Furthermore: “The program was designed to support high-capacity communities, with many investment opportunities and long-standing relationships between arts and community stakeholders, as well as communities lacking those attributes but possessing a clear vision and committed leadership. The NEA decided to take a risk and see if requiring a partnership between arts organizations and local governments as a condition of each Our Town grant would produce successful collaborations.” (Chu and Schupbach, 2014 p.67-8)

These statements remind me very much of the communicative model of advocacy discussed in chapter two. The first statement underpins the idea that arts organizations, and indeed the residents within the community require the support of many different actors in the public realm to hand hold them “in concert with other community development efforts” to an end result that they, as a group, know best. The actual people that live in these communities are not mentioned. Recall that, “When information is most influential, it is also most invisible.” (Inness, 1998 p. 54) There are many grant managing participants (an average of 15 per $75,000) and a simple statement that the actions need to be “tied to local assets and knowledge” is concerning bases upon who is deciding what knowledge is powerful, ala the rational model of advocacy creeping in. (Flyvbjerg, 2002) Who is given a seat a the table is a political act. Not only that, but by requiring a nonprofit to get the sign off of the highest ranking official of a partnering government organization is both relinquishing some expertise in the field to another agency, but also relegating possible applicants to those with powerful political ties. Public arts funding
agencies are typically weak public agencies compared to almost any other, so this requirement immediately creates a power dynamic that may detract from the ultimate goal and quality of service to the community by an arts agency that probably knows this constituency better than most. Other less powerful cultural nonprofits may not have the capacity to manage 15 different constituencies, but that does not mean they can not produce a quality product. In the second half of this statement, I also wonder what is meant by “high capacity communities with many investment opportunities and long-standing relationships between arts and community stakeholders”? If the idea is to affect livability, this description seems like there is little need for intervention, assuming these areas are already functioning at “high capacity,” and this also would seem to brush aside newer, more entrepreneurial non profits, as well.

This constant use of language to make less clear or reframe over and over was sighted by Markusen herself when discussing frustration with Our Town indicators: “many of the indicators charted in ArtPlace, NEA Our Town, and other(s) bear a tenuous relationship to the complex fabric of communities or specific creative placemaking initiatives. Terms like “vitality,” “vibrancy,” and “livability” are great examples of fuzzy concepts.”(Markusen, 2012)

Confusion over word smithing and what has felt like constantly evolving definitions of creative placemaking over the course of my readings and research made me go back and look at the original definition from the 2010 white paper, that is also included in the Our Town description, and try to simplify meaning to a boiled down, more easily translatable description.
“In creative placemaking, partners from public, private, nonprofit, and community sectors strategically shape the physical and social character of a neighborhood, town, tribe, city, or region around arts and cultural activities. Creative placemaking animates public and private spaces, rejuvenates structures and streetscapes, improves local business viability and public safety, and brings diverse people together to celebrate, inspire, and be inspired.” (Markusen and Gadwa, 2010)

Now becomes:

**In creative placemaking, community collaborators reinvigorate with art and culture. Places become more vibrant, sustainable, and people are inspired.**

This version of a definition for creative placemaking *immediately* gave me far more clarity and inherent support for it. Reduce the indicator referencing language and it becomes much less *fuzzy*. What makes this parsing down of the intention so much more palatable for me, is that it is easily decipherable for the most important part of the equation, the one so seldom mentioned in much of the literature. The *people* who live in these cultural district.

Not everyone who lives in an arts district is a cultural producers. Using Markusen and Gadwa’s own date from the 2010 report, there were roughly 2 million artists in the US in 2005 when the population was also approx 295 million. That’s about 0.67% of the
population that self identifies as an artist. Even using their much broader figures of the number of workers in cultural industries (approx 4.9M) plus other supporting industries that include many service, education, and management workers (27.3M) (Markusen and Gadwa, 2010 p.12) you are left with roughly 11% of the population that might identify are a member of a cultural production group. Certainly, many others simply enjoy arts and culture, but with the emphasis on this policy being highly economic, I question the force with which some of the claims are being made. But even more, I wonder how the other 89% of non arts producers, that also live, work, play, invest, and pay taxes in these communities feel about the social experimentation happening via policies that do not consider their opinions. Not to mention those that economically or socially are already marginalized or do not have a voice.

The Our Town grants are a drop in the bucket for what likely needs to take place on a much larger scale and from a local perspective. While they promise much, they invest too little. $5 million dollars per year spread out across the entire continent could never achieve what is being claimed, at least not for a very lengthy time period, and even then only in small instances. The money is probably better used to invest internally at the NEA and with funders and educational institutions to determine how best to propagate a workable strategy to help naturally occurring cultural districts become more sustainable, and how local arts funders can begin to work to foster growth in emerging neighborhoods that doesn’t immediately attract gentrification. “The goal of policy and planning should be to nurture grass-roots districts, remove impediments that prevent them from achieving their potential, and provide the resources they need to flourish.” (Stern and Seifert, 2007 76
p.5) A drop in the bucket may fill it up over time, but its the *ripples* we need to pay attention to...more on this later.

Clearly much more time would need to be spent on studying and nurturing even a single granting program in Our Town for it to bear fruit. This being the case, I intend to take a closer look at what local arts funders are doing in the realm of cultural district development in the cities they work in, much more proximate to the neighborhoods and people they serve, and see if there are any lessons to be learned through the lens of my now reduced definition of creative placemaking.
Chapter Five: Case Study of State and Local funders

The Ohio Arts Council

While I am primarily most interested at what is happening at the local level with arts funders, its instructive to first look at how a state arts council is engaging creative placemaking strategies. After several years of heavy budget cuts, the Ohio Arts Council has just recently received word that it is getting a raise. The “arts council said that roughly $12.5 million would be available through OAC grant programs in fiscal year 2016 for individual artists, arts organizations, schools and other nonprofits. In 2017, the amount would be roughly $13 million.

The arts council will also grant nearly $1 million in federal funds in each fiscal year provided by the National Endowment for the Arts.” (Litt, 2015)

Of the granting programs offered by OAC, only one currently operating would be near to a cultural sustainability model that could be associated with communities and neighborhoods. With the Building Cultural Diversity OAC “believes communities are strengthened by the presence of arts experiences that reflect the viewpoints of Ohioans from all backgrounds and traditions. The BCD program provides grants to Ohio’s culturally diverse arts organizations whose mission, activities, staff, and board are rooted in culturally specific communities. BCD grants can be used for continuing programming
or project support, or for the short-term professional development of arts administrators within those culturally diverse organizations.” The grant specifically targets cultural organizations that are rooted in minority populations or historically underserved rural areas. It also requires that at least 50% of the board of the organization be a member of the cultural specific community they intend to serve. In this manner, the population and people who comprise the community itself are steering the efforts to serve and sustain their culturally specific heritage and districts. This to me is an excellent example of using an funding art organization to help reproduce a valuable cultural commodity from generation to generation.

Additionally, in other OAC literature, a paper entitled New Frameworks for Revealing the Public Value of the Arts: From Transactions to Transformations (Farnbaugh, Quinlan-Hayes, Yoshitomi) expresses a desire to go beyond the typical customer based approach of some arts funding agencies that I found to be impressively progressive in its scope. Funders give monies, institutions deliver a service (often also in exchange for funds), and grantees are asked (in increasingly painful detail) to expound on the documentable benefits of this transaction. Instead of such black and white returns, the OAC recognizes that there are other intrinsic benefits, but “people must first perceive” what they are. Why do people spend their valuable time and money on arts, what are the meaningful experiences, the transformations, that drive them? If the public value of the arts begins and ends with the personal experience, then there is a need to communicate what that transformative phenomenon is, in a way that everyone can understand, and that this will in turn help grow support for the arts.
I think in this there are lessons to be learned about how we relate cultural development strategies to communities and neighborhoods. A solely economically driven policy arch and argument is not going to resonate with a population, especially in an already naturally occurring arts district. Why, if the neighborhood already has a self directed, positive cultural experience should outside collaborations of policy actors be trusted? Is the language of private development really the best means we have to persuade neighborhoods to collaborate with other cultural and political organizations that seek to “revitalize” them? A better option is to find out what transformative experience within the community makes it valuable to them, what shared respect for culture and arts has helped develop an environment that is unique and valued by outsiders.

**The Greater Columbus Arts Council**

The Greater Columbus Arts Council’s website immediately provides you with a clear cut definition of what they value as an arts funder for Columbus, Ohio. Under “Impact of the Arts” nearly every heading and bullet point is a direct push for economic justification. In their view, the arts matter because they have a “profound economic impact on the city, the arts attract and retain new talent and business, the arts are important to residents and visitors, and because GCAC [themselves are] vital to the success of the region’s arts and culture industries.” (source: GCAC.org) This was a new one for me, though I must have overlooked it many times before... the arts are important partially because the organization itself *exists.*

It was also highly notable that there was little discussion of people, sustainability, diversity, education, or any notion of transformation. This impact argument is the near
perfect definition of an entrepreneurial development strategy. GCAC’s mission and
vision are also equally telling, and appears to fit the Markusen’s definition of “fuzzy”
quite well:

Mission: Through vision and leadership, advocacy and collaboration, the
Arts Council supports art and advances the culture of the region. A
catalyst for excellence and innovation, the Arts Council funds exemplary
artists and arts organizations and provide programs, events and services
of public value that educate and engage all audiences in our community.

Vision: A great Columbus: Always thriving artistically, culturally and
economically.

What strikes me most about this mission/vision statement is that is it completely
unmemorable and generic. It doesn’t speak much to what its community values, it
instead is telling its community what it plans to do to it. What are the things that GCAC
and the actors that steer it value? When they say a “great Columbus” who determines
what defines “great” or who gets to “thrive?”

Investigating their expenditures give a greater indication of what GCAC values as
a funder. Of a $5.1M budget in 2013, 1.25M (24%) was spent on operating costs for the
agency itself. Nearly the exact same percentage amount was spent in operating costs the
following year as well. In 2014, of $4.25M remaining earmarked for grants, the vast
majority of that amount (71%) was granted in operating support to 28, primarily large,
high arts institutions. All of these 28 exist in the downtown central district, with only a
small few being 2 miles or less from the center of downtown. The remaining monies went
to project support and small grants that, again, were densely clustered in the downtown area, and roughly 5% of the granting dollars available went to individual artists grants.

Of all the grants awarded, only two appeared to be directly aimed at community impact, and both went to the same organization, Global Gallery a fair trade organization. Global Gallery received $12,495 for community outreach programs, and an $8,700 community impact grant, totaling $21,195 or 0.005% of all possible grant dollars GCAC budgeted. No other grants had any specific designation that would indicate they were for either creative placemaking efforts, nor did any other grantees appear to have a primary mission that included activities that would be deemed specifically for cultural district improvements or engagement in anything except the most broad sense.

GCAC did receive a $150,000 grant form NEA’s Our Town initiative in its inaugural year, 2011, for the purpose of public art to be installed around Columbus’ riverfront area during the 2012-2013 timeframe. During this time there was a flurry of investment by the city in this area, as they completely redesigned and rebuilt the waterfront section of the downtown corridor ahead of the city’s bicentennial celebration. Neither GCAC or the NEA have any additional information available on how the grant was used and what or even where the public art was installed. In the 4 years since the grant there have been several different art installations in this area, but without knowing anything further I would be guessing as to what ultimately was produced with the grant. Even so, it would be nearly impossible to gauge if any public art in this area had a significant impact in any if the NEA indicators, as there has been a nearly complete rebuild and massive monetary investment in the area to the point that it looks nothing like
it did 4 years ago. What public art there is is a blip on the radar of a total facelift. To some degree, that may be a great example of the difficulties with the Our Town program. If nothing else, it is clear that GCAC is focusing heavily on the downtown business, commercial, and tourist area with a laser like intensity, so the idea that additional dollars from the NEA were needed to somehow create community, in an area that is already a very affluent district, by interjecting it with more investment dollars seems misplaced.

The remainder of GCAC annual report is full of economic impact arguments, and very little about the people it serves. As it is heavily funded by a hotel bed tax from businesses primarily in the downtown and Short North district, I imagine there is pressure to reinvest those dollars to generate even more tourism for the hotels, and the numbers do show GCAC investing their funds almost entirely surrounding the major hotels downtown. Their Board, meanwhile, is dominated by prominent business people and political actors. And, while the name of the agency makes a point to denote it as serving the “greater Columbus” area, that research shows that it expends the vast majority of its efforts in a small geographic area surround the immediate downtown and the entertainment districts proximate (for possible reasons discussed above).

Anecdotally, as a now nearly 9 year Columbus resident, I would also recognize the change I have seen in one district particularly. The Short North, the district next to downtown to the north, has undergone a serious facelift and change in model in the past few years. When I arrived in Columbus, the district was very arts based, with several galleries, a gritty vibe, and numerous festivities that I attended regularly. My wife
(though not at the time) worked in the district, at the afore mentioned Global Gallery, and we spent many a night enjoying the atmosphere and businesses.

However, as the district became more and more popular, it drew the interest of prominent Columbus investors. Rental rates increased as landlords saw an opportunity, and well loved stores, bars, restaurants, and galleries moved out due to inability to afford it any longer (including, unfortunately, Global Gallery). GCAC played a role in marketing and branding the district to tourist and affluent citizens. The mix went decidedly more upscale, with luxury national retail brand moving in, what would have been considered blasphemous and tacky just years before. Development brought several large scale condos, hotels, and parking garages. The Short North Business Association (SNBA), what had previously been a group of surly entrepreneurs that fought to retain the districts individuality, eventually dissolved as private real estate investors took over and changed it’s mission and purpose. A Special Improvement District security force became more prominent and a piece of public art, a large concrete couch often favored by homeless, was removed under the guise of a “cleaning” and has never returned.

In an example of how an improvement district can backfire on artists and entertainers, a performance artist friend of mine applied for, and received a permit to perform on the street during a monthly Gallery Hop. The first issue is that he had to apply at all, the second is that he was kicked out halfway through the event. His schtick, as a comedy based performer, was to perform as Carl Vaggino, the “World’s Worst Character Sketch Artist” (generally just a silly bit, with a few off color jokes thrown in for good measure). When he was asked to leave by SNBA staff, and refused when they
could not tell him why they wanted him gone, the SID security was called in. Video
taped by his girlfriend, the security guards continue to harass and intimidate them, basing
their claims on private property rights while he sits 3 feet away from a public sidewalk.
The security guards invade personal space, take pictures of them both, and verbally
harass and badger him until he finally leaves, exasperated. The clear message is, Gallery
Hop is for certain people, cultured people, and you do not represent us. This is the
danger of a BID stifling arts and free speech.

In 2013, I attended an Urban Land Institute forum with a few of the prominent
retailers from the area to discuss the history of the Short North. One of the most well
know was a local Columbus celebrity and gourmet chef, Kent Rigsby. Kent talked about
the really gritty days of the Short North, when he struggled as the only business in a
block radius, with crime all around, and how everyone thought he was crazy at the time
for taking a chance on the area. Now with numerous luxury restaurants around the area
and a spotless reputation for quality and business savvy, he explained that all it takes in
one good restaurant to draw people in. People need a place to meet, mingle, and enjoy
each others company over good food. The audience, largely bankers, real estate
investors, and architects, were eager to hear from Kent where the next big thing was
going to be. But he explained that if it hadn’t been for the generosity of a local landlord
and developer, who “curated” the neighborhood by giving entrepreneurial business
people low rents, even free rent in some cases, just to make the area more diverse and
welcoming, there would never have been a “Short North” as they see it today.” It was
one person who gave others a chance to build there businesses, and one good restaurant,
that laid the foundation for a multi million dollar, nationally hyped district just 10-15 years later. But it takes that kind of time and sacrifice to make it happen, and it takes people that want to spend their time together with each other in order to make a place have cultural appeal.

The investors in the room didn’t get it. The moderator, the director of the SNBA, remained focus on pitching the district to possible investors, and even made it clear that they are actively now trying to appeal to wealthy “empty nesters.” After the panel, the conversation mainly stuck to arguing or inquiring about where the next investment ought to go that will give them the best return. It seems GCAC is operating in an identical manner. Its basing its investment strategy on the same voracious appetite to show profit as many of the developers and politicians in the city around it. Its looking for the next big thing to list on its resume, another district it can claim as a “success” story, but not consider the people. The concern appears to be justification of the appropriation of the bed tax dollars by continuing to relate increases in tourism and affluent populations with its cultural branding efforts.

Meanwhile a 2011 article in the Columbus Dispatch states: “A report released today by the Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program says the number of census tracts showing extreme poverty in the city of Columbus increased from eight to 24 over 10 years. "That's a very significant uptick," said Alan Berube, one of the report’s authors. The report says the number of extremely poor neighborhoods — those with poverty rates of 40 percent or higher — has jumped since 2000, with the population in those
neighborhoods rising by one-third.”2 Clearly there are other districts that could use economic revitalization and arts intervention, but they are not the constituency GCAC seems intent on serving.

*ArtsWave- Cincinnati, Ohio*

Returning to where we started, with Creative Placemaking, I want to look at one final example. In Ian David Moss’ 2012 article that criticized the output problems inherent in creative placemaking, he also reflected on some earlier relevant research he conducted in which he “created a simple model of arts-led gentrification to illustrate the specific case of a neighborhood lent a young, “hip” reputation by newly relocated artists.”

First, in the incremental process, there is tourism amongst districts, by other artists. Second, bars and restaurants play a pivotal role, an attraction to the neighborhood and as meeting places. As reputation grows, the final piece is the presence of specific kinds of activities, visual cues and cultural performances that give off the signal that draws visitors in. (Sound familiar?)

Later this model (see Fig 7) became important when Moss worked in a research initiative for Cincinnati funder ArtsWave. “Based on hundreds of conversations, interviews, and focus groups with area residents, two key “ripple effect” benefits emerged as especially valued by citizens:“-that the arts create a vibrant, thriving economy: neighborhoods are more lively, communities are revitalized, tourists are

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2http://www.dispatch.com/content/stories/local/2011/11/03/povertys-grip-grows.html
attracted to the area, etc…and -that the arts create a more connected community: diverse groups share common experiences, hear new perspectives, understand each other better.”

Figure 6: The Artist Colonization Process (Moss, 2012)

To its immense credit, ArtsWave didn’t just sit on these results and continue in the status quo. Instead, the 83-year-old united arts fund underwent a total transformation, taking on a new name and organizational identity, and most importantly, adopting these two themes as the new goals for its grantmaking.”

The “‘arts ripple effect’ incorporates a deeper understanding of the best way to communicate with the public in order to achieve that shared sense of responsibility.” (ArtsWave, 2011) In discussing the results of their research in 2011, coincidently near to the Creative Placemaking push, ArtsWave points out that:
“While leaders of business and other nonprofit sectors have conducted research using framing science methodology to develop communications strategies for change, this is a first-in-the-nation analysis for arts and culture. In the long term, we want broad support and public demand for arts and culture. While most people feel positively toward the arts, we will have to change the conversation in order to motivate action by the public for the arts.” (ArtsWave, 2011)

The ability to converse eloquently and simply on why the arts matter in our lives has been a basic problem in arts and culture advocacy, they argue, and more study was needed directly with the people they serve, as opposed to continued economic impact arguments. The messaging needs to be changed, in their opinion, so that everyone in the conversation recognizes arts as a public good, has a clear picture of what is meant and what activities are being referenced, has a proactive approach, and included all people in a region, not just downtown centers. The focus must be on community wide public good (we), not private (me) or solely economically based.

The results of their research is quite interesting. Assumptions that get in the way of understanding the value of arts as a public good are that it is a private matter or thought of as a good that is purchased, which also positions art as a passive activity (as in something to be bought, but not nurtured). And, ultimately, it is seen as a low priority, even when people consider themselves supporters of the arts. In attempting to use these assumptions to craft a new language that will compel people to change their perceptions
and transform into champions of arts support, they landed upon two “ripple effects” enumerated above.

By framing discussions on the impact of arts as ripple effects that help the economic vitality of an area are are the ways in which communities come together, conversations on how the arts engage are easier to draw connections to the impacts on people and regions (not just downtowns, and interactions in the community increase. ArtsWave has definitely made an impressive effort to be something more than just an arms length funder, relying on old measurements of the value of arts in dollars and sense, and actually reaching out to the citizens they serve for direction. While they acknowledge an economic factor in their final ripple effects, its from a simpler position. It can also be used in just about any discussion and people understand it. The research showed that when interviewees had priorities for arts support framed in this way, they found some civic pride in knowing that their community was capable of creating connections and vibrant communities, and the idea of ripple effects was much easier to remember and repeat later.

**Parsons project revisited**

When I think back on the situation we encountered with the developers and the city pitted against a small naturally developing arts district in Olde Towne East I just see nothing but missed opportunities. The vacant lot has been vacant for more than ten years now. The only reason anyone was considering building was exactly because of the “Artist Colonization Process” Moss iterates above. Had the city or GCAC seen the potential earlier, maybe there would already have been a development in place and the
district would be ahead of where it is today. But GCAC could also have been paying close enough attention (and there were numerous print and television stories on our protests) to step in and, in this case, offer to mediate the situation with the developer, and possibly a better outcome for all would have taken place. Or, better yet, joined with us and presented to the Board of Zoning in opposition to the gentrifying effort. I’m of the opinion that it may be better for public arts administrators to be more activist on occasion, and not be so immediately differential to economic development at the cost of cultural investments.

The results of such efforts could possibly be ripple effects, as Arts Wave describes:

1. “A vibrant, thriving economy: Neighborhoods are more lively, communities are revitalized, tourists and residents are attracted to the area, etc. Note that this goes well beyond the usual dollars-and-cents argument.

2. A more connected population: Diverse groups share common experiences, hear new perspectives, understand each other better, etc.”

**Summary**

ArtsWave’s philosophy draws interesting parallels with my boiled down version of the creative placemaking definition:

*In creative placemaking, community collaborators reinvigorate with art and culture. Places become more vibrant, sustainable, and people are inspired.*
As this comparison shows, and the other case studies and literature reviews indicate, there is power in what language we choose to use when serving communities as public arts administrators, and simplification of message can clarify vision. The choices we make when we present the community with a mission and vision should first not speak to placing the power in the hands of administrators, but firmly in the grasp of the citizens themselves. Arguments that rely solely in economic impacts don’t have any inspiration for the general public at large, and don’t really offer the kind of public good arguments that are likely to incite anyone to actively engage (other than those already in power who are most likely to benefit). A simplification of the language being used in the creative placemaking movement is demonstrative of a result that speaks much more to people, rather than place.

Frankly, the Our Town program could also use a great deal of simplification in its policy implementation, as well. Public administrators appear to be wasting valuable time, money, and energy on an initiative that will likely never bear the fruit it claims in the current unfocused, fuzzy manner in which it is being delivered.

If the NEA’s mission is indeed to “provide all Americans with diverse opportunities for arts participation” then it may well be time to redesign such programs as Our Town that have a hyper focus on instrumental outcome justification. If arts participation is intrinsically valuable on its own merits, then the NEA should look to promote it as such by removing barriers that make arts organizations less flexible to efficiently deliver such services, and place a great deal of focus on evaluative measures that are difficult to quantify. Such policies and procedures in use at the federal level
naturally trickle down to the state and local level and further compound the complexities that make serving communities unnecessarily difficult.

And it is wasteful to use grantee organizations in the manner in which they are made to jump through hoops and stretch for outcomes in order to justify and retain funding. I also broadly question whether the current policy of requiring one to one matching grants for arts organizations is helping or hindering growth. We must be more aware of the power dynamics at play here, and how the weaknesses of rational and communicative advocacy models creep in as additional stakeholders are brought to bear on initiatives delivered by nonprofit arts organizations who must answer to these (often multiple) outside funding forces. The organizations invest a great deal of time and energy in order to meet the various needs and parameters of each grantor they are funded by, and to increase the pull, and influence, that each granting organization naturally has on grantees by making it policy to have more than one at any given time may be stifling creativity and outcomes.

In addition, federal funders pushing for a policy initiative such as Our Town that is underfunded, highly complicated, economic development driven, and overly ambitious is simply not fair to either our colleagues at local levels (who often work tirelessly, for peanuts), but it also makes serious assumptions about what communities need without allowing them to steer the discussion. There is also no impetus without supporting data from the federal level for other public arts funders to support similar initiatives in tandem, or develop their own versions of the initiative in a more localized way. They are simply trying to appease another grantor in order to gain funding to create additional
forms of arts participation for their communities, so why not make it easy for them to do so? Unless they are personally motivated, lower levels of public arts funders may continue to use old models of strategic planning in order to just appease the NEA, continuing poor models of service and evaluation that become the norm, which can work in opposition to more forward thinking policies now and in the future.

However, state and local agencies do play a role and should assist in creating new language for advocacy usage, should increase lobbying for policy adjustment at the federal level, and make attempts to drive change from the bottom up. In these case studies and literature readings, ArtsWave is an example of such a trailblazer. There are excellent opportunities here for the nonprofit service field to reach out to the academy partnership on similar, longer term research, and collaborative sharing of best practices could be most useful. With the $5M the NEA is spending trying to make tidal waves across the country, they could instead fund research to investigate cases like Cincinnati, and draw new connections and create new paradigms skipping stones across the pond.

Recognition that advocacy frameworks like the rational or communicative models might not work best for our field indicates that it is also time to develop sustainable systems by taking chances at local community levels and working to increase equity and access. Development strategies need to be more local, progressive, and reproducible. Abandon the entrepreneurial development strategies to the real estate investors. Public arts administrators must work to create belonging by celebrating our differences, not white washing cities with a formula that primarily benefits the powerful and affluent. And it is imperative that these areas, too, garner further research, scholarship, and
recognition from the academy. There is much talk in the classroom nowadays about various different entrepreneurial aspects of arts management. But there seems little actual instances of its usage in the real world. Educators and students need to help drive evolution in the field by developing new models of decision making that are more forward thinking and leave behind isomorphic parity of other agencies and fields that do not benefit the arts administration world or purpose.

In terms of creative placemaking as a policy in itself, there is potential there. But in its current state it is misguided to advocate for its use in cultural development or as a fundamental basis for arts administrators to use as a guide for their funding organizations without more research. It requires more time to germinate and develop into something more polished before it is able to make the claims currently lobbied. Natural cultural districts deserve more than “drive by” arts intervention from public funders. If we truly want to preserve such districts, then we need to take the time to listen, observe, and talk about what works face to face and eye to eye with the communities that are lucky enough to have already figured it out on their own. That means a willingness to abandon transactional models of service, and to transform public arts funding agencies into partners for the public good beyond the central cultural districts of downtown.

Citizens must be considered a public arts agency’s primary partner and given advisory roles. The fact that trustee members are often made completely of just prominent business people and politicians is a political act that has real consequence for the people public funders serve. Board seats for citizen members of naturally occurring cultural districts should be the norm. Public funders also are in the position of expecting
more from the traditionally largely funded grantees, the high arts. The constituencies of
cities are omnivorous in their appetites for all manner of culture, and the few high arts
institutions in downtown clusters can no longer expect to be the primary focus when
access to all forms of culture are readily available and cheaper than ever. A new regional
paradigm of service must emerge in order to be more sustainable and equitable in its
distribution of public funds.

In closing, I am reminded most of Norman Krumholz and his willingness to put
his career on the line for the disadvantaged citizens he served. The activism he displayed
not only had a huge difference in the quality of life of individual people in Cleveland, but
had lasting, intergenerational effects on communities that had previously been ignored.
His courage also drew the brightest, sharpest minds to his side, and further added to the
scholarship and reputation of the field.

Public arts administrators certainly could keep towing the economic impact line,
and stay within the safe confines of downtown. But a new generation of arts
administrators are graduating from institutions across the country in growing numbers.
Some will be highly motivated, mobile, intelligent, and savvy, and they are going to be
looking for agencies to join that inspire them and give meaning to their lives. They will
seek out the forward thinking agencies that can keep them excited about arts participation
and offer open ended possibilities for helping communities of artists and citizens engage.
This new crop of talent is the best natural resource we have, so it would be wise to start
thinking sustainably and to help them begin to create and support policies that are for the
public good of the communities they serve. I also suspect that cities which are now
claiming returns on arts support based mainly on economic impact models will be far behind the leaders of the field in the next five to ten years. Unfortunately, this is a case where a lack of flexibility and magical thinking has real results for people in places they live. The focus going forward needs to be on a new language, people making ripples, not place. There is no “place” without people.
References


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## Appendix A

### References for BID city data

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