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# Artistic Enclaves in the Post-Industrial City

A Case Study of Lawrenceville Pittsburgh

 Springer

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ISSN 2212-6368  
SpringerBriefs in Sociology  
ISBN 978-3-319-55262-0  
DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-55264-4

ISSN 2212-6376 (electronic)  
ISBN 978-3-319-55264-4 (eBook)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2017934445

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Printed on acid-free paper

This Springer imprint is published by Springer Nature  
The registered company is Springer International Publishing AG  
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

# Preface

## Why I Decided to Launch This Study

This study was initially sparked by my desire to study a bohemian enclave. I first learned about bohemia from my parents, David and June Moss. My late father had been an actor, theater producer, and (later in his life) a Speech and Drama teacher at Forest Hills High School in Queens, New York. My dad acted and produced plays within the rising alternative theater sector that emerged in 1950s New York (i.e., early Off-Broadway). Like the typical 1950s bohemian, my dad viewed much of America as relatively “square” and was critical of the capitalist system, often expressing his conviction that “the system stinks.” My mother was not an actress, but often assisted him in his theatrical pursuits. During the summer season, he and my mom would quit their day jobs and go to summer stock. Both my parents were part of New York’s bohemian theater scene; they worked with and befriended bohemian actors and went to their parties.

In 1975, when I had just started High School, my dad introduced me to Greenwich Village (“The Village”), which served as New York’s bohemia central for much of the twentieth century. I distinctly remember that he took me to Washington Square Park (the heart of the Village) and said, “Isn’t this great?” I liked the park, but was not (yet) impressed; I was too young and immature to fully appreciate the cultural significance of the area. By the end of my freshman year at Queens College (1978), however, I came to appreciate that the Village was a very special place, a stimulating place where fun, excitement, and personal and cultural freedom could be found. I had, furthermore, become an avid bohemian tourist. I started spending my weekend nights hanging out in the Village and began to frequent Washington Square Park as well as various village bars, cafes, restaurants, and music venues. During my senior year, I occasionally visited the bohemian enclave that had emerged in Soho. While I was a graduate student at Columbia University during the 1980s and early 1990s, I often took the 1/9 train to New York’s Lower East Side and frequented a variety of well-known bohemian haunts (e.g., The Life Café and CBGB’s).

My scholarly interest in bohemia did not emerge until 2004. I had stumbled upon popular and scholarly works on bohemia while visiting a bookstore in Greenwich Village, and soon became fascinated with numerous sociological, historical, interdisciplinary, and literary accounts of bohemian life. I decided that I myself would investigate the nature and characteristics of a contemporary bohemian enclave. My former leisure pursuit (bohemian tourism) had become an area of professional interest.

## **How I Came to Select Lawrenceville Pittsburgh as My Research Site**

In 2004, I was still living in New York, but decided to look elsewhere for a research site. New York's major bohemian enclaves (e.g., those in the East Village and Soho, and in Brooklyn's Williamsburg) had been subject to rapid gentrification and displacement, and most of the city's bohemian artists were scattered throughout the city. Some lived in relatively small pockets of bohemia that existed within former bohemian communities, or within neighborhoods that were relatively affordable compared to other New York locations. Bushwick Brooklyn was emerging as a new bohemia central, but just about everyone was predicting that it would, like its predecessors, soon be gentrified out of existence. A York College colleague who had lived in Pittsburgh (Kim Jones, an anthropologist) asserted that Pittsburgh's deindustrialized South Side contained a thriving bohemian enclave made economically possible by low housing costs. I was intrigued. I wondered what bohemia might look like when not encumbered by the relatively high-cost New York housing market. I did not, however, spend enough time in South Side to confirm that its artistic community was truly bohemian. By the time I did my preliminary investigation of South Side (2005), I quickly discovered that relatively affluent urban gentrifiers and a rising college bar scene had (largely) displaced South Side's artistic community. The neighborhood still contained several establishments frequented by artists and by members of various alternative subcultures (e.g., Dee's Bar and the Beehive Cafe), but most of its galleries and other artistic venues had closed, and the neighborhood's college bar scene came to overshadow its artistic scene. Housing costs were nowhere near New York levels, but had risen substantially; many artists had already relocated to other deindustrialized neighborhoods to obtain relatively cheap Pittsburgh housing. Several artists still living in South Side informed me that they prefer to hang out in neighborhoods not dominated by college students. These artists also informed me that some of their artistic peers had moved to Lawrenceville Pittsburgh. I decided to do a preliminary investigation of Lawrenceville to determine its suitability as a research site.

I launched my preliminary investigation of my research site in March 2006. The neighborhood was too large for me to quickly walk through on foot, so I began by performing a "windshield survey" in order to internalize a visual map of the

neighborhood (Andranovich and Riposa 1993). The neighborhood contained numerous establishments that were the products of artistic (and perhaps bohemian) activity (e.g., edgy shops and galleries). Most of the neighborhood was dilapidated and did not appear to be subject to a high level of gentrification. I proceeded to explore the neighborhood on foot and conversed informally with artists, gallery owners, and other neighborhood residents. These residents informed me that the neighborhood contained a growing artistic community. I decided that Lawrenceville constituted a suitable research site.

## **Bohemian or Creative Class?**

After investigating and analyzing Lawrenceville's artistic community in detail, I came to the conclusion that to conceptualize this community as bohemian would be misleading. This community, that is, was partly bohemian, but also partly bourgeois. It integrated classic bohemian practices (i.e., independent artistic production, alternative artistic venues, the discussion of art and ideas, and relatively low-cost living within a gritty urban neighborhood) with classic bourgeois practices (i.e., practicality, economic security, commercialization, well-organized neighborhood-based collaboration, and the ownership of residential and commercial space). This enclave, furthermore, eschewed the anti-bourgeois stance that has been a central component of the bohemian tradition. It made no attempt, that is, to oppose, shock, mock, or seek refuge from that which is viewed, in contemporary terms, as relatively bourgeois (i.e., yuppies, corporations, the mainstream, the urban establishment).

To clarify and illuminate my interpretation of Lawrenceville's artistic community, I eventually decided to draw on ideas introduced by Florida (2002) in his best-selling book, *The Rise of The Creative Class*. Florida, an economic geographer and public intellectual argued that the economic success of cities is increasingly contingent on their ability to attract a broadly defined "creative class" of artists, professionals, executives, scientists, software designers, and others whose work requires (at least) a modicum of creative output. The creative class, he further proclaimed, has transcended the historic divide between bohemian and bourgeois and has morphed the bourgeois practicality with the bohemian quest for creative freedom. Florida, furthermore, offered a brief commentary on urban artistic life, proclaiming that struggling urban artists are no longer alienated outsiders, and have become integrated into, and often collaborate with yuppies and other members of the larger creative class. I ultimately decided that some of his ideas, if subjected to substantial elaboration and amendment, could provide a proper basis for conceptualizing Lawrenceville's artistic community.

My use of Florida's ideas is limited to his notion of a bourgeois-bohemian morph and his brief commentary on urban artistic life. I did not assess empirical data designed to test Florida's controversial creative class thesis that a city's ability

to achieve economic success (i.e., economic growth and shared prosperity) tends to be contingent on its ability to attract the creative class (e.g., high tech entrepreneurs like Steve Jobs) by promoting a tolerant (e.g., pro-gay, pro-immigrant), artistic, and creatively stimulating people climate. There is already a large and growing literature dedicated to this task. Also, I wish to say at the onset that I am not a full-fledged advocate of Florida's (2002) creative class approach to urban economic development. I view this approach as useful (for promoting art, creativity, and liberal tolerance), but seriously incomplete as a way of promoting shared prosperity within and between post-industrial cities. This approach, furthermore, has often contributed to working class displacement, and a decrease in affordable housing.<sup>1</sup>

## Contributions to the Existing Scholarly Literature

The Urban Sociology and Urban Studies literatures have invariably supported Zukin's (1982) now classic assertion that artistic enclaves that emerge within major post-industrial cities inevitably fail to achieve long-term sustainability. Urban artistic gentrifiers tend to attract relatively affluent members of the middle class who strive to "live like an artist" and engage in "Loft Living." These relatively affluent urbanites help ignite a complex gentrification process that drives up the cost of housing and other amenities. In the final analysis, artistic gentrifiers get priced out of their artistic communities.<sup>2</sup> The present work demonstrates that this fate is not inevitable. Lawrenceville's artistic enclave, that is, has achieved long-term sustainability by morphing bohemian and bourgeois practices, and by collaborating with Pittsburgh's creative class. This enclave's openness to bourgeois practices, and eagerness to engage in creative class collaboration made it possible for artists to purchase live/work and commercial space (e.g., for galleries and boutiques that sell artisan goods), acquire low-cost artist community housing, market a now well-known annual art fair, and produce and market independently produced art alongside artisan goods and other goods and services (e.g., coffee, framing, wine, clothing, and furniture).

The Floridian idea that artistic communities can benefit from morphing bourgeois practicality with bohemian creative expressiveness, and by collaborating with a larger creative class has informed a substantial amount of public policy (see Stern and Seifert 2007).<sup>3</sup> This idea, however, has not been backed up by detailed

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<sup>1</sup>Florida, though, has amended this approach; I will comment on the limitations of these amendments later in this book.

<sup>2</sup>Zukin (1982) also pointed out that in New York, this process ultimately displaced most middle-class gentrifiers and helped to prepare much of the city for upper class use.

<sup>3</sup>Stern and Seifert, though, point out that support for artistic communities has generally been less substantial than support for major arts institutions (e.g., museums and major performing arts centers).



academic case studies of actual artistic enclaves. Neither Florida nor his academic followers, furthermore, have documented the existence of artistic communities that have achieved long-term sustainability, or theorized that such communities have the potential to exist within contemporary creative cities. By clearly and thoroughly conceptualizing the existence of an artistic enclave (in a gentrifying Pittsburgh neighborhood) that has achieved long-term sustainability by integrating bourgeois and bohemian practices, and collaborating with a larger creative class, the present work thus augments and amends the existing academic literature in important ways.

## The Organization of This Book

In Chap. 1 (Introduction), I describe the purposes and limitations of my study, explain my research methodology, and introduce my major empirical findings. I also introduce Richard Florida's work and explain (in more detail) why I decided to draw on this work. I conclude by defining what I refer to as the *artistic creative class enclave*, a creative class subtype that clarifies and amends Florida's (2002, 2012) brief commentary on contemporary artistic life. In Chap. 2 (Florida's Creative Class Thesis), I discuss Florida's concept of a creative class and his overall creative class thesis in more detail, summarize critical reactions to his work, and present my own critique of his work. I conclude by reiterating that my use of his work is highly partial and selective. In Chap. 3 (The Larger Urban Context), I discuss the larger urban (Pittsburgh) context of the present case study. I draw primarily on existing sources, but also utilize my field data, and the results of an artist survey that I performed in collaboration with Lawrenceville's annual art fair (Art All Night). I present a brief overview of Pittsburgh's transition from industrial to post-industrial city, place the Pittsburgh artist in context, and summarize and assess Richard Florida's comments on Pittsburgh's creative future. The next two chapters enable the reader to acquire, in a detailed way, a basic understanding of the distinction between the classic bohemian tradition and the bourgeois-bohemian (creative class) morph that provides the foundation for the present case study. In Chap. 4 (Bohemia: Introduction and Classic Prototypes), I offer a basic introduction to the bohemian phenomenon and provide an overview of major historical accounts of classic bohemia and the bohemian avant-garde in Paris and early twentieth-century Greenwich Village. In Chap. 5 (The Growing Integration of Bourgeois and Bohemian Culture), I introduce the literature on bourgeois-bohemian integration, discuss David Brook's *Bobo's in Paradise* and Richard Florida's *The Rise of the Creative Class*, and explain why I chose to draw on the later work, rather than the former. In Chap. 6 (Lawrenceville's Artistic Enclave), I draw (primarily) on my field study, and also on survey data that I collected in conjunction with Lawrenceville's Art All Night (2008, 2009) art fair to offer a detailed account of Lawrenceville's artistic enclave, and demonstrate that this enclave exemplifies an artistic creative class enclave. I also demonstrate that this enclave has achieved long-term sustainability. In Chap. 7 (An Alternative to the

Dominant Academic Narrative), I analyze previous studies of struggling artistic enclaves within major post-industrial cities in terms of four organizing themes, maintaining that these themes constitute a *dominant academic narrative*. I then demonstrate that the artistic creative class enclave constitutes an alternative to this narrative. I conclude by comparing and contrasting the artistic creative class enclave with three related community types (i.e., artistic enclaves described by Zukin 1982; Mele 2000; Lloyd 2006). In Chap. 8 (Summary and Conclusion), I summarize my analysis and argue, in a preliminary way, that the central concept of this analysis, *the artistic creative class enclave*, will not likely prove to be a Pittsburgh anomaly. I also hypothesize that the artistic creative class enclave is the only type of artistic enclave that has the capacity to avoid short-term existence and/or socio-spatial invisibility within contemporary major cities. I then discuss the policy implications of my analysis for those who wish to promote such enclaves, and conclude with a preliminary critical appraisal of their potential impact on society.

**Acknowledgements:** I would like to thank my former colleague, Kim Jones (Department of Social Sciences, York College of the City University of New York), for suggesting that I study artistic life in Pittsburgh. I would also like to thank my Temple University colleagues, Joshua Klugman and Robert Kaufman, and numerous anonymous reviewers. Their comments raised many important questions and proved to be invaluable. I also want to thank my wife, Kay Williams, for assisting with the 2008 onsite version of my Art All Night artist survey (and for helping me to collect some of my field data), and Owen Lampe for assisting with the 2009 online version of this survey. In addition, I want to thank Assistant Editor Hendrikje Tuerlings for facilitating this project. Finally, I want to thank Robert Johnson, Kirsten Forkert, and Ann Galligan for making numerous editorial suggestions pertaining to this project. These suggestions enabled me to make a clearer, stronger, and more complete argument. The final argument presented here, though, is my own. The positions taken within this book, that is, are not necessarily similar to those who have reviewed my work.

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