
The American scenscape: amenities, scenes and the qualities of local life

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Received on August 31, 2010; accepted on August 17, 2011

This paper outlines a new approach to measuring local quality of place. It uses a national database of some 500 types of local amenities to measure the local ‘scene’ in every US zip code. It provides a brief tour through the American ‘scenscape’ at the national, regional, urban and neighbourhood levels by outlining variations in types of amenities and the values they support, such as tradition, self-expression, transgression or local authenticity. And it shows that scenes with a strong self-expressive dimension promote growth and innovation while enhancing the economic impacts of technology clusters.

Keywords: amenities, scenes, innovation, quality of place

JEL Classifications: O2, O3, O4, R12

Introduction

With their 2009 ‘Report on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress’, Joseph Stiglitz, Amartya Sen and Jean-Paul Fitoussi articulated a set of ideas in a prominent political and policy context that had been gaining momentum within the academic social science context for some time. This is the notion that standard measures of gross domestic product leave out important dimensions of experience that shape citizens’ productivity, well-being and standards of living, such as health, social connections, cultural opportunities, political voice, personal security, education, household consumption and environmental sustainability. Stiglitz et al. (2009) and others (such as Helliwell, 2003) have made the case for revised production measures to be supplemented by

indicators of these other dimensions. Di Tella and MacCulloch (2008) and Diener (2006) among others have argued for measures such as gross national happiness.

Though Stiglitz, Sen and Fitoussi (Stiglitz et al. 2009) stress the limitations of nationally aggregated measures, the vast bulk of research into alternatives, including their own, has been cross-national. Mellander et al. (2010) summarize much of this research and conclude, ‘‘Most of the research that has anything to say about place and well-being has focused on national differences’’. The dominant approach has been to assess the impact of national income on some nationally aggregated measure of happiness (or ‘subjective well-being’) relative to other factors, such as post-industrial values, health, social capital or democratic politics. This leaves out local and regional differences, which can be

dramatic, making it impossible to investigate how these differences influence domestic migration and urban development patterns.

This paper reports on ongoing work to develop a new perspective on how to conceptualize and measure (some of the) variation in local qualities of places at the neighbourhood, urban, regional and national levels. To do so, it uses a national database of local amenities that covers over 40,000 US zip codes and includes over 500 types of amenities, such as parks, art galleries, beauty shops, churches, boutiques, ice cream stores and operas. The particular constellation of amenities in a place is treated as indicating the local 'scene' or the specific aesthetic of a place. Quality of place, on this approach, has much to do with this aesthetic, which defines a place as for instance an opportunity for cultivating personal uniqueness, celebrating connections to friends and family or shining out glamorously. These cultural themes and their underlying patterns of amenities vary substantially across and even within cities and regions. And these variations, as we will see, have significant consequences for economic growth patterns and population changes. What emerges is an original approach to assessing and measuring the qualitative and cultural character of places and a set of conceptual tools that can be applied in a number of contexts.

The discussion proceeds in three major sections. The first presents a highly compressed outline of the 'scenes perspective' on local quality of place. The second provides a descriptive 'tour' of the American scenscape, moving first down from national to regional to urban to neighbourhood variations in amenities and then moving back up from local to national variations in the types of cultural attractiveness expressed by these amenities. The third presents results of national and context-specific regressions analysing the associations of amenities and scenes with various measures of economic growth and population change, controlling for core urban development variables and covering all US zip codes. While much of the research cited above examines the impact of economic factors on subjective well-being, this essay reverses the equation and shows that non-economic dimensions of

experience influence economic ones such as productivity, innovation and talent attraction.

The scenes perspective: a (very) brief introduction

The scenes perspective

Particular mixes of amenities are often taken to indicate the character of the local scene (Clark, 2004; Currid, 2007; Florida, 2008). Consider a place full of boutiques, rare and second-hand book and music stores, improv comedy houses, jazz clubs, fusion restaurants and poetry slam venues. Here is a scene that says 'express yourself!', urging a unique outlook on existence as a way of life. Now consider instead a scene filled with local pubs, family diners, parks and playgrounds, community recreation centres and pizza parlours. The ambiance here is different, suggesting neighbourly warmth, mutual support and local connections. A place replete with designer clothing outlets, fashion houses, film festival venues, high-end jewellers, fine art galleries and nightclubs paints a different scene. Now glamour is in the air, with shimmering scenes of beauty and grace.

Translating such intuitions about the qualitative and cultural aspects of urban life into social science is difficult, as is assessing the significance of variations in such expressive qualities to urban and regional development. Yet, if we wish to expand our insight into elements of regional well-being beyond income or education, then developing methods for comparing and measuring the extent to which places cultivate distinct styles of life is vital. For these, define what it means for a region to actively promote a sense of 'being well' and 'living right'.

The scenes perspective was developed in order to meet this challenge. It encourages us to characterize places not in terms of any single item (operas, juice bars, parks, bike paths etc.) but holistically, in terms of the total scene created by its ongoing activities and practices. Building on much recent work on the cultural dimension of place (summarized in Kaufman and Kellner 2011), the scenes perspective formulates an expressive approach to comparing places according to what they 'say' or 'mean' when

considered aesthetically, as containing amenities for consumers in addition to firms for workers and homes for residents.

How do we distinguish one scene from another? Richness of meaning needs to be respected and preserved. We also need to rise above the single case and compare multiple scenes, looking for what they share and how they differ, isolating recurrent patterns and significant outliers. To do so, an analytical scheme can be helpful. We can use such a scheme to compare places on single dimensions of symbolic meaning, asking for instance whether one place contains a scene that more strongly affirms individual self-expression than does another. We can investigate combinations of dimensions, looking for places that, for example, join the value of self-expression with that of glamour and neighbourliness. And we can then study the patterns and consequences of different scene complexes in a more systematic and comparative way.

Table 1 summarizes a paradigm for evaluating the range of meanings that can differentiate one scene from another. Without claiming theoretical completeness, this matrix offers significant analytic utility for comparative analysis of places' styles of life.

This schema draws on and synthesizes a large and growing body of work on urban cultural experience in urban planning, geography and sociology (summarized in Silver et al., 2010). Rather than making any single dimension such as exhibitionism or transgression the UrScene of EveryScene, this theory of scenes proposes a multi-dimensional approach that joins elements of scenes discerned in these and other case studies into a single comparative framework.

The scenes perspective suggests that scenes may be usefully distinguished by their specific types of *theatricality*, *authenticity* and *legitimacy*. Theatricality has been highlighted in much recent work, in particular in the writings of authors like Alan Blum (2003), Elizabeth Currid (2007) and Charles Taylor (2007). 'Theatricality' here refers to, as Taylor puts it, the styles of mutual self-display valued or resisted in a scene, for instance, performing glamorously, transgressively or in a neighbourly way. Authenticity has been equally significant in recent, mostly ethnographic, discussions, especially in the work of authors like David Grazian (2003), Sharon Zukin (2009), Richard Lloyd (2006), Japonica Brown-Saracino (2009) and again Charles Taylor

Table 1. *Symbolic dimensions of scenes.*

Theatricality: styles of appearance supported or attacked by a scene	
Glamorous	Standing on the red carpet at Cannes gazing at the stars going by
Formal	Going to the opera in a gown or white tie and tails
Transgressive	Watching a performance artist pierce his skin
Neighbourly	Attending a performance by the community orchestra
Exhibitionistic	Watching weightlifters at Muscle Beach
Authenticity: sources of genuine identity supported or attacked by a scene	
Local	Savouring local fruit and meat at a farmers' market
Ethnic	Recognizing the twang of Appalachia in the Stanley Brothers' Voices
Corporate	Enjoying the real thing that is Coke or prizing Gucci bags over knock-offs
State	Visiting the Gettysburg Battlefield or the White House
Rational	Celebrating the power of human reason at a planetarium or before a university library or laboratory
Legitimacy: bases of moral authority supported or attacked by a scene	
Traditional	Hearing Mozart performed in the Vienna State Opera or church bells call one to worship
Utilitarian	Savouring the value of efficient production at a museum of industry
Egalitarian	Enjoying the democratic implications of a crafts fair or fair trade coffee
Self-expressive	Hearing a jazz musician improvise a solo
Charismatic	Crowding to be near Michael Jordan

(2007). ‘Authenticity’ refers to what is valorized as real rather than phony, such as the authenticity conferred by local customs, ethnic heritage or even a corporate brand. Legitimacy is a classic topic from Weber to Bellah, recently joined more closely with urban studies by research into ‘ethical consumption’ practices (such as fair trade fairs, cf. Barnett et al. 2005) as well as specific studies of restaurant (Johnston and Baumann 2007) and straightedge scenes (Haenfler 2004). ‘Legitimacy’ in the scenes perspective refers to the moral bases of authority projected by a scene—for instance, one’s own self, a charismatic leader, all of humanity equally, utility calculations or a tradition.

According to the theory, all scenes promote a sense of theatricality, authenticity and legitimacy in some form, just as all fruit has some form of taste, colour and texture. But there are many variations on these themes (just as some fruits are sweet, red and firm). The glamour of fashion shows and film festivals differs from the neighbourliness of community gardens and neighbourhood diners. The self-expressiveness of improv comedy and Do It Yourself music venues differs from the traditionalism of Catholic churches and historical monuments. The localism of corner pubs and microbreweries differs from the corporateness of Gucci outlets and flashing Coca Cola signs. Each category is thus further specified by subtypes of legitimacy, theatricality or authenticity, as shown in Table 1. These have proved useful in multiple research contexts, though some settings highlight some more than others or may require additions. Each dimension may be affirmed or denied: resistance to corporate authenticity or destruction of tradition gives certain scenes their meaning.

Variations in scenes can be identified by determining how sets of amenities indicate specific types of theatricality, authenticity and legitimacy, though many other empirical indicators are possible. A given scene may contain amenities that promote a sense of self-expression, transgression, locality, anti-rationalism and anti-corporateness—this combination we could call a ‘bohemian scene’. Another one might promote neighbourliness, tradition and locality—a more ‘communitarian scene’. Other complexes are

possible, and any set of indicators may be ‘translated’ into a complex of symbolic meanings via this matrix. Operationally, this means coding them in terms of the extent to which they affirm, reject or are neutral with respect to these dimensions, as discussed below.

A national database of local amenities

This paper reports on work that uses a US national database of amenities to measure scenes. The database is comprised primarily of two sources. First is the US Census’ zip code Business Patterns from 2001 (BIZZIP), which utilizes the North American Industry Classification System. The census provides surprisingly useful data on both commercial and non-commercial activities—for example, within the category of arts, entertainment and recreation, it differentiates between theatre companies and musical groups; between promoters of performing arts, museums and independent artists and between fitness centres and sports teams. It also includes human rights organizations, restaurants and churches. BIZZIP is useful in that it represents the population of amenities, not just a sample, and results from an official accounting. Moreover, it is available at the zip code level, a highly detailed unit of analysis.¹

Yet, BIZZIP obviously has limits. Most of the information it provides concerns more formal organizations and is classified from an industrial rather than a consumption perspective. And while information about the number of restaurants, music clubs or churches in an area is useful, this leaves out crucial questions of what kinds of religious practice, cuisine or musical style are available. For a greater level of differentiation, hundreds of categories from online yellow pages (YP) sources were downloaded.² These provide a much higher degree of specificity, both in terms of category (Chinese restaurants are differentiated from Mongolian restaurants, Catholic churches from Baptist churches, tattoo parlours from parks and playgrounds etc.) and in terms of geography (data are available at the street address level, although here zip code is the basic unit of analysis). However, the YP also have their limits. Unlike BIZZIP, YP data are not collected with completeness as a necessary goal and

are therefore more likely to leave some listings out, either by accident or by design (by not listing businesses that do not have a business phone etc.).³ Despite these limitations, both sources provide maximal coverage, relatively high levels of differentiation and some standardized classification scheme.

Building measures of scenes

Though not perfect, these seem to be the best sources available for extensive research into scenes. In order to use them as a basis for investigating scenes, they were translated into the theory of scenes outlined above. Teams of coders scored all amenities on a five-point scale, evaluating each of the amenity categories on the basis of the extent to which its typical practices affirm, reject or are neutral with respect to each of the 15 dimensions of scenes.⁴

Referred to here as the ‘performance score’, an average score for each of the 15 dimensions across all the amenities in each zip code was computed.⁵ Analyses typically employ a normalized version of this measure based on its *z* score, where the mean value across all zip codes is subtracted and the result divided by the standard deviation. This score indicates the average degree to which the set of amenities in a zip code feature each of the types of theatricality, authenticity and legitimacy. For instance, the average zip code BIZZIP amenity mix in Los Angeles (LA), Chicago and New York has a *z* score on transgression of, respectively, 0.48, 0.20 and 0.45; tradition of -0.44 , -0.31 and -0.42 and on localism of -0.30 , -0.23 and -0.18 . No doubt there are limits to these measures and data, but they yield much face validity and significant construct validity across a number of contexts (Navarro, 2010; Silver et al., 2010), as well as surprisingly strong results in multivariate analysis. They provide the most powerful resource to date for extensive analysis of USA as a ‘scenscape’ defined by the qualities of life affirmed or denied by a place.

The American scenscape: a snapshot and brief tour

Since the scenes approach is new and unconventional, we do not begin directly with the scenes

dimensions outlined in Table 1 but instead slowly build up to them. We first chart distributions of amenities at national, regional, urban and neighbourhood levels before moving back ‘up the ladder’ through variations in the strength and correlations of some of the scenes dimensions.

National variation in amenities

Table 2 summarizes the 25 most numerous types of amenities contained in the US database.

Even at this level of generality, distinctive aspects of the symbolic meanings embedded in daily experience emerge. Food, god, health, the law, the family and the community dominate the list. Typical American experience is saturated with spaces for shared food consumption, personal care and self-presentation, worship, tending one’s garden and serving one’s community. It is also full of

Table 2. *The 25 most numerous amenities in the USA.*

Rank	Amenity	Total
1	Full-service restaurants	193,262
2	Offices of lawyers	167,852
3	Religious organizations	165,984
4	Landscaping services	72,504
5	Beauty salons	71,944
6	Grocery (except convenience)	68,797
7	Child day care services	67,117
8	Pizza restaurants	57,380
9	Sports and recreation facilities	55,852
10	Auto dealers	54,822
11	Hospitals	53,656
12	Jewellers	51,376
13	Hotels	45,972
14	Custom computer programming	43,557
15	Pharmacies and drug stores	40,026
16	Bakeries retail	39,202
17	Fast food restaurants	34,672
18	Gift, novelty and souvenir stores	33,678
19	Civic and social organizations	31,711
20	Convenience stores	30,560
21	Furniture stores	29,920
22	Antique dealers	29,185
23	Beer, wine and liquor stores	28,695
24	Bookstores	26,322
25	Health clubs and gyms	25,696

Note: This table combines both YP and US Census sources.

lawyers, expressing the formality and litigiousness associated with the impersonal, egalitarian rule of law. There are more civic and social organizations in the USA than beer and liquor stores, confirming once again Tocqueville's observations about how participatory, voluntaristic and localistic the typical American scene is. The strong strands of individualism, moralism and civic activism that Bellah et al. (1996) noted in *Habits of the Heart* are present in the national scene as well. As we will see below, the self-expressive dimension emerges more strongly at lower levels of aggregation.⁶

Regional variation in amenities

These national data begin to show how much information about amenities and cultural scenes can be derived from seemingly non-cultural sources of data such as the census of businesses or the YP. Yet, the distribution of amenities varies considerably by US regions (cf. Elazar, 1975), illustrated in Table 3. This table shows the 10 most numerous types of amenities listed in the YP within the South, West, Midwest and Northeast (regions are specified according to the US Census definitions).⁷

These rankings reveal strong regional differences in the qualities of place typical of each region. First, consider religion. In the South and Midwest, different types of churches account for 6 of the top 25 most numerous amenities (4 of the top 10 in the Midwest), while in the West and Northeast, they

account for just 3 of the top 25 and none of the top 10. In the West and Northeast, there are more bakeries, art galleries, cafes and coffee shops and health clubs than any type of church. The availability of artistic amenities also varies tremendously by region. Western states contain a full 1.3 art galleries per zip code, over double the number in the Midwest and South. Residents of these regions have access to strikingly different experiences that shape the defining qualities of day-to-day life.

These differences do not mean, however, that the scenes of the different regions are oppositional. There is considerable overlap. Fast food restaurants are in the top five across all regions and in the top two everywhere except for the denser Northeast. Despite their differences in religion, both the West and the South have large numbers of equestrian centres and Mexican restaurants, while these amenities are not in the top 25 in the Northeast and Midwest. The South, West and Northeast all share a taste for jewellery, which is in the top five for all three (the Midwest is more reserved and less glamorous: jewellers are 11th, outranked by pizza restaurants, bar and grill restaurants and Lutheran churches). Nor does the strong religious orientation characteristic of the top Southern amenities mean that Southerners do not have fun after dark. In fact, there are more nightclubs per zip code in the South than in any of the other regions. Quality of place is complex and multi-dimensional.

Table 3. Top 10 YP amenities by region (mean quantity of amenities per zip code by region).

Rank	South	West	Midwest	Northeast
1	Baptist churches (2.80)	Fast food restaurants (2.57)	Fast food restaurants (1.96)	Pizza restaurants (2.58)
2	Fast food restaurants (2.35)	Cafes and coffee houses (2.3)	Pizza restaurants (1.81)	Jewellers (1.95)
3	New car dealers (1.62)	Jewellers (2.13)	Hospitals (1.61)	Bakeries (1.85)
4	Hospitals (1.51)	Pizza restaurants (1.84)	Baptist churches (1.53)	New car dealers (1.84)
5	Jewellers (1.38)	New car dealers (1.75)	New car dealers (1.39)	Fast food restaurants (1.79)
6	Pizza restaurants (1.33)	Bakeries (1.58)	Bar and grill restaurants (1.35)	Delis (1.43)
7	Methodist churches (1.25)	Hospitals (1.41)	Lutheran churches (1.16)	Hospitals (1.42)
8	Bakeries (1.01)	Commercial artists (1.33)	Catholic churches (1.03)	Antique dealers (1.29)
9	Cemeteries (0.89)	Art galleries and dealers (1.30)	Methodist churches (0.94)	Health clubs (1.02)
10	Automobile customizing (0.76)	Book stores (1.25)	Bakeries (0.90)	Cafes and coffee houses (1.01)

Note: regions are defined according to US Census definitions.

Urban variation in amenities

One of the founding principles of urban sociology is that there is a distinctive form of urban experience (Simmel, 1971), what Louis Wirth called ‘urbanism as a way of life’ (Wirth, 2004). Major cities often have more in common with one another than they do with smaller cities and rural areas in their geographic regions, and the forms of well-being and quality of life they promote may be similar as well. This idea should not be taken too far: Chicago urbanism, as Edward Glaeser (2011) suggests, likely

contains more ‘Midwestern’ qualities than do New York and LA and downtown Houston contains many ‘Texan’ aspects absent in the other three. To highlight how studying amenities illuminates both the commonalities and the differences in the qualitative character of urban experience, we now focus on the three most populous American cities—New York, LA and Chicago.⁸

Table 4 compares the 10 most numerous types of YP amenities across the three cities and Figure 1 compares the average number of other selected amenities across the three cities.⁹ The three cities

Table 4. Top 10 YP amenities in New York, Chicago and LA.

Rank	LA	New York	Chicago
1	Jewellers (8.02)	Jewellers (13.69)	Jewellers (6.17)
2	Cafes and coffee houses (4.41)	Delicatessens (6.51)	Fast food restaurants (6.08)
3	Bakeries (4.23)	Bakeries (6.14)	Pizza restaurants (5.73)
4	Fast food restaurants (4.22)	Pizza restaurants (5.30)	Baptist churches (5.56)
5	Commercial artists (3.54)	Art gallery dealers and consultants (5.15)	Bakeries (5.29)
6	Pizza restaurants (3.13)	Sports and recreation facilities (4.41)	Bar and grill rest (5.21)
7	Automobile dealers—new cars (3.03)	Commercial artists (3.99)	Sports and recreation facilities (4.25)
8	Sports and recreation facilities (2.89)	Antique dealers (3.72)	Cafes and coffee houses (4.15)
9	Book dealers—retail (2.37)	Cafes and coffee houses (3.39)	Hospitals (4.14)
10	Children’s clothing (2.26)	Fast food restaurants (3.19)	Cemeteries (3.82)

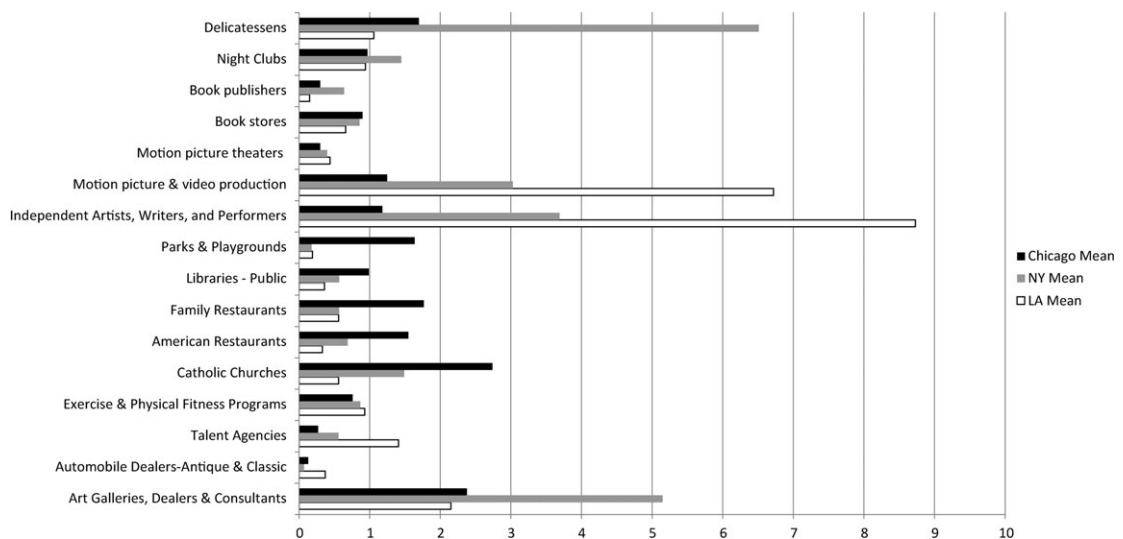


Figure 1. Comparing Amenities in New York, Chicago and LA.

Note: This figure compares selected amenities per zip code within LA County, Cook County and the five county boroughs of New York.

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do, as one would expect, share many common characteristics. Of the 40 most numerous types of amenities in each city, 27 are shared by all three.

Yet, striking differences also emerge. Jewellers are ranked first for all, but in New York, there are considerably more (about 14 per zip code compared to 8 in LA and 6 in Chicago)—a difference reflecting New York's strong position in the gem market but also likely contributing to scenes valourizing material abundance. In laidback LA, cafes and coffee houses outnumber fast food restaurants, while in Chicago, the reverse is true. Fast-paced New York City contains more delis than cafes and coffee houses. New York has the most publishing houses and book stores; LA the least. And in New York, one is highly likely to find a designer clothing store or fashion designer. Chicago is a distant third on both counts. Nightclubs abound in New York: 1.5 per zip code, compared to under 1 in LA and Chicago. As do art galleries and dealers: 5.2 per zip code, compared to roughly 2 in LA and Chicago—Elizabeth Currid's 'Warhol Economy' of Fashion, Art and Music incarnate. New York's amenities paint glimmering scenes of income, intellectual and aesthetic sophistication, constant motion and intense urbanity. These are vital dimensions of experiences that New York offers to those who live and work there. But they will not show up in measures of income or average education levels.

LA's amenities depict a different scene. Cars are important. Auto dealers are the seventh most numerous amenity in LA, which has significantly more classic car dealers than Chicago or New York does. There are numerous cafes (almost 4.5 per zip code) for hanging out, as well as many artists (commercial artists are 5th). Indeed, in LA, there are more independent artists, writers and performers per zip code than churches! With the 1.5 talent agencies per zip code (23rd in LA, not in the top 40 in New York or Chicago), aspiring stars are always on the scene. The 0.43 body art studios and 0.93 physical fitness programs per zip code suggest other ways of being noticed. And there are the movies. LA has the most film studios, but it also has the most movie theatres of the three. The LA scenescape is filled with cars, stars, bodies and

cafes, and these amenity mixes help us to measure and quantify main elements of the city's distinctive feel and to take account of that feel in modelling urban development.

The scene suggested by Chicago's amenities is still different. It is first a Midwestern scenescape of god, country, community and family. Chicago is filled with churches. Baptist churches are 4th in Chicago while no church is in the top 10 in New York or LA. And unlike any other major US city, Chicago is distinctly Catholic: there are 2.7 Catholic churches per zip code in Chicago (0.6 in LA and 1.5 in New York). Chicago also contains high concentrations relative to New York and LA of family restaurants, American restaurants, ice cream shops, bar and grill restaurants, public libraries, cemeteries and parks. Yet, these scenes are joined by a New Chicago. Cafes and coffee houses rank 9th, commercial artists rank 13th, health clubs 16th and art galleries and dealers 17th, and there are more custom computer programmers per zip code in Chicago than in either New York or LA. Chicago's scenescape combines its Midwest accent on tradition, neighbourliness and local authenticity with newer amenities more characteristic of what Richard Lloyd calls 'neo-bohemia', where café and gallery culture mix with commerce and technology (Lloyd, 2006). Here is a way both to quantify the distinctive feel of Chicago—a wholesome and neighbourly Midwest scene plus a strong knowledge economy—and also a basis for assessing whether the quality of life it creates contributes to Chicago's success.

Local variation in amenities

Even if regions and cities offer rich diversity, life is lived at the street level. Yet, quantitative studies of amenities and scenes typically report results at the city or higher level. For instance, Florida's (2002) 'bohemian index' measures artists per capita in metropolitan areas. But if we move down to zip codes, we discover more dramatic variations.

One way to highlight the limits of considering individual amenities without the context of the scene is to look at one amenity, body art and piercing studios. Consider the extent to which the scene surrounding such studios varies. Table 5 compares

the top 10 amenities in four of the US zip codes with the highest total number of body art and piercing studios nationally.¹⁰ The zip code 02118 is in downtown Boston, in the ethnically diverse, gay friendly and culturally active South End neighbourhood. The zip code 70806 is in downtown Baton Rouge and includes the historic Capitol Heights neighbourhood. The zip code 92109 includes San Diego's Pacific Beach neighbourhood replete with surfers, nightlife and singles. The zip code 30338 is in Dunwoody, Georgia, on the suburban fringes of Atlanta.

While these four neighbourhoods are national leaders on the same amenity, the overall scene is strikingly different in each. We look first at differences in their surrounding amenities; below more specifically at how they express different cultural themes.

- South End, Boston, contains 15 body art and piercing studios but even more graphic artists, numerous seafood restaurants, many cafes, antique dealers and fine artists, together with a few designer clothing stores and nightclubs.
- By contrast, in Capitol Heights, Baton Rouge, churches surround the body art studios. This

zip code features nearly twice as many Baptist Churches as body art studios, as well as several Full Gospel churches, family restaurants and ice cream parlours. This mix includes not only the body art studios but also significant numbers of tattoo parlours and nightclubs (more than in South End, Boston) as well as a few modelling agencies and dance companies. These are scenes of sin and redemption, night and day.

- San Diego's Pacific Beach features fewer arts amenities than South End and more sports and recreation centres, tattoo parlours, health clubs, cafes and nightclubs. It also has numerous fast food restaurants, many yacht clubs and an array of amenities from diverse ethnic traditions, like yoga studios, Mexican restaurants, Italian restaurants, Thai restaurants, Indonesian restaurants, martial arts clubs and Creole restaurants. Here, we find a strong beach party scene with multiple ethnically themed amenities together with the standardized culture of McDonalds and the elite culture of the yacht club.
- In Atlanta's Dunwoody, the body art studios are surrounded by a suburban scene of fast food restaurants, gyms, pizza, Italian restaurants, dance

Table 5. *Amenity profiles in four zip codes with the most body art and piercing studios in the USA—amenity (total).*

South End, Boston 02118	Capitol Heights, Baton Rouge 70806	Pacific Beach, San Diego 92109	Duwoody, Atlanta 30338
Commercial and graphic artists (17)	Baptist churches (25)	Sports and recreation facilities (23)	Fast food restaurants (13)
Body art and piercing (15)	Hospitals (16)	Tattoos (19)	Body art and piercing (11)
Seafood restaurants (14)	Antique dealers (15)	Health clubs and gyms (18)	Jewellers (7)
Baptist churches (12)	Body art and piercing (13)	Auto dealers (17)	Health clubs and gyms (6)
Pizza restaurants (12)	Jewellers (12)	Pizza restaurants (17)	Sports and recreation facilities (6)
Bakeries retail (9)	Sports and recreation facilities (8)	Boat and yacht charters, rental and leasing (14)	Coffee and tea shops (5)
Cafes (8)	Bookstores (8)	Cigar, cigarette and tobacco dealers (14)	Methodist churches (5)
Antique dealers (6)	Auto dealers (7)	Mexican restaurants (13)	Dance companies (5)
Fine art artists (6)	Health clubs and gyms (7)	Bar and grill restaurants (12)	Exercise and fitness classes and instruction (5)
		Coffee and tea shops (12)	
		Fast food restaurants (12)	

Note: These are approximately the top 10 amenity types for each zip code. The lists were cut-off at the point where the total zip codes including ties came closest to 10.

companies and coffee shops—a mix where the body art seems almost out of place.

These divergent mixes would escape us if we considered only rankings of the body art studios. Generally, ranking neighbourhoods on just one or a few amenities fails to capture the qualitative dimensions of a place's characteristic practices and activities. We need tools more explicitly designed to meet this challenge. Enter scenes.

From amenities to scenes

Neither national rankings of localities nor atomistic focus on single amenities capture the lifestyle or feel of a place. The language above on amenity mixes and their symbolic meanings hints in a more holistic direction. To better capture the range of qualitative experiences embedded in places, we therefore shift our attention from individual amenities to the 15 cultural themes outlined in Table 1.

The performance score measures of the 15 dimensions summarize the huge amounts of cultural information from the amenities database into a manageable set of indexes. Consider again the symbolic

meanings attached to those four zip codes with the most body art and piercing studios.

Figure 2 shows YP performance z scores of selected scenes dimensions—that is, each zip code is scored relative to the national average (which is 0). The scenes measures permit intelligible comparisons of what would otherwise be a cacophonous jumble of amenities. For instance, we can see clearly that these four places promote considerably more transgressive styles of appearance than does the typical American scene. But we also see considerable differences among the four:

- Pacific Beach, San Diego, paints the most transgressive overall scene, though it ranked third on body art and piercing studios. It also has the lowest egalitarian score and features corporateness and ethnicity the most of the four, mixing these with informality, exhibitionism and glamour to make a kind of 'entertainment zone' scene.
- By contrast, while the Capitol Heights, Baton Rouge, scene also projects transgressiveness, glamour and exhibitionism, its nearby churches and other amenities add tradition, formality,

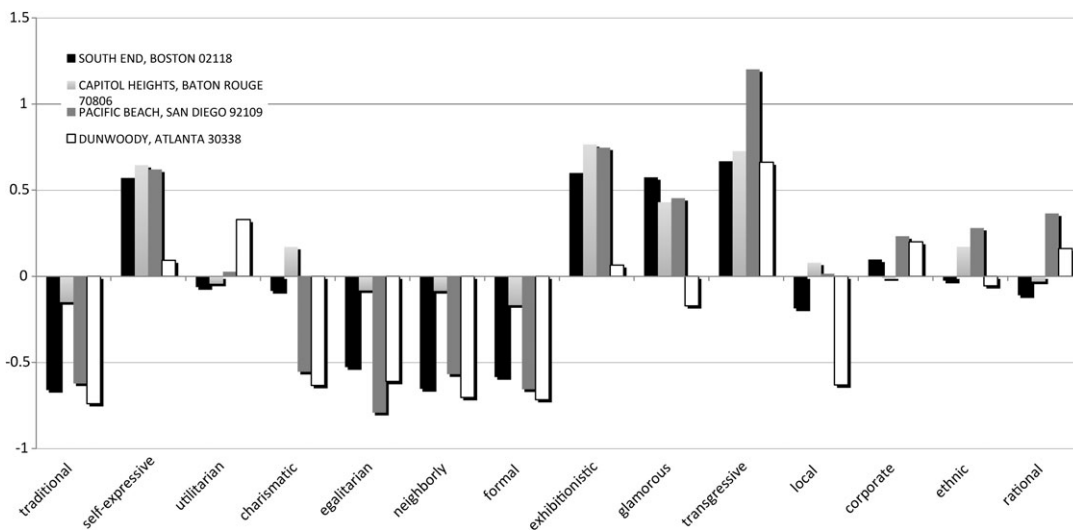


Figure 2. *Scenes dimensions at the neighbourhood level.*

Note: This figure shows z scores of selected performance scores for four zip codes with the most body art and piercing studios in USA. They show the strength of these scenes dimensions in these places relative to the national average (scored 0). The strong differences in each zip code's overall scene profile illustrate how no single amenity and no single dimension defines the total scene.

neighbourliness, locality and charisma (while Pacific Beach is a more informal beach scene).

- The Dunwoody, Atlanta, scene scores show how distinct it is from the others. Its profile is more mall than beach: it ranks below the national average on neighbourliness, formality, local authenticity and exhibitionism. Its utilitarian and corporate style joins with fewer opportunities for glamour, self-expression and exhibitionism.
- Finally, the South End, Boston, scene has the highest score on glamour, which, together with strong levels of self-expression and transgression and relatively low score on corporateness and utilitarianism, suggests a more independent and alternative scene; its low neighbourliness and localism indicates its more cosmopolitan feel.

To be sure, personal inspections of these scenes could bring out further details. So could inspecting the hundreds of individual amenities generating these scenes performance scores. Yet, considerable details about their qualitative profiles can still be gleaned and rapidly summarized with these scene concepts, measures and data, paving the way for large-scale comparative analysis of variations in local styles of life.

Urban variation in scenes

The scene measures also reveal meaning at the metropolitan level. Figure 3 shows *z* scores of the mean BIZZIP performance scores of all zip codes within LA County, Cook County and the five county boroughs of New York. They again show the strength of these scene dimensions in these cities relative to the national average (scored 0).

These measures highlight similarities of the scenes in the three largest metropolitan areas. Despite dramatically different geographies, immigrant groups, political cultures and economic specialties, the three overall scene profiles are remarkably similar, relative to the country as a whole. Compared to the average US zip code, scenes in these three cities affirm self-expression and utility over tradition and egalitarianism. They encourage transgressive, glamorous and formal styles of mutual display

more than neighbourliness. And they root authenticity in reason, the state and the corporate brand more than in locality. Urbanism as a way of life and the 'metropolitan' form of existence (Simmel, 1971) continue in the late modern city, as more abstract, formal, distanced social relations are linked with heightened individualism and weaker primordial ties.

The scenes measures also efficiently highlight striking differences in symbolic meanings expressed by the three cities' amenities. For instance, LA scenes have more self-expression and glamour than do the other cities; they are also less intellectual. New York scenes affirm more strongly an identity based on the power of the intellect and stamp of the corporate brand; they appeal to efficiency and material success and promote formality. Chicago scenes encourage the greatest levels of neighbourliness and tradition. Similar demographic patterns are here mediated by different cultural settings, which in turn might well account for divergent economic and political outcomes that would be otherwise difficult to capture. Scenes measures help to consolidate and quantify the cultural character of cities.

Regional variation in scenes

The scenes measures also help to capture key regional cultural differences. The Figure 4 maps of BIZZIP performance scores illustrate the differences.

Scenes in the Northeast and West are more self-expressive, while those in the South and Midwest refer more to tradition. Scenes in the South and Midwest express more neighbourliness, while Northeastern and especially Western scenes manifest more transgression.

Relationships between dimensions also vary considerably across the regions. For instance, the more glamorous scenes in the South are also more likely to promote tradition than are the glamorous scenes in the other regions. The correlation between glamour and tradition in the South is 0.3 but only 0.01 and 0.06 in the Northeast and West, respectively. This registers the legacy of the more genteel, familial and local Southern scenes, where beauty salons and tailors prepare for Sunday's best and coming out

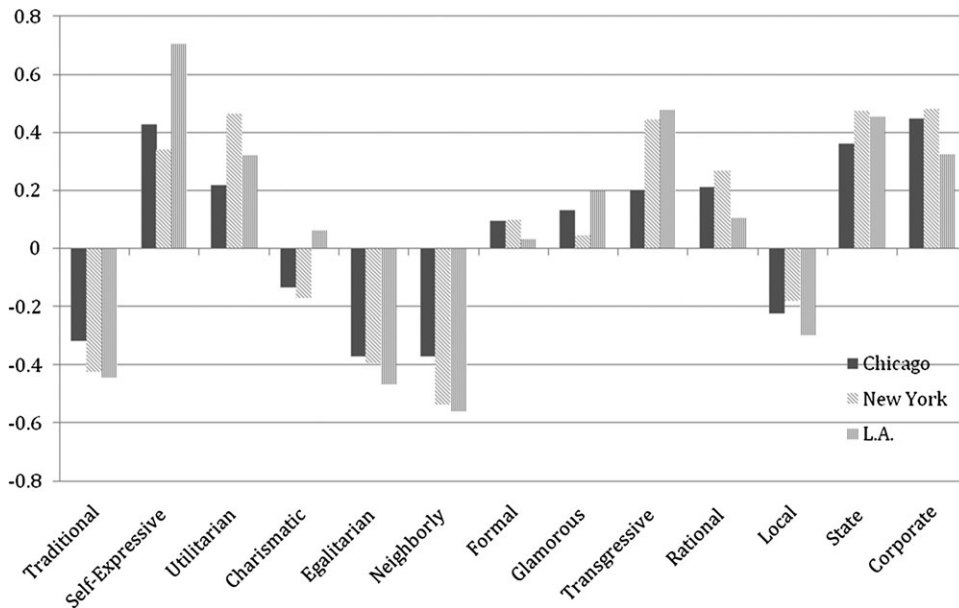


Figure 3. Metropolitan variation in scenes.

Note: This figure shows z scores of the mean performance scores of all zip codes in LA County, Cook County and the five county boroughs of New York. They show the strength of these scenes dimensions in these cities relative to the national average (scored 0).

parties more than media-oriented haute couture and film openings.

The scenes scores compile the cultural information contained in the amenities database into relatively precise measures of key symbolic dimensions of regions. These all have much face validity and are consistent with recent urban scholarship. These data and measures allow us to document and analyse such patterns systematically.

Do scenes make a difference for local economic well-being?

More subtle descriptions of other localities can enhance the more classic geographic and demographic descriptive reports that regularly come from the census and are featured in the media. But the scenes approach also provides a sharper focus on many current economic processes than more traditional economic and demographic indicators can.

To this end, Silver et al. (2011) present detailed summaries of dozens of regression results, analysing the relationship between many dimensions of

scenes and numerous indicators of economic well-being in reference to and controlling for a host of variables, such as education, population, income, rents, race, cultural industry clusters, commuting times, weather and more. Since the present essay is more illustrative, it highlights just a few key results, suggesting how others may add one or more scenes variables to analyses on many different topics.

Figure 5 shows standardized regression coefficients for nine outcomes regressed on self-expressive scenes: three types of patents; growth in population, income and employment; change in median rents and change in college graduate and postgraduate population. The bars show results for self-expression within a model that includes a ‘core’ set of control variables: population, rent, education, crime, party voting, race, arts industry clusters and the first factor of a principal components analysis on the 15 dimensions of scenes.¹¹

Self-expression shows significant associations across a wide range of outcomes. Scenes oriented towards self-expression are positively associated

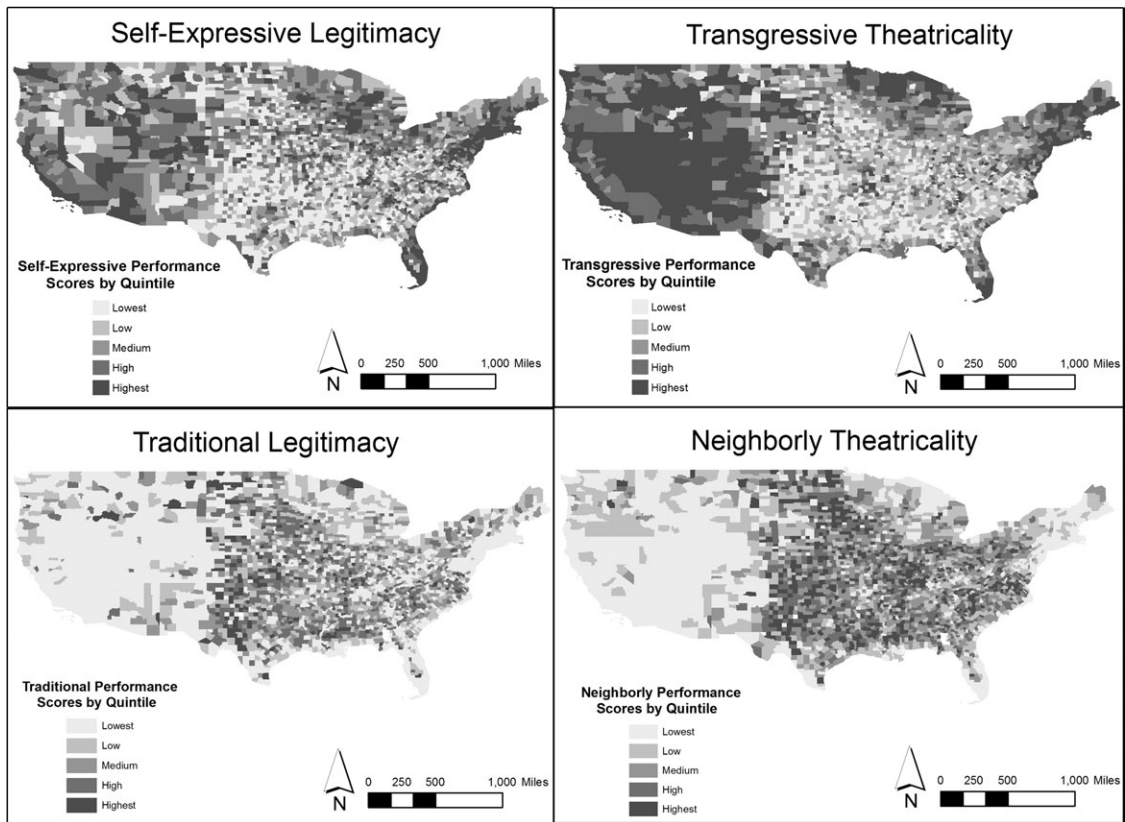


Figure 4. Regional differences in scenes dimensions.

Note: This figure shows regional variations in selected performance scores. Lighter shades indicate counties in lower quintiles (of self-expression etc.); darker shades indicate higher quintiles.

with changes in eight of nine measures of economic innovation and growth. Of the dozens of variables analysed (over 40), *none other* showed such a broad-based set of positive relationships, including education, arts jobs and other creative occupations such as research and technology (change in college graduates is the closest). Arts and R&D employment in particular showed mostly insignificant or negative impacts in the full model. Other variables (not shown) such as weather, commuting time or social climate show decidedly weaker and more mixed results than self-expressive scenes do.

Economic well-being thus seems strongly related to local opportunities for self-expression. Controlling for other variables, such places tend to generate more patents, create jobs and increase their shares of

college graduates. Multiple mechanisms may be at work, both direct and indirect. Self-expressive scenes may cultivate skills and talents in the cultural and creative economy. They may also drive migration patterns, drawing talented persons and new businesses.¹²

One indication of the fact that self-expressive scenes may enhance creative work is given in Figure 6. It deconstructs the widely discussed idea of clusters as development vehicles, as stressed by Michael Porter (2000) and others.

Figure 6 summarizes regression results for clusters of technology jobs within quintiles of self-expressive scenes. That is, the national file was split into five groups based on their self-expression performance scores. Technology job concentration was then analysed within each quintile.

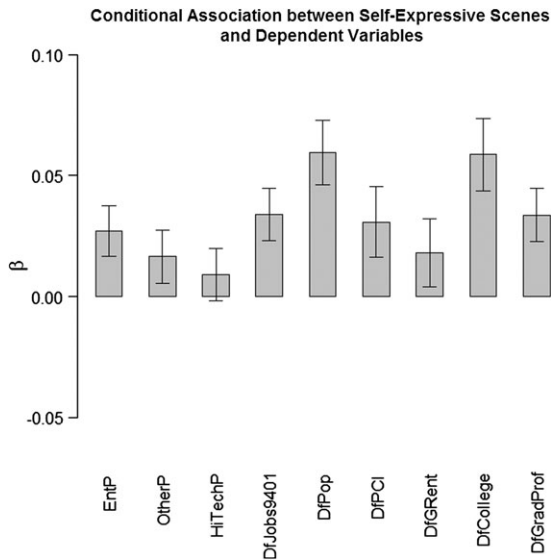


Figure 5. *Self-expression is a key factor in local economic growth.*

Note: In Figures 5 and 6, bars show the impact via the standardized regression coefficients for scenes that promote self-expression on nine dependent variables (EntP etc.). Whiskers indicate the 95% confidence interval for each coefficient. Thus, if the whiskers do not cross (or touch) the horizontal line at zero, the results are statistically significant. From left to right, dependent variables are log entertainment patents per capita, log other patents per capita, log high-tech patents per capita, log proportional change in total employment (1994–2001), log proportional change in population (1990–2000), proportional change in per capita income (1990–2000), proportional change in gross rent (1990–2000), difference in proportion of college graduates (1990–2000) and difference in proportion of individuals with postgraduate degrees (1990–2000). These are classic least squares multiple regression point estimates. Control variables are summarized in the appendix: population, rent, education, crime, party voting, race, arts industry clusters and the first factor of a principal components analysis on the 15 dimensions of scenes. Subsequent analysis (not reported here) of an expanded model that included some 20 controls revealed substantively similar results.

In a near linear fashion, the association between technology clusters and many outcomes becomes increasingly positive as we move from the least to the most self-expressive scenes. That is, technology industry clusters are associated with growth and innovation more when they are located amidst amenities that promote self-expression. Absent location in such scenes, that association is negligible. Quality of life enhances quality of work in measurable ways.

This contextual consequence becomes clearer by comparing national results to quintile results. Nationally, technology jobs are positively related to patent concentration, job growth, population growth and human capital gains, but not significantly related to changes in rents and income. These connections are strongly mediated by the self-expressiveness of the surrounding scene. The positive relationship between technology industry clusters and entertainment and technology patents occurs only within the two most self-expressive quintiles. The positive and significant relationship between technology and college graduate gains exists only in the upper three quintiles, and the magnitude of the coefficient increases fairly linearly. Technology jobs and general job growth are only significantly related within the most self-expressive quintile. The association with population growth and postgraduate gains is significant only in the two most self-expressive quintiles.

Technology clusters may play a part in the new urban economy, but the scene in which those clusters are situated mediates that role. A city may contain large concentrations of technological work, but without self-expressive scenes, they may not attract the most highly trained workers and the spillover effects noted by many geographers may not occur. Approaches that analyse standard production and employment variables will miss these powerful contributions of scenes to the economic health of places.

Conclusion

The interaction between scenes and other standard economic development variables offers one strategic site for further analysis. Urban economists have analysed amenities for several decades, but they have generally used them atomistically—one or a few at a time. The innovation implicit in the scenes approach is to combine hundreds of such amenities and to assign weights to all of them to generate scenes measures for each US zip code. These scenes have direct consequences for many processes. They also measure contexts that transform the operations of other variables, as we saw in the case of self-expressive scenes and technology

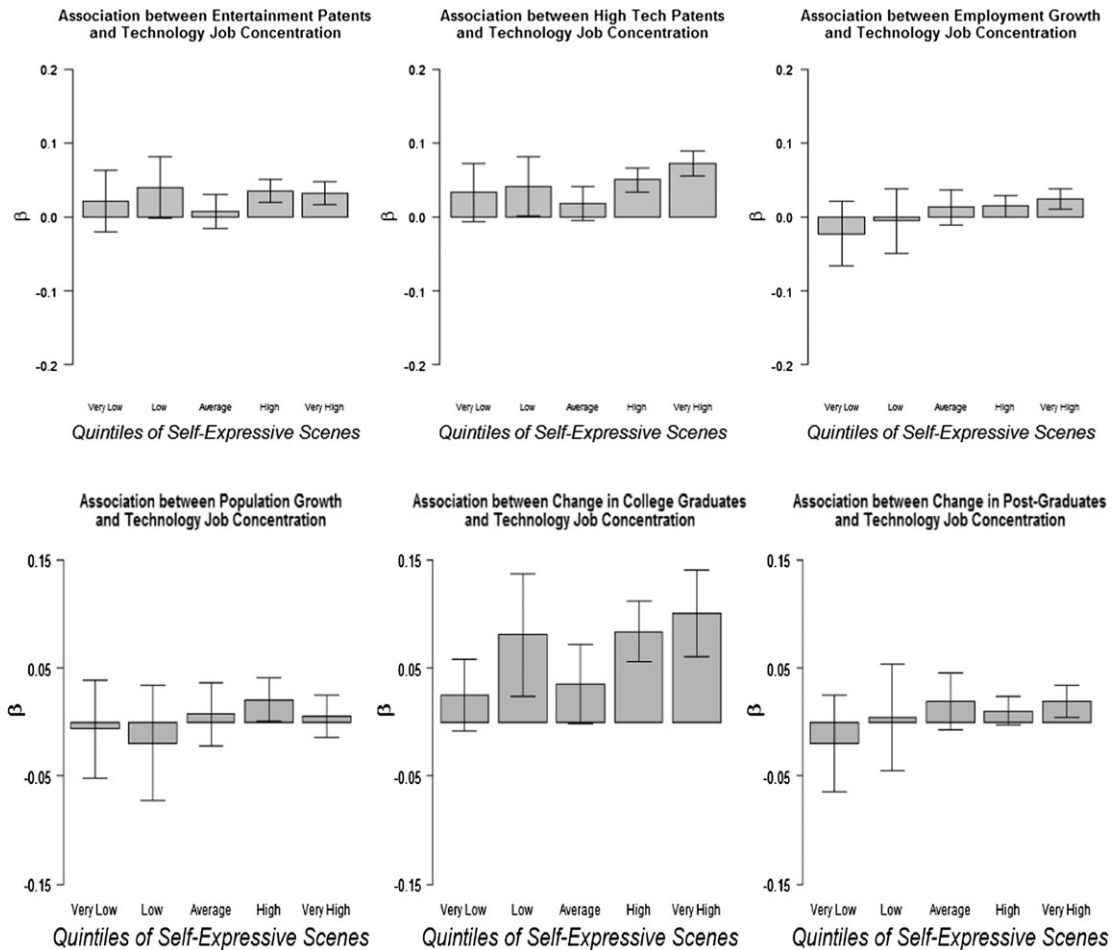


Figure 6. Technology clusters impact local economic growth more strongly in self-expressive scenes.

Note: This figure shows the impact via the standardized regression coefficients of technology clusters on two types of patents, job growth, population growth, change in college graduates and change in postgraduates. The full model was repeated across national quintiles of self-expressive scenes. See the note to Figure 5 for more details on the variables in the model. The appendix details how technology clusters are measured.

clusters. Other research shows that the socio-economic gains that accrue to walkable neighbourhoods are enhanced if they are located in neighbourly and locally oriented scenes (Silver et al., 2011 detail evidence for this connection).

Scenes measures can thus enhance connections among other aspects of regional well-being. Other work in progress shows strong connections between variations in the strength and type of scenes and variations in social trust (Da Silva et al., 2010),

political engagement and activism (Knudsen and Clark, 2009) and psychological dimensions. More generally, we might even proffer that as consumption, taste and lifestyle grow more socially salient, in at least some scenes, production functions estimated omitting scenes variables will be underspecified. To be sure, scenes should not replace classic variables stressed by past work on urban and regional processes. But the scenes perspective adds new tools to the social science tool kit.

Endnotes

¹ Selection criteria are further discussed in Silver et al. (2010).

² PageRaptor software was used to download the categories in 2006 from yellowpages.com. Though the kind of amenities present may change year over year, an analysis of BIZZIP data showed a less than 1% total change in any scene measure based on the overall local set of amenities, from 1998 to 2004. This was despite an increase in the total number of amenities of interest of over 7%.

³ Furthermore, unlike BIZZIP data, where there is an established and documented rationale for the classification system, there is no such information available for YP data. Individual businesses usually select their categories from a preset list.

⁴ The coding process required many detailed and fine judgements and tests for validity and reliability. Coders applied a dichotomous decision tree to each category based on operational definitions of the scenes dimensions. The general strategy was to use the coding process to add operational detail about each dimension. Intercorrelations among coders' results were computed almost weekly, and if they fell below 0.8, the teams would meet, discuss and add more conceptual consistency in writing with more detail about how and what to code, to make the criteria as explicit and consistent as possible for any future coder/analysts to use or recode differently. Though it is possible to quibble with any individual decision, the final scores are relatively stable with respect to any single amenity. Removing even the most numerous types of amenities changes them very little. The appendix, available at www.utsoc.utoronto.ca/~dsilver/CJRES_Appendix.pdf, includes illustrative selections of amenities used to indicate each of the dimensions of theatricality, authenticity and legitimacy.

⁵ We compute separate scores for each source, BIZZIP and YP. These scores are in general substantively similar, though they sometimes differ based on the fact that BIZZIP contains broader coverage but coarser categories while YP is the opposite. YP is thus often more appropriate for comparing smaller sets of more distinctive zip codes and BIZZIP for national analysis of larger units. Since the purpose here is to illustrate the utility of the general scenes approach, the present paper does not detail differences in the two measures (the methodological chapter of a book on scenes does, available from the author upon request).

⁶ Other features of the national distribution of amenities emerge when we look not at the most numerous but rather at the most concentrated amenities, in particular the clustering of some art scenes in major cities. For instance, among the top 50 zip codes for 'independent artists, writers and performers', not one besides Nashville's 37212 comes from outside the New York City or the LA area, and one must scroll down to number 72 to find the next non-New York/LA zip code, Santa Fe, NM. Musical groups and performers, though also concentrated in New York and LA, do include more variation in the top 50, with for instance Nashville zip codes holding the number 1 and 3 positions and zip codes in Branson, Boston and San Francisco holding, respectively, the 21st, 28th and 32nd positions (for more on the geography of musicians, see Florida et al., 2010).

⁷ The more extensive figures referred to in the text can be consulted at http://www.utsoc.utoronto.ca/~dsilver/CJRES_Expanded_Tables.pdf.

⁸ 'New York' is defined here as the five county boroughs; 'LA' as LA County and 'Chicago' as Cook County.

⁹ More detailed rankings can again be found at http://www.utsoc.utoronto.ca/~dsilver/CJRES_Expanded_Tables.pdf.

¹⁰ More detailed rankings are available at http://www.utsoc.utoronto.ca/~dsilver/CJRES_Expanded_Tables.pdf.

¹¹ This factor divides the scenscape along its strongest division, between 'urbane' dimensions that are more impersonal, universalistic and individualistic (corporate, state, rational, utilitarian, glamorous and transgressive) and 'communitarian' dimensions that are more personal and particular (traditional, neighbourly and charismatic). Controlling for this factor allows us to isolate specific dimensions (like self-expression) net of this most generic aspect of the US scenscape. All variables used in the model are described in more detail in the appendix, at http://www.utsoc.utoronto.ca/~dsilver/CJRES_Appendix.pdf.

¹² Multiple causal pathways are likely at work. People may move to places with higher average education levels or rents (due to networking or signalling effects), and scenes may then emerge to support these tastes, subsequently taking on a life of their own. Further analysis shows that places with increasing college graduate populations and higher densities tend to have more self-expressive scenes. But such factors explain a small share of the variance in scenes. The connection between scenes and urban development does not seem to be a function of density, income

or college graduate population, as controlling for these does not reduce the impact of scenes. Once a scene is there, the quality of life it creates matters in its own right. Further work is needed to isolate distinct causal processes.

Acknowledgements

The author thanks Terry Nichols Clark, Benjamin Schatz and Christopher Graziul for helpful comments and technical assistance and gratefully acknowledges the support of the Cultural Policy Center at the University of Chicago and Urban Innovation Analysis.

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