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TGIS415
Final Paper
June 5, 2012

The State of the Arts: A Comparative Study of Public Arts Spending in Tacoma, WA in the 1999-2000 and 2011-2012 Funding Bienniums

Introduction

The State of the Arts is a project that considers the distribution of cultural spending in Tacoma, Washington. This study exclusively considered data on spending by the City of Tacoma's public art program in two funding bienniums, 1999-2000 and 2011-2012. The 1999-2000 biennium is significant because 2000 is the year that the One Percent for Art policy was re-introduced in Tacoma, and the 2011-2012 biennium is significant because it is the current funding period. These two distinct time periods also correspond with decennial census data. The project considers information about arts spending against a backdrop of three different measures at the block group level: income, population density, and educational attainment of residents over 25. Data on arts spending is classified into four categories: Operational Funds,¹ Permanent Artworks,² Temporary Events,³ and Temporary Projects.⁴

This project could be expanded in a number of ways, the most obvious being time span, geographic area, number and diversity of funders, and number of social and economic measures. Ideally, this project would have measured 30 years' worth of data in 5 year increments, starting in the 1981-1982 biennium and ending in the current 2011-2012 biennium. It also would have included a larger variety of arts and culture funders, both private and public. With access to the right information and unlimited resources, it could easily be expanded to as large a geographic area as the United States.

By mapping out the City's spending on arts and culture, this project attempts to uncover spatial patterns relating to the following questions:

- Where is cultural spending most concentrated in the City of Tacoma?
- How has spending changed over the last 10 years?

¹ Operational Funds can be spent on anything from staffing to programming to physical maintenance to office supplies - things that won't necessarily inspire a donor's passion. In the case of TAC, it is an investment in the long term health of local cultural institutions with large budgets (over \$200,000 annual budget).

² Permanent Artworks include statues, murals, and any artwork that is a physical object meant to stand for a long period of time.

³ Temporary Events are festivals, parades, performances, and happenings tied to one specific, continuous event.

⁴ Temporary Projects are temporary artworks, performances, or projects that are ongoing but ephemeral in nature.

- How are types of arts activations distributed throughout the city and what affect does that have on perceived vitality?
- How might cultural spending be better distributed throughout the city to ensure more equal access?
- How does cultural spending match up with other policy efforts?
- What types of organizations have the greatest economic impact compared to the amount that they're granted?

The resulting maps will be most useful for a viewer that is highly aware of the arts in Tacoma. Arts activity is, by nature, difficult to measure quantitatively and rich in qualitative impacts. Ideally, these maps can be used to inform both grantmakers and grantseekers of areas where cultural spending could be better leveraged, areas where there is a current lack of investment, areas where the currently funded activity is unsuccessful, and areas where the currently funded activity is successful. Together, they compose just one interpretation of the impact of the City's arts spending in Tacoma, and they should be considered within the context of anecdotal information and personal perspective.

Theoretical Foundation

The impact of the arts is difficult to measure. Impacts are both quantitative and qualitative and, like many other highly social disciplines (education, for example), results cannot be measured in a vacuum. Creativity and culture are nebulous things that often inspire passion and unrequited investment of time and resources. They are difficult to measure; benefits can be vague or specific, impacts can be lasting or fleeting. Increasingly, arts administrators and grantmakers in America (lead in many ways by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA)) have begun to focus on quantitative measurement of the arts' impact on their communities. The reasons for this seem to be twofold. Increased access to tools and technology (including GIS) that make gathering and understanding quantitative data easier has played a part. This, combined with the assault on public arts funding of the 1980s and 1990s and ongoing, seemingly endless budget cuts have required organizations to make the case for funding in more concrete terms. Since the 1990s especially, in the wake of the Culture Wars (Hunter, 2010) and the NEA Four,⁵ arguments for supporting the arts have tended towards social and

⁵ The NEA Four consist of Tim Miller, Karen Finley, John Fleck, and Holly Hughes, all part of a group of 18 performance artists that had been chosen in 1990 for NEA funding by an appointed panel. The funding for all 18 artists was suspended and eventually restored to all but the NEA Four. The Four sued and eventually won their case. This brought to the forefront questions of censorship, criteria for funding, and the purpose of the Endowment. Shortly afterwards, the NEA stopped funding individual artists, except those in the literary field.

economic impact, rather than the intrinsic value of the arts. While still difficult to measure quantitatively, social and economic value are much easier to measure than intrinsic value.

As a response to criticism, funding cuts, and the Culture Wars of the 1980's and early 1990's, the NEA began to move in a new direction. Rather than focusing many of their resources on the individual artist, the Endowment began to direct their energies toward institutions and community-oriented projects. As art critic Michael Brenson (2001) explains, "that astonishing government trust in the artist was dead. After Congress eliminated funding to individuals, the Endowment, too, detached the power of art from the power of the artist" (p. 90). The arts needed a more concrete and measurable purpose if they were to be funded.

The 1997 publication *American Canvas* (Larson, 1997), which was published by the NEA), explains the new position:

Gone are the days—if, indeed, they ever really existed—when art can be left to speak for itself, its right to public patronage unchallenged, its value to society universally acclaimed. In addition to offering their basic programs, arts organizations will increasingly need to place their work in a social context, making clear their stake in the community. (p. 122)

American Canvas made an important statement that marked a shift in the NEA and the American art world. This statement was in turn confirmed by the emergence of more community-based artwork and the use of art as an economic tool, especially since the 1990s.⁶

Richard Florida (2010) and others have done much to popularize this idea of "soft" infrastructure and the importance of creative people and environments in building a thriving city, which they explore under the mantra of the Creative Class. In *The Rise of the Creative Class*, Florida posits that a creative culture can draw and develop these talented and creative workers, and that in turn will attract and create business. Florida's work on the Creative Class has been highly influential in the use of the arts as a tool for urban revitalization and economic growth (Stern & Seifert, 2008). Florida has made quite a name for himself and his findings in the niche where urban planning and arts advocacy overlap. His work makes a clear assertion and is very much in line with the current desire to establish the measurable positive effects of the arts on communities, especially in economic terms. While many of his teachings should be taken with a

⁶ Exhibitions like Mary Jane Jacob's *Places with a Past* in Charleston, SC and revitalization efforts like the establishment of Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (Mass MOCA) in North Adams or the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao are prime examples of the new models that emerged as art began to be understood differently in relationship to its environment. Each of these examples specifically used art to increase economic activity and engage site-specific histories, cultures, and populations in one city.

grain of salt, Florida has given a popular voice to the idea that the arts play an important role in urban renewal.

Much of the thinking that has encouraged the use of the arts as a revitalization tool in the past two decades has been increasingly focused on economic benefits. In the scramble to prove that the arts still have a valid place in governmental funding, emphasis has been placed on the hard, demonstrate-able facts; how many private investment dollars were leveraged, how much tax money was taken in; how many tourists were brought to the area, etc. Investment in the arts, then, has focused on these ends.

This study takes a cue from this line of thinking, with the intention of being only one part of a more comprehensive picture. By focusing the number and amount spent on arts projects, it is firmly rooted in quantitative data. However, by including the types of arts activations (permanent vs. temporary), and capturing short narrative descriptions of each project, I have also attempted to include a bit of the qualitative in my project. It is my hope that the layers produced can be used as a tool to inform the viewer's perspective of vitality in Tacoma, and its relationship to arts spending. What is the perception of investment in culture by the City? Is it focused on one particular neighborhood or business district? What is the perception of vitality in the city? Does more investment in temporary activation (festivals, performances) correlate to the perception of vitality in a neighborhood? How can these questions of very subjective, experiential matters be understood when measured against quantitative information such as income, education level, and population density?

Planning process

This project's scope fluctuated several times in the planning process. Originally, the intent was to measure the impact of Spaceworks sites. With less than 25 locations and two years of programming, there were simply too few data points to support a meaningful analysis. Instead, the project shifted to mapping the distribution of cultural spending by the City of Tacoma. The plan was to look at where, and in what amounts, grant-making organizations distribute funds throughout the city. I planned to include funds distributed by the City of Tacoma and other organizations with dedicated giving programs to the arts, such as the Greater Tacoma Community Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Washington State Arts Commission. Faced with limited time and access to data, I chose to focus on the funder whose data I could most easily access: the City of Tacoma's Arts Program.

Although this project is designed to fit into a larger context of anecdotal information and personal perspective, I also wanted to give it a quantitative reference. With this in mind, I

planned to create two layers that my maps could be measured against: an index of basic socioeconomic status (SES), including mean education level and income at the block level, as well as a layer of population density at the block level. I hoped this would help “normalize” the data for viewers, explain abnormalities, and uncover patterns. However, an index of two variables is not effective. Rather than creating a SES index, I opted to create three different layers against which to contextualize my work: population, educational attainment, and income level. Because my final product is more of a working set of tools than one static representation of information, I felt it was not important to create one single map product.

My data on arts funding in Tacoma was gathered from a variety of sources including databases, documents, and institutional knowledge. Data from the 1999-2000 biennium was in a different (and better organized) format than that from the 2011-2012 biennium. Most data was hand-entered and interpreted, sometimes from narrative description of the projects. While in the planning process, I decided that, along with basic information about the sponsoring organization and its physical location, I would gather information about the funding program (Murals Program, Percent for Art, Tacoma Artist Initiative Program (TAIP), etc.), the nature or type of activity (Operational Funds, Permanent Artworks, Temporary Events and Temporary Projects), the amount of money that was awarded, and a narrative description of the project for future reference.

Methods and Implementation

The most difficult part of my project was gathering data and converting it to a usable format. Even with free access to all the necessary files, I spent several weeks collecting data, which required several distinct steps. First, I mined institutional knowledge to make sure all sources and funds were captured. Next, I read through notes from Tacoma Arts Commission meetings, since all programmatic funding must be approved by the Commission. Following this, I mined databases from the 1999-2000 biennium used to generate contracts for arts services, and through the actual contracts from the 2011-2012 biennium. I then measured my findings against my own knowledge and existing lists to make sure all relevant expenditures were captured.

Most projects were simple to assign to one geographic location. However, a handful were difficult to pinpoint. Diane Hansen’s 2011 Arts Project, for example, is a project in which the artist created hundreds of hand-blown glass balls and hid them around the city for Chinese New Year. Community members were encouraged to search for these ‘gifts’ and take them home. This fantastic project promotes vitality, exploration, creativity, and humor, and encourages the community to interact with the city on a very intimate level. However, it is

intentionally not tied to one specific geographic location. That would defeat the purpose of the project. I chose to locate this project at the artist's studio because that is where the glass balls were created and a majority of the balls were most likely hidden closer to the studio than anywhere else, for convenience.

Several projects were created and presented in different places. For example, most of TAIP projects were awarded to individual artists, with a public component presented at a different site. For these, I created two distinct sites for each single project and equally divided the funds between the artist's home and site of the public component. This captured both the location of cultural 'consumption' and the location of the creation. Once the points were identified, I georeferenced my data, which involved assigning an address to a number of locations with un-mappable addresses.

With relatively few data points, my layers of arts spending in the two different bienniums were difficult to display. After experimenting with Hot Spot Analysis, Kriging, IDW, and Point Density, I decided to simply symbolize my points by size and color. The data points are few enough that almost any viewer could visually interpret the hotspots, which also preserves the integrity of my data presentation.

For full effect, I put my data into Arc Scene and placed it in the context of census data. To do this, I created six different continuous surfaces from census data at the block group scale for all of Pierce County, then clipped each layer to a Tacoma Neighborhoods layer. The six census layers represent average income, average educational attainment, and population density for both 2000 and 2010. Each layer was displayed as a 3D landscape in a green-to-red continuous surface, with red/low symbolizing distress (high population, low income, low education) and green/high symbolizing security (low population, high income, high education). Each layer's 3D exaggeration was adjusted so that the peaks and valleys were relatively consistent. On top of each of these layers, I placed a layer representing the corresponding arts spending (1999-2000 data was placed on top of 2000 census data, 2011-2012 data was placed on top of 2010 data). Data on arts spending was extrapolated according to amount spent and four different colors were used to symbolize the four different types of spending identified.

Results

Several interesting patterns emerged with the visualization of these maps. Perhaps most striking is the absence of any activity in Northeast Tacoma in either biennium. Despite relatively high average income and education levels, Northeast is a cultural wasteland as far as these measures are concerned. Most spending in both bienniums is predictably focused on New

Tacoma, which is home to the downtown core and most of the city's large arts organizations. In the current biennium, spending has increased in amount, as well as occurrences.

In 1999-2000, large areas of the city were not engaged by funding. Every neighborhood besides New Tacoma, which received 70% of funding, was underrepresented. The South End and the North End were the the second most funded, at 7% of total expenditures each (see Appendix 1). Three neighborhoods actually received less funding than projects located outside of the city limits: South Tacoma, Eastside, and Northeast.

In 2011-2012, funding is more evenly distributed, but still disproportionately high in New Tacoma. No locations outside of the city limits were funded, and each neighborhood received between 5-7% of funding, with the exceptions of New Tacoma (which received 66%) and Northeast (which received 0%).

Besides the slight geographical shift, there was a noticeable shift in the types of projects funded. In 1999-2000, 72% of funded projects were temporary. By contrast, in 2011-2012, 79% of funded projects were temporary. This reveals a slight but distinct uptick in temporary projects. This is interesting when you consider the amount spent on temporary projects. In 1999-2000, just under 50% of total funds were spent on temporary projects; in 2011-2012, just under 41% of the money was spent on temporary projects. Given these numbers, it seems that spending is trending towards fewer, bigger permanent projects and more, smaller temporary projects.

Conclusion & Critical Analysis

Grants can only be given to organizations that apply for them. It follows that the success of any funder is integrally linked to the success of the organizations that it supports. To some degree, funding must follow activity and civic engagement, so this study should be seen more as an indicator of those things than anything.

With such a small sample size and limited time periods, it is difficult to draw any definite conclusions. However, a few interesting shifts did occur. Over the past decade, spending has become more geographically diverse and it has also shifted to supporting fewer but larger permanent projects and more but smaller temporary projects.

In 2000, the One Percent for Art policy was put into effect, which means that 1999-2000 would have been the last biennium to not include large, permanent public art projects with funding tied to specific public projects. This accounts for the noticeably smaller percentage of total funding spent on permanent work in 1999-2000 compared to 2011-2012. In the current biennium, the One Percent ordinance has been firmly in place for a decade, so by now it is a robust program. At the same time, the administrative trend is ever more towards temporary

works. Currently, money tied to the One Percent ordinance is being used for temporary projects (specifically Artscapes and the EnviroChallenger).

Going into this project, it was my personal opinion that the arts can have a significant effect on the community, both economically and socially. Different types of programming have varying effects - my personal preference is for more activations in more locations, funded at smaller amounts. I believe that enabling more projects and individuals at a smaller amount (rather than large, one-time projects) allows for a more direct investment in the community and is a more effective tool for stimulating innovative work and ensuring the long-term creativity and vitality of a community. My opinion about the impact of the arts has not changed after completing this project; if anything I feel I am better equipped to support my position. However, as with any study, more comprehensive data (either from more organizations or more distinct periods of time) would paint a more complete picture.

Appendix 1

BASIC FIGURES

	1999-2000	2010-2011
Total Amount Spent	\$271,600	\$758,255
Number of Locations	75	171
Average Amount Spent	\$3,621	\$4,434
Spending Range	\$300-\$15,000	\$100-\$50,000

AMOUNT SPENT BY NEIGHBORHOOD

NEIGHBORHOOD	Total amount 1999-2000	Percentage of total 1999-2000	Total amount 2010-2011	Percentage of total 2010-2011
Northeast	\$0	0%	\$0	0%
South End	\$19,200	7%	\$40,500	5%
West End	\$13,750	5%	\$55,738	7%
South Tacoma	\$4,375	2%	\$34,845	5%
North End	\$19,000	7%	\$47,346	6%
Central	\$12,200	4.5%	\$34,388	5%
New Tacoma	\$191,425	70%	\$498,102	66%
Eastside	\$1,500	0.5%	\$47,335	6%
Other Areas	\$10,150	4%	\$0	0%

Appendix 2: Education

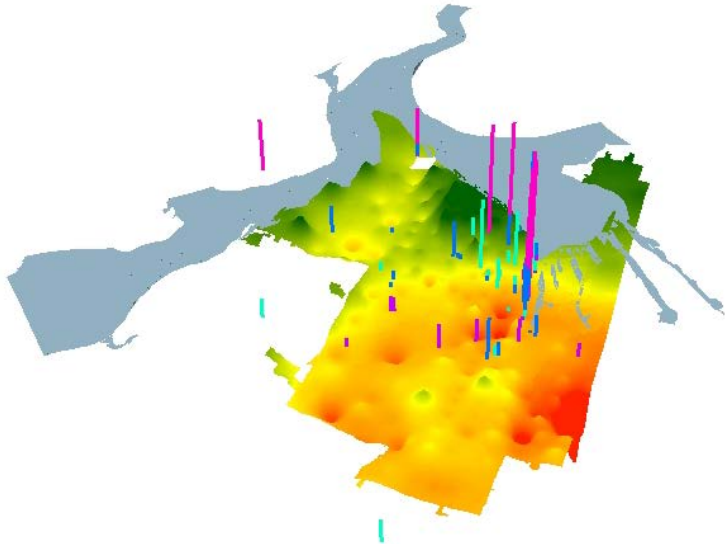


Fig. 1: Arts spending in Tacoma, WA in 1999-2000, against a raster layer of average educational attainment of adults over 25 in 2000.

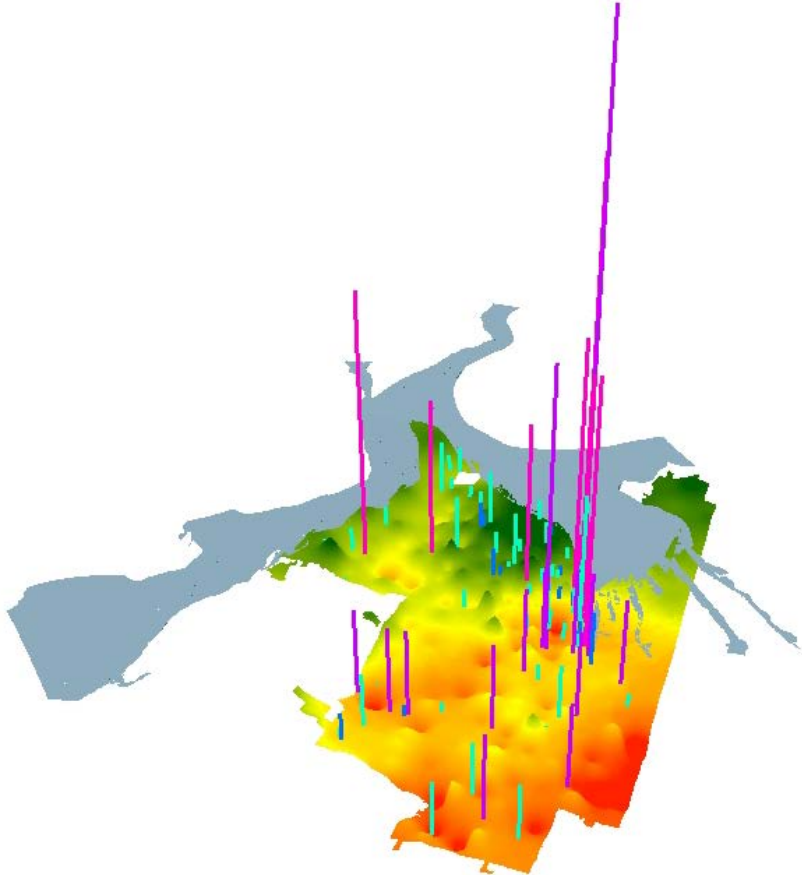


Fig. 2: Arts spending in Tacoma, WA in 2011-2012, against a raster layer of average educational attainment of adults over 25 in 2010.

Appendix 3: Income

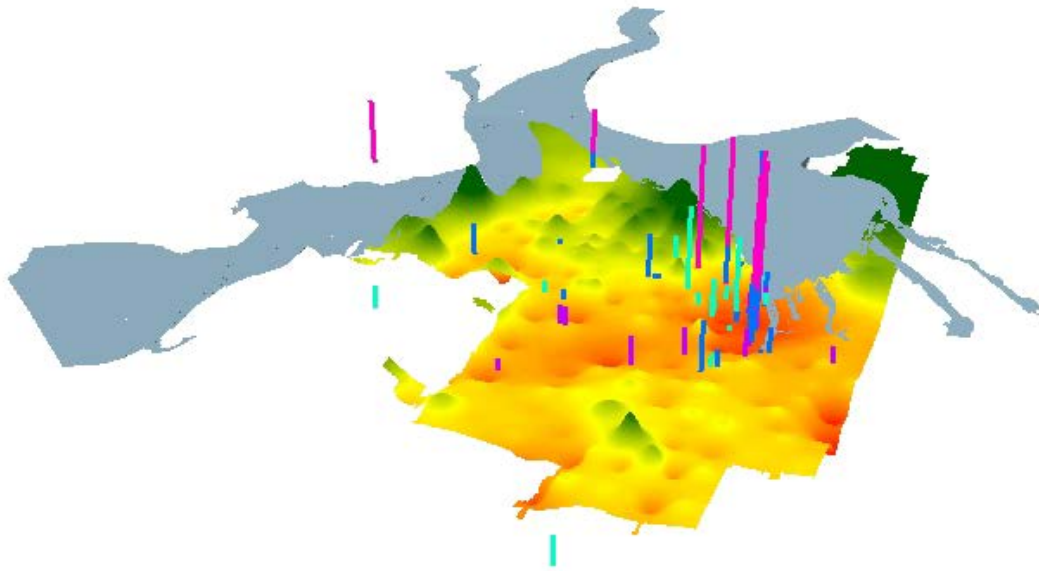


Fig. 3: Arts spending in Tacoma, WA in 1999-2000, against a raster layer of average income in 2000.

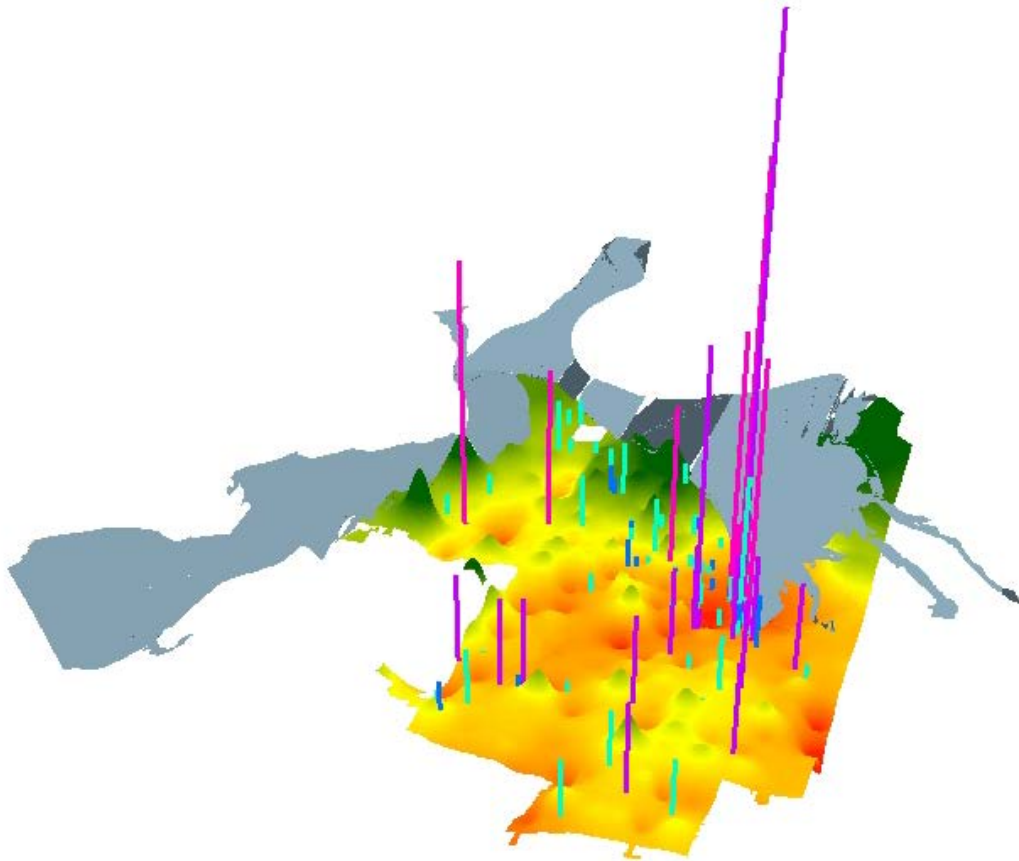


Fig. 4: Arts spending in Tacoma, WA in 2011-2012, against a raster layer of average income in 2010.

Appendix 4: Population Density

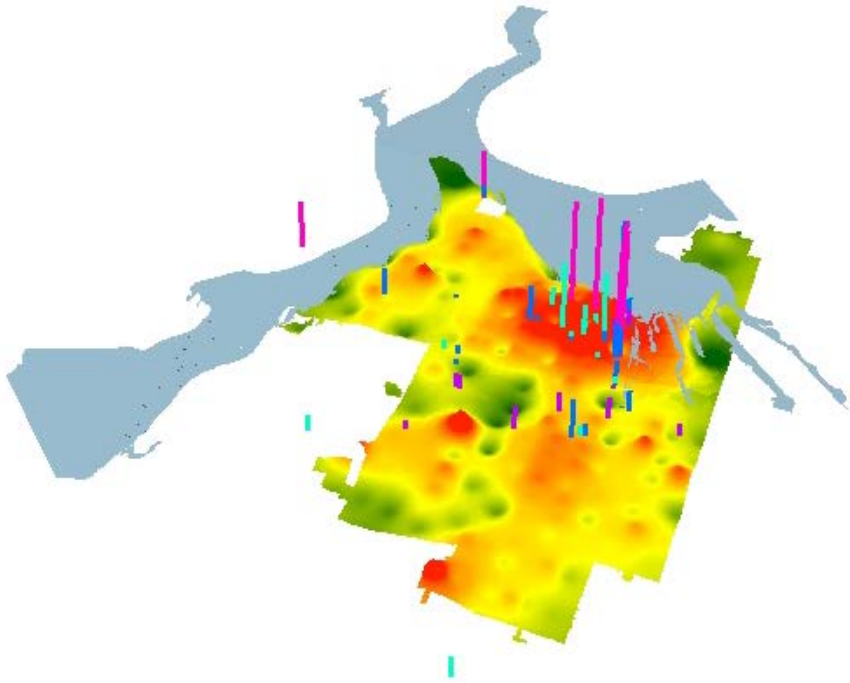


Fig. 5: Arts spending in Tacoma, WA in 1999-2000, against a raster layer of population density in 2000.

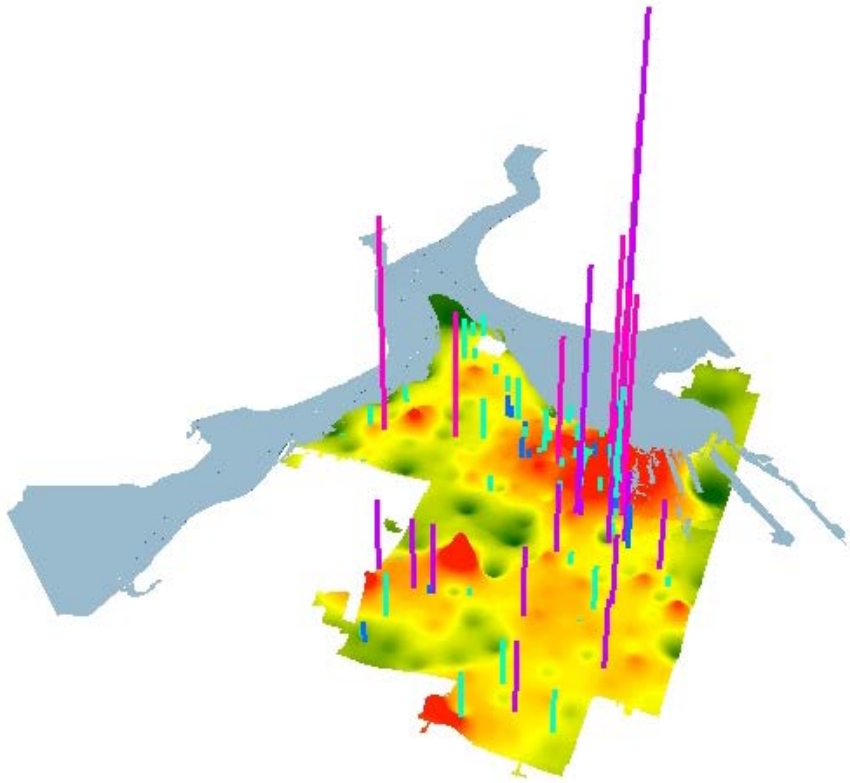


Fig. 6: Arts spending in Tacoma, WA in 2011-2012, against a raster layer of population density in 2010.

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