

to determine recovery and preventative measures. As a method of “testing the waters,” renting homes has increased as well in the growing city, reiterating the need to draw the creative class into these communities that are balancing on the edge. Finally, people are taking more initiative in their home search. The desire to live, work, and settle in the area is present. Grand Rapids is heading in the right direction; all that’s needed is the proper push to get it moving there more effectively and smoothly.

## Jobs

Region	Creativity Index Rank	Tolerance Rank	Creative Class		Super-Creative Core	
			Share	Employment	Share	Employment
San Francisco	2	20	36.08%	1,217,760	21.90%	739,150
New York	20	25	33.25%	3,080,450	19.51%	1,807,290
Chicago	39	81	31.70%	1,372,630	25.73%	1,114,200
Grand Rapids	131	206	25.14%	138,020	35.51%	194,980

Creative cities generate various jobs and opportunities. Because of the size, population, and number of businesses in large cities, there are many more of these creative class jobs which are attracting college graduates and keeping them there. The table we have provided is a compilation of Florida's Table 1 and Table 2 in Appendix B. It shows the Creative Index of a city as well as its employment percentage. The higher the Creative Index, the higher the employment.

## Conclusion

San Francisco is the Mecca of the Creative Class. There is major potential for Grand Rapids to become the “San Francisco of the Midwest” by developing the cultural life that is there, and fostering creative endeavors and new business. This potential can be met and exceeded through diversity, artistic districts, a sophisticated nightlife, housing, and jobs. The opportunity is there, but what is the next step? Collaboration

and dialogue between policymakers and the future Creative Class will take Michigan cities, especially Grand Rapids, to the next level. Governor Granholm and the Michigan Legislature have acknowledged the importance of this issue and have implemented the Cool Cities Initiative referenced throughout this informative brochure.

## Resources

1. Audu, Lola. "5 Important Grand Rapids Real Estate Trends to Watch in 2008! « Grand Rapids Real Estate Musings...." Grand Rapids Real Estate Musings.... <http://sellgrandrapidshomes.wordpress.com/2008/02/15/5-important-grand-rapids-real-estate-trends-to-watch-in-2008/> (accessed November 12, 2008).
2. Florida, Richard. *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life*. New York: Basic Books, 2002.
3. "Greater Grand Rapids Ethnic Diversity: The Right Place." Economic Development Grand Rapids, Michigan: The Right Place: Greater Grand Rapids, MI -- The Right Place. <http://www.rightplace.org/live/diversity/> (accessed November 13, 2008).
4. Lopez, Alejandra. (2001). "Racial/Ethnic Diversity and Residential Segregation in the San Francisco Bay Area." Google. [http://74.125.95.104/search?q=cache:eOQCJvzGt8J:ccsre.stanford.edu/reports/report\\_1.pdf+diversity+in+san+francisco](http://74.125.95.104/search?q=cache:eOQCJvzGt8J:ccsre.stanford.edu/reports/report_1.pdf+diversity+in+san+francisco) (accessed November 12, 2008).
5. "Sexual Health: Gay." (2008). Discovery Health. [http://health.discovery.com/centers/sex/sexpedia/gay\\_02.html](http://health.discovery.com/centers/sex/sexpedia/gay_02.html) (accessed November 12, 2008).

**professional writing @msu**

This report is available for download and may be used according to the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 3.0 license.

<http://kairos.wide.msu.edu/~sue/townhall/town.html>



# Building a Creative City: The Potential of Grand Rapids

Sarah Bowser, Nicole Cillette, Laura Mitchell, Joe Morsello  
November 2008



Photo courtesy of [www.flickr.com/photos/sparkys\\_joint/469425162/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/sparkys_joint/469425162/)

## Overview

In analyzing diversity, artistic districts, sophisticated nightlife, housing, and jobs of a city such as San Francisco, we have discovered the potential for a Michigan city to become a "Cool City," as stated by Granholm's initiative, nurturing the Creative Class. The potential lies within Grand Rapids, and if influenced, could nurture the Creative Class and provide a new, central creative industry for the Michigan economy. Our report will discuss what the Creative Class wants in a city, and Grand Rapids potential to fulfill those desires on the basis of diversity, artistic districts, sophisticated nightlife, housing, and jobs. Our research covered the Michigan Cool Cities initiative, Florida's *The Rise of the Creative Class*, and data pulled from analyzing an existing creative city such as San

Francisco. In providing the resources for the Creative Class to flourish, this report will show that it is possible to supplement the declining Auto Industry with a new Creative one, and that Michigan professional writers and policy makers can influence and speed up the progress.

## Diversity

The ethnic diversity in San Francisco provides a way to understand how a Creative City gets to the magnitude that it does and how it is important that diversity, sexual orientation included, exists in a Creative City. "Over the past century and a half, it [the United States] built the most powerful and dynamic economy in the world, and it did so largely by building creative strength: by eagerly fostering the birth of new industries, by maintaining a free and open society, by making massive investments in creativity (such as in higher education, scientific research and culture), and most of all, by drawing waves of energetic, intelligent people from all over the world to its shores".<sup>2</sup> In San Francisco, the Asian population (at 36.36%) exceeds any other percentage of ethnic population for people < 18.<sup>4</sup> Richard Florida explains, "The 2000 Census makes it abundantly clear that a large share of regional growth over the 1990s was driven by immigration."<sup>2</sup> While ethnic diversity plays a role in “maintaining a free and open society.” To achieve this diversity needs to exist at the sexual orientation level. “San Francisco, New York, Chicago and Los Angeles appear to have the largest concentrations of gays in the United States.”<sup>5</sup> This shows that Creative Cities attract certain types of people by fostering a home for that “creative” industry type environment.



For Grand Rapids, and the greater area, “People of all races and nationalities have called Greater Grand Rapids home, from our Dutch forefathers to today’s Sudanese, Chinese, and Eastern European immigrants.”<sup>3</sup> Diversity is perhaps the most important ingredient needed to build a creative city. The reason why a city such as San Francisco is so creatively successful is because it is an open society that accepts the differences between people. Acceptance and nontraditional values are what make creativity thrive.

## Artistic Districts

It is vital that the Creative Class live in a place that allows inspiration to flourish. As Florida asserts, “What these people [the Creative Class] have in common is a strong desire for... environments that let them be creative”<sup>2</sup>. This requires a variety of factors and outlets for creativity.

Although art has been incorporated into all of San Francisco’s diverse neighborhoods, the Mission District is arguably the epicenter of the arts in San Francisco. It combines the culture and lifestyle of the community with the artistic amenities the district provides. Colorful murals adorn walls and store fronts. It boasts numerous art galleries and many options for individual

expression including performing arts centers. The district is a cultural hub for the “indie” movie and music scene with its historic movie theatres, independent record stores, and intimate music venues. All of this is concentrated in a few main streets and within walking distance most residents.

Grand Rapids has started its own artistic district with the hopes of cultivating a successful and attractive neighborhood much like the Mission District. The Heartside District has been transformed to the Avenue for the Arts. The project gained support with the Cool Cities initiative receiving a \$100,000 grant to continue the revitalization.

## Sophisticated Nightlife

While jobs and housing bring the creative class to a city, it is the city’s social atmosphere that keeps them entertained and content. The creative class is drawn to all forms of creative scenery. The scenery comes in many forms such as: music, art, film, outdoor recreation, and the overall nightlife. “The scene may spill out onto the sidewalks, with dining tables, musicians, vendors, panhandlers, performers and plenty of passersby at all hours of the day and night.”<sup>2</sup> It is the mixture of all these forms of entertainment

along with a mixture of cultures that makes up the social atmosphere of the creative class.

The city that properly exemplifies creative scenery is San Francisco because it has over 1000 different venues for the creative class to choose from, including over 300 bars and restaurants. Not to mention the 200 nightclubs and almost 100 live music venues that fill the streets of San Francisco. But the city is not limited to only these forms of entertainment. Even children can enjoy the city nightlife at a club for all ages and the gay community can enjoy one of the 16 venues offered to them in San Francisco.

San Francisco remains in continual growth and creative leadership because the city has a social scene for all people. Not only does the city appeal to the social wants of individuals, it also appeals to the social life of families because of the theaters, live music venues, and restaurants they have to choose from. San Francisco’s nightlife acts as a model for cities in the midst of building the amenities necessary for a creative class to thrive in.

## Housing

Location, location, location: the three elements

most essential to choosing a place to live, work, and grow. “Creativity flourishes best in a unique kind of social environment: one that is stable enough to allow continuity of effort, yet diverse and broad-minded enough to nourish creativity in all its subversive forms”<sup>2</sup> San Francisco is in an especially prime position to improve the vital environment of people looking to take up residence in this creativity Mecca. For those within the ages of 25 to 44, the target age range for the Creative Class, San Francisco has seen a steady increase in its housing markets. The creative demographic already established there have contributed to the prosperity of the city by making it the fastest growing eco-friendly housing area. “Green housing construction” has taken precedence, and as such has cemented San Francisco’s reputation as creative innovators.

In contrast, Grand Rapids is not seeing the growth it needs to establish itself as a creativity center. However, with the right combination of people and the right amount of growth, Grand Rapids may be able to reach that goal. Housing sales have been increasing steadily, almost doubling, over the past four years; helped by the increase of web real estate practices. Foreclosure rates are being studied more closely