Social Inclusion
2026 • Volume 14 • Article 11611
https://doi.org/10.17645/si.11611

cogitatio

ARTICLE

Open Access Journal

Location and Residential Concentration of the "Creative Class" in Riga, Latvia

Maris Berzins, Sindija Balode-Kraujina, and Zaiga Krisjane

Department of Geography, University of Latvia, Latvia

Correspondence: Maris Berzins (maris.berzins@lu.lv)

Submitted: 26 October 2025 **Accepted:** 16 December 2025 **Published:** 18 February 2026

Issue: This article is part of the issue "Digital Transition and New Forms of Spatial Inequality" edited by Tiit Tammaru (University of Tartu), Kadi Kalm (University of Tartu), and Rūta Ubarevičienė (Lithuanian Centre for Social Sciences), fully open access at https://doi.org/10.17645/si.i468

Abstract

Economic and urban geographers have paid considerable attention to creative and cultural industries, both for their propensity to cluster in urban neighbourhoods and their potential to drive economic development. The thesis of the "creative class" has been a central topic of academic debate and urban planning since the dawn of the 21st century. It is widely believed that a city's economic prosperity is directly related to its ability to attract and retain "creative people." Within this context, our study aims to examine the residential patterns of the "creative class" in Riga, Latvia, using geo-referenced individual-level census data from 2021 and a multi-scalar k-nearest neighbour approach. We identify a pronounced spatial concentration of creative class workers in the historic inner city and adjacent pre-war neighbourhoods, with substantial variation across subgroups: Cultural workers show the strongest inner-city clustering, knowledge and creative industry workers display moderately dispersed but still core-oriented patterns, and leisure industry workers are the most spatially integrated across the city. Creative class workers are markedly underrepresented in Soviet-era housing estates, reflecting established socio-spatial divides, rather than active displacement processes. These findings demonstrate that "creative class" residential patterns in Riga align with fragmented forms of urban transformation characteristic of post-socialist cities, while revealing significant internal heterogeneity that challenges the notion of a unified "creative class."

Keywords

creative class; knowledge workers; residential patterns; Riga

1. Introduction

Since Richard Florida's seminal work on the "creative class" at the turn of the millennium, urban scholars and policymakers have extensively debated the role of creative workers in shaping contemporary urban

development. Florida's thesis posited that cities capable of attracting and retaining creative professionals—defined broadly as individuals engaged in "creating meaningful new forms"—would experience enhanced economic vitality and urban prosperity (Florida, 2002). This framework has profoundly influenced urban policies worldwide, with cities competing to cultivate "creative" environments through investments in cultural infrastructure, amenities, and quality of life enhancements (Cerisola & Panzera, 2022; Grodach, 2017; Peck, 2005; Scott, 2006).

However, the creative class thesis also generated substantial criticism. Scholars have questioned its theoretical foundation, empirical validity, and social implications (Krätke, 2010; Storper & Scott, 2008). Critics argue that the focus on attracting creative workers neglects the underlying economic structures, exacerbates socio-spatial inequalities, and fuels gentrification processes that may diminish the diversity and authenticity that initially attracted them (Atkinson, 2000; Faludi, 2019; Ley, 2003). The relationship between creative class clustering and gentrification has emerged as a particularly contentious issue, with research demonstrating that creative professionals often serve as "pioneers" of neighbourhood change, preceding and facilitating subsequent waves of capital investment and displacement (Kitsos et al., 2025; Ley, 2003; Lloyd, 2010; Zukin, 1982).

Empirical studies of creative class residential patterns have revealed complex spatial dynamics that vary across national and urban contexts. In Western European and North American cities, creative workers tend to concentrate in inner-city neighbourhoods characterised by historic architecture, cultural amenities, ethnic diversity, and vibrant street life (Markusen, 2006; Musterd & Gritsai, 2013). These "soft" locational factors—authenticity, cultural capital, and social milieu—appear to outweigh traditional "hard" factors such as proximity to employment centres, although accessibility and housing affordability remain significant considerations (Bontje et al., 2011; Comunian et al., 2010). Research across European cities has demonstrated that creative class settlement patterns follow predictable trajectories, beginning with concentration in transitional inner-city areas and subsequently diffusing outwards as gentrification advances and life-course factors influence residential choices (Lawton et al., 2013; Musterd & Gritsai, 2013).

In post-socialist contexts, creative class dynamics intersect with distinctive urban legacies and transformation processes. Cities in Central and Eastern Europe have experienced rapid socio-economic restructuring since 1990, characterised by privatisation, marketisation, and profound changes in urban structure and social geography (Sýkora & Bouzarovski, 2012; Tammaru et al., 2015). The spatial outcomes of these transformations differ markedly from Western patterns, with post-socialist cities exhibiting complex mosaics of renewal and decline, persistent residential segregation along ethnic and socio-economic lines, and distinctive forms of gentrification that often remain fragmented (Gentile et al., 2012; Kovács et al., 2013). Research on creative class settlement in post-socialist cities remains limited, showing that while some patterns partially mirror those observed in Western cities, their settlement also exhibits distinctive local characteristics (Górczyńska, 2017; Kozina et al., 2021).

Riga, the capital of Latvia, presents a compelling case for examining creative class residential dynamics in a post-socialist context. As the second largest city in the Baltic states and a significant regional economic centre, Riga has undergone substantial transformation since Latvia's independence in 1991 and particularly following its accession to the European Union in 2004. The city's historic core, recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage Site for its exceptional concentration of Art Nouveau architecture, has experienced selective

renovation, in-fill, and commercial development (Treija et al., 2020), while Soviet-era housing estates on the periphery house the majority of the population. Riga is characterised by significant ethnic diversity, with approximately half of the population identified as Russian-speaking minorities, creating complex patterns of socio-spatial segregation (Krišjāne & Bērziņš, 2014). Recent scholarship has documented emerging gentrification processes in select inner-city neighbourhoods, although these remain more limited and fragmented compared to Western European cities (Krišjāne et al., 2015).

Despite Riga's regional significance and distinctive post-socialist trajectory, the residential geography of the creative class remains underexplored. This study addresses this gap by examining the spatial distribution and concentration of creative class workers across Riga using high-resolution, individual-level data from the 2021 Population and Housing Census. Specifically, we investigate: (a) How are creative class workers spatially distributed across Riga at multiple scales? (b) Do creative class subgroups (creative, knowledge, culture, and leisure industries) exhibit distinct residential patterns? (c) How do these patterns relate to the urban structure, neighbourhood characteristics, and ongoing processes of urban change?

The spatial scale of analysis has proven critical for understanding the residential patterns of different social groups, including the creative class (Lawton et al., 2013; Lichter et al., 2020). By employing a multi-scalar k-nearest neighbour approach and location quotient analysis on a uniform 1-hectare grid, this study provides methodologically rigorous insights into creative class residential geographies while avoiding the analytical limitations associated with administrative boundaries. Our findings contribute to broader debates on creative class theory, gentrification, and socio-spatial polarisation in post-socialist urban contexts, with implications for understanding how urban residential patterns shape creative economies.

2. Data and Methods

This study utilised anonymised, individual-level data from the 2021 Population and Housing Census, collected by the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia. The dataset covered all employed residents of Riga, geo-referenced to their place of residence. The "creative class" was defined by economic sector based on the Statistical Classification of Economic Activities (NACE, Revision 2) 2-digit codes, including workers within (a) creative industries, i.e., motion picture and video, radio and TV, software and consultancy, architecture; (b) knowledge industries, i.e., financial intermediation, law and accounting, business and management consultancy, R&D and higher education, market research and public opinion polling; (c) culture industries, i.e., art and entertainment, library and archives, museums; and (d) leisure industries, i.e., catering and bars, sport and recreation. This comprehensive definition captured 54,273 individuals, or 17% of Riga's workforce, while acknowledging that some hybrid or emerging occupations may not be fully represented by these classifications, a known limitation of occupational coding systems (Connelly et al., 2016).

While leisure industry workers exhibit distinct socio-demographic profiles from other creative class subgroups, their inclusion reflects how urban policy and "creative city" strategies commonly frame the broader creative economy as encompassing both producers of symbolic goods and facilitators of creative urban lifestyles (Bille, 2010; Florida, 2002; Roberts, 2006). Leisure industries play a crucial role in producing the urban "scene" and amenity infrastructure that attracts and sustains creative workers. From this perspective, treating leisure industries as part of the wider creative economy allows us to empirically examine how workers who contribute to these scenes are positioned within the urban social and spatial structure.

Simultaneously, we explicitly acknowledge the conceptual tension between this broad, policy-driven understanding of the creative economy and class-analytic approaches to the "creative class" that emphasise high levels of human capital, autonomy, and professional status. Therefore, we do not claim that leisure industry workers occupy the same class position as knowledge, culture, or creative professionals. Instead, we retain them as a clearly differentiated subgroup to critically interrogate the internal segmentation that is often obscured when urban policy discourses aggregate diverse labour segments under a single "creative city" label.

To precisely analyse intra-urban spatial patterns, a uniform grid of 1-hectare cells covering the city of Riga was used (Figure 1). This fine resolution grid was selected to balance sufficient spatial detail with computational efficiency while addressing the modifiable areal unit problem by avoiding reliance on administrative boundaries. The 1-hectare resolution effectively captures neighbourhood-level variation while maintaining analytical tractability, aligning with similar high-resolution spatial analyses in urban geography. A coarser grid would obscure the small-scale clustering characteristics of the fragmented post-socialist urban environment. The systematic grid enabled consistent comparison and aggregation across spatial scales, thus providing a robust framework for capturing urban diversity in creative-class residential patterns.

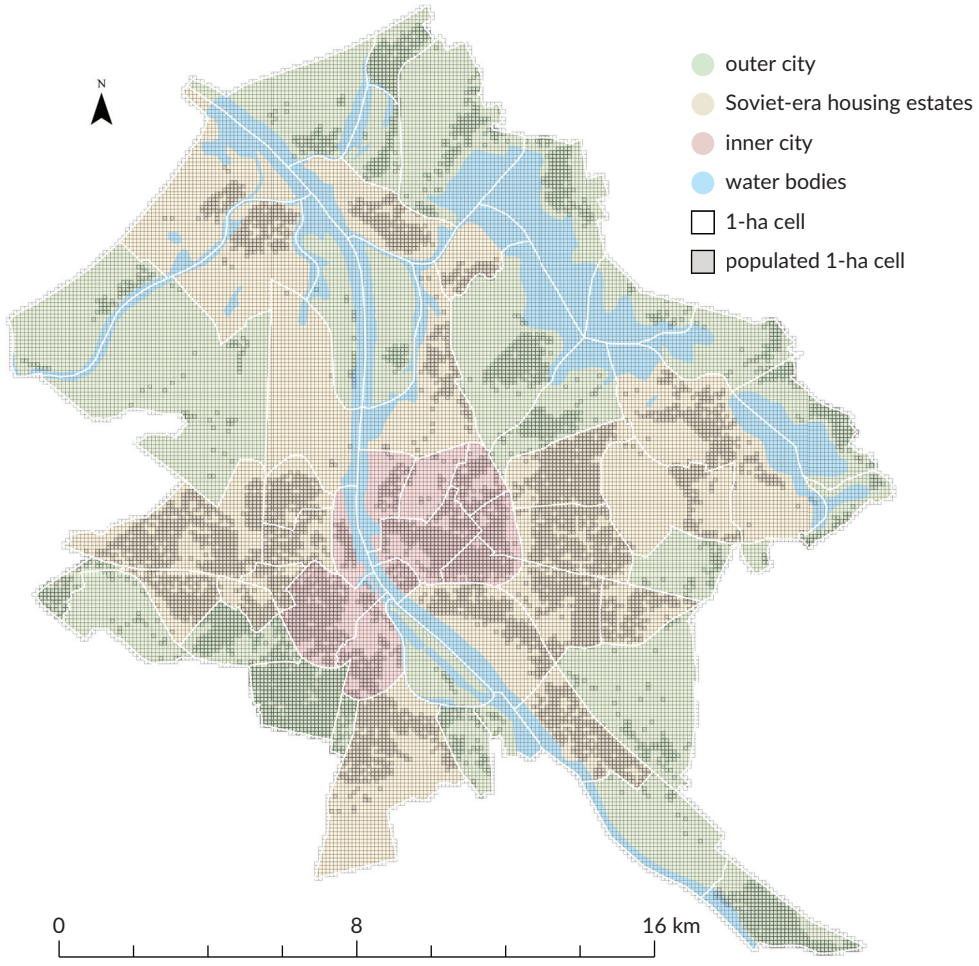

Figure 1. Gridded study area and administrative neighbourhoods by urban structure in Riga.

Scale sensitivity has important implications for both theory and policy, highlighting the need for analytical frameworks that capture spatial heterogeneity, while avoiding the modifiable areal unit problem inherent in analyses based on administrative boundaries (Openshaw, 1996). For spatial analysis, we employed the k-nearest neighbour approach, which computes individualised neighbourhoods comprising the k-nearest neighbours (or nearest residents) for each grid cell. The selected k values were 200, 800, and 6,400, allowing a multi-scalar analysis, where a smaller k value corresponded to the immediate local surroundings, and a larger k value captured a broader urban context.

Then, to quantitatively assess residential location and concentration patterns of the "creative class," the location quotient (Apparicio et al., 2014) was calculated for each individualised neighbourhood. Recognising heterogeneity within the "creative class," subgroup analyses were performed to differentiate between the creative, knowledge, culture, and leisure industries. Each subgroup was profiled across sociodemographic variables, including average age, gender ratio, ethnicity, education, marital status, occupational status, and residential mobility (Table 1). Creative, knowledge, and cultural industries generally attracted more highly educated individuals occupying higher-status roles, but while knowledge, culture, and leisure industries had a larger proportion of women, creative industries were male-dominated. Cultural industries were characterised by an older and more ethnically homogenous workforce whose residential mobility was low, while leisure industries stood out for their high ethnic diversity and relatively youthful staff, often with lower levels of formal education and occupational status, suggesting differential residential preferences.

Table 1. Sociodemographic indicators of creative class subgroups in Riga in 2021.

	Creative industries	Knowledge industries	Culture industries	Leisure industries	Creative class	All employees
Mean age	38.3	42.1	48.2	38.0	40.7	45.0
Share of women, %	39.1	63.9	64.3	62.0	56.9	54.2
Share of married persons, %	47.9	49.0	42.2	35.4	43.6	49.2
Share of ethnic minorities, %	45.3	36.2	17.9	53.6	40.8	49.3
Share of university educated, %	69.8	74.6	62.2	20.1	61.1	44.8
Share of high-status occupational groups, %	71.7	57.0	65.6	13.4	52.6	34.0
Share of mobile residents, %	14.3	12.4	8.7	12.4	12.7	10.1
Total, thousands	14.4	24.5	4.2	11.2	54.3	316.2

Source: Authors' calculations based on data from Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia (2025).

Individualised neighbourhoods were computed using Equipop Flow (Östh, 2024), location quotients were computed using Geo-Segregation Analyzer v.1.2 (Apparicio et al., 2014), and mapping was carried out using ArcGIS Pro.

3. Results

3.1. Creative Class Multi-Scalar Analysis

This subsection examines the overall spatial distribution of creative class workers across Riga using the k-nearest neighbour approach at various scales. Spatial analysis revealed a pronounced scale-dependent concentration of Riga's creative class (Figure 2). At all analytical scales, creative-class workers demonstrated preferential settlement in the historic inner city and adjacent neighbourhoods, coinciding with areas characterised by diverse amenities, architectural heritage, and fragmented gentrification. These findings corroborate broader research demonstrating that creative workers privilege neighbourhoods with strong "soft" locational factors while also weighing traditional "hard" factors (Bereitschaft, 2017).

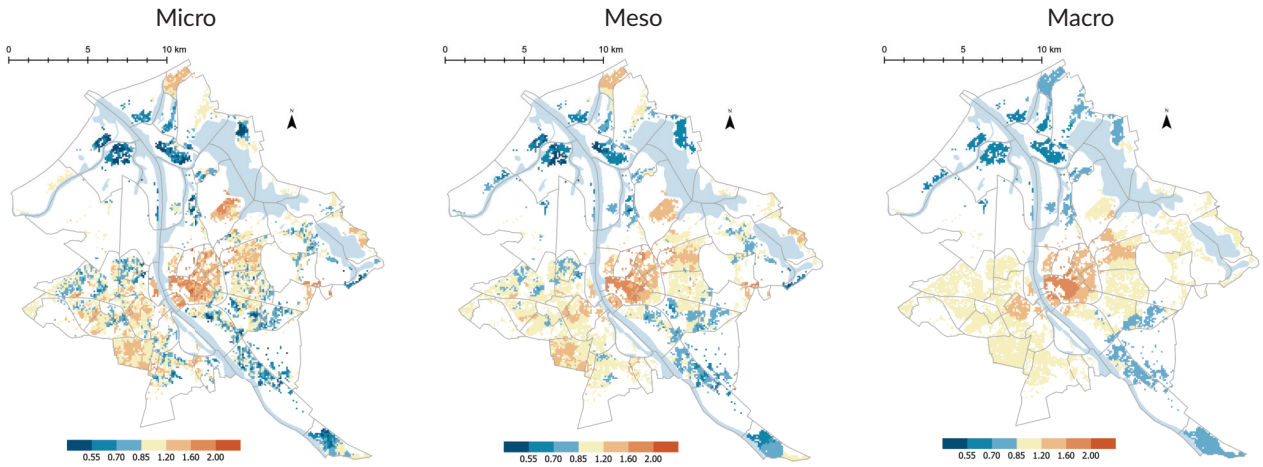

Figure 2. Distribution of location quotients of the creative class in Riga among 200, 800, and 6,400 nearest neighbours in 2021. Source: Authors' calculations, based on Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia (2025).

At the micro scale, the creative class concentration exhibited sharp spatial differentiation, with particularly high concentrations in the inner city and selected outer city locations. The most pronounced clustering occurred within the Art Nouveau district and adjacent pre-war neighbourhoods characterised by mixed-use development, historic building stock, and proximity to cultural institutions. At the meso scale, core centralisation remained robust, whereas the concentration peaks became somewhat attenuated. Notably, the micro- and meso-scale analyses also identified select pockets of elevated creative class concentration in peripheral locations, including certain outer-city and Soviet-era housing estate zones, characterised by low-rise residential areas with distinctive architectural characteristics. However, these peripheral concentrations remained isolated and substantially smaller in extent compared to the dominant inner-city clustering.

At the macro scale, the spatial distinctiveness of the creative class settlement has diminished considerably. Location quotient values converged toward unity across the western and eastern parts of the city, with only the historic core and a few adjacent neighbourhoods maintaining overrepresentation. This pattern suggests that, while creative professionals demonstrate strong preferences for specific neighbourhood types and amenity configurations, they are not categorically absent from peripheral or suburban areas when considered at aggregate spatial scales. This pattern aligns with findings from comparative European studies, where creative class settlements spread outwards from an initial city-core anchor, following the

advancement of gentrification, while balancing lifestyle preferences, family formation needs, and housing cost considerations, particularly among older cohorts (Janssen et al., 2023; Lawton et al., 2013).

3.2. Creative Class Subgroup Multi-Scalar Analysis

Turning to the internal composition of the creative class, the residential patterns of its subgroups reveal a clear differentiation. The culture, creative, knowledge, and leisure subgroups each exhibited distinct and scale-sensitive spatial distributions linked to their demographic and occupational characteristics (Figure 3). This scale-sensitive pattern reinforces key insights from creative class theory—namely, that amenity-oriented preferences and socio-demographics shape both the micro-localisation and broader residential distribution of creative professionals and that urban structure exerts a powerful filtering effect on where each subgroup ultimately resides.

Workers in *creative industries* showed moderate spatial clustering, with micro- and meso-scale peaks in Riga's inner city and areas in select outer-city and Soviet-era housing estate neighbourhoods. This subgroup, characterised by younger age, high rates of university education, a high share of high-status occupations, predominantly male and ethnically diverse, demonstrated a clear preference for central locations with cultural amenities and modern work environments. At the macro scale, creative industry workers exhibited more evenness in most of the southwestern part of the city, while remaining overrepresented in the inner city and selected neighbourhoods around the inner city's periphery. This pattern suggests that, while central locations remain attractive, creative industry professionals demonstrate flexibility in residential location choice, potentially reflecting higher incomes and varied workplace locations across the city.

Knowledge industry workers, representing the largest creative class subgroup, showed patterns similar to those of creative industry workers. However, there was a higher overrepresentation than that of creative industry workers at all scales in the inner city and several more affluent outer-city areas. This pattern reflects the distinctive socio-demographic profile of knowledge industry professionals: older average age, the highest university education rate, greater residential stability, higher likelihood of family formation, and capacity to afford housing in established middle-class neighbourhoods throughout the city, suggesting that this subgroup's residential choices balance professional identity and amenity preferences with family needs and housing quality considerations.

Culture industry workers exhibited the most pronounced spatial clustering in all subgroups. At the micro and meso scales, culture workers showed the highest overrepresentation across the inner city and selected outer-city areas. The inner-city neighbourhoods, primarily located in the Art Nouveau district and adjacent pre-war areas, have served as traditional centres of cultural production and consumption in Riga, offering both professional opportunities and lifestyle amenities valued by culture workers. The distinctive socio-demographic profile of cultural industry workers—highest average age, most ethnically homogeneous, and lowest residential mobility—suggests a settled population with long-term residential commitment to central neighbourhoods. Despite lower formal educational attainment compared to creative and knowledge workers, cultural industry professionals occupied substantial high-status positions, likely reflecting experiential expertise and cultural capital. Even at the macro scale, cultural industry workers showed persistent overrepresentation in the historic core, demonstrating stronger spatial attachment to central neighbourhoods than other creative class subgroups.

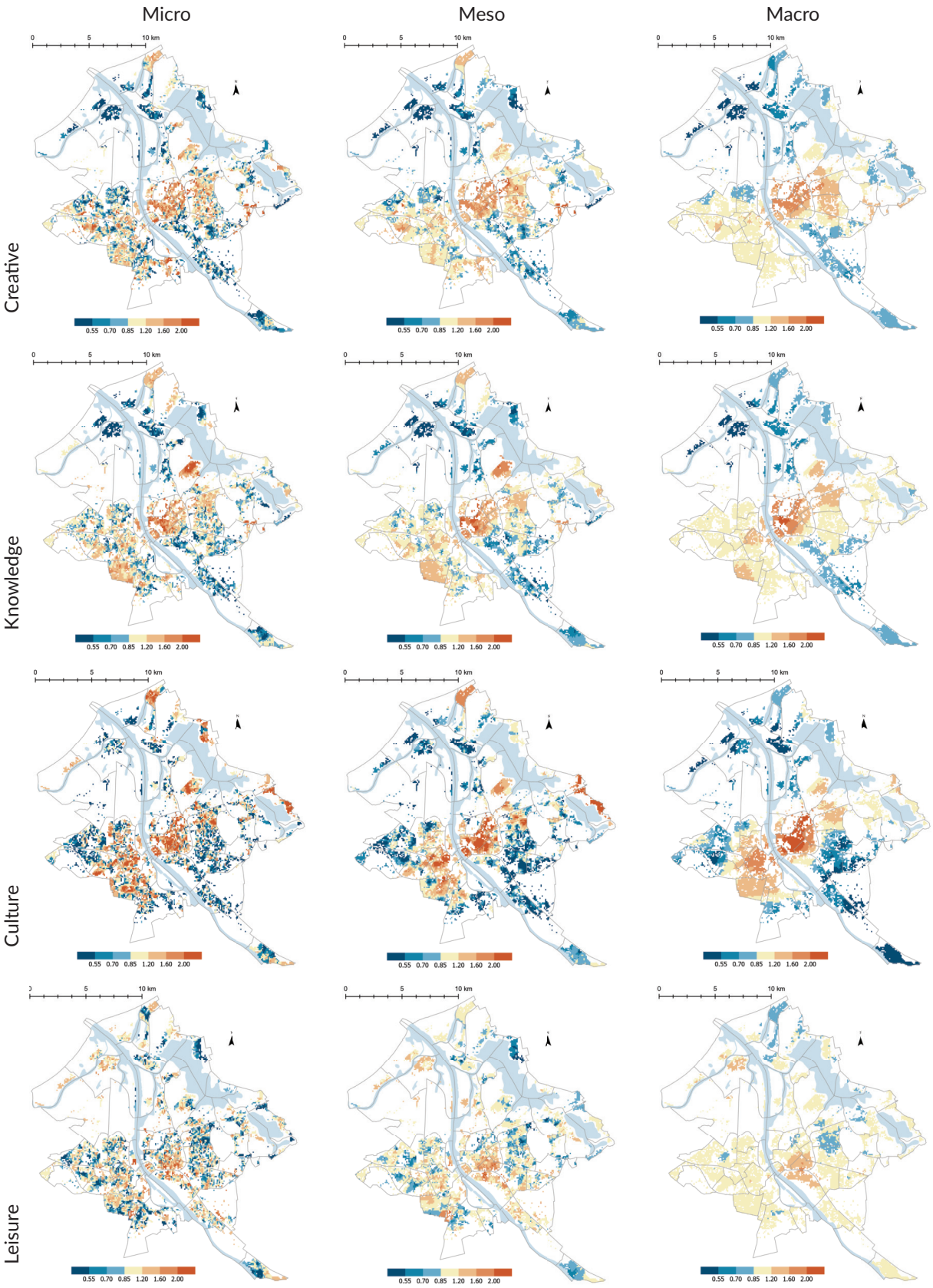

Figure 3. Distribution of location quotients of creative class subgroups in Riga among 200, 800, and 6,400 nearest neighbours in 2021. Source: Authors' calculations, based on Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia (2025).

Leisure industry workers demonstrated the most spatially integrated distribution of all creative class subgroups, reflecting both the dispersed geography of leisure employment—restaurants, cafes, bars, and recreational facilities—distributed across residential neighbourhoods rather than concentrated in specific districts, and the distinctive socio-demographic profile of leisure workers. These workers were characterised by the youngest average age, the highest ethnic diversity, the lowest educational attainment, and the lowest occupational status. These characteristics suggest that many leisure workers occupy service positions with lower socioeconomic status, potentially facing greater housing affordability constraints and residing in more diverse neighbourhood types. At the micro and meso scales, leisure workers showed only modest concentrations in the south-central areas. At the macro scale, leisure workers exhibited a nearly even spatial distribution, with very few areas of over- or under-representation. This pattern distinguishes leisure workers from other creative class subgroups and raises questions about their inclusion in creative class conceptualisations based purely on industry classification. The spatial integration of leisure workers suggests that residential patterns are driven more by housing affordability, accessibility to dispersed employment locations, and general urban amenities than by specific neighbourhood cultural characteristics or creative milieu.

The analysis reinforced theoretical insights into the multidimensional nature of residential location decisions shaped by scale-specific factors. Amenity-driven preferences dominate micro-scale localisations within favoured neighbourhood types, whereas housing affordability, family and life course dynamics, and workplace proximity increasingly shape meso- and macro-scale distributions. Urban structure, through the spatial configuration of housing, employment, and amenities, acts as a filtering mechanism aligning socio-demographic profiles with corresponding residential environments. The observed patterns suggest that creative class theory's emphasis on urban-centric settlement holds at aggregate scales, but specific neighbourhood preferences operate primarily at local resolutions.

These findings highlight the necessity of multi-scalar analytical frameworks for understanding creative class geography. Analyses restricted to coarse spatial units risk underestimating localised clustering, while micro-scale studies may exaggerate spatial distinctiveness by neglecting broader integrations. The k-nearest neighbour method applied here captures both fine-grained concentration and broader distributional patterns, demonstrating that conclusions about creative class settlement are contingent on the spatial resolution of the analysis.

3.3. Spatial Exclusion and Socio-Economic Polarisation

This subsection explores residential concentration patterns across different urban neighbourhood types, examining which areas attract or repel the creative class settlement. Except for leisure, extensive areas of underrepresentation characterised Soviet-era housing estate neighbourhoods across all creative class subgroups. Several contextual factors contribute to the absence of the creative class from peripheral housing estates. First, the standardised building typologies, high-density residential configuration, and functional separation from commercial and cultural activities of large housing estates distinguish them from the mixed-use, finer-grained urban fabric, and pre-war building stock found in the inner-city areas. Second, Soviet-era estates generally have a lower provision of cultural amenities, entertainment venues, and street-level commercial activities and are located further from major employment and cultural centres than inner-city neighbourhoods. Third, these neighbourhoods house predominantly working-class populations,

ethnic minorities, and elderly residents (Krišjāne & Bērziņš, 2014), which contributes to distinct social and demographic profiles when compared with central districts. In Riga's context, creative class clustering intersects with persistent ethnic segregation, with Russian-speaking minorities concentrated in peripheral Soviet-era housing estates, potentially reinforcing multiple dimensions of social division simultaneously. Our analysis documents an association between creative class clustering and these objectively observable features of the urban environment; it does not directly measure local perceptions of "authenticity" or neighbourhood desirability, which have been emphasised in studies of creative workers in Western cities (e.g., Florida, 2002; Graif, 2018), and may not fully translate to the post-socialist context.

The systematic exclusion of creative class residents from peripheral areas simultaneously concentrates this relatively affluent and highly educated population in inner-city neighbourhoods, a pattern consistent with higher housing market pressures, amenity-based stratification, and socio-spatial differentiation. The association between the settlement of the creative class in the urban core of Riga and the fragmented gentrification processes identified in earlier studies may be understood as part of broader concentration patterns that, according to the literature, risk undermining the diversity and authenticity that initially attracted creative professionals (Elliott-Cooper et al., 2020; Zukin et al., 2009). However, our cross-sectional evidence cannot indicate the causality between creative class settlement and fragmented gentrification. Instead, it is more consistent with the picture of limited and fragmented upgrading on top of relatively stable socio-spatial divisions, as described by Krišjāne et al. (2015). Simultaneously, our findings resonate with wider debates on how such concentration patterns may, over time, contribute to differentiated neighbourhood trajectories if they coincide with targeted investment and policy support, raising questions about the long-term social sustainability of creative class-oriented development strategies in a post-socialist context.

3.4. Digital Transition and Creative Class Residential Patterns

Our findings have important implications for understanding how digital transition and remote work possibilities relate to the residential patterns of the creative class. Labour force data for Latvia in 2021 indicate that remote work was widespread but uneven and changed throughout the year. The number of remote workers declined from 167,600, or 22.6% of the total workforce, in the first quarter of 2021 to 99,400 (13.1%) in the third quarter, before partially recovering to 143,700 (18.8%) in the fourth quarter (Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, 2025), mirroring the tightening and easing of Covid-19 pandemic-related restrictions.

Sectoral differences in telework prevalence closely align with the internal structure of the creative class. Throughout 2021, information and communication services—overlapping substantially with our creative industries subgroup—recorded very high levels of remote work, with between 58.3% and 78.9% of employees working remotely across all four quarters. Financial and insurance activities, which form a core part of our knowledge industries, showed similarly high telework shares, ranging from 56.9% to 81.6%, indicating that remote work was a normal mode of operation rather than a temporary emergency arrangement in these knowledge-intensive services. Scientific, administrative, and real estate-related services, also largely associated with knowledge industries, exhibited moderate but persistent telework levels of 26.7–31.5%. By contrast, trade, transport, accommodation, and food services—which include many leisure industry jobs such as catering and hospitality—consistently recorded low telework levels, varying only between 7.5% and 12.5%, in line with the strong requirement for physical presence in customer-facing service work.

These statistics are reported for broad NACE sections rather than directly for our creative class definition; therefore, we use them as contextual rather than explanatory evidence. Nevertheless, they suggest that the potential for remote work is highly stratified within the broader creative economy. Workers in sectors corresponding to our creative and knowledge industries had substantially greater scope to decouple daily work tasks from fixed office locations than workers in leisure-related activities, who remained tied to onsite, contact-intensive employment. This stratification is consistent with our subgroup findings: Knowledge and core creative industry professionals, who are most likely to be employed in high-telework sectors, are also the groups most strongly concentrated in central neighbourhoods, whereas leisure industry workers, whose jobs allow little remote work, display the most spatially integrated and least concentrated residential patterns.

The persistent concentration of workers in the creative and knowledge industries within central urban areas, despite the high potential for remote work, indicates that digitalisation has not reduced the appeal of inner-city neighbourhoods. Instead, it appears to represent the relationship between the work, residence, and daily activity spaces. For many creative and knowledge workers, remote work seems to decouple employment from specific office buildings more than from the broader central urban environment: Living in inner-city neighbourhoods still provides close access to amenities, co-working spaces, cafés, and cultural institutions. These environments support hybrid online/offline working practices, facilitate informal interaction and professional networking, and can be accessed on foot or via short trips, features that are more difficult to replicate in peripheral estates.

Subgroup differences further illustrate how digitalisation interacts with urban structures. Knowledge industry workers, who are most likely to have formal remote work arrangements, remain concentrated in central and established middle-class neighbourhoods, where they can combine flexible work with access to diverse services and networks. Cultural industry workers continue to cluster around central institutions—such as theatres, museums, and galleries—that structure both their workplaces and everyday routines, which helps explain their particularly strong inner-city attachment despite varying telework possibilities. In contrast, leisure industry workers are employed in sectors where remote work is rare, and workplaces are dispersed across the city.

Taken together, these patterns suggest that the digital transition currently supplements rather than replaces the value of dense urban environments for creative class workers (Althoff et al., 2022; Sánchez-Moral et al., 2026). Remote work opportunities are unequally distributed and concentrated in high-skill, high-wage services. This unequal distribution of telework potential has implications for the spatial patterns of work, commuting, and inequality, and it aligns with our broader finding that both the benefits and constraints of digitalisation are unevenly mapped onto Riga's socio-spatial landscape.

4. Conclusion

This study analysed Riga's creative class residential patterns using individual-level census data and a multi-scalar spatial methodology. The findings demonstrate that creative-class workers are unevenly distributed, forming pronounced clusters in the historic inner city and adjacent neighbourhoods. However, the intensity and location of clustering vary substantially by subgroup—creative, knowledge, culture, and leisure industries—and depend on the spatial scale of analysis, highlighting the need to disaggregate the creative class and consider multi-scalar urban dynamics.

At all spatial scales, the creative class displayed clear preferences for inner-city areas rich in historic architecture, amenities, and cultural vibrancy. These mirror established Western research showing that "soft" locational factors—such as cultural amenities and neighbourhood diversity and ambience—act as limited attractors, while secondary concentrations in certain outer neighbourhoods indicate that residential choice also reflects affordability and life-course stage (Martin-Brelot et al., 2010; Murphy & Redmond, 2014). These nuances emerge most sharply in micro- and meso-scale analyses, which reveal localised pockets of creative class overrepresentation beyond the traditional core.

Disaggregation by occupational subgroup underscores the internal diversity of creative class residential strategies. Culture industry workers show the strongest central clustering, oriented around established cultural infrastructure and vibrant neighbourhood life. Creative industry professionals demonstrate intermediate patterns that appear in both central districts and mixed-use neighbourhoods. In contrast, knowledge industry workers, who are generally older and more socioeconomically established, display more dispersed yet still inner-city-oriented patterns, suggesting alignment with middle-class residential norms as much as creative class identities. Leisure industry workers stand apart, exhibiting the most spatially integrated and least concentrated patterns, shaped by lower socioeconomic status and widespread, service-oriented workplaces. These findings challenge the notion of the creative class as a coherent and homogeneous group, reinforcing the importance of a nuanced analysis that recognises demographic, occupational, and life-cycle heterogeneity.

The spatial logic of creative class clustering is deeply intertwined with Riga's urban structure and the legacies of post-socialist urban change. Clustering coincides with neighbourhoods that previous studies have identified as sites of selective upgrading, cultural investment, and demographic transformation, but these dynamics are best characterised as fragmented gentrification rather than large-scale, Western-style transformation (Krišjāne et al., 2015), shaped by distinct legacies of property ownership, investment cycles, and ethnic segregation. The notable absence of creative class residents in Soviet-era housing estates and peripheral zones marks an urban divide with relatively stable patterns of segregation and uneven amenity provision.

Finally, the continued concentration of creative workers in the inner city despite expanding remote work possibilities suggests that digitalisation has not weakened the centrality of urban cores in the creative economy. Instead, it appears to take advantage of daily activity spaces and working practices within these neighbourhoods, reinforcing the importance of central urban environments as platforms where digital and face-to-face interactions intersect (Bathelt & Turi, 2011).

From a policy perspective, our results suggest caution regarding the uncritical adoption of creative class strategies in post-socialist contexts. While attracting creative workers may generate economic benefits and contribute to urban regeneration, policymakers must recognise and address potential negative externalities, including housing affordability pressures and the reinforcement of existing spatial inequalities (Gilmore & Burnill-Maier, 2025; Leslie & Catungal, 2012). Strategies for inclusive urban development should equitably integrate support for creative economies with policies that ensure housing affordability, socioeconomic diversity, and revitalisation benefits.

Our analysis highlights the need for differentiated policy responses that reflect the heterogeneity within the creative class. For lower-income segments—particularly leisure industry workers and younger cultural

workers, who are more likely to occupy lower-paid positions—policy measures should focus on maintaining and expanding affordable housing options. This might include targeted rent stabilisation or subsidy schemes for vulnerable tenants, the protection and refurbishment of existing affordable housing stock, and inclusionary zoning requirements that ensure a share of new developments remains accessible to lower- and middle-income households. Such measures would help safeguard households that contribute to everyday urban vitality but are least able to absorb rising housing costs.

For higher-income creative segments, especially knowledge industry workers who are more established and concentrated in inner-city and middle-class neighbourhoods, a different policy emphasis is appropriate. Rather than directly regulating rents, policies could focus on steering the broader development process to maintain a social mix and avoid exclusive enclaves. Tools such as mixed-income housing requirements in new projects, limits on the conversion of long-term rental housing into short-term accommodation, and community benefit agreements that tie new investments to local service provision can help ensure that neighbourhood upgrading does not come at the expense of diversity.

Across all subgroups, supporting the creative economy in socially inclusive ways requires attention to non-residential spaces. Investment in cultural infrastructure, affordable workspaces, and neighbourhood-level amenities in both central and peripheral areas can extend the benefits of creative development beyond privileged districts. In the post-socialist context of Riga, where gentrification remains partial and socio-spatial divisions are relatively stable, the main policy task is to prevent future exclusionary dynamics and ensure that emerging creative clusters contribute to, rather than undermine, socio-spatial diversity.

This study has several limitations. First, the occupational classification system, although comprehensive, may not fully capture hybrid or emerging creative occupations, potentially underrepresenting certain creative class segments. Second, the cross-sectional nature of census data limits our ability to analyse residential mobility trajectories and neighbourhood change dynamics over time. A longitudinal analysis tracking creative class settlement patterns across multiple census waves would provide valuable insights into gentrification temporalities and residential succession processes. Third, while our spatial analysis documents where creative class workers live, it does not directly measure the causal relationships between creative class settlement and neighbourhood change, necessitating complementary qualitative research examining decision-making processes, neighbourhood perceptions, and lived experiences.

Future research should extend this analysis in several directions. First, comparative studies examining creative class residential patterns across multiple post-socialist cities would illuminate the extent to which Riga's patterns reflect broader regional tendencies rather than city-specific dynamics. Second, integrating qualitative methods, including interviews and ethnographic observations, would deepen the understanding of the motivations, preferences, and experiences shaping creative class residential choices. Third, a longitudinal analysis tracking neighbourhood trajectories over time would clarify the temporal relationships among creative class settlement, property investment, and socio-demographic transformation. Finally, research examining the experiences of displaced residents and communities affected by creative class-driven neighbourhood change remains critically important for developing socially just urban development policies.

In conclusion, the creative class in Riga is characterised by both spatial clustering and internal diversity, with subgroup-specific patterns influenced by urban structure, neighbourhood characteristics, and processes of selective urban transformation. These findings affirm established theories in the European and North American contexts, while simultaneously revealing the distinctive, path-dependent trajectories of post-socialist urban transformation. As competition for creative talent intensifies, it becomes even more crucial to attend not only to the economic benefits of creative class settlement but also to its complex social and spatial consequences for developing equitable and sustainable urban futures.

Acknowledgments

The authors wish to extend their gratitude to the editors of the thematic issue and the anonymous reviewers for their insightful feedback during the preparation of this article. We also acknowledge Mr. Uldis Ainars, director of the Department of Technologies and Innovations at the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia.

Funding

This study was supported by the Recovery and Resilience Facility project, Internal and External Consolidation of the University of Latvia, under grant No. 5.2.1.1.i.0/2/24/I/CFLA/007, and the project No. VPP-LETONIKA-2021/4-0002.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Data Availability

The georeferenced census data of 2021 employed in this study are subject to an agreement between the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia and the University of Latvia. The occupational data were anonymised and processed in accordance with a confidentiality agreement, ensuring compliance with all data protection, privacy regulations, and contractual obligations. For additional information regarding data usage, please contact maris.berzins@lu.lv

LLMs Disclosure

For the purpose of language editing, we utilised the following LLMs: Paperpal and DeepL.

References

Althoff, L., Eckert, F., Ganapati, S., & Walsh, C. (2022). The geography of remote work. *Regional Science and Urban Economics*, *93*, Article 103770. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.regsciurbeco.2022.103770

Apparicio, P., Martori, J. C., Pearson, A. L., Fournier, É., & Apparicio, D. (2014). An open-source software for calculating indices of urban residential segregation. *Social Science Computer Review*, *32*(1), 117–128. https://doi.org/10.1177/0894439313504539

Atkinson, R. (2000). Measuring gentrification and displacement in Greater London. *Urban Studies*, *37*(1), 149–165. https://doi.org/10.1080/0042098002339

Bathelt, H., & Turi, P. (2011). Local, global and virtual buzz: The importance of face-to-face contact in economic interaction and possibilities to go beyond. *Geoforum*, *42*(5), 520–529. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2011.04.007

Bereitschaft, B. (2017). Do "creative" and "non-creative" workers exhibit similar preferences for urban amenities? An exploratory case study of Omaha, Nebraska. *Journal of Urbanism: International Research on Placemaking and Urban Sustainability*, *10*(2), 198–216. https://doi.org/10.1080/17549175.2016.1223740

Bille, T. (2010). Cool, funky and creative? The creative class and preferences for leisure and culture. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, *16*(4), 466–496. https://doi.org/10.1080/10286630903302741

Bontje, M., Musterd, S., Kovács, Z., & Murie, A. (2011). Pathways toward European creative-knowledge city-regions. *Urban Geography*, *32*(1), 80–104. https://doi.org/10.2747/0272-3638.32.1.80

Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia. (2025). *Population* [Data set]. https://stat.gov.lv/en/statistics-themes/population

Cerisola, S., & Panzera, E. (2022). Cultural cities, urban economic growth, and regional development: The role of creativity and cosmopolitan identity. *Papers in Regional Science*, *101*(2), 285–303. https://doi.org/10.1111/pirs.12654

Comunian, R., Faggian, A., & Li, Q. C. (2010). Unrewarded careers in the creative class: The strange case of bohemian graduates. *Papers in Regional Science*, *89*(2), 389–411. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1435-5957.2010.00281.x

Connelly, R., Gayle, V., & Lambert, P. S. (2016). A review of occupation-based social classifications for social survey research. *Methodological Innovations*, *9*. https://doi.org/10.1177/2059799116638003

Elliott-Cooper, A., Hubbard, P., & Lees, L. (2020). Moving beyond Marcuse: Gentrification, displacement and the violence of un-homing. *Progress in Human Geography*, *44*(3), 492–509. https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132519830511

Faludi, J. (2019). The paradigm of the creative class in regional and urban development revisited. An overview. *Corvinus Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, *10*(2), 167–188. https://doi.org/10.14267/CJSSP.2019.2.9

Florida, R. L. (2002). *The rise of the creative class: And how it's transforming work, leisure, community and everyday life*. Basic Books.

Gentile, M., Tammaru, T., & van Kempen, R. (2012). Heteropolitanization: Social and spatial change in Central and East European Cities. *Cities*, *29*(5), 291–299. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2012.05.005

Gilmore, A., & Burnill-Maier, C. (2025). Creative improvement, cultural infrastructure and urban zones: A tale of three cities and their cultural districts. *City, Culture and Society*, *41*, Article 100634. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ccs.2025.100634

Górczyńska, M. (2017). Gentrifiers in the post-socialist city? A critical reflection on the dynamics of middle- and upper-class professional groups in Warsaw. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, *49*(5), 1099–1121. https://doi.org/10.1177/0308518X16688218

Graif, C. (2018). Neighborhood diversity and the rise of artist hotspots: Exploring the creative class thesis through a neighborhood change lens. *City & Community*, *17*(3), 754–787. https://doi.org/10.1111/cico.12317

Grodach, C. (2017). Urban cultural policy and creative city making. *Cities*, *68*, 82–91. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2017.05.015

Janssen, K. M. J., Cottineau, C., Kleinhans, R., & van Bueren, E. (2023). Gentrification and the origin and destination of movers: A systematic review. *Tijdschrift Voor Economische En Sociale Geografie*, *114*(4), 300–318. https://doi.org/10.1111/tesg.12581

Kitsos, T., Nathan, M., & Gutiérrez-Posada, D. (2025). Don't shoot the pianist: Creative firms, workers, and neighborhood gentrification. *Economic Geography*, *101*(1), 60–85. https://doi.org/10.1080/00130095.2025.2470721

Kovács, Z., Wiessner, R., & Zischner, R. (2013). Urban renewal in the inner city of Budapest: Gentrification from a post-socialist perspective. *Urban Studies*, *50*(1), 22–38. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098012453856

Kozina, J., Bole, D., & Tiran, J. (2021). Forgotten values of industrial city still alive: What can the creative city learn from its industrial counterpart? *City, Culture and Society*, *25*, Article 100395. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ccs.2021.100395

Krätke, S. (2010). 'Creative cities' and the rise of the dealer class: A critique of Richard Florida's approach to urban theory. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, *34*(4), 835–853. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2427.2010.00939.x

Krišjāne, Z., & Bērziņš, M. (2014). Intra-urban residential differentiation in the post-Soviet city: The case of Riga, Latvia. *Hungarian Geographical Bulletin*, *63*(3), 235–253. https://doi.org/10.15201/hungeobull.63.3.1

Krišjāne, Z., Berziņš, M., & Kratoviš, K. (2015). Occupation and ethnicity: Patterns of residential segregation in Riga two decades after socialism. In T. Tammaru, S. Marcinczak, M. van Ham, & S. Musterd (Eds.), *Socio-economic segregation in European capital cities: East meets West* (pp. 287–312). Routledge.

Lawton, P., Murphy, E., & Redmond, D. (2013). Residential preferences of the 'creative class'? *Cities*, *31*, 47–56. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2012.04.002

Leslie, D., & Catungal, J. P. (2012). Social justice and the creative city: Class, gender and racial inequalities. *Geography Compass*, *6*(3), 111–122. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-8198.2011.00472.x

Ley, D. (2003). Artists, aestheticisation and the field of gentrification. *Urban Studies*, *40*(12), 2527–2544. https://doi.org/10.1080/0042098032000136192

Lichter, D. T., Parisi, D., & Ambinakudige, S. (2020). The spatial integration of immigrants in Europe: A cross-national study. *Population Research and Policy Review*, *39*(3), 465–491. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11113-019-09540-3

Lloyd, R. (2010). *Neo-bohemia: Art and commerce in the postindustrial city*. Taylor & Francis.

Markusen, A. (2006). Urban development and the politics of a creative class: Evidence from a study of artists. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, *38*(10), 1921–1940. https://doi.org/10.1068/a38179

Martin-Brelot, H., Grossetti, M., Eckert, D., Gritsai, O., & Kovács, Z. (2010). The spatial mobility of the 'creative class': A European perspective. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, *34*(4), 854–870. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2427.2010.00960.x

Murphy, E., & Redmond, D. (2014). The role of 'hard' and 'soft' factors for accommodating creative knowledge: Insights from Dublin's 'creative class.' *Irish Geography*, *42*(1), 69–84. https://doi.org/10.55650/igj.2009.78

Musterd, S., & Gritsai, O. (2013). The creative knowledge city in Europe: Structural conditions and urban policy strategies for competitive cities. *European Urban and Regional Studies*, *20*(3), 343–359. https://doi.org/10.1177/0969776412439199

Openshaw, S. (1996). Developing GIS-relevant zone-based spatial analysis methods. In P. A. Longley & M. Batty (Eds.), *Spatial analysis: Modelling in a GIS environment* (pp. 55–73). Wiley.

Östh, J. (2024). *EquiPop Flow* [Computer software]. Uppsala Universitet. https://www.uu.se/en/department/human-geography/research/equipop

Peck, J. (2005). Struggling with the creative class. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, *29*(4), 740–770. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2427.2005.00620.x

Roberts, M. (2006). From 'creative city' to 'no-go areas'—The expansion of the night-time economy in British town and city centres. *Cities*, *23*(5), 331–338. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2006.05.001

Sánchez-Moral, S., Arellano, A., & Díez-Pisonero, R. (2026). The impact of remote working on residential mobility in the metropolitan region of Madrid. *Cities*, *169*, Article 106462. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2025.106462

Scott, A. J. (2006). Creative cities: Conceptual issues and policy questions. *Journal of Urban Affairs*, *28*(1), 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0735-2166.2006.00256.x

Storper, M., & Scott, A. J. (2008). Rethinking human capital, creativity and urban growth. *Journal of Economic Geography*, *9*(2), 147–167. https://doi.org/10.1093/jeg/lbn052

Sýkora, L., & Bouzarovski, S. (2012). Multiple transformations: Conceptualising the post-communist urban transition. *Urban Studies*, *49*(1), 43–60. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098010397402

Tammaru, T., van Ham, M., Marcińczak, S., & Musterd, S. (Eds.). (2015). *Socio-economic segregation in European capital cities: East meets West*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315758879

Treija, S., Bratuškins, U., Barvika, S., & Bondars, E. (2020). The liveability of historical cities: Current state and prospects for habitation. *WIT Transactions on the Built Environment*, *193*, 15–26. https://doi.org/10.2495/GD170021

Zukin, S. (1982). *Loft living: Culture and capital in urban change*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Zukin, S., Trujillo, V., Frase, P., Jackson, D., Recuber, T., & Walker, A. (2009). New retail capital and neighborhood change: Boutiques and gentrification in New York City. *City & Community*, *8*(1), 47–64. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6040.2009.01269.x

About the Authors

Maris Berzins serves as a professor of population and urban geography and is the head of the Department of Geography at the University of Latvia. His research focuses on internal migration, residential mobility, and socioeconomic segregation. Dr. M. Berzins has participated as a researcher in numerous national and international research projects.

Sindija Balode-Kraujina is a PhD candidate and researcher in the Department of Geography at the University of Latvia. Her PhD research focuses on the socio-spatial dynamics in Riga's inner city, specialising in the multi-scalar analysis of urban ethnic diversity and residential segregation. She holds a master's degree in economics from Riga Technical University. Ms. Balode-Kraujina has presented her work at international conferences and contributed to national and international research projects.

Zaiga Krisjane is a professor of human geography at the University of Latvia and a member of the Latvian Academy of Sciences. Professor Krisjane possesses extensive experience in international collaboration and serves as the chairperson of the Global Change and Human Mobility Commission (Globility) of the International Geographical Union (IGU). Her research expertise is substantial in the domains of migration studies, as well as urban and population geography.