The Boom in U.S. Nonprofits

The U.S. Arts Nonprofit Growth Spurt, 1960-1980s

The exact number of arts nonprofits in this period is hard to nail down, but looking at the founding dates of organizations at the end of the 1980s shows clear growth.

- Reg. Theaters founded after 1960*: 87%
- Dance orgs founded after 1969**: 89%
- Opera companies founded after 1970***: 50%
- Art museums founded after 1960****: 35%
- Folk Arts orgs founded 1960-1980*****: 65%

The growth of arts nonprofits took place in the context of massive growth in the nonprofit sector as a whole. In 1940 there were 12,500 charitable tax-exempt entities, by 1980 there were 320,000 (Hall, 2005 p 19).

*TCG’s Theatre Profiles IV, DiMaggio 1984
**Dance organizations listed in Dance Magazine Annual, 1979 (DiMaggio, 1984)
***Opera companies from Central Opera Service, Inc (Heilbrun, 1993)
****National sample of art museums (DiMaggio, 1984)
*****Survey of Folk Arts Organizations (The Changing Face of Tradition, NEA, 1996)