Strategies for Multicultural Cities: Overcoming Barriers to Effective Planning and Community Development in Three Vietnamese American Communities

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Submitted to the Department of Urban Studies and Planning
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ABSTRACT

Today, 34 years after the first large wave of Vietnamese refugees arrived in the United States, the challenges that the Vietnamese American community face cannot be under-stated. However, there have been many strategies deployed by a variety of actors, both community-based and those who are less regularly immersed in the communities, to address the myriad of challenges. The goals of this thesis are to identify the most salient challenges to effective planning and community development in Vietnamese American communities, to describe a variety of strategies that community-based actors and those operating from the "outside" can use to address these challenges, and to make recommendations based on these findings. The Vietnamese American communities in New Orleans, Biloxi, MS and Boston are used as cases to illustrate these challenges and strategies. The challenges identified include: the "Generation Gap," anti-Communism and conflicts over homeland politics, lack of experience and exposure to traditional American non-profit and civic engagement structures, lack of linguistic and cultural competency on the part of planners, and lack of funding and resources. The strategies identified are explicitly linked to the specific challenges, and reflect a wide variety of interventions such as bridging generational divides through story-telling, developing consistent outreach and language access policies, and building multicultural coalitions through joint catalyst projects. The resulting recommendations incorporate lessons learned from the challenges and strategies in order to provide general competencies as well as specific tools for effective community engagement, planning, and community development in Vietnamese American communities.

Acknowledgements

To Lorlene Hoyt and Ceasar McDowell, my thesis committee, and to Karl Seidman whose invaluable insights and support helped me to produce this work; to the ladies in the Thesis lunch for lending a helping hand and a dose of empathy; to friends at DUSP who keep me focused and passionate about our common goals; to Janda who continues to challenge me and to keep me grounded everyday...

to the interviewees and those whom I had the pleasure to work with, your dedication and innovations inspired me to write this thesis.

Thank you.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

There are many challenges that prevent city planners, consultants, and community-based actors from effectively engaging, organizing, and developing Vietnamese American communities. There have also been many innovative strategies implemented by a variety of actors that have sought to address these challenges. In this thesis, I focus on practical tools and solutions to how these challenges can be overcome. The geographic foci of the thesis are the Gulf Coast region and Boston, but I hope that at least some of the lessons learned can be generalizable to other cities and towns in the United States.

The research focuses primarily on communities with Vietnamese American immigrant enclaves. An "ethnic enclave" is defined as an area where there is some cohesion personally, institutionally, and geographically between people of the same ethnic origins. I have chosen as my three cases the Versailles community in New Orleans, the East Biloxi community in Biloxi, Mississippi, and the Field's Corner community in Boston.

I focus primarily on the activities and topics most closely related to the practice of planning in America. My subjects are planning professionals and consultants, as well as community activists, community leaders, and employees of community-based organizations. This relationship between the field of planning and Vietnamese American communities is very important. As Vietnamese American communities interact with spaces, institutions, and attitudes in America, it is often through realms most closely related to planning (housing, education, social services, workforce training) that they navigate.

Research Question

I ask the two following research questions, which are inextricably linked. What are the barriers that prevent planners from effectively engaging with Vietnamese American communities and how can these barriers be overcome? What are the barriers to effective community organizing and empowerment that are faced by people working in Vietnamese American communities and how can these barriers be overcome? There needs to be sufficient capacity on the part of planners as well as on part of the communities that they engage in order to create sustainable community development. Only analyzed together can effective strategies for community engagement and empowerment in the Vietnamese American community be developed that leverage and build internal community visions and capacities as well as external power structures and resources.

Effective engagement is defined as the planner's abilities to recognize the diverse histories and interests of Vietnamese Americans communities in a neighborhood, to understand the implications of these interests on planning practice, to develop systems for soliciting active participation by Vietnamese American communities in planning processes, to ensure equitable outcomes from these planning processes, to remove as much cultural bias from legislative and regulatory policies as possible, and to implement equitable culturally and linguistically competent decisions regarding the physical spaces and services that are connected to the field of planning. Effective community organizing and empowerment are defined as the abilities to effectively gauge community needs, to mobilize strong community support, to organize effectively

in order to implement strategies that would address these needs, and to build lasting community capacity to achieve additional community goals in the future.

Methodology

Through a mixed-method of participant observation and reflection, semi-structured personal interviews, and review of primary and secondary written sources, I identify the barriers to effective engagement with Vietnamese American communities, explore the causes of the barriers, develop strategies on how to overcome these barriers, and make recommendations based on the findings.

I have selected two Vietnamese American communities in the Gulf Coast, namely New Orleans East, LA, and Biloxi, MS, as well as one Vietnamese American community from Boston in Dorchester, MA as my examples.

Written Materials

I use the existing literature around multicultural planning problems, tools, and competencies to frame the issues, define the barriers, suggest strategies to overcome the barriers, and suggest lessons and promising solutions. I also use reports from planning processes that have occurred in neighborhoods to see how well the methodology incorporated culturally/linguistically competent practices, and to see what level of participation the processes achieved. I also utilize a collection of literature directly related to Vietnamese American immigrant experiences in the United States, especially in New Orleans, Biloxi, and Boston.

Interviews

Semi-structured personal interviews are used to develop a more holistic picture of challenges to effective practice, as well as innovative ways in which individuals and

groups have addressed these challenges. I have interviewed a variety of stakeholders, namely planners that have been involved in planning processes with the Vietnamese American commuinities in New Orleans, Biloxi, and Boston, community leaders within these communities, and young Vietnamese American professionals who have participated in and/or continue to participate in community development activities in these three communities. The interviews are aimed at getting a more nuanced and intensive understanding of why, even though there is a lot of literature regarding effective strategies for multicultural planning and effective cases of multicultural planning on behalf of some planning agencies and community groups, that general practice in the field is so reluctant to adopt these practices. The interviews are also used to describe the challenges to organizing and empowerment in these three communities and strategies that have been deployed by commuity leaders and activists to address these challenges.

In total, I interviewed 28 people. Table 1, below, describes the interviewee's characteristics. These interviewees served in the roles of planning professionals and consultants, as well as community activists, community leaders, and employees of community-based organizations in the three locations that I have chosen.

Table 1. Characteristics of Interviewees

Location	Generation	New Orleans *	Biloxi *	Boston *
5 from New Orleans only	9 1.5 Generation	3 Dan Than Fellows	2 Dan Than Fellows	4 VietAID staff (organizers, planners, developers)
5 from Biloxi only	2 Elders	2 City Planners	1 Community activist	3 Activists in Catholic Church
12 from Boston only	8 Young Professionals	1 Community Consultant	1 Community consultant	3 Community Center steering committee members
3 from New Orleans & Biloxi		2 Dan Than regional coordinators	2 Dan Than regional coordinators	2 activists in Vietnam Veterans Association
2 from New Orleans Biloxi, & Boston		1 Community planner	1 Community planner/architect	4 current & past VACA Board members
1 from an academic institution in Orange County, CA		1 Planning consultant	1 Planning consultant	2 Leaders of Viet-Vote
				3 Members of Vietnamese Community of Massachusetts
				2 Professors/community activists
				3 unassociated young professionals/community activists

*Some individual interviewees fit into more than one category

I used snowball sampling to select interviewees. All of the interviewees were found through four different methods: personal contacts with potential interviewees who I had met through my work in the Gulf Coast, contacts obtained through New Orleans and Biloxi City Planning agencies, internet key word searches for prominent Vietnamese American organizations in Boston, and referrals and contacts obtained through the three prior methods. Besides four interviews that were conducted in

person, all interviews were conducted over the phone at times that were deemed most convenient for the interviewees. Interviews generally lasted between 45 minutes to 75 minutes. I typed or hand-wrote notes during the interviews, and there were no audio or video recordings of the interviews.

Reflection on Past Professional Experience

I also analyze my three years of experience of working in or directly engaging with the Vietnamese American communities in New Orleans and Biloxi in order to extract the challenges and lessons-learned from these experiences. This analysis focuses on the questions and concerns that I had before starting the work, the challenges that I encountered while on the ground and while assisting in research since being at MIT, and how I have tried to address these challenges. The strategies that were employed are analyzed as to their effectiveness, and questions and challenges that still remain are posed to interviewees.

Timeline Professional Experience and of Interviews Conducted

October 2005 – December 2005 New Orleans East: Serving as Dan Than (Be the Change) fellow in which I aided in capacity-building both for organizational structure and for local personnel. My goals were to provide short-term relief as well as to support sustainable long-term community development.

January 2006 – November 2006 East Biloxi: Serving as Dan Than (Be the Change) fellow in which I aided in capacity-building both for organizational structure and for local personnel. My goals were to provide short-term relief as well as to support sustainable long-term community development.

December 2006 – April 2009 Los Angeles and Cambridge: Continued consulting, recruiting for, and advising Gulf Coast projects until now. Includes recruiting for Dan Than Fellowship. Doing trainings and workshops for Dan Than members. Economic development research and program development in New Orleans East and East Biloxi. Mentoring New Voices fellow. Networking with Vietnamese American young people in the Gulf Coast.

January 2009 – April 2009 Cambridge: Interviews with key stakeholders who worked with the Vietnamese American community in Biloxi and New Orleans.

March 2009 – April 2009 Cambridge: Boston research done mostly through written sources and interviews with stakeholders.

Background

History of Immigration in the United States

The history of race, ethnicity, and immigration in the United States is even older than the country itself, and discrimination based on these factors continues to be embedded practically in the daily behaviors of residents and in government policies. Even though there has been mass immigration in the United States since even before the country's founding, the country's history of immigration is one that is riddled with exclusionary policies and practices. For example, after Chinese laborers were heavily recruited in the early to mid-1860s to work on the railroads and in mines in the United States, the United States created the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 and anti-miscegenation laws that prohibited additional Chinese immigrants from entering the United States and prevented them from marrying white women even if they were already in the country (Hing, 1993).

The issue of immigration is often itself compounded with other forms of racism, classism, and xenophobia. The United States has historically been a country in which even fourth and fifth generation descendents of immigrants face blatant discrimination. For example, in 1942, thousands of Japanese-Americans who were American-born citizens were placed in internment camps and had their property and livelihoods virtually stolen from them because they had been perceived as ethnic outsiders that could not be trusted. It was not until 1992, 50 years later, that a formal apology was released by the US government (Inada, 2000).

Even though there have been some policies put in place to affirm equitable treatment for immigrants and other historically disenfranchised groups, "new

immigrants" still face formal and informal forms of discrimination because of the uneven implementation of these policies and the fact that policies within themselves cannot remove the institutionalized discrimination that still remains embedded in American society.

Vietnamese American Ethnic Enclaves

This section contains the history of Vietnamese immigration into the United States, as well as a general overview of characteristics and important issues pertinent to the Vietnamese American experience. This information is crucial because it provides a historical perspective and a contextualized lens with which to explore the barriers and strategies to engaging and empowering Vietnamese American communities. The point of this section is not to suggest that all of the experiences and characteristics of Vietnamese Americans are unique and not shared by other groups, but rather to highlight how Vietnamese American experiences and histories have been shaped by and have also contributed to the American fabric.

The Vietnamese American community itself is not homogenous by any means, and this chapter aims to highlight the points of convergence, difference, and conflicts within the Vietnamese American community and between Vietnamese American communities and the mainstream. This chapter highlights the history of Vietnamese immigration to the United States, the experiences of different waves of immigrants, the theory behind assimilation versus adaptation, the struggle to define kinship and identity in a new country, the problems of invisibility and racism, the role of community institutions, and the general demographics of the Vietnamese American community that are relevant to this analysis.

History of Vietnamese American Immigration to the United States

Before 1975, there were only a few Vietnamese in the United States, and most of them were students, military trainees, diplomats, and women who were married to non-Vietnamese men (Vo, 2003). The mass immigration of Vietnamese into the United States began in April 1975 after the fall of the U.S.-backed South Vietnamese government to the Communist party of North Vietnam. The number of those who were in this "first wave" of immigration are estimated at about 130,000.

As the Vietnamese government began to adopt more punitive measures, including placing thousands of people in prisons deemed "re-education camps and forcing people into hard labor, many Vietnamese and ethnic Chinese living in Vietnam began to pay small boat owners to take them to nearby countries, such as Thailand (Chan, 2006). This trend of "boat people" constitutes the "second wave" of immigration and continued with increasing numbers.

The "third wave" of immigrants occurred throughout the 1990s as Congress extended the ODP program to include the Humanitarian Operation (HO) Program and the Amerasian Coming Home Act. The Humanitarian Operation Program was designed to allow prisoners who had been in the re-education camps for three years or longer and their immediate family members to enter the United States (Chan, 2006).

Initially in the United States, the strategy was to resettle refugees across all 50 states in order to speed up the process of assimilation. However, as Vietnamese Americans began the process of permanent resettlement and successive waves of refugees entered the country, many moved to urban areas such as San Jose, Houston,

Orange County, and New Orleans that already had high numbers of Vietnamese Americans (Rutledge, 1992).

Defining Community, Kinship, and Identity

The Vietnamese have a very strong cultural identity that spans back for thousands of years. Many historians point to the fact that even though the Vietnamese were under Chinese rule for almost a thousand years starting in 36AD, they rejected and did not assimilate into Chinese social customs and national traditions. Subsequently, the Vietnamese were also subject to 300 years of French Colonial rule, followed by periods of French and American influence. Most recently, there were two defining wars within the country of Vietnam, ending in 1954 and 1975, which many Vietnamese Americans adopted as periods that deeply shaped the identity of their communities.

However, Vietnamese cultural identity is not homogenous within the group, nor is it a static identification. In order to recognize this diversity in personal and group identity exists, I use the terms Vietnamese American community interchangeably with the term Vietnamese American communit*ies* to show that more than one monolithic group exists.

How has this Vietnamese Americans ethnic identity formed? Many scholars within the assimilation framework thought ethnic ties were rooted in heredity and were pre-determined based on group origins. However, many scholars have since challenged this fixed view of identity, preferring instead to view ethnic identity as a socially generated and constructed concept that can change over time and space. This perspective of the dynamic characteristics of ethnic affiliation and boundaries emphasizes the *agency* of ethnic groups in providing and shaping meaning to group

membership. Within this lens, ethnic identity can be used as a strategic resource in response new conditions (Kibria, 1993).

Kinship is also another concept in Vietnamese American communities that is not fixed. Because of the history of forced immigration from Vietnam, many families were split up and many traditional kinship networks were destroyed. In response to these losses, Vietnamese Americans have often shifted and expanded their definition of family and kinship network to include friends and distant relatives that they may have only felt marginal connections to in Vietnam. Migration to the United States has, in many ways, changed the definition of family ties for many Vietnamese Americans (Kibria, 1993).

Invisibility, Misconception, and Racism

Vietnamese Americans have been shaped by an American history of invisibility, misunderstanding, racism, and ethnocentrism. With respect to invisibility, when the Vietnam War was mentioned repeatedly in relation to media coverage of the Iraq War, none of the references were actually to the Vietnamese residents of the country or to the Vietnamese Americans who were in the country as a result of the war (Vo, 2003).

More direct forms of community and interethnic conflicts have arisen in America, as well. In Biloxi in the 1980s, fist fights broke out and the local shrimp industry printed and sold stickers that said "Save Your Shrimp Industry: Get Rid of Vietnamese, Contact Your Local Congressmen." Also in the Gulf Coast, the Ku Klux Klan became involved in boat burnings and cross-burnings on the front yards of Vietnamese American residents (Rutledge, 1992).

In another incident, during the Dorchester Day parade in Boston, then city councilman Albert "Dapper" O'Neill was caught on tape saying the following in response

to the emerging businesses owned by Vietnamese Americans, "It looks like Little Saigon. It makes you sick... I'll be here later this afternoon to drop off the welfare checks" (Aguilar-San Juan, 2000 p. 90). Thus, the places where Vietnamese Americans are residing cannot be understood without understanding that the United States is a racialized society. The continued impact of racism, ethnocentrism, and misunderstanding on Vietnamese American lives and communities cannot be ignored.

Community Institutions and Organizations

Many community institutions were created to facilitate the resettlement and adaptation of Vietnamese Americans in the United States. However, there are still only a few Community Development Corporations (CDCs) and other official long-term planning and community development organizations in the Vietnamese American community.

Mutual Assistance Associations (MAAs) were initially set up as self-help organizations where refugees that had lived in the United States for a certain time would help to welcome and assist new refugees. These MAAs were useful in delivering linguistically and culturally appropriate services to new refugees since those who were providing the services were refugees themselves (Rutledge, 1992). Many of these MAAs and community organizations became powerful over the years, and began to lobby on refugee issues and issues relevant to South East Asian politics. However, as the waves of refugees from Vietnam have slowed and the resources tied to refugee resettlement have dried up, many of these organizations are struggling to find funding in order to sustain themselves. Also, these community organizations continually need to change and adapt as the needs of Vietnamese American communities have shifted

from direct social services related to refugee resettlement to other needs such as gang prevention, affordable housing, and economic development.

General Demographics of Vietnamese American Communities

According to the 2000 Census, Vietnamese Americans made up the fourth largest Asian American group in the United States, totaling approximately 1,100,000 to 1,200,000 depending on whether Vietnamese Americans who also reported for another group is counted. The average household size in Vietnamese American communities was 3.70, which was very high compared to the total average household size of approximately 2.60 and the Asian average household size of approximately 3.1 (Reeves & Bennett, 2004). This large family size often indicates the need for higher household incomes than other groups. This large family size also means that housing needs (size and design) may be significantly different for Vietnamese American families than other groups.

As of the year 2000, only 24% of Vietnamese Americans were born in the United States, compared to approximately 89% in the total population and approximately 31% in the Asian population. 44% of Vietnamese Americans were foreign born, naturalized citizens, while approximately 32% were foreign born and were not citizens. Of Vietnamese Americans who were foreign-born, almost 50% had entered the United States between 1990 and 2000 (Reeves & Bennett, 2004). These numbers suggest that the majority of Vietnamese Americans in the United States had spent at least a part of their lives in Vietnam, possibly creating a transnational sense of identity. Also, since almost a third of the population were not citizens, this means that civic participation must take other forms rather than just voting in order to be relevant to a large portion of

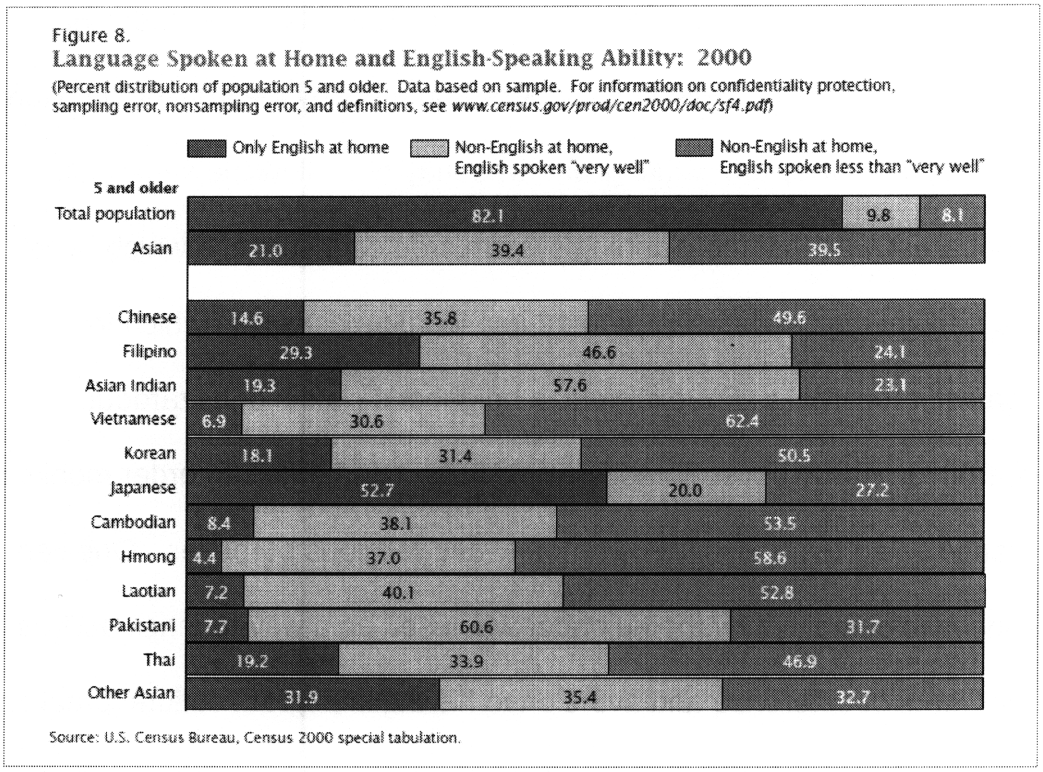
the community. As illustrated by the statistics, Vietnamese Americans have come to the United States in successive waves and not just in one concentrated time period. These differences in time of arrival to the United States affect the types of needs, resources, and world views that Vietnamese Americans may have.

As far as English proficiency, 62.4% of Vietnamese Americans reported that they did not speak English at home and that English was spoken less than "very well" by them. Approximately 30% of Vietnamese Americans reported not speaking English at home, even though they were able to speak English "very well." Only approximately 7% of Vietnamese Americans reported speaking only English at home (Reeves & Bennett, 2004). The implications of these statistics are daunting since over 3/5 of Vietnamese Americans are not able to equitably participate in public meetings and events that are English-only, nor can they clearly communicate with planners/consultant who do not speak English and who do not put effort in practicing linguistically competent communications methods. Moreover, because the overwhelming majority (92.4%) of Vietnamese Americans reported not speaking English at home, it can be assumed that Vietnamese is still the primary language used between families. Because of this, information delivered in Vietnamese would be more likely to be discussed and processed in Vietnamese American households than information delivered in English. These statistics also have strong linguistic and cultural implications, and affect the type of civic engagement that is valued and even possible for many Vietnamese Americans.

Approximately 38% of Vietnamese American report being "Less than high school graduate," as compared to approximately 19.5% in the Total and Asian populations. The poverty rate for Vietnamese Americans is approximately 16%, as compared to

approximately 12.5% in the Total and Asian populations (Reeves & Bennett, 2004). These numbers suggest that practitioners need to keep in mind that the lower levels of educational attainment, coupled with higher rates of poverty, may create extra hurdles for Vietnamese Americans to achieve equitable economic and community development. Finally, these statistics show the danger of analyzing and engaging Vietnamese Americans within an aggregate "Asian American" category since these aggregate statistics often obscure many important trends in Vietnamese American communities .

Table 2 Problems of Aggregating Into "Asian American" Category



Source: We The People: Asians in the United States. Census 2000 Special Reports (Reeves & Bennett, 2004)

Barriers to Planning in Multicultural Communities

Current literature identifies many existing problems and barriers to how planners can effectively engage with immigrant communities. Leonie Sandercock identified 4 broad types of problems in "When Strangers Become Neighbours" (2000) The first category was that planning by-laws, institutions, and regulations often reflect the values and norms of the dominant culture. Thus, these laws and regulations are often not "neutral" but rather reflect a vast amount of cultural bias. The second category of barriers that Sandercock defines was that apart from the above-mentioned institutional barriers, problems also lie in the culturally biased attitudes and practices of planners themselves. These biases may include different attitudes towards public speaking, disclosure, and conflict resolution between planners who embody the dominant culture's norms and the immigrants they are working with who may not follow the same norms. The third type of barrier was that the planning system creates a space in which racist and xenophobic sentiments can be incorporated into legal process with which to discriminate against immigrants. For example, a neighbor's claims of hazardous incense smoke from a nearby house-turned-temple forced authorities to order monks at the temple to cease using the house for community and religious purposes. One can argue that the incense complaint by the neighbor was used as a way to mask actions based on deeper fears of difference and aversion to having immigrant cultural practices in the neighborhood. The fourth and final category of barriers that Sandercock identified was when planners are confronted with working in a particular place with cultural practices that are totally foreign from their own values, and the resulting internal and external conflicts that may arise from this difference (Sandercock, 2000).

The barriers that Sandercock identified deeply impact how planning is practiced. Thus, even when planners can perceive the different ethnicities and cultures in a neighborhood, they may not be able to translate how these differences relate to planning practice. Due to these barriers, it is often very difficult for planning practitioners to identify the ethnic composition of their constituentss *and* understand the historical factors that may influence communities *and* how public policies may affect these communities (Bollens, 2000).

An Alternative Framework – Multicultural Planning

A variety of planning theorists have caught on to the insufficient abilities of current planning theories to operate equitably in multicultural settings and they have presented alternative approaches to planning. In Elsie Achugbue's Masters thesis, "Multiculturalism and Planning: Lessons from Vancouver," (2005), she succinctly identified three main challenges that culturally diverse cities pose for planning: 1) The need to expand "the scope of planning practice and policy to reflect the multicultural nature of today's cities, 2) The need to build "competence and capacity to meet the needs of diverse citizens, and 3) The need to recognize, respect, and lend "legitimacy to individuals' experiences in multicultural communities." Achugbue made very insightful recommendations on the types of competencies, skills, and support networks that planners needed to possess in order to address these challenges. However, as she mentioned in her "Limitations" and "Looking Forward" sections, the "community voice is largely absent" from her analysis, and a comparative approach would have enhanced the nature of her findings. It is the goal of my thesis to not replicate Achugbue's work, but rather to supplement the work by contributing more of the "community voice" as well

as to present comparative analysis between different Vietnamese American communities.

Upon reviewing prominent writings from academics and practitioners, as well as building on Elsie Achugbue's thesis, I have narrowed the types of strategies that are recommended for planners into four different categories:

1) Question planning's history, assumptions, and scope.

2) Be reflective, question one's values, and be open to the norms of others.

3) Increase participation of and decision-making by a diverse set of people.

4) Plan with racial, social, and historical contexts of diverse communities in mind

Chapter 2. New Orleans and Biloxi

In this chapter, I reflect on my post-Katrina work in New Orleans East and in Biloxi, MS. After reflecting on my experiences, I describe the lessons that I have learned prior to beginning my interviews. I then describe the challenges and strategies that have been identified through those interviews.

Because the following narrative and reflection is done through my eyes, I will take this opportunity to quickly frame my own experience as a Vietnamese American woman. I was born in Saigon, Vietnam. Saigon is now officially called Ho Chi Minh City, after the North Vietnamese Communist icon, Ho Chi Minh. However, I rarely ever hear a Vietnamese American person call the city by that name. My family roots are in South Vietnam and in the Central Coastal region of Vietnam. My family moved to the United States in 1991 through the Humanitarian Operation (HO) Program. We were able to qualify for the program because my dad was a prisoner of war in the Communist "re-education" camps for over five years. I grew up in different parts of Los Angeles County and have always lived near and worked near Vietnamese Americans enclaves. However, before starting my year as a Dan Than fellow in the Gulf Coast with the National Association of Vietnamese American Service Agencies (NAVASA), I had never actively participated in any community development work with the Vietnamese American community.

New Orleans East – Versailles

History and Pre-Existing Conditions

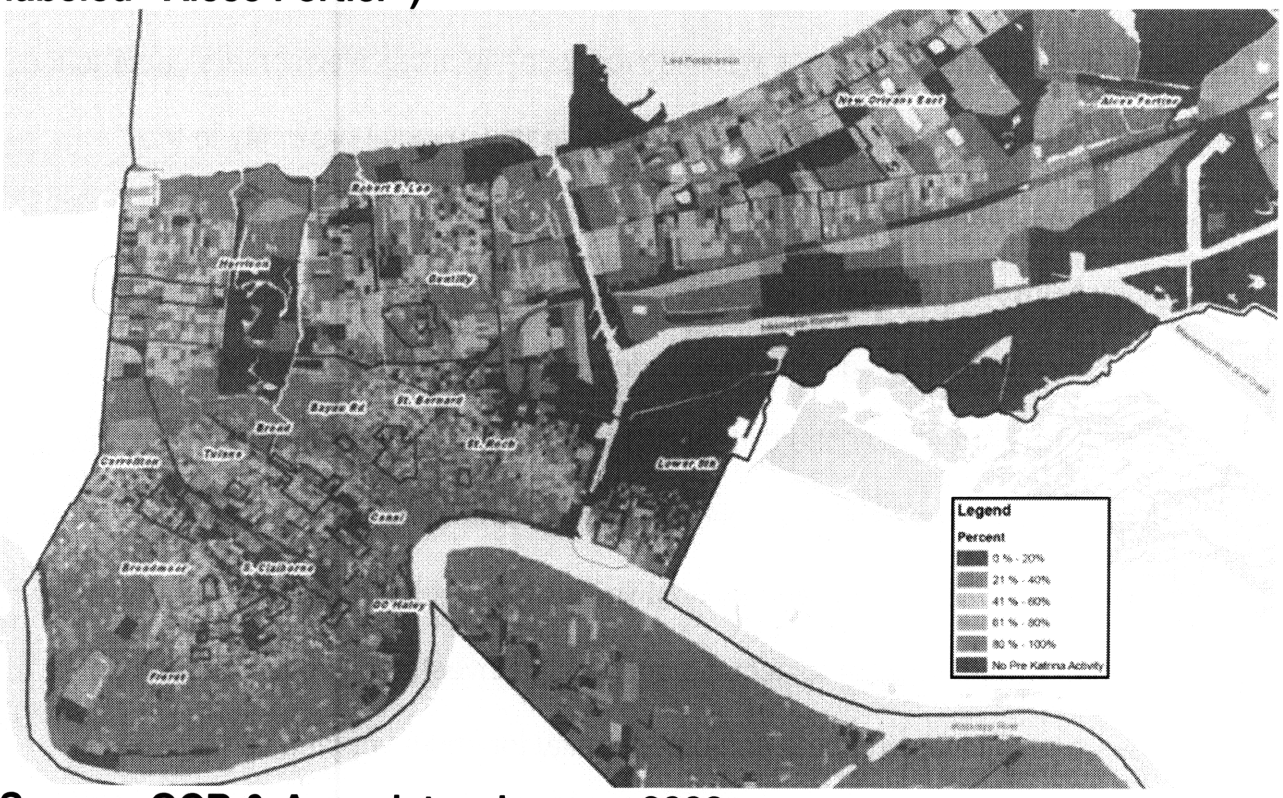
Demographics

According to the American Community Survey 2007 Estimates, there are currently 7,939 Asian Americans living in Orleans Parish, which is where the City of New Orleans is located. There was a relatively high rate of return in the Vietnamese American community after Hurricane Katrina for a variety of reasons. According to GCR & Associates, by January 2008, over 60%, and in most cases, over 80% of the population in the Vietnamese American neighborhood in New Orleans East (which they label as Alcee Fortier) had returned. This was significantly higher than many other parts of the city. According to community leaders in New Orleans East, the current population of Vietnamese Americans in New Orleans East is about 6,500 people.

The American Community Survey 2005-2007 estimates that the Median Household Income for Asian Americans in Orleans parish is $38,280. This number is significantly higher the Median Household Income in East Biloxi, which is estimated at $26,698.

For other demographics information such as Average Household Size, I assumed that the numbers from the 2000 Census for Vietnamese Americans in the United States that have been described in Chapter 1 were consistent with those for Vietnamese American residents in New Orleans East.

Rate of Return for As of January 2008 (Vietnamese Community is labeled "Alcee Fortier")



Source: GCR & Associates January 2008

History of Settlement

The Vietnamese American community in Versailles had a very deep history that started long before the 30 years of history that most Vietnamese people have been living in the United States. Most of the families of Vietnamese Americans residents in Versailles lived in the same three rural and primarily Catholic regions in northern Vietnam before 1954. When the country was split in 1954, the families moved together to 3 regions in South Vietnam to escape the North Vietnamese communists. From 1975 on, community members fled again, this time to escape political persecution of Catholics by the newly formed Communist government in Vietnam. In short, the

experience of displacement from their families and communities were not new to many who lived in Versailles, but neither was the fight to remain together at high costs.

The area in New Orleans East where most of the Vietnamese Americans live is called Versailles, named after the first housing development, Versailles Arms, where the first wave of Vietnamese refugees were moved to in the area. Newcomers came to the community through kinship networks, and often settled in close proximity to the Versailles Arms apartments.

Community Networks & Resources

As the community began to develop formal organizations and networks, the strongest one that arose was the Catholic Church. Along with the church, economic self-help networks were also developed within the community. These formal yet often not legally documented entrepreneurial networks often pooled resources from family and kinship networks in order to accumulate enough investment capital to open up businesses and to invest in boats and other capital for shrimping and fishing. From these networks, two strong commercial retail nodes began to emerge in Versailles during the 1990s (Zhou & Bankston, 1998).

Conditions When I Worked in Versailles

I worked primarily with the Vietnamese American community in Versailles starting in October 2005. My official title was a "Dan Than Fellow" (interpreted as "Be The Change" in Vietnamese) and I was funded by the National Alliance of Vietnamese American Service Agencies (NAVASA). Generally speaking, I aided in capacity-building both for organizational structure and for local personnel. My goals were to provide short-term relief as well as to support sustainable long-term community development. In

my time in New Orleans East, I worked primarily at Mary Queen of Vietnam Church (MQVN). MQVN's 6,000 parishioners make up about 80% to 90% of the Vietnamese-American population in Versailles.

I first arrived to the community two weeks after the area was re-opened to residents. There was no gas, electricity, or running water in New Orleans East. On the first three Sundays that the church had re-opened after the storm, 1,300-2,200 people attended mass. Service providers were recruited by us to provide emergency care to the residents. These service providers included: FEMA, SBA, EPA, job-training, acupuncture, and medical clinic services who provided services free of charge to everyone who was on the church grounds. These medical professionals were provided with young volunteers from the church who were responsible for translating and for managing lines and services so that older people and newer Vietnamese American immigrants were able to access these services. The church was also providing spiritual leadership and hope for the community in this time of extreme devastation and need. Many of the Vietnamese people had very painful memories of displacement from when they escaped as refugees within Vietnam and from Vietnam to the United States.

One of the big turning points in political mobilization and advocacy in the Versailles community occured a few weeks after I arrived. The Vietnamese American residents, whose network of attaining information was primarily through word of mouth, were anxious after hearing a proposal made by the Urban Land Institute (ULI), an out-of-state planning consultant group that was working pro bono for the city. The ULI proposal was to turn most of New Orleans East into what it called "greenspace" and

industrial investment zones (Donze & Meitrodt, 2005). This was the first iteration of what would later be called the infamous "Green Dot Map."

After the ULI report was announced, the head pastor of Mary Queen of Vietnam Church, Father Vien Nguyen, rallied his parishioners to make their marks at the next Bring New Orleans Back Commission (BNOBC) meeting. When I arrived at the site of the BNOBC meeting at the Sheraton Hotel in downtown New Orleans, I was overwhelmed by what I saw. There were at least seventy Vietnamese American people in the lobby filling out meeting sign-up sheets, and just about as many who were already sitting down inside the reception/meeting hall.

I almost cried due to the rush of emotions that made me feel so proud of my ethnic community yet so sad that they had to organize this way just to fight for the right to stay on their own land. Never in my life had I seen this many Vietnamese American people attend a mainstream political event that was not related to anti-communist mobilization. It was surreal to turn around during the meeting and see a sea of Vietnamese faces looking forward. Even a few Vietnamese people came up to speak during the comments period, including a gentleman who requested to speak in Vietnamese with an English translator. The speakers were not pushing for the city to give them any special treatment. They were demanding that the city keep a clear and open decision-making process that would allow them more voice in decisions on what would happen to their own properties.

Later that week, I was nominated to attend a planning meeting on behalf of the community. I was not nominated because I had any formal expertise in planning (which I did not) but simply because I was the only one available to meet mid-day in a busy

work week. Trang Tu helped prep me for the meeting by bringing up some common planning terms which I had never heard of before, and off I went to my first official planning meeting. Trang was my regional coordinator and also a professional planner who was volunteering with the Versailles community and coordinating NAVASA's Gulf Coast efforts.

When I arrived at the city planning workshop, which was hosted by a large city planning firm called Wallace, Roberts, Todd (WRT), the first thing I thought was 'I have not seen this many white people in suits since I attended an event put on by the UC Berkeley College Republicans." This thought, besides being a slight at right wing conservatism, stemmed from how un-representative of the general New Orleans population these people who were planning the rebuilding of the city seemed. There were six people in my "break-out" group, and they started out talking about flood planes, and "greenspaces" and water management systems. After listening to the discussion for about ten minutes, I explained to the break-out group my perspective, which was that the planning process seemed very absent of general community involvement. Whatever altruistic economic and environmental intentions these planners and academics might have had, they would be seen as yet another group of "land-grabbers" by the people of the city who were not able to/invited to assume meaningful roles in the city's development plan. At the meeting, I felt disgusted at the fact that it took me, a person from California who had been in New Orleans for only a month, to point these facts out to them.

Meanwhile, residents of Versailles found themselves not being able to find any housing or livelihoods in their own city. In reaction to the seemingly discriminatory

practice by Mayor Ray Nagin of not approving trailers for legal city residents, the church organized a "Tent City" to house displaced residents and to garner media attention. MQVN also initiated a class-action lawsuit that asserted the legal rights of residents to equitable access to government resources. It was only after a drawn-out media and political organizing campaign that atracted US Senators, including Hillary Clinton, to MQVN that Mayor Nagin was willing to sign the trailer request.

The Vietnamese American community in New Orleans East, once thought to be very insular and apolitical, continued to mobilize itself in order to assert its rights to return and to be active participants in the civic, economic, and political landscape of the city of New Orleans. Far from being the silent "model minority" that Vietnamese Americans are usually stereotyped as, the tight-knit Versailles community made its voices heard and heeded in the mainstream. I left the community in January 2006 to work full time in Biloxi, but have remained engaged in different capacities with the Versailles community since.

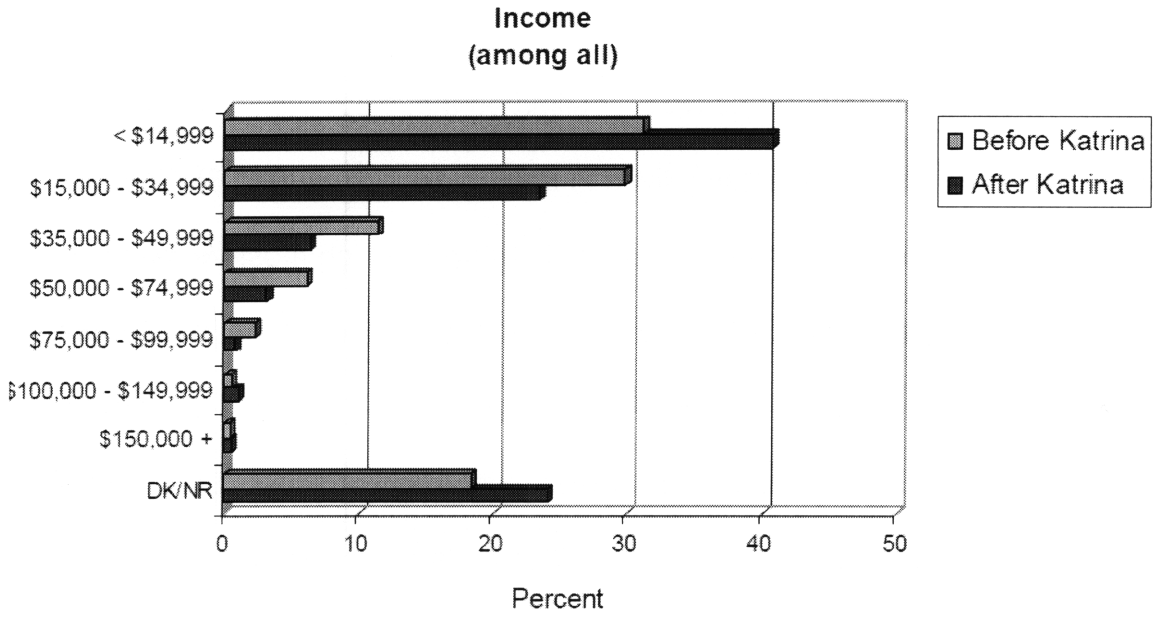
Even with conflicts, both external and internal, the Versailles community went on to win its campaign to shut down the Chef Menteur landfill, developed a Community Development Corporation, formed a youth leadership organization called Vietnamese American Youth Leadership Association (VAYLA), supported most pre-storm businesses to return and helped to develop new ones, channeled high amounts of public and private investments into the neighborhood, opened a community clinic, and helped to elect the first Vietnamese American US congressman ever. I describe in more detail some of the strategies that led to these great outcomes later in this chapter.

Biloxi

History and Pre-Existing Conditions

Economic Research Associates (ERA) estimated that 1,620 Asian Americans (overwhelmingly Vietnamese Americans) lived in East Biloxi in 2005 (2006). The East Biloxi peninsula was the neighborhood in the City in Biloxi in which most Vietnamese Americans resided before Hurricane Katrina. Vietnamese Americans made up about 20% of the total East Biloxi population. ERA also estimated that by the year 2010, 1,948 Asian Americans will be living in East Biloxi, an increase of about 20% over five years. However, anecdotal estimates are lower since the area on the tip of the East Biloxi peninsula where most of the Vietnamese Americans lived was the most damaged by Hurricane Katrina's storm surge.

East Biloxi has historically been an economically depressed area. Before the storm in 2005, ERA estimated that the Median Household Income in East Biloxi was $26,698. This number is almost $12,000 lower in comparison to the Median Household Income in the whole City of Biloxi, which is $38,289. According to the 2000 Census, the poverty rate for East Biloxi residents was approximately 24%, compared to the citywide rate of approximately 14%. (Warnke CC, 2006). The Vietnamese American population is about 65% Catholic and 35% Buddhist, as compared to the overwhelmingly Catholic community in Versailles.10 For other demographics information such as Average Household Size, I assume that the numbers from the 2000 Census for Vietnamese Americans in the United States that have been described in Chapter 1 are consistent with those for Vietnamese American residents in East Biloxi.

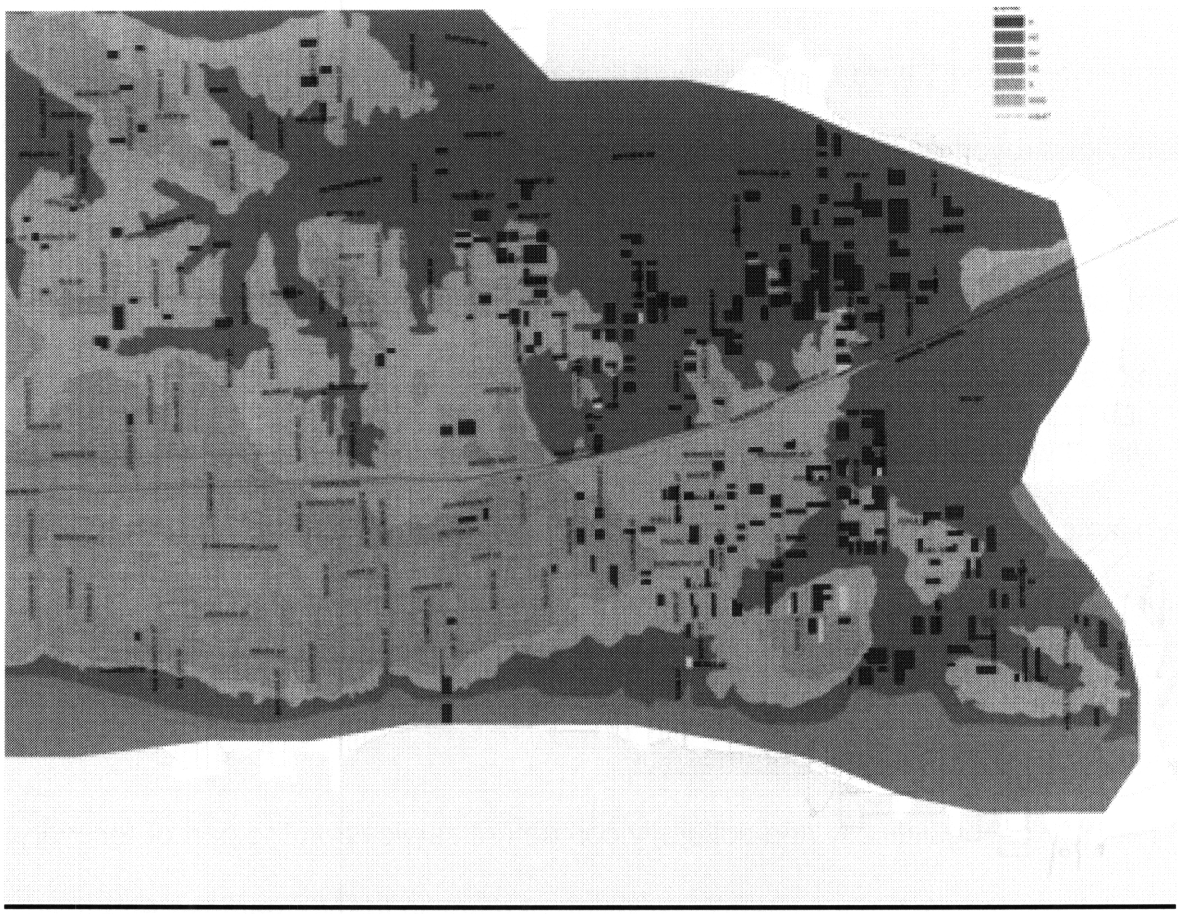


Source: Warnke East Biloxi Community Plan

In the late 1970s and early 80s the first wave of Vietnamese refugees moved to Biloxi,MS from Louisiana in order to work at seafood processing plants in the area and to shrimp in the Gulf Coast. Economic forces such as a demand for cheap, "unskilled" manual labor that required little English proficiency were ideal for many new Vietnamese American immigrants (Schmidt, 1995).

As more residents decided to settle in the area, they purchased or rented properties near the waterfront and on the interior of the eastern half of the East Biloxi peninsula (See Map Below). This area is walking-distance from different Biloxi harbors and from the seafood processing plants. However, this area also happened to be primarily in the 100 year flood plane, was low in elevation, and experienced the highest amount of damage during Hurricane Katrina.

Concentration of Vietnamese Households in 100 Year Flood Plane (Dark Green)



Source: Gulf Coast Community Design Studio

Small businesses that were tailored towards specific cultural and regional needs in the Vietnamese American community began to develop as the population in Biloxi increased. Land-based small business ownership provided a key wealth-building tool for the community as it diversified its economic options past the seafood industry.

Before Hurricane Katrina made landfall, Biloxi's economic engines were increasingly changing from the seafood industry and the Keesler Airforce Base into more gaming and tourist-oriented industries. The casino industry also brought with it a need for low-wage un-trained labor. Like factory work these jobs did not require English skills nor offer too many incentives to learn English (Phan, 2006).

Conditions That Existed When I Worked in Biloxi

Because of its geographical location in East Biloxi, the Vietnamese American community was hit very hard by Hurricane Katrina. As the storm surge came in, it completely destroyed or severely damaged most of the properties in the area. Because of the overwhelming amount of damage incurred by residential properties, businesses, shrimping boats, and seafood processing plants, the Vietnamese American community's infrastructure and livelihoods were devastated.

While I worked in Biloxi, many public officials touted the success of the casino as the main indicator that communities were recovering at a similar speed. However, judging by the lack of residential redevelopment in the areas around the casinos, it was clear that this assumption was not true.

Language Access and Cultural Competency

The lack of linguistically and culturally competent services on the part of recovery service providers resulted in a systemic exclusion of many in the Vietnamese American community. After Hurricane Katrina, the community had trouble becoming aware of recovery services, accessing services, and expressing their needs when they did arrive at service centers (Choi, 2006). This phenomenon also put undue and unrealistic burdens on organizations such as NAVASA, Boat People SOS, and other Vietnamese-centric community-based organizations.

Language access and cultural competency issues should not just be for governmental and large relief agencies to worry about. Non-profits like the East Biloxi Coordination and Relief Center (EBCRC), Architecture for Humanity, Hands On Gulf Coast, Back Bay Mission, and a host of other service agencies in the Biloxi area also

had trouble outreaching to and understanding the needs of the Vietnamese American community. None of these groups were staffed by Vietnamese Americans while I was there, though some groups have made substantial changes since.

Planning Processes and Disenfranchised Communities

Most planning processes to determine the path of short and long term development of East Biloxi in the aftermath of Katrina were not inclusive of the needs and the opinions of the Vietnamese American community. When the Governor's Commission on Recovery, Rebuilding, and Renewal conducted its initial charrettes in October in Biloxi, there was very low participation on part of the Vietnamese American community. The only explicit mention of the Vietnamese American community in the Commission's final report in December was to state their significant contributions in the seafood industry in Biloxi (2005).

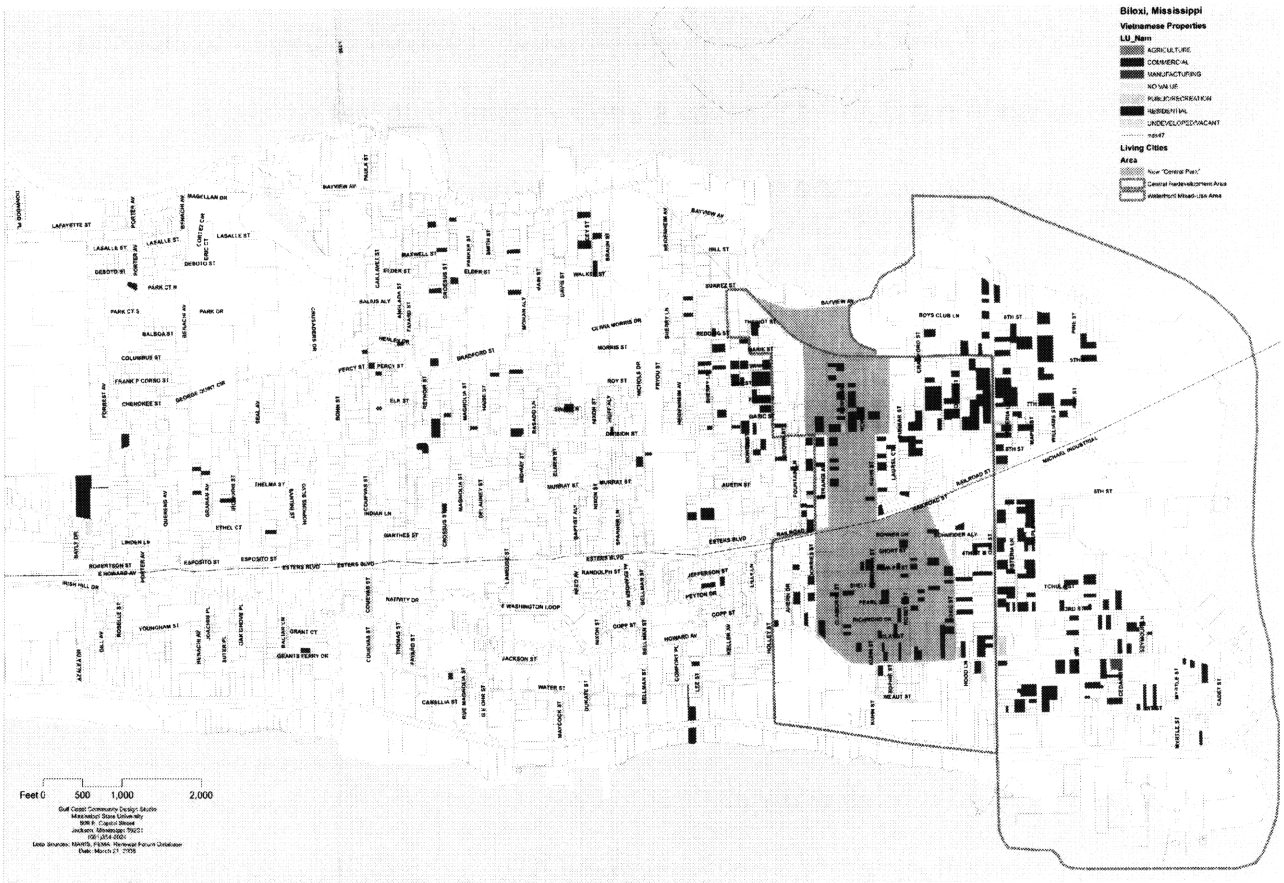
About a month after I arrived in Biloxi, a set of community leaders and community-based organizations and I decided to conduct a community-based planning process. In contrast to the governor's process, this one was dedicated to listening to the needs, ideas, and visions of residents, and to developing a feasible implementation plan. The planning process utilized four primary methods: a community survey, a land use and building condition survey, six community meetings and one-on-one interviews with community leaders. Within the six large community meetings, we also broke out into smaller groups in order to accommodate and support participants who were not as comfortable speaking to large crowds. We made sure that all survey materials were translated into Vietnamese and Spanish, and I provided live translation in Vietnamese at the public meetings and another person provided live translation in Spanish. The one-

on-one interviews with community leaders were conducted in culturally and linguistically competent ways. From this process, the East Biloxi Community Plan was developed (Warnke CC, 2006).

However, as this process was going on, we had competition from the City of Biloxi, which was conducting its own planning process. There was outreach about these meetings in Vietnamese using mail announcements, but there were not any language-appropriate information provided at the meetings when Vietnamese American residents attended. I felt these meetings were yet another indicator of how culturally inappropriate the top planning consulting firms in the country was. This time, the planning firm was not WRT, but rather Goody Clancy.

The draft report for the Living Cities Plan was released in June and it did not even mention the existence of the Vietnamese American community even though Vietnamese Americans made up 20% of the East Biloxi community (Living Cities, 2006). In addition, the Living Cities plan recommended that the area where about 70% of the Vietnamese American community resided be turned into a much more high density Central Redevelopment Area and Waterfront Mixed-Used Area (Living Cities, 2006; GCCDS, 2006). A Central Park had also been recommended that would be placed on top of many Vietnamese American and African American homes. To me, this seemed like another "Green Dot" map. See Map Below

Concentration of Vietnamese Americans in Condo and Park Redevelopment Zones



Source: Gulf Coast Community Design Studio

There were many encouraging recommendations in the Living Cities report, as well. Living Cities suggested that the city set an affordability requirement for developers who wished to build housing, establish a seafood village complete with improved infrastructure for the shrimping industry, and build a family resource center to provide centralized technical assistance and social services to the community. [4] However, even as the gaming industry is operating at above pre-storm levels in East Biloxi today, the Living Cities recommendations that were more positive for low-income communities were not implemented due to the lack of city tools and capacity for implementation, and to the current economic crisis.

Working from the "Outside"

After leaving the Gulf Coast in November 2006, I stayed engaged by helping NAVASA to recruit more Dan Than fellows and by conducting workshops at conferences regarding hurricane recovery in the Vietnamese American community. In August 2007, I began the Master in City Planning program at the Department of Urban Studies and Planning (DUSP) at MIT. Through a research assistant position with Professor Karl Seidman, I was able to continue working with the Vietnamese American communities in Versailles and in Biloxi.

However, this time, I worked as a consultant from thousands of miles away. Karl and I supported the Access 2 Equity Business counseling and business development program which NAVASA and local partners were spearheading in the Gulf Coast. For one year, I conducted a retail analysis of ethnic retail in New Orleans East and in East Biloxi, an industry analysis of the construction industry in the Gulf Coast, a market analysis of the gasoline station market in the Gulf Coast, and completed a series of industry profiles for business counselors who were working with primarily Vietnamese American residents to use as resources.

This was my first experience with consulting from a distance and it was significantly different than being embedded in the community. However, I did not feel like a complete "outsider" since I had developed strong relationships with many of the community leaders and local staff. Yet, I also could not just walk or drive over to the MQVN CDC office or the church, nor could I measure the commercial buildings for square footages myself. Also, as new staff replaced staff that I knew in some of the

organizations, I realized that I did not have the same levels of trust and familiarity with the local community as I did before.

In one telling incident, I wrote a memo to explain the significance of four different Excel spreadsheets and I failed to explain the findings in a way that would be easily-understood and useful to A2E staff. One particular A2E staff person called me up one day and bombarded me with about ten questions. During the conversation, I realized that I should have known these ten questions would have arisen and should have tried to answer them prior. It was my own embeddedness in the "data" and my inability to empathize with someone who had not done this type of data analysis before that caused a staff member who was over-worked and under-resourced to become even more confused and anxious. This experience really alarmed me since I had always been so critical of these very same technocratic and inconsiderate actions. However, I am thankful for the A2E staff member who helped bring this problem to my attention so that I could try harder to perceive situations from other perspectives than just my own.

Lessons Learned from Working Within the Gulf Coast Communities

Linguistic and Cultural Competency

Even though language access is one very important component, planning processes and outcomes need to express a deeper level of cultural competency, as well. For example, planners interested in economic development must understand the communal credit systems in many Vietnamese groups, the types of paperwork (or lack thereof) in the primarily cash-based small business retail ventures, and how highly Vietnamese people value property ownership.

Word-of-mouth and the "rumor mill" are often times the only way to distribute information and to gather support for specific agendas. This process has its limitations (misunderstanding, exaggerations, information only getting out to certain networks, inability of people who receive information to verify accuracy, etc.) However, it is important to acknowledge that this form of information dispersal is still common, fast, and needs to be strategized around.

Heterogenous Histories & Networks

I have learned that people from the same country are not homogenous groups, and often times distinguish themselves from each other by such characteristics as: region of origin, urban/rural, religion, family lineages, times of immigration to the United States, Army regiments and titles, and occupations. Distinguishing factors are also determined by skin tone, way of dress, and accents which observers who are not from the group may not be able to detect. These are not just historical conflicts and differences, but rather those that still stratify communities today. For example, Father Vien loved referring to us transplants from the West Coast who had come after Hurricane Katrina as "Tattooed Liberals from the Left Coast."

Youth & the Generation Gap

The "generation gap" leaves young people without too many role models and known trails that they can follow. Also, many young people, including myself, are conversational in Vietnamese, but lack a technical and professional vocabulary. To exacerbate this problem, there also exists the "Brain Drain" in which many young people who go away from home for college do not return because of the lack of economic opportunities. However, a post-Katrina phenomenon to note is the presence of the

"Reverse Brain Drain." Young people, like myself, are moving to the Gulf Coast (temporarily or for longer periods) to work with the Vietnamese American communities, to help develop community capacity, and to take lessons back to their own communities.

Coalition Building & Collaboration

I have learned from working on the ground that there are many barriers to building race-based and issues-based coalitions with other groups for the following reasons The salience of racial bias and stereotyping between different groups make collaboration and trust-building very difficult. Also, the competitive nature of public services and funding sources encourage groups to fight with each other and put each other down in order to distinguish themselves as the most deserving. Deep collaboration is difficult since even when community leadership is united, there is the much harder work of getting residents from different groups to work with and trust each other. Also, community leaders are often tasked with the work of establishing ties, but because of time and resource constraints, there is still a tendency to put on the blinders and to retreat to their respective silos.

Public Participation and Civic Engagement

One of the most interesting lessons that I learned is that Vietnamese American people tend to be very vocal in one-on-one and small group discussions, but may not be as vocal or candid in larger group settings. Also, when there are other non-Vietnamese around, Vietnamese Americans tend to keep quiet and act more reserved. This makes membership in committees and other decision-making groups problematic since on

paper, there seems to be Vietnamese American representation, though in practice, it is not very substantial.

Another big lesson that I learned, which has pushed me to write this thesis, is that unless there is a diverse set of organizations that represent the Vietnamese American community or at least an organized effort by Vietnamese American residents, most planners will not voluntarily recognize and conduct deep outreach and consultation with the community. The importance of being organized contributes largely to the different levels of recovery between the more organized Versailles community and the much less organized Biloxi community.

Lessons from the "Outside"

One of the lessons I learned after working as an economic development consultant is that market analysis and economic analysis require the researchers to make assumptions and "best guesses." This is different than the general belief that economic analysis is always "technical" and "objective." Thus, technical tools need to be supplemented with tools that educate and empower community-based actors to understand the effects of distinct choices and how best to prepare for them. Without popular education, capacity-building, and testing "technical" analysis with real-life problems, technical analysis is ineffective and is sometimes even harmful. Unless this capacity to interpret information exists on the ground, the continued dependency on outside consultants will be high and there is still no guarantee of successful implementation after the consultants leave. Resources should not just be invested in paying consultants to develop feasible plans, but rather to increase community capacity to develop their own plans, to hire consultants that they are most comfortable working

with, and to educate and build knowledge within the communities to shape the plans according to the needs and opportunities that arise.

Questions That Still Remained

The main reason why I decided to write this thesis was because even though I had learned many lessons from my experiences of working with the Vietnamese American communities in the Gulf Coast, I still felt like I lacked a coherent understanding of what are best practices for working with Vietnamese American communities.

I decided to pose my main questions, concerns, and ideas to other people who could help me answer pressing questions. Examples of the types of questions that still remained for me were: How can generational issues be addressed more directly? How can conflicts between religious leaders and other community leaders be resolves and/or avoided? How can burn-out and discouragement by people who are turned off by community infighting and strict anti-Communism be prevented?

Using the list of lessons learned as my guide, I asked interviewees about the challenges and strategies that they employed in their work, their observations on unique characteristics of the Gulf Coast Vietnamese American communities, their reactions and thoughts regarding youth and the "generation gap" in Vietnamese American communities, their experiences in interacting with planners and/or interacting with locally-based actors, and their impressions of how much and what type of support and resources for effective community engagement with/in the Vietnamese American are available to them. I hoped to identify the challenges and strategies that others have used in working with the Vietnamese American community, and to better understand the

differences and similarities between the Vietnamese American communities in New Orleans East and East Biloxi.

Identification of Challenges by Interviewees in the Gulf Coast

Community Conflicts, Differences, & General Challenges

Immigration Wave

Most interviewees who were Vietnamese American mentioned the major impact that immigration waves had on community mobilization and organizing. The needs of subsequent waves of immigrants who were generally less educated and lower income were different from those in the first wave, so this also made it hard for the Vietnamese American community to find a unified voice to articulate their diverse needs.

Homeland Politics

Even though some of the interviewees in the Gulf Coast recognized that feelings of anti-Communism were strong from many people in the Vietnamese American community, only two mentioned that this posed strong barriers to their work as it related to disaster recovery and rebuilding. A majority of community-based interviewees stated that the devastating effects of Hurricane Katrina created strong and immediate needs in the Vietnamese American community that overshadowed political mobilization efforts around anti-Communism.

Generation Gap

Barriers regarding the "generation gap" were mentioned often in the interviews. Barriers included communication problems, distrust, lack of confidence, the "brain drain", and lack of power and voice for the younger generation. One former Dan Than fellow who worked in the Gulf Coast stated, "There are limitations. As a young person, there is only so much you can push things without upsetting traditions and social

limitations that are set in the community. Also, language is a huge limitation for younger people who cannot verbally communicate with the older generation." Another Dan Than fellow mentioned that this generation gap was not just cultural or social, but also economic. As young people strived for higher education and other types of economic opportunities, a "brain drain" resulted in which young professionals left the Vietnamese American community because they did not see opportunities for success for them if they stayed. An interviewee who worked in the Versailles community stated that, "Being young, you have to try harder to get the older generation's respect... The elderly can't relate and may feel that young people are selfish and don't feel that young people give back to the community. Elderly have come and built this community and now [they believe] young people are trying to encroach." The same interviewee said that this "encroachment" was sometimes perceived regarding MQVN CDC because the organization was staffed mostly by people in the 1.5 and second generations.

Leadership Conflicts

Five of the interviewees who worked in Biloxi stated that conflicts and lack of communication between religious leaders created a strong barrier to community development in the East Biloxi Vietnamese American community. Interviewees stated that this included the lay-leaders of these religious organizations and not just the spiritual leaders. Also, one interviewee mentioned that there were also conflicts that existed between leadership *within* the church and temple that distracted from potential community development activities and also discouraged some church and temple members from becoming more active in the institutions.

Documentation

Three interviewees mentioned that one of the barriers to recovery from Hurricane Katrina was the lack of official documentation for some Vietnamese American residents. Interviewees defined this documentation as legal residency, as well as credit scores, credit histories, proof of insurance, and proof of homeownership. However, interviewees did not just blame this lack of documentation on Vietnamese Americans, but also on linguistically and culturally incompetent American systems of credit, finance, and policy-making. "They do not consider whether folks are paying their electric or water bills on time. They just look at whether people are paying their credit card bills and are applying for credit cards. However, if you do not trust credit cards and the credit system, then you're out of luck as far as getting a good [credit] score to qualify you for decent loans."

All three of the interviewees who mentioned documentation barriers talked about FEMA's policy of only allowing one "head of household" per address, which meant that Vietnamese American residents who sometimes lived with more than one household in one address could not get a FEMA number and were thus not eligible for a variety of recovery-related resources.

Public Participation and Civic Engagement

Lack of Experience with Mainstream & Tokenism

A few interviewees highlighted the high numbers of Vietnamese Americans who were more familiar with social service agencies (due to their experiences of navigating refugee-related services), but not familiar with long-term community development organizations. Interviewees also mentioned that this situation was changing, especially with respect to those who were part of the second generation and the 1.5 generation,

and especially in the Gulf Coast where there have been more pressing reasons to become engaged in long-term development.

One interviewee also mentioned the danger of Vietnamese Americans getting co-opted by the mainstream and being led by organizations and communities that are more politically powerful to support causes and campaigns that did not necessarily benefit the Vietnamese American community.

Attendance and Participation in Public Meetings

In the case of New Orleans East, the numbers of Vietnamese Americans who attend public meetings have increased significantly after Hurricane Katrina, but one interviewee mentioned that the quality of understanding and participation was still low on the part of attendees. Also, one interviewee mentioned that it was usually the seniors in New Orleans East who had the time and level of community investment in order to attend meetings regularly, but due to their lack of English comprehensions skills and lack of ability to communicate their ideas to the mainstream, their participation was still limited.

One Dan Than fellow listed the following reasons for lack of attendance at public meetings: the busy schedules of residents, the sometimes problematic and frustrating task of interpretation and translation during meetings, and the lack of demonstrated successes that could create momentum and generate excitement around attending additional meetings.

Barriers to Engagement with Planners/Consultants/Outsiders

One planner who had regular engagement with the Vietnamese American communities in the Gulf coast mentioned that the tendency to telescope the barriers of

working with the Vietnamese American community to translation was problematic since it let planners off the hook on having to actually change their culturally inappropriate practices, not just how they communicate these practices.

A community-based interviewee perceived large gaps in planners' understandings of where they fit into a community's long-term vision. "Since they're kinda around but not really, they are generally not very engaged and don't understand what drives the community." Another interviewee has worked in Biloxi for two years and has come in contact with three different types of planners in Biloxi (a planning consulting firm, and community-based planning firm, and the city planning department). She did not think all planners were the same, and brought up one egregious example with a planning consulting firm to set them apart from the more community-based planning firms. The interviewee stated that when the planning consulting firm Wallace, Roberts, Todd (WRT) was working with the City of Biloxi to develop a comprehensive plan, they scheduled a meeting with the Vietnamese American community at 8:30am on a Thursday. This time was incredibly inconvenient for most people who worked. On top of this, the meetings were only advertised in the mainstream English-only newspaper and they also did not have an interpreter or translated written materials at the meeting.

Almost all of the community-based actors interviewed cited the inaccessible nature of some planning terms and concepts as barriers to effective engagement with the Vietnamese American community. For example, one interviewee who worked with the New Orleans East community during the United New Orleans Plan planning process recalled, " In the UNOP process, a lot of people didn't understand the role of planning and how to choose between different planners. And planners did very ad hoc outreach

to the community and the community had to take a lot of initiative to be present and to push ideas."

Finally, the last and most cited barrier to effective engagement by planners/consultants/outsiders in the Vietnamese American community was the lack of trust between these groups and the Vietnamese American community. One community-based actor in New Orleans mentioned that the ephemeral nature of planners and consultants made it hard to build trust. "We have planners left and right that come into the community. Everytime a new planner comes in, they want to do a new process and to hold focus groups and community meetings again. They can't just waste people's time. It's hard to build trust and grow."

Identification of Strategies By Interviewees in the Gulf Coast

Community Conflicts, Differences, & General Challenges

One interviewee who worked as a planning consultant, city planner, and community planner suggested highlighting differences between community members as assets instead of divisions that needed to be overcome. Instead of trying to avoid discussion of differences, the interviewee suggested that people can benefit from hearing the opinions and stories of others, even if they may not agree.

Three interviewees who were based in the Gulf Coast also emphasize that beyond differences, there were high intrinsic values that Vietnamese American community members placed on affordable housing, quality health care, quality education, cultural expression, and well-paying jobs. Especially in a post-disaster environment where there were glaring needs around these issues, the Vietnamese American community was able to capitalize on shared needs as a way to bridge community conflicts.

Youth & the Generation Gap

One interviewee who worked extensively with both youth and community elders in the Gulf Coast suggested that in his work, he tried to budget more time when he worked with elders. "They want to give you context and history of where they came from, and not just where they're at. So the extra time investment is necessary to build trust and to really understand where people are coming from."

One interviewee mentioned that the Vietnamese American Young Leaders Association (VAYLA) had found a way to capitalize on the assets of the youth while still

actively engaging the elderly. During the landfill campaign in New Orleans East, VAYLA youth requested that elders with limited time and English proficiency who wanted to call their elected representatives to express concern about the landfill could sign up on a list and the VAYLA youth would call the elected officials on their behalf. VAYLA was then able to flood the answering machines of powerful decision-makers to send a strong message against the landfill. The interviewee stated that through engaging in these specific political actions together, different generational cohorts began to show more mutual respect for each other. They were also able to witness and experience effective young leadership, which had been not very visible in the community prior to Hurricane Katrina.

Public Participation and Civic Engagement

Lack of Relationships with and Experiences in Working with the Mainstream

Interviewees generally agreed that in the Gulf Coast communities, the needs to stay informed about recovery issues and to engage in planning caused many Vietnamese American residents to become more involved in community development and public planning activities.

The lack of experience of dealing with the mainstream was seen as particularly acute in Biloxi where there were less established networks and channels between Vietnamese American residents and public and private entities outside of the community. However, one interviewee re-framed this issue as an asset. The interviewee stated that having this lack of networks and infrastructure could be advantageous for leadership to intervene and to actively shape and develop capacity and networks with the mainstream. It was important to acknowledge in the case of

Biloxi that it would take much more time for this infrastructure to be built, as opposed to in Versailles where the existing experience and networks had already been developed. Also, the interviewee stated that during this process, it was okay for initial leadership to consist of local people and also non-local people who wanted to help. However, the same interviewee emphasized that investments in capacity-building of local residents was still key in this situation so that eventually the leadership roles could be filled by people who were invested in the community for the long term.

In the case of New Orleans, all of the interviewees who worked in New Orleans highlighted the importance of the Chef Menteur Landfill campaign in educating, politicizing, and developing the capacity of the Versailles community to advocate for their needs and visions in the mainstream. The Chef Menteur landfill campaign allowed for Vietnamese American community members and leaders to develop partnerships with mainstream environmental, legal, and political advocacy organizations. The protests, educational workshops, and youth workshops on direct action strategies also created opportunities for people of all ages in the community to gain valuable experience in political mobilization. The landfill campaign also helped to spawn VAYLA, who continue to draw successfully on their skills and networks today. The landfill campaign helped to establish the Versailles community as a force to be reckoned with so that those in the mainstream are now more likely to approach the community whenever they have any plans to develop or make other changes in the community.

Outreach

Most interviewees stated that the best way to do outreach in Vietnamese American communities was through word-of-mouth, existing ethnic networks, and

institutions. Other networks and community institutions that were identified by interviewees included Vietnamese-centric stores and supermarkets, informal settings such as cultural festivals and social events, community-based organizations and social service agencies, and ethnic media outlets (newspapers, television, radio). Eight different interviewees emphasized the importance of utilizing religious networks (ie. Churches and temples) in order to disseminate information and to mobilize community members to act. "A lot of organizing happens through the church and if the religious leaders ask people to come, people are much more likely to come."

Attendance and Participation in Public Meetings & Public Events

In the case of New Orleans, members of the MQVN CDC and other Vietnamese American community members successfully advocated for translation services at meetings as well as for translated documents. However, realizing that the lack of public participation was not just due to translation but rather to more deep-seated issues, MQVN CDC and other leaders also held educational workshops and community meetings within the community in order to help Vietnamese American residents understand what was going on, to talk about relevant issues, and to set community priorities so that those Vietnamese American residents who participated in broader community meetings could know what to say when speaking on behalf of the community. A planner who worked for the city of New Orleans also mentioned that often times, even if Vietnamese American residents showed up at meetings, they did not want to publicly share their thoughts, especially if they were not comfortable with English. The planner suggested providing the participants with options to give input in

other ways, such as writing down their thoughts on comments sheets or e-mailing their comments.

Strategies around being sensitive to different people's schedules were also mentioned often. For example, during shrimping season, many shrimpers are out on the water days to months at a time, and some only return to shore for a few days before departing again. Casino workers also tend to have vastly different schedules since casinos are open and active 24 hours a day. This meant that there needed to be a few different meetings scheduled on different days and times in order to be feasible for a diverse set of stakeholders to attend.

Lack of Community Capacity

One interviewee who worked as a program manager in the Gulf Coast suggested a two-pronged strategy to build community capacity. The first strategy, building individual and group capacity, was to work with individuals over time to develop their own skills and to engage in group work so that individuals learn how to work together to become a critical mass. The second strategy, building organizational capacity, was to develop better community development corporations and other community-based organizations so that the vehicles and systems of work could be improved and many other individuals could plug in on a project by project basis.

The same interviewee stated critical thinking, collective sharing, and leveraging existing knowledge and networks were also critical to the individual and organizational development within a community. For example, this particular interviewee had met Father Vien (Head Pastor of Mary Queen of Viet Nam Church in Versailles) over ten

years ago, where they worked on cultural development. "The next logical step was community development work."

One interviewee who worked in the Gulf Coast highlighted a phenomenon called the "Reverse Brain Drain." The "Reverse Brain Drain" reflected a post-Katrina phenomenon where young Asian American and Vietnamese American professionals and university students made short-term and long-term commitments to working in New Orleans and in Biloxi. The interviewee, in an article he co-authored, suggested that these young people are building community capacity through service, advocacy, research, and education. The interviewee perceived this strategy of encouraging the "Reverse Brain Drain" as one of the centerpieces for NAVASA's Dan Than Fellowship program, in which I was also a fellow for one year. The central idea behind this strategy was three-fold. 1) To creatively build lasting local institutional capacity, 2) To pragmatically develop program, projects, and systems tethered to a community-drive agenda, and 3) "To practice critical thinking inside and out-reflecting the Freirian philosophy of praxis by engaging local leadership with "Reverse Brain Drain" activists to mutually share/shape work through transparent dialogue and action. Not only were these young people contributing to the capacity of communities on the Gulf Coast, but they, like myself, were also given the opportunity to develop technical and social skills that they could use elsewhere.

Lack of Collaboration with Other Community Groups

In the case of New Orleans, an interviewee who worked for a few years in New Orleans stated that the Vietnamese American community and the African American community in New Orleans East had established deeper relationships of collaboration

on a wide variety of issues since Hurricane Katrina. Much of the collaboration started in joint protests against the Bring New Orleans Back Commission "Green Dot" Map as well as against the Chef Menteur Landfill. It was through these moments where the two communities felt like they were threatened by common forces that brought them together. The interviewee stated that since then, they have also organized joint community clean-ups where members of the predominantly African American neighborhood association, leaders from the local Buddhist temple and the church, and Vietnamese American residents both young and old participated. This strategy was used to create more a more regular infrastructure of communication and organization between different community leadership groups and residents, and all of the community leaders have committed to continue to jointly plan community clean-ups.

The same interviewee also described MQVN CDC's membership in a coalition of limited English proficient communities (Vietnamese, Spanish, and Portuguese speakers in the greater NO area). The group has both short-term and long-term goals that it hopes will get adopted and implemented due to the strength in numbers and capacity of the joint coalition. The short-term goals are to create a standardized process to create guidelines and training qualifications for interpreters, and to create an interpreter bank so that qualified interpreters can be located quickly. The long-term goal is to pass legislation to push for the permanent institutionalization of the short-term goals.

Two interviewees in Biloxi mentioned that they were active in the STEPS Coalition and in other Mississippi-based progressive coalitions. Through developing strong relationships with coalition members and in taking leadership roles in facilitating workshops and writing memos on behalf of the coalition, interviewees stated that they

were able to interject the priorities of the Vietnamese American community into the mission and actions of these coalitions. The interviewees also stated that framing the issues that the Vietnamese American community faced as problems for the whole general community and not just for a minority group also helped to build networks of support and create joint motivations for change.

Barriers to Engagement with Planners/Consultants/Outsiders

Language and Communications Barriers

One interviewee who worked in both New Orleans and Biloxi but did not speak Vietnamese stated that they needed to locate interpreters with some knowledge of the business language and with relationships in the community to build trust. In short, interviewees believed that having an even more institutionalized and organized process of involving interpreters directly in preparing materials and in working towards ideal outcomes was critical. Also, two planners suggested that creating a separate funding stream in budgets dedicated to live interpretation and translation of written materials as well as creating clear policies on when these resources should be deployed were the best options to ensure that services were consistent.

Other interviewees emphasized the value in pushing service agencies, public agencies, and other groups that interact with Vietnamese Americans to hire their own bilingual/bicultural staff. For example, a non-Vietnamese planner with the Planning Commission in New Orleans commented on the positive changes in communication once the department hired a Vietnamese American planner. "He can speak planner language as well as Vietnamese." The interviewee appreciated having this "in-house

capacity" which has diversified their staff and broadened the Vietnamese American community's ability to access services and to participate in meetings.

Lack of Understanding by Planners/Outsiders & Lack of Cultural Competency

One interviewee who worked in Biloxi, New Orleans, and Boston suggested that planners and others who were not familiar with the Vietnamese American community needed to delve deeper into Vietnamese American community structures and cultures to figure out what community priorities were (ie. Family, church, community unity, etc.). They should then frame the issues as something that could support or threaten these priorities. While delving deeper, planners also needed to talk to as many people as possible.

With relation to not just changing outreach methods in order to become more culturally competent, but also changing patterns of practice, one interviewee who helped low-income homeowners rebuild their housing in the Mississippi Gulf Coast stated that his organization was committed to making sure the homeowner was involved in the decision-making process of the housing design as much as possible. For example, the interviewee observed that Vietnamese Americans tended to be more interested in planting gardens and being productive with land on their properties, so the organization worked more closely with Vietnamese American residents on how to design their yards than they do with non-Vietnamese American residents.

Finally, many interviewees emphasized the need to create leadership positions for and to include representative Vietnamese American community members in official planning processes. For example, part of the reason why the Versailles community had been so successful in advocating for themselves with respect to planning was because

they had developed strong working relationships with the planning commission and city staff who kept them informed of upcoming projects up for review that could affect the community. These planners and other public officials also invited representatives from MQVN CDC to other technical advisory meetings in order to keep them engaged. One interviewee stated that members of MQVN CDC have also developed strong relationships with planning schools, including UNO and MIT, and these schools provided them with the technical skills that they did not have on their own.

Lack of Trust

There were different routes to establish community trust depending on the community context. For example, in Versailles, there was a very strong and centralized leadership network through Mary Queen of Vietnam Church. The main route for one interviewee was to develop trust with religious leaders, then building out the trust network from there. However, the same interviewee worked in Biloxi, as well, and mentioned that in Biloxi, no such centralized leadership network existed and the strategy there was to cast as broad of a net as possible with different religious leaders, civic leaders, and different generational cohorts, and to more slowly gain community trust through inter-personal relationships.

Another interviewee suggested that trust was best built through participating in joint projects so that the planner/consultant became seen as less of an outsider. He stated that a long-term engagement was more important than "barn-storming" charettes. Another interviewee echoed this point by advising that planners and others should continue to be tenacious. "Especially with building trust, you have to keep being present and communicate." He advised sustained outreach and emphasis on small

wins so that community members could become more accustomed to and excited about the relationship.

Questions that Still Remained

After gathering these interviews, I wanted to compare the barriers and the strategies that had been used by interviewees in the Gulf Coast with another Vietnamese American community that was not recovering from a hurricane. I chose the Vietnamese American community in Boston because it was physically accessible to me. Also, I had learned of some innovative practices and actions that had been taken by the Vietnamese American community in Boston, including the creation of the nation's first Vietnamese American Community Development Corporation called the Vietnamese American Initiative for Development (VietAID), the establishment of the nation's first Vietnamese American Community Center, the establishment of a cooperative model for cleaning services and childcare services, and also the creation of a bilingual pre-school. I believe highlighting the challenges and strategies that the Boston Vietnamese American community have faced helps me to produce a more comprehensive set of recommendations for community development and planning in Vietnamese American communities generally.

Chapter 3. Boston

In this chapter, I briefly describe the history of the Vietnamese American community in Boston and highlight some still salient challenges that still exist. However, my questions posed to interviewees and my research of written sources focused primarily on best practices and strategies that have been employed by the Vietnamese American community in Boston to address many of the challenges that have already been described at length in this thesis.

History and Pre-Existing Conditions

As of 1980, only 3,172 Vietnamese Americans were counted in the Census for all of Massachusetts. By the mid 1980s, the Field Corner neighborhood in Dorchester (in Boston) that Vietnamese Americans would come to settle in, was inhabited mostly by African Americans. At this point, Vietnamese American residents who were more concentrated in Cambridge and Brighton saw the opportunities to reside in Field's Corner, with its low rents, high amount of vacant potential commercial space and its accessibility to the Red Line. Today, Boston is home to the fifth largest concentration of Vietnamese Americans in the United States, composing of more than 10,000 residents in Dorchester (McGroarty, 2006).

In addition, the Vietnamese American community in Field's Corner and the surrounding communities have made very distinctive marks on the neighborhood as well as on the community development field. In 1994, Vietnamese American Initiative for Development (VietAID) became the first Vietnamese American CDC in the United States. In 2002, the Vietnamese American finished construction on the first Vietnamese

American Community Center in the United States. Also, in 2002, the University of Massachusetts, Boston became one of the only schools in the country to offer Vietnamese American Studies courses. Finally, in 2004, Boston was the site of the first national conference of Vietnamese Student Association, which then developed into the Union of North American Vietnamese-American Students Association (uNAVSA) (Tang & Bui, 2009/2010).

Current Challenges & Strategies

Political Orientation

According to a nationwide survey conducted by the Asian American Legal Defense Fund (AALDEF) in 2004, which chose the Vietnamese American community in Field's Corner as one of its target sites, 51% of Vietnamese Americans in Dorchester who voted in 2004 were registered Republicans. 31% of Vietnamese American voters in Dorchester were not registered with a specific party, while only 15% were registered as Democrats. In contrast, 62% of Cambodians in Lowell, MA were registered Democrats. 79% of the Vietnamese Americans in Boston voted for George W. Bush while only 21% voted for John Kerry for president (Kiang & Tang, 2006).

Homeland Politics

The overwhelming majority of Boston's Vietnamese American community are anti-Communist South Vietnamese refugees and their families. This history of immigration and transnational identity deeply affected how Vietnamese Americans, especially those in the older generation, approached political action. The salience of anti-Communist sentiments often overshadowed other community development and civic engagement goals. Dai Nguyen, who was a housing inspector and an influential

campaigner for local politicians such as Mayor Menino stated, "Everybody is for affordable housing, but for most [Vietnamese] people, they say democracy is key. They still really dislike Vietnam's communist government. They come here and they see that they government will support them and they like that. I think that's more important to them than things like affordable housing" (McGroarty, 2006).

Homeland politics have also created rifts between different generational cohorts of Vietnamese Americans in Boston. For example, after a youth mural was painted by young Vietnamese Americans, Vietnamese American elders commented that the youth did not understand the "true" culture of Vietnam and should have chosen other cultural symbols than they did. Also, one specific elder complained that a figure in the mural "looked like a Viet Cong," then criticized the adult Vietnamese American lead artist for being "uneducated" and said "there was no hope for the future" (McGroarty, 2006).

The political realities of engaging the Vietnamese American community in Boston means that issues of transnational identity and homeland politics must be better understood and strategized around. This is not unlike the older-generation Cuban Americans who are also anti-communist political exiles from their homelands.

VietAID

When Councilman Dapper O'Neill made his statement in 1992 regarding being "sick" about Dorchester Avenue turning into Saigon, only 100 Vietnamese Americans were registered voters in the City of Boston. After this incident, younger community members felt like they needed to increase the civic power of Vietnamese Americans in the city, planting one of the seeds that grew into the Vietnamese American Initiative for Development (VietAID) (McGroarty, 2006).

VietAID was developed in 1994 by Long Nguyen, Hiep Chu, and other people in the 1.5 generation who wanted to build civic power, to shift the community focus from the conservative homeland politics of the Vietnamese Community of Massachusetts, and to broaden the scope of community development from just the service provision model that VACA operated within. (McGroarty, 2006).

Vietnamese American Community Center

In 2002, VietAID developed the first Vietnamese American Community Center in the United States. This $4.6 million project was a great achievement by any measures, and currently houses the VietAID offices, the Au Co Bilingual Pre-school, a community library, and office/program space for other organizations, projects, and coalition activities. Its location in a formerly abandoned lot in the center of the Field's Corner neighborhood also helped to revive the neighborhood. However, the process of developing the center was not without its pitfalls, and there are many lessons to learn about the innovative ways in which organizers of the community center project created special roles for different generational cohorts in the Vietnamese American community, and also special roles for both "insiders" and "outsiders" to contribute to the process (Tang & Bui, 2009/2010).

In the community center planning process, young professionals were brought together in order to organize innovative fund-raisers using their marketing, graphic design, and mainstream networking skills. Those in the 1.5 generation were often the ones who could develop relationships with financial and political partners in the mainstream while still being able to embody and express the cultural values that the community center was aimed at nurturing to elders in the community. Finally, elders in

the community were responsible for drumming up support within the Vietnamese American community through house meetings, public meetings, internal fund-raising, and informal communications and social networks. Even though these different groups met intermittently, the decentralized organizational structure prevented generational conflicts from arising since each group was responsible for a different set of tasks even though they were all working towards similar goals and visions.

Generational Issues

The "Our Voices" project in Boston's Vietnamese American community is one example of how generational differences have been addressed in Boston's Vietnamese American community. The project employed methods of grassroots cultural production, namely inter-generational story-telling and processing, in order to promote communication and understanding between different generations. In 2003, youth were trained in oral history methods, then conducted interviews with elders in the community about the Vietnam War, adjustments to the United States, and Vietnamese culture and history. Using this information as well as incorporating their own generational perspectives, the youth developed and acted out a play for a diverse multicultural audience at the community center (Tang & Bui, 2009/2010).

Through their story-telling, youth were able to show that the inability of many youth to operate within Vietnamese traditional culture was not just due to generational differences, but also due to the socio-economic struggles new immigrant families faced. In one particular scene, a son was trying to write an essay on Vietnamese culture, but his dad had to work too many long hours and could not provide the son with help on writing the essay. Other themes of the play included the additional burdens and

responsibilities placed on older siblings, especially older sisters, to assume additional adult roles of caretaker, bilingual cultural broker and translator, and breadwinner. These insights on the intersections of ethnicity, class, gender, age, and immigration status were powerful ways of showing how American economic and social realities can exacerbate generational conflicts (Tang & Bui, 2009/2010).

A strategy to prevent youth burn-out due to political and generational conflicts and to increase youth participation in community-based work was presented by one interviewee who was an educator of students in the Vietnamese American community in Boston. He suggested that helping community members to predict, to critically analyze, and to respond to conflicts regarding homeland politics were probably the best strategies at preventing "burn-out" and preventing acute discouragement from future community-oriented work. The interviewee stated that applying an analytical perspective to conflicts and differences, and treating them as predictable outcomes of an unjust system could prevent people from taking the conflicts personally. "We should appeal not just to the passion and personal experiences of people, especially young people, but also promote critical analysis of existing structures in order to blunt the negative impacts of differences."

In addition to the work of the elders and of the youth, the 1.5 generation, sometimes called the "bridge generation," have played very significant roles in community development and empowerment in Boston's Vietnamese American community. It was specifically those in the bridge generation who had bicultural and bilingual skills to navigate Vietnamese and American cultural and political structures that helped make the community center a reality for. However, not all interviewees believe

that the 1.5 generation is the primary change-agent in Vietnamese American communities today. One interviewee believes it is rather more those in the second generation who will have more formative roles in driving community development agendas moving forward. " The 1.5 generation, ten years ago, they were the critical lever for change. However, it's past them now. Some key individuals from the 1.5 generation will still continue to play critical roles, but as a generational cohort, they have moved into non community-oriented careers and they have made choices to get into other industries. Now, they have their kids and their families and their attention has shifted. They may find volunteer opportunities and other ways to contribute in their 30s and 40s, maybe provide financial and technical expertise, but it's not usually advocacy and it's generally not for career, full-time shifts."

Gender Identity & Conflicts

As described above, there are extra responsibilities and roles for young Vietnamese American women as a result of traditional Vietnamese American culture but also due to pressures of adaptation to harsh American realities for low-income refugees. One interviewee described a project when she developed an afterschool program that focused on empowering young girls. However, she said that attendance was low because many of the young girls had to go home right after school because they had domestic responsibilities. She said that this was not the case for boys in a similar afterschool program. The same interviewee also said that the biggest challenge for her in working with the Vietnamese American community is her strong personality. "I'm a very direct, blunt, and loud woman, and people are just not used to it."

As one strategy to address these gender inequalities, VietAID developed a project in order to educate, to train, and to help to license childcare providers. VietAID staff provided opportunities for women to network socially and to develop a support network of childcare providers to share stories and experiences. VietAID staff also encouraged women to get more involved and vocal in political and civic issues. For example, staff would help to prep women to speak with elected representatives and to make presentations and join discussions at conferences.

Cultural Development

Another strategy that the bridge generation and the younger generation adopted in order to empower and engage a diverse set of people in the Field's Corner neighborhood was through diverse forms of cultural development and expression. These artists and community activists refused to accept the simplified view that housing, land redevelopment, and business development were the main components for successful community development. The alternative vision that they presented instead was one in which a multilingual, multicultural, and multigenerational group of people can live together and share and validate their lived experiences through creating collective memories and appreciating cultural traditions. These processes of "cultural production" became important sites for new voices and new leadership to emerge in the Vietnamese American community. A growing body of scholarship supports this view that art and cultural objects can be tools that build community pride and can even economically revitalize communities. These "cultural productions" included plays, documentaries, murals, and digital story-telling. All of these different productions in one way or another helped to develop stronger multicultural, multigenerational, and

multilingual ties in the neighborhood in ways that building an affordable housing project could not (Tang & Bui, 2009/2010).

Multiracial Organizing & Collaboration

One of the most prominent signs of "cultural production" in the Fields Corner neighborhood, namely the 5 murals that were created between 2002-2005, not only brought the Vietnamese American, African American, Irish, Jamaican, and Cape Verdean youth of the neighborhood together to create a joint product, but also built in a process of consultation with community leaders and stakeholders to ensure that the murals produced would be representative of the diversity of views and interests in the neighborhood. The youth started this consultative process in the second mural after the first mural was harshly criticized by Vietnamese American elders for being "unrepresentative." The second mural was a painting of the Red Line subway train, which was a symbol of the site of daily interactions between a diverse set of people in Dorchester. Within each Red Line car was a painting of one of the consultative meetings that youth held with community members over a two-month period. This mural is a constant reminder to the neighborhood of the value of communication and collaboration (Tang & Bui, 2009/2010).

Another example of multicultural organizing was exemplified by the development of a trash-strewn lot into a community garden. Young people and others spent a few years researching native Boston plants that local immigrant communities were familiar with and determining how multilingual meetings regarding the community garden could be conducted. They also hired a Khmer (Cambodian) master ceramist to create a colorful 25-foot frieze. Within the tiles, the following Vietnamese proverb was translated

into Spanish, Creole, Vietnamese, and English. "Dear Pumpkin, Please Love the Squash, Because Even Though You are Different, You Both Live on the Same Trellis" (Tang & Bui, 2009/2010, p. 22). In this example, not only did a diverse set of multiracial and intergenerational set of actors participate in a project together, but the product itself was a recognition of social segregation and stratification and a strong view of shared responsibility in community revitalization (Tang & Bui, 2009/2010).

Finally, the last example of multiracial organizing through cultural production was one in which youth from the Cape Verdean American community and the Vietnamese American community were brought together in 2004 to produce iMovie digital stories. These stories consisted of many themes, but a consistent thread seemed to be the shared experiences of young people "growing up in immigrant families, experiencing generational gaps, fighting racism in schools and surviving violence in urban communities." In one story by a young Vietnamese American woman named Hoa, she stated " I was born in Boston, Massachusetts. My family is originally from Vietnam. I'm not your typical Vietnamese daughter. I do not always obey my parents. I'm not fluent in Vietnamese. I do not understand all of the traditions. But that's okay. I have many other qualities that make me who I am and that is all that matters" (Tang & Bui, 2009/2010, pg. 24). Hoa's story became the focal of the group discussion at the public forum at which the digital shorts were presented because it resonated with many different youth, regardless of whether they were Cape Verdean American or Vietnamese American. This theme of intergenerational conflict was relatable to many youth, highlighting how multiple ethnic groups could share very similar experiences and that communicating these experiences may be a very valuable step in addressing

racism, youth violence, and other social problems (Tang & Bui, 2009/2010).

Public Participation & Civic Engagement

In order to encourage business owners to donate to the VietAID community center and to get them to attend planning meetings, one interviewee who volunteered with VietAID stated that the most important thing they needed to do was to care about the problems of the business community. "You have to relate to them. Each of them wanted something to come out of their donation. Give them free referrals. Make them feel special. Go back and use their services so that they feel you care about their business and their success. As you go forth and do other events, you have to go back to the same businesses every year, so you have to show you appreciate them."

In order to increase participation and awareness, interviewees suggested having an information booth at a festival, and making short educational and mobilizing speeches between music shows. "Vietnamese people do not like to go to boring sit-down meetings, but they love coming together for festivals, music shows, cultural celebrations, and other social events... You need to figure out ways to gauge public needs and ideas through these forums." Another interviewee stated, "At the event, you can provide more information and get people's contact information so that you can reach out to them at a later time." Interviewees suggested that after building trust and recognition through these informal types of meetings that organizers had better chances at encouraging more formal community engagement in the future.

Another interviewee, an elder in the Boston community, emphasized the important role that his social network based on mutual care played in developing community capacity to care for the elderly. The association often times hosted private

fund-raisers for health care and funeral costs. A few interviewees mentioned another example of leveraging networks to build community capacity. They mentioned religious networks specifically since those within this network already met regularly if not semi-regularly, and were often motivated by similar social and moral goals. Also, religious leaders often commanded respect from residents and could help to encourage residents to participate in community capacity building.

Problems that Planners/Outsiders Face in Working with the Community

One interviewee laid out a culturally competent learning and outreach for outsiders in five steps. 1) Find leadership in the Vietnamese American community and get buy-in from influential key leaders. 2) Find out where Vietnamese American people congregate and what types of organizations they participate in and go to these organizations and places directly. 3) "Articulate clearly why you, the outsider, wants to work with the community and don't act patriarchal." 4) "Help people to understand that change takes time and patience is definitely a virtue." 5) "Don't be an asshole because the world is a really small place. Don't burn your bridges."

Another interviewee who worked for a long time in Boston and as a national consultant to community groups, especially Vietnamese American organizations, proposed another strategy to help planners become more culturally competent. This strategy involved economic development planning and business development. The interviewee stated that "It really gets back to the basic concept of 'understanding the market.'" For example, in Boston, the interviewee found opportunities in childcare services based on market opportunities and based on the skills that Vietnamese American residents had. He also found opportunities for commercial cleaning services

and developed a program that aided Vietnamese American residents in cooperative service delivery & advertising.

Chapter 4. Summary & Recommendations

Summary of All Interviews

Challenges

Community Conflicts, Differences, & General Challenges

Interviewees identified a wide variety of historical, cultural and social characteristics that created barriers and challenges for community development and political empowerment within the Vietnamese American community. These challenges included: the generation gap, gender norms, leadership conflicts, regional differences, religious conflicts, and fixation on homeland politics. Many interviewees also recognized that Vietnamese Americans and Vietnamese American communities were heterogeneous and complex. The above-mentioned similarities and differences between groups and individuals could combine in very different ways according to specific contexts.

Immigration Wave

People who first immigrated generally had higher education levels and more transferable skills. The "first wave" of immigrants, those who immigrated to the United states in 1975 were also the first ones to step into leadership roles in order to develop the organizational structures for Vietnamese refugee social service and support in America. Many of these immigrants from the first wave continue to dominate the leadership in social service agencies and Vietnamese American associations today. Immigration waves issues are significant because they have shaped the social status hierarchy within Vietnamese American communities, affect the leadership structures

and agendas that dominate Vietnamese American communities, and challenge the Vietnamese American community's abilities to gauge needs and interests for a diverse set of immigrants.

Anti-Communism & Homeland Politics

All of the Vietnamese interviewees with the exception of seven mentioned that anti-communist sentiments in the Vietnamese American community was one prominent characteristic that could pose challenges for community development and community empowerment. Interviewees expressed that this affected what types of activities community organizations and individuals engaged in and how they framed these activities.

Interviewees also brought up other examples when community leaders had lost much of their power and influence after accused of being communist by other community members. In addition, three interviewees also stated that often times, when there were leadership conflicts, accusations of communism are used in order to hurt a rival's reputation and to increase one's own anti-communist credentials.

As mentioned earlier, these anti-communist sentiments also contributed to why Vietnamese Americans, especially those of the older generation, tended to be more Republicans. However, most interviewees expressed the need to recognize that there is a very real history of direct harm inflicted by the Communists in Vietnam and the resulting anger and pain are justified for people and their families who went through the Vietnam War, the re-education camps, and the refugee experiences. They also struggled with how to recognize the lasting trauma for many people in the Vietnamese American community while still pushing for more active engagement in Vietnamese

American communities that do not revolve around anti-communist demonstrations or are not mired by anti-communist accusations.

The issue of anti-communism seemed to be more prominent in Boston than in either Biloxi or New Orleans. Most interviewees did not speculate as to why they thought this was the case. One interviewee did mention that because the Gulf Coast communities had been dealing primarily with disaster recovery and redevelopment that these activities forced the residents to become more engaged in American politics and possibly in turn had distracted them from anti-communist activities.

Public Participation and Civic Engagement

Lack of Experience with Mainstream & Tokenism

Interviewees expressed that, generally speaking, the Vietnamese American communities that they worked with tended to have limited knowledge about and limited interaction with community development organizations and public planning agencies. The issue of lack of representation was ever-present with respect to Vietnamese Americans in mainstream organizations. Because of the limited experience by Vietnamese Americans with planning practices generally, there was also lower internal community capacity to be able to digest this information and to figure out how to present it to the community in ways that were relatable and easily understood.

Challenges were also identified regarding the quality and effectiveness of participation and representation for Vietnamese American communities in mainstream advocacy and decision-making arenas.

Attendance and Participation in Public Meetings

Generally speaking, interviewees mentioned that attendance by Vietnamese Americans at mainstream public meetings tended to be low. Also, one interviewee mentioned that it was usually the seniors in New Orleans East who had the time and level of community investment to attend meetings regularly, but due to their lack of English comprehensions skills and lack of ability to communicate their ideas to the mainstream, their participation was still less than ideal.

Problems that Planners/Outsiders Face in Working with Community

Linguistic, cultural, and local barriers exist for planners and consultants who engage the Vietnamese American community on a limited basis. Interviewees who were committed to working with Vietnamese Americans over the long-term but were relatively newcomers to the community also mentioned that they faced some of these same barriers. The largest problem that most planners and consultants from outside of the community identified was language and communication. However, interviewees who were community-based actors mentioned that the tendency of "outsiders" to telescope the main problem of working with the Vietnamese American community to simply communication and translation instead of cultural incompetency was a problem in itself.

Another large barrier that was identified was one of resource constraints. Some interviewees stated that they simply did not have the resources they needed. This often meant that whatever linguistically and culturally competent work that got done was "extra" work that was not budgeted, and this put extra strain on over-worked staff who were already operating under tight schedules.

Another general problem that planners interviewed faced was when what they had assumed was theoretically effective or had worked for them in the past did not work with the Vietnamese American communities in specific situations. Community members who worked with these planners were continually frustrated at this insistence on a "cookie-cutter approach" that was not sensitive to local conditions, needs, and preferences. Another characteristic of this problem was that there was a lack of trust and skepticism towards planners and consultants who came in for short periods of time.

Strategies

Community Conflicts, Differences, & General Challenges

Most interviewees observed that community differences were common challenges that must be considered when working with all communities, including the Vietnamese American community. As described earlier, some of these differences resulted in conflicts, while at other times, they resulted in synergies that could tackle complex community problems. Interviewees identified a wide variety of strategies to address the conflicts that arose and to capitalize on the assets that having a diverse set of interests, experiences, and goals could provide. The strategies included using the differences as assets instead of divisions, emphasizing culturally-based events and developments to appeal to shared cultural roots, developing professional support networks for women, appealing to the "silent majority" who may not have already picked sides in a conflicts, providing supportive venues for sharing stories and experiences , creating mentorship programs between elders and youth, separating conflicted groups physically while still ensuring that they are working towards similar goals, using 1.5 generation members as mediators and bridges, and outreaching to and including a broad set of stakeholders at the beginning of a process in order to prevent claims of favoritism down the line.

Gender Differences

Interviewees, mostly women, brought up strategies on how to address gender differences in the community. These strategies included creating professional and social development opportunities for women, and also empowering them economically.

Generation Gap

Interviewees listed a large number of strategies to empower the young and older generations alike and to bridge generation gaps. These strategies included educating youth on Vietnamese American culture and language so that they could communicate with and understand their elders' motives, utilizing the bridging capabilities of the 1.5 generation to mediate differences, educating all age groups about the experiences and needs of those not in their age group, assigning roles and tasks that play to the assets of each age group, creating leadership and skills training programs for youth, and educating youth to cope better with generation gaps so that these conflicts do not prevent them from actively participating in the community in the future.

Leadership and Organizational Conflicts

Interviewees mentioned three main strategies in dealing with conflicts between leadership and between organizations in Vietnamese American communities. First, many interviewees suggested that it was essential to predict potential conflicts in a project and attempt to build a broad enough coalition of support at the beginning of a process in order to prevent claims of favoritism and bias later on. Second, many interviewees found success in focusing on building trust and in learning about existing conflicts before starting a project so that they would be seen as independent enough to not pick sides. Third, when there were cases where these groups may be too "penetrated" by conflicts in order to be brought into a working group together, it was essential to outreach to and to engage leadership and groups individually and to help them "agree to disagree" while still working separately towards similar goals.

Educational System

The challenges faced by youth and parents in navigating the educational system was brought up much more in Boston than it was in the Gulf Coast. This may possibly be due to the fact that I did not interview staff that were working directly in the educational system in New Orleans and Biloxi, while I did interview one educator in Boston. However, I also believe that the legacy of the banishing of bilingual education in Boston in 2002 left a deep gap in the k-12 educational system, but also created a large leadership vacuum due to the fact that the Parent Advisory Councils (PACs) were disbanded along with the bilingual program.

However, examples such as the Au Co bilingual pre-school in the Vietnamese American Community Center in Boston and the charter school that is being planned in New Orleans East provided opportunities for re-imagining what effective education for youth can look like.

Public Participation and Civic Engagement

Outreach

Most interviewees stated that the best way to do outreach in Vietnamese American communities was through existing ethnic networks, institutions, and media outlets. Other networks and community institutions that were identified by interviewees included Vietnamese-centric stores and supermarkets, informal settings such as cultural festivals and social events, community-based organizations and social service agencies, and ethnic media outlets (newspapers, television, radio). One interview stated that "If you start out with these networks and institutions, then from there, you will

be tapped into other networks that may not be as obvious to those who are not intimately involved in such networks." This meant there also needed to be a long-term strategy of building trust, relationships, and networks in the community instead of just expecting people to read about an event on a flyer and to show up without any other encouragement.

Attendance and Participation in Public Meetings & Public Events

Interviewees tended to separate public meetings and events in two categories. The first category was of public meetings and events that appealed primarily to the Vietnamese American community and the second category was of public meetings and events that were for a broader audience. In the second category, interviewees emphasized that having interpreters present was a must if a group was interested in engaging a broad section of the Vietnamese American community. In cases where interpreters were not available or were not provided, then another strategy was to encourage Vietnamese American community members who understood community issues to go to and represent the community in a public meeting. This person should also to return from the meeting to de-brief those who were not in attendance. Even though some non-Vietnamese planners and even some Vietnamese American community members have stated that this system worked very well, most within the community are unsatisfied with this strategy because it placed too much pressure on a few individuals to represent a broad range of often conflicted community interests. It also often let public agencies and other groups off the hook for not providing linguistically and culturally appropriate services.

Interviewees proposed four main strategies on how to encourage attendance and meaningful participation in public meetings and events in both categories. The first recommendation was to be sensitive to the schedules of the target population and to schedule meetings at times when they can actually attend. The second general strategy was to provide food, childcare services, and other types of services and incentives for people to come. The third strategy was to frame the issues so that they were relevant to the types of people that were being targeted. The fourth general strategy was to make the public meetings and events less formal and more fun.

Interviewees mentioned that because so much occurs through informal networks and through word of mouth in the Vietnamese American community that plugging into these informal networks was critical to ensure public participation and effective engagement.

Lack of Community Capacity

Interviewees suggested a large number of strategies to build community capacity, namely developing institutional memory and organizational capacity, building up sustainable economic resources, leveraging existing knowledge and networks, sharing collectively and thinking critically, encouraging a "Reverse Brain Drain," developing strong and responsive leadership, and offering training programs and workshops to educate and empower residents to take ownership of community problems and to take action.

Young leaders need to learn more than just typical skills but also need to learn cultural competency skills because that will make it easier for them to build bilingual,

bicultural community capacity that would benefit all members of the Vietnamese American community.

However, it is important to note that the level of community capacity that a community starts out with greatly determines the menu of options that it has. For example, because New Orleans already had a strong community network derived from generations of kinship, the options available for them to build capacity quickly through energizing networks was not available to those in East Biloxi. Also, because the level of physical devastation was so much higher in East Biloxi than in New Orleans, the technical knowledge and resources capacity needs were much higher in the recovery process in Biloxi.

Community capacity-building also worked differently in the City of Boston, which has had a much longer history of interaction with other Asian American groups, while Vietnamese American communities in the Gulf Coast make up the overwhelming majority of all Asian American populations in the region. For example, the influence that Asian American groups such as the Asian Community Development Corporation and the Chinese American Civic Association have built over decades in Boston may have provided some relatable examples and actual capacity-building resources for the Vietnamese American community in Dorchester. However, the issues may not be so simple, as having other Asian American groups may create more competition for resources and may result in a tendency by outsiders to conflate all Asian Americans into a generic category without recognizing some of the critical differences between Asian American groups.

Lack of Collaboration with Other Community Groups

Many interviewees stressed that increasing collaboration would require strategies that not only addressed some of the logistical linguistic barriers between groups, but also differences in culture, power, and opinions. Interviewees suggested creating a more regular infrastructure of communication and organization between different community leadership groups and residents. Strategies of using "cultural productions" in Boston in order to organize across cultural lines were also helpful because they did not assume "sameness" between groups, but provided groups with opportunities to express differences in creative ways, to communicate and listen to other perspectives, to build coalitions, to organize around shared experiences, and to take responsibility for building even deeper ties in the future.

Problems that Planners/Outsiders Face in Working with the Community

Language and Communications Barriers

With relation to language and communications barriers only, and not to cultural competency and other issues, strategies that interviewees suggested included: hiring knowledgeable interpreters and empowering them to act, pushing service providers and public agencies to hire bilingual staff, advocating for simultaneous translations and translated printed materials whenever possible, and budgeting enough resources in order to ensure that these above-mentioned actions are ensured for all public processes.

Resource Constraints

Generally speaking, most interviewees agreed that the onus was on the public sector and other public service agencies to provide resources to bridge linguistic and

cultural barriers since they generally have more resources and are more powerful than individual Vietnamese American residents and small community-based Vietnamese American organizations. "People need to step back and to think more broadly about how to effectively engage communities. If you only throw money at translators and consultants to go out there and work directly with community, then it takes pressure off the staff and politicians themselves to go out there and understand for themselves what the appropriate approach is."

Generally speaking, the process of long-term engagement required a large budget to support partners on the ground in order to help them develop capacity for implementation.

Lack of Understanding by Planners/Outsiders & Lack of Cultural Competency

Interviewees provided many strategies for planners to become more culturally competent and to develop deeper understandings of Vietnamese American culture, histories, politics, goals, and preferences. Interviewees suggested that planners and others who were not familiar to the community should seek out existing community-based organizations and networks and to talk to as many people as possible since the Vietnamese American community is not homogenous and one or two Vietnamese American people probably cannot accurately represent a whole community. Other strategies included adopting an attitude of humility and not assume that community residents were more ignorant than the experts, going to the places where Vietnamese Americans congregate instead of expecting the community to come to the planner, identifying key people who are bilingual/bicultural who are well-networked in the community, and not just changing outreach patterns but also changing patterns of

conception and practice of the work itself. This included changing perceptions of what types of business counseling and development was appropriate, for example.

Lack of Trust

It is very important for planners and other people from outside of the Vietnamese American community who are interested in engaging the community to build feelings of trust and mutual respect. However, there were different routes to establish community trust depending on the community context. For example, in Versailles, there was a very strong and centralized leadership network through Mary Queen of Vietnam Church. The main route for one interviewee was to develop trust with religious leaders, then building out the trust network from there. However, the strategy differed in the East Biloxi context.

Finally, many interviewees suggested that making the actual planning meetings and projects as comfortable as possible for people also helped to build trust since people were more likely to feel trusting if they were relaxed and engaged. Also, another strategy was to recruit people who seemed to be more engaged and community-based to take leadership positions in technical review committees and other decision-making bodies so that they could also help to build trust within their own networks, and to connect decision-makers to these networks.

Recommendations

Vietnamese American immigration, resettlement, and community development experiences consist of unique cultural, linguistic, and historical qualities that should be given extra attention. However, these processes of adaptation also consist of many shared qualities with non-Vietnamese American groups. Today, 34 years after the first large wave of Vietnamese refugees arrived in the United States, the challenges that the community faces cannot be under-stated. However, the community continues to actively pursue a variety of strategies in order to adapt to the United States while still retaining its cultural heritage. The history of forced migration of many Vietnamese Americans from their homeland to a completely foreign country continues to create challenges and also opportunities for the community.

People who work and live regularly in Vietnamese American enclaves often confront the many differences, conflicts, barriers, and challenges that the community still faces. These challenges include community differences and conflicts, namely the "Generation Gap," anti-Communism and conflicts over homeland politics, not to mention other common conflicts in any community such as gender conflicts, leadership conflicts, and religious conflicts. However, the challenges and barriers also include those that are attributed primarily to adapting to a foreign culture and system, namely the lack of experience and exposure to traditional American non-profit and civic engagement structures, to governmental institutions, to planners and consultants, to long-term planning processes, and to other ethnic and community-based organizations.

Planners, some public officials, consultants, and other people who engage the community for shorter periods of time need to recognize the challenges listed above

and to learn strategies on how to effectively engage the Vietnamese American community. Besides from the challenges above, this group must also consider barriers that exist specifically for people who are generally "outsiders" to the Vietnamese American community. These challenges and barriers, as identified in the framework in Chapter One and as illustrated in Chapters Two and Three, include lack of linguistic and cultural competency on the part of "outsiders," the tendency of these outside groups to telescope the challenges of working with Vietnamese American community to just translation and not deeper cultural barriers that need to be addressed, poor public planning and public participation theories that do not consider the unique challenges facing new immigrant communities, lack of staff and funding dedicated to cultural competency and outreach, and efficiency standards for planning practices that often value using cookie-cutter approaches instead of investing in the long-term in learning the specific needs, practices, and effective strategies for the Vietnamese American community.

After participating in Vietnamese American community development in some capacity over the past three years, reviewing historical documents, reviewing secondary resources, and conducting interviews with a broad range of stakeholders "inside," "outside," and "between" three Vietnamese American communities in the United States, I have come to learn not just of the challenges that Vietnamese American communities and those that seek to work with them face, but also about the strategies that have been employed to address these challenges. It is important to note that far from being a homogenous Vietnamese American community, there are many marked differences between the three communities that I focused on, as well as between members within

the communities. These differences within groups and between groups in large part provide the context for action in all of these cases.

I have found through personal experience and through my research that depending on the community, a different set of strategies need to be employed in order to effectively engage, empower and develop Vietnamese American communities. The goal of the preceding recommendations is to provide a menu of options for action that have been deemed successful in specific situations by me and those that I interviewed. The recommendations have been generated from reflections on my prior work, analysis of interviews, and from the application of planning theories. The recommendations, especially for planners, follow and build upon the "Multicultural Planning Framework" that I laid out in Chapter One. The four components of this framework are:

1) Question planning's history, assumptions, and scope.

2) Be reflective, question one's values, and be open to the norms of others.

3) Increase participation of and decision-making by a diverse set of people.

4) Plan with racial, social, and historical contexts of diverse communities in mind

These recommendations will not be comprehensive and effective in all contexts, and many recommendations will be tailored towards the three Vietnamese American communities that I focused on in my research. However, I believe that there are larger generalizations that can be made about the implications of the findings and how they can help to create more effective community development (both from within and without) in Vietnamese American communities and beyond.

Recommendations for "Outsiders"

1) Learn historical/social/racial/cultural/economic contexts of the communities

Do not just telescope the barriers to working with immigrant communities to the lack of translation. Instead, develop deeper understanding of community histories, experiences, and values that determine the priorities and goals of a community. This contextualized understanding should also affect the strategies and ways of practice that are employed in helping to achieve these priorities. This is hard because it is not just a shift in action, but a shift in conception that requires planners to move outside of their comfort zones.

This learning process that leads to strategy development and implementation also has to be done in a tactical manner that differs from case to case since the overall planning system is generally biased towards the typical "process", or the cookie-cutter approach. Attempting to change practice and conception at the systemic level is even harder because it requires a large shift from the English-only, white and Christian paradigm that has been dominant in the United States since its conception.

One way, and maybe the only way in the short-term to shift this paradigm is to empower those in the minority to show to the dominant groups that the minority group's practices and values are beneficial for all. For example, there is now enough precedent and experiences to show that Chinese medicine and eastern medical practices such as herbs, acupuncture, cupping, etc. are beneficial, and the only way for mainstream US medical researchers and practitioners to gain this domain of knowledge is to consider the "others" to be experts, to learn from them, and to respect the culture from which they are derived.

Another example is that the United States has a huge problem with figuring out how to care for the elderly (ie. There is a crisis in ballooning Social Security costs for the public), while other cultures have figured out models on how to care for the elderly without over-burdening the public system. This is often why immigrant communities live inter-generationally with grandparents in the home with their grandchildren. The United States could learn to value this practice more instead of just emphasizing the "nuclear family" paradigm.

Another place that this type of paradigm and system shift occurs is through the globalization of ethnic and social networks, commerce, and finances. There is now a need to learn the cultures of other people and countries just to operate in your own, which could possibly cause the dominant system to change.

2) Provide and train interpreters and provide enough resources for culturally and linguistically appropriate communication. Make these consistent by developing language-access policy.

This means that planners need to be proficient in multiple languages and cultures themselves, to find resources to hire people who are, to devise other forms of communication that may be based on culturally appropriate gestures, and/or to create other mechanisms for meaningful participation by Vietnamese Americans. Also, there needs to be consistent translation language when interpreting complicated planning terms that may or may not have a direct translation to Vietnamese. Thus, using interpreters who are not trained and knowledgeable about this type of technical information or using different interpreters who may have different ways of translating the same technical concept is problematic. The goal should be to have planners who are

also bilingual/bicultural so that not so much gets "lost in translation," and/or to prep, to train, and to develop a consistent team of interpreters who are more familiar with the technical aspects of planning.

Two examples of these strategies are: 1) The hiring of a Vietnamese American planner who is fluent in Vietnamese by the New Orleans Planning Commission, and 2) The intensive work that one business counselor did to train an interpreter on the business concepts being discussed as well as on the approach to take in communicating with different types of community members.

Policies need to be created in order to mandate the abovementioned actions. This will create more consistency to determine when interpreter services are appropriate, will build trust with Vietnamese Americans who will be more likely to participate with consistent translation, and will remove the responsibility from individual planners to do something "extra" by seeking interpreter services. Setting policies in place will establish linguistically competent services as the status quo.

3) Conduct culturally & linguistically appropriate outreach. Develop policies to make outreach consistent.

Planners should tap into community networks such as ethnic media outlets, including native-language and bilingual newspapers, radio, cable and satellite television, and internet sites. Since AALDEF found in 2004 that Vietnamese American tend to use ethnic media even more than other Asian American groups, developing relationships with the producers of ethnic media and developing policies on exactly when to reach out to these networks is critical. In addition, planners should also be developing relationships with a variety of community leaders and not just assume that one person

or organization represents the opinions of a large group of people. Planners should try to talk to as many people in the Vietnamese American community as possible and also to take time out to develop trust with individuals. Often times, this will require planners to speak Vietnamese or to be accompanied by a trained interpreter at all times. It is also important to "hit the pavement" and conduct outreach anywhere where Vietnamese Americans may congregate. This may include religious institutions, supermarkets, restaurants, schools, etc.

One example of this strategy is exemplified by the East Biloxi community-based planning outreach, in which translated flyers for the meetings were posted in Vietnamese supermarkets, churches, restaurants, and at public events. Additionally, I utilized word-of-mouth by making announcements at religious events, and also appeared on local ethnic radio in order to make a case for why Vietnamese Americans should attend the meetings.

4) Educate and be open to adopting competencies that are not currently considered "technical"

This requires both planning practice and planning education to change. These competencies may include the ability to recognize non-traditional sources of information, to communicate through culturally-competent gestures that can help to build trust, and to learn and analyze through gestures and physical cues instead of just verbal ones. Learning these competencies is critical because they can act as frameworks to help planners/consultants be more adept at understanding problems and identifying solutions even if the specific strategies and actions used by

planners/consultants should differ from place to place according to local contexts and conditions.

One example includes the case of the planner in Biloxi who committed himself to consulting each family regarding their needs and goals for how their homes should function. The planner was open to invested in working with the families for long periods of time in order to build trust, to continually make changes to the form of the home based on the family's use patterns and not just based on technical analysis, and to be persistent in asking many clarifying questions since some of the desires and needs of the families often got lost in translation.

5) Create different types of opportunities for participation and decision-making

Examples of these different types of participation opportunities include translated surveys, one on one interviews, using visual and interactive tools, small groups in Vietnamese/interpreted, larger discussions in Vietnamese/interpreted, participation mechanisms built into public celebrations and festivals instead of formal meetings, allowing written responses and feedback instead of just verbal ones, and identifying community representatives that can speak on behalf of the community. As for increasing opportunities for actual decision-making, this means that planners should proactively seek a diverse set of stakeholders to sit on boards, advisory committees, public review committees, etc. This also means that planners should provide training and capacity-building for participants so that they can be equipped with more skills with which to participate and make decisions effective. This training can take the form of mentorships, workshops, degree programs, and more. It is important to note that not all of these strategies will work under all circumstances, but planners should be prepared

to always strive for the maximum amount of participation opportunities and decision-making opportunities for historically disenfranchised groups such as Vietnamese American communities. In the same vein, this will also require planner to depart from the "process" and from specific timelines and require them to be flexible and open to alternative forms of participation and decision-making.

One example of this is through the East Biloxi community-based planning process where we devised a variety of ways in which residents could participate. There were large groups forums, break-out groups, visual presentations that participants could mark up, surveys, one-on-one interviews, and also focus groups. All of these participatory mechanisms were delivered in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese.

6) Understand the larger contexts that affect the community

It is important to take a broad view of influential events and personalities that may affect how the Vietnamese American community reacts and responds to specific interventions. For example, broad educational trends, economic trends, and political trends may affect the Vietnamese American community in very acute ways, and these issues can converge with issues specifically related to the refugee experience.

Examples of external factors include: transnational affiliation and homeland politics issues that determine decisions Vietnamese Americans make domestically, the Catholic Church closings in Boston that closed down two out of three churches with large Vietnamese American congregations, the removal of the bilingual education in Boston that also disbanded an active Parents Advisory Council, and economic crises that affected CDC investments and funding streams.

Recommendations for "Insiders"

1) Tap into and promote community-based and network-based economic development strategies.

Understanding these trends and tendencies more holistically and capitalizing on them as assets will help to build community and economic capital. These networks that are based on identity, kinship, and economic affiliations are already familiar to most people in the Vietnamese American community, and highlighting and legitimating them as resources are the next logical steps toward effective community development. Examples include the community lending practices that produce capital for small business investments in New Orleans and the elderly associations in Boston that help families pay for funerals. Another example is the process of streamlining and maximizing profits by salon owners by jointly contracting suppliers, products, and services in the greater Boston region.

2) Utilize media sources

These media sources include both mainstream & independent English media as well as mainstream and independent media in other languages. Be strategic about why each media outlet is used. Build relationships w/ reporters, editorial boards, etc. in order to develop sympathetic partners who may be willing to provide support around specific issues and to promote for events for free. Developing long-term relationships with reporters will also help to build on existing stories and to get deeper analysis of issues that the community faces. Also, do not just have other people write articles, but be more pro-active by writing op-eds. Keep all media stories and use them to inform and legitimate the organization and community "outsiders" and skeptics.

One example of this strategy is how MQVN created a "Tent City" in order to house people without trailers, but also to make a strong visual statement that would be powerful when translated as media stories and images. The community invited CNN to come and to report on the Tent City, which then led to a story broadcast over cable television which attracted the attentions of influential politicians.

3) Do not just focus on "bricks and mortars" issues

Try to relate to different people's values and their motivations to act. These values and motivations to act may not just be about housing development or economic development, but rather cultural development & preservation, education, creating healthier environments for their children, community praise and leadership, community status, etc. Do not just assume that the non-profits who focus on bricks and mortars issues are the centers of leadership and are the representative voices of the community. Even for "insiders," there are probably multiple layers of networks and associations that have yet to be discovered and discovering them requires broadening the conceptualization of community priorities and interests.

Examples of broadening the scope of practice are the "cultural productions" that young Vietnamese Americans and Cape Verdean Americans created by making digital movie shorts. Through this process of storytelling and sharing about their daily struggles with urban violence and intergenerational conflicts with their families, immigrant youth were able to bridge racial conflicts that existed between them.

4) Include, empower, train, listen to, and make good use of local leaders, organizations, and institutions

Increasing community capacity is critical for effective community development and empowerment. Create as broad of a list as possible of places, people, and organizations that can be community assets and work to build the capacities of these entities. These entities may include: places of worship, community centers, private & public associations, non-profit organizations, religious & layleaders, politicians, board members, community-based workers, artists, professionals, youth, educators, etc. Capacity-building can take many forms, including workshops, sustained summer and year-long fellowships, coalition-building, financial resources, consulting services, public forums, and many more.

5) Innovate linguistically and culturally appropriate programs, then find financially sustainable models to fund them.

For example, the Au Co Preschool is currently not financially stable and does not have a feasible long-term financing model. So, even though in practice, the school is very effective at offering bilingual education, it is still very hard to sustain considering present resources.

In the case of New Orleans East, they have developed a proposal for a charter school as an innovative way of financing bilingual education. The goal of the program is to develop curriculum that can meet state and federal testing mandates, but also engages with the Vietnamese American community's historical, cultural, and linguistic. To do this, the school not only needs relevant curriculum and instructional models, but also needs skilled, culturally responsive practitioners who can facilitate the development of such models concretely in the Versailles context.

One bottleneck to this process may be the lack of a critical mass of Vietnamese teachers, educational administrators, and other education professionals who are prepared to re-envision what k-12 education can do for the Vietnamese community. The next innovation that is required would be to figure out how to train educators and to develop curriculum for this type of innovative schooling approach.

Recommendations for "Everyone"

1) Incorporate meaningful roles for different groups of people, including young and old, professionals and non-professionals, men and women, etc.

These roles may be different or the same, but just make sure people feel supported & empowered. Also, predict and try to mitigate conflicts that may arise, but also prepare people to understand that conflicts are predictable. It is important to critically analyze them, but not to take them personally and quit because of them.

This strategy is exemplified by the process of developing the Vietnamese American Community Center in Boston, in which different generational cohorts were responsible for different tasks that played to their skill sets. The young professionals were responsible for designing materials, marketing, and hosting a fund-raising event. Those in the 1.5 generation were responsible for using their "bridge" skills to garner interest and resources from financial institutions outside of the community, while knowing enough of Vietnamese culture in order to express the values of such a community center to all parties. Finally, the seniors were responsible for garnering support and interest from within the community because of their many existing networks and connections.

2) Incorporate history, culture, civic-mindedness, and participatory activism into afterschool and extracurricular activities for youth. Affirm the fragile cultural identities of youth and build a sense of belonging.

Create mentorship programs, service programs, oral history interview program, artistic performances, etc. where youth interact with & learn from elders and vice versa,

but each group also has a chance to re-interpret and react to these experiences in their own way.

Many youth often feel like their language skills are not good enough or are told that their language skills are not good enough. Bilingual education for youth needs to be improved. However, any community development strategy needs to also promote and support the identities of youth so that they feel like they are important to the community. Bilingual education, coupled with Vietnamese American Studies classes, should used in ways that actively promote community development, not just as passive channels of knowledge disbursement.

Also, educate older people in the community the importance of community-based work for young people and create a better image for these careers so that they can be held in higher esteem in the community. Couple classwork with community work so that young people don't feel like they cannot do both. Often right now, the choice is between going to school and being successful, or doing work that can benefit the Vietnamese American community. Strategies include weekend Vietnamese language & heritage classes for young people, especially after church and temple events. Parents love these types of classes, and kids are already in attendance, so there would be a captive audience. Maybe the 1.5 generation who already have other careers can participate in teaching these types of classes and play their roles as "bridges" without needing to change whole careers since they are past the stage to do that now.

4) Incorporate multi-racial, intergenerational communication and activities (formal AND informal). Create safe spaces in order to increase social interaction.

This may take time, but is critical for the community. It can be fun and artistic, and not just formal and somber all the time. Examples include mural projects, inter-generational story-telling, community gardening, etc. The main problem with this approach is that it seems to be absent from funders' radars, and parents may not value this type of action ,either.

5) Include parents in the process of shaping their children's educations and school experiences.

The Parents Advisory Committee (PAC) in Boston, before the bilingual program was ended, was an effective channel for participation that connected residents directly with decision-makers and also organized them around topics they cared deeply about. This also helped immigrant parents organize with each other, which is rare but needs to happen more. These residents (both bilingual teachers and parents in the PAC) became empowered to take up leadership roles outside of the school, as well. For example, many people who are in leadership positions in Boston's Vietnamese American community today had their first in-roads to community development through the PACs.

6) Develop better understandings of the role of race with respect to Vietnamese American communities

Even though young Vietnamese Americans tend to not be linguistic minorities today, they are still often segregated by race from other groups. Especially in urban places where racial conflicts are more apt to occur because of close living conditions, race has to be a top consideration in developing communities. The dominant conflicts and barriers are currently framed as those between parent and child, but miss all of the

other barriers that Vietnamese American youth face in multi-racial American societies. In other words, the larger racial context has affected what happens on the inside of the Vietnamese American community.

7) Collect, retain, analyze, and utilize community data over time

One of the biggest problems is that data usually is collected by researchers and academics for their articles, but it is hardly ever given back to communities in order to help them develop deeper understanding of circumstances, to develop more relevant strategies, and to promote agendas.

Develop short-term and long-term priorities and strategies based on the data and other types of input. Data will often help to justify the priorities and strategies to funder, skeptics, and many others. Use data tools in order to promote community consciousness both internally and externally. This may also help communities to frame their needs and visions around the types of information that the mainstream finds to be "legitimate," such as qualities that can be quantified through percentages and fractions. Get more people to actively participate in digesting data so that there are more perspectives based on the raw information than just one person's or one group's interpretation. Use data to strategically create "shock value" when necessary, but also use it to create deeper and more robust contextualized understandings of the experiences of those in the VN community.Use data to highlight different priorities in different communities, and then also to highlight commonalities and how policy decisions and long-term decisions should consider these differences and commonalities Create articles and theses using data, but also create more accessible types of formats

for popular education, such guidebooks, summaries, interactive games, and scavenger hunts.

8) Create inter-ethnic and cross-issue coalitions.

Other groups that NAVASA works with in coalition, such as the Mississippi Immigrants Rights Alliance, the Mississippi Latin American Association, Boat People SOS, and many other governmental and non-governmental organizations have all publicly announced in various forums that translations services and culturally competent practices are crucial to their abilities to serve the communities that they work with.

This helps to create a more mainstream and powerful community of support for the Vietnamese American community, and helps to develop synergies between groups and to "de-silo issues." However, this process needs to be careful to not remove the autonomy of participants to speak honestly and constructively, even if there are conflicted opinions in the group. Also, mechanisms of equitable representation need to be built into group structures and practices (formally into board memberships and by-laws as well as informally through meeting facilitations). Be careful of tokenism or co-optation that give the coalition legitimacy as a "diverse" organization, but does not actually incorporate the needs and visions of the Vietnamese American community into the coalition's agenda.

It may be necessary to have a board system that is explicit about inclusion, and to have sub-groups that can advocate for different types of priorities within the larger group. Providing these groups with at least the physical infrastructure (translation machines) to be able to offer these services, as well as training to equip them with other tools and competencies would serve a variety of purposes. This would assuage their

technical needs, as well as encourage and pressure them to better bridge the language and cultural gaps that are usually apparent in coalition processes.

9) Recruit community activists, leaders, and staff who are curious, creative, and inter-disciplinary

As described in this thesis, the nature of community development work, especially in the Vietnamese American community, requires actors to be flexible, open to learning other perspectives, and also knowledgeable about many different topics instead of being embedded in specific silos. All of the above recommendations require that actors who are interested in working with the Vietnamese American community to be constantly making connections between issues that are not immediately obvious and to also re-frame barriers as opportunities for innovative change in the Vietnamese American community. In order to move away from the "cookie-cutter" processes that have historically disenfranchised and excluded many Vietnamese Americans in the past, actors must find creative ways to develop strategies that are linguistically, culturally, and contextually appropriate.

One example of this type of person is an interviewee who has worked in all of the locations that I have described in this thesis. This person has been able to coordinate Gulf Coast activities while teaching a class about the effort to students at U-Mass Boston. This same person is also entering into an enterprise in Vietnam that may be able to contribute to economic development and affordable housing options for Gulf Coast communities in the future. These abilities to perceive single occurrences as parts of larger systems, and to take action on many different scales must be incubated and promoted in Vietnamese American communities.

Limitations

Due to a variety of common research-related factors such as a short project timeframe, lack of funds for travel, and my own personal embeddedness in the thesis topic, there are limitations to how generalizable and complete this thesis is. First, the selection of the cases were based on the two locations that I had worked in the Gulf Coast after Hurricane Katrina as well as in Boston, which is conveniently located near MIT. These locations are each embedded within their own unique contexts, and some of the challenges and strategies that were identified may not be as common in other Vietnamese American communities. For example, the strategies that were developed by interviewees in response to Hurricane Katrina may not be as applicable or relevant in areas that have not experienced such pronounced physical, economic, and social devastation. Even though the Field's Corner neighborhood in Boston was chosen as a case in order to combat the Katrina-centric perspective of the thesis, Boston itself is also unique in many ways such as its urban environment, high numbers of educational institutions, and its highly developed network of active non-profits.

Second, the number of interviewees, which totaled 28, could have been expanded and diversified in order to get a broader set of perspectives and insights into my thesis questions. I had personally met or heard about most of the interviewees in the Gulf Coast prior to starting this thesis, which means that they are largely connected to my networks. There were other stakeholders that could have been interviewed in order to broaden the scope of the thesis, both in the Gulf Coast as well as in Boston. Examples include: front-line staff at social service agencies, more elderly people from the first generation, additional planners and consultants who had worked with the

communities in less intensive ways, policy-makers, funders, and planning professors and students.

Third, the timing of this thesis also posed some limitations since many city departments and non-profits were struggling to manage their dwindling budgets due to the current economic crisis. This made it harder for interviewees to propose and execute strategies, such as simultaneous translation services, that would require additional funds.

Finally, because of my own embeddedness, both as an active participant in many of the events described in the thesis as well as a Vietnamese American immigrant, my own opinions and biases have influenced this thesis. There are positive attributes to the participant observation method, but some of the negative attributes include viewing issues from the perspective of specific mission goals and specific organizations instead of through a broader scope, and the tendency to surround myself with allies instead of those who I deeply disagreed with. Also, because I myself am a young, Vietnamese American immigrant woman who is part of the 1.5 generation, the descriptions of racism, sexism, generational conflicts, the lack of access to linguistically and culturally competent resources, and pressures towards assimilation in this thesis are all things that I have experienced personally. My reality has been deeply shaped by these factors, and the ways in which I have interpreted information for this thesis has been through this personal reality.

Looking Ahead

I have additional questions that have yet to be answered by this thesis, and I hope that my future work and those of others can help to further answer these questions. This thesis aimed to identify salient challenges and to describe practical strategies for effective planning and community development in Vietnamese American communities. However, the resulting recommendations cannot be applied across all contexts and deeper analysis must be done of other Vietnamese American communities in order to make the findings more generalizable. More in-depth comparative analysis of other Vietnamese American communities such as ones in California, Seattle, Virginia, and elsewhere will paint a more holistic picture of salient challenges and successful strategies in Vietnamese American communities. Also, even though I believe some of the challenges, strategies, and lessons learned can also be applied to other non-Vietnamese American communities in the United States, more comparative analysis would also need to be done to test this hypothesis.

Originally, I wanted to broaden the scope of this thesis to include the role of planning education in determining how planners conceive of their work, and what strategies they choose to execute the work. Even though I was not able to conduct that research, I still believe that an analysis of how the priorities, goals, frameworks, and skills established by educators and professional development institutions affect planner's actions in Vietnamese American communities would be valuable.

Even though I have identified many strategies and "best practices" in this thesis, more work should be done to evaluate these strategies to see whether they have been effective at producing desired outcomes. Many of these strategies could be

strengthened and better deployed if there is a more systematic way of conducting reflections and program evaluations to determine what worked, what did not, what can be improved upon, and what was missing.

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