COMMUNITY BUILDING IN TRANSITIONING NEIGHBORHOODS

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ABSTRACT

As of 2011, the population of the United States had become roughly 83% urban, but by the year 2050, 90% of the country will be living in urban areas. The residents that are already in these places, as well as those coming into the city, will have to adjust to each other in profound ways that challenge their previously held relationship with space and notions of community identity.

The thesis develops the Diffuse Mosaic City model to explain the hypothesis that neighborhoods are composed of public spaces that are either intra-community zones that support the reinforcement of a single community group, or inter-community zones that, with the proper programming, can create opportunities for cross-community building. In the 1960s, Puerto Rican immigrants founded Villa Victoria as an ethnic enclave in Boston's South End district. However, it is undergoing a demographic shift, and by 2013, more than 40% of the population is not Puerto Rican with influxes of Chinese and African American populations. The older Puerto Rican community is concerned about the erosion of their history, which has created tensions among residents. Classical sociological theory deems this an invasion-succession scenario, where the incoming group will replace the pre-existing group, or a compromise will be reached that halts an entire population shift. The Diffuse Mosaic City model offers an improved way to address whether open public spaces can play a role in maintaining the history of Villa Victoria while embracing new incoming groups, and how the physical space can support social capital development for community cohesion in a transitioning neighborhood.

The Diffuse Mosaic City model uses spatial analysis and workshops to investigate how community zones might foster inter-group cohesion. Based on my detailed on-site inventory of the public spaces, I hosted workshops to solicit feedback from a representative sample of Villa Victoria residents. The workshops invited 18 tenants (Puerto Ricans, African Americans, and Chinese Americans) to respond to clearly defined questionnaires, while I used cooperative techniques to elicit their cognitive maps of the use and perception of the open spaces by the various demographics. The results led to the conclusion that within Villa Victoria the ethnic group that shared its intra-community zone with the core of the development is the prominent group in the area. Finally, this thesis presents the Diffuse Mosaic Model's recommendations for how to best utilize the community's open spaces to preserve the area's history, while embracing natural population changes.
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As of 2011, the population of the United States had become roughly 83% urban, but by the year 2050, 90% of the country will be living in urban areas. The residents that are already in these places, as well as those coming into the city, will have to adjust to each other in profound ways that challenge their previously held relationship with space and notions of identity.

Cities are dynamic entities, and the population influxes cause changes that are most apparent at the neighborhood scale. Urban sociologists, particularly from the Chicago School, have been studying neighborhood change since the early twentieth century. However, the phenomenon of community changes is now attracting the attention of the urban planning field. Academics and professionals alike are exploring what the community development and spatial implications of these social changes might be. The issue of maintaining community cohesion among different resident groups as a neighborhood transitions is particularly important because of the expected 15% population growth from now until 2050. Although there is a body of work that explores the idea of designing good public space for all user types, scant research has sought to connect the sociological study of neighborhood change with a perspective on community development and place-making through urban design.

This thesis aims to look at an urban ethnic enclave whose rich history and identity are changing
because the incoming resident base differs culturally from that of the founding community group. It will examine public space as a means for facilitating community-building in light of the area’s transition from a Puerto Rican enclave to a multi-ethnic neighborhood. The research from this case study introduces a theoretical framework, the Diffuse Mosaic City, for approaching spatial analysis that informs inter- and intra-community building. Using this framework has several practical implications. First, the research determined that a set of programming and design interventions could encourage community cohesion. Second, the research recommendations include generalizable guidelines for the design of public open spaces that support community building between and amongst various social groups. Third, the social factors affecting the classification of a site between an inter- or an intra-community zone is brought to light.

The Diffuse Mosaic City is a framework for spatially interpreting the difference between zones for a single community group (intra-community) and zones for cross-community interactions (inter-community) in public open spaces. For the purposes of this thesis, the focus is on outdoor public spaces, excluding libraries or government buildings for example. This approach has multiple benefits for analyzing public space that support community development in mixed low-income neighborhoods. Urban planners can leverage the public space to ease demographic tensions, while also celebrating the unique communities within the neighborhood to facilitate population changes. This is especially true in areas that were previously dominated exclusively by one culture. The Diffuse Mosaic City builds on Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess’ research in the 1925 publication, *The City*, where he described the city as “a mosaic of little worlds which touch but do not interpenetrate”. While it is true that the city is full of “little worlds”, these do interpenetrate. This interpenetration occurs in a diffuse manner, and these blurred areas of intersection can become areas of interaction from which to build an integrated diverse community. Identifying the diffuse areas requires spatial investigation and analysis of the residents’ use of the public open spaces. Once the inter-community zones have been identified, repurposing them to give the zones a neighborhood identity that is reflective of all the groups can begin cross-community interaction.
The neighborhood for this case study is Villa Victoria, located in the South End district of Boston, Massachusetts. Although originally named Parcel 19 by the Boston Redevelopment Authority, it was later renamed by its Puerto Rican founders to better reflect their heritage. This area became the arrival destination for Puerto Rican immigrants who were recruited by Bostonian employers in the 1950s and did not want to leave it when the city undertook an urban renewal initiative for the site. Through extensive grassroots protesting and community organizing the residents, along with support from several activists and community organizations, were able to design and implement their own affordable housing development. Hence, the name Villa Victoria, or Victory Village was chosen to commemorate their efforts to keep their community intact.

Community involvement up until the 1980s was quite high, since many founding residents, or their adult children, continued to live in Victoria Villa. Community initiatives were almost exclusively Puerto Rican in nature. However, the new resident cohorts that have arrived since have been detached from the original struggle. Importantly, the ethnic make-up of the Villa has also changed. Non-Puerto Rican Latinos, African Americans and Asians have formed constituencies within the same neighborhood. Of that, the Chinese resident population has been gradually, but steadily growing faster than any other resident group.

Due to macroscopic urban trends, Villa Victoria is a perfect case study for this thesis because it is experiencing the phenomenon in question. It is transitioning from a place with a strong cultural identity to a place that is more open of other groups within the neighborhood. Not only that, but because of the fear of losing its rich historical identity it is struggling with community cohesion. During the time of urban dis-investment the residents of Parcel 19 were able to find affordable
housing within their Puerto Rican community, thus creating their ethnic enclave. However as urban revitalization picked up, the South End transformed itself from a diverse affordable district into a highly gentrified community with expensive real estate. Other ethnic enclaves such as Chinatown in Boston have been affected by similar trends. Affordable neighborhoods for low-income populations are becoming rare in cities. As resources for affordable housing become scarcer, families are more willing to leave their identity group for decent and reasonably priced housing for their children. The Diffuse Mosaic City, in the context of Villa Victoria, discusses how the dominant Puerto Rican community can still conserve its history and identity in the development while integrating the growing Chinese population.

The Diffuse Mosaic City model and the recommendations in this thesis are not applicable solely to Villa Victoria. They can be applied to any neighborhood having difficulties with demographic changes. It helps communities identify a spatially oriented approach for handling this phenomenon so that concerns over territoriality or loss of history are addressed. Other cities with similarly large immigrant populations would benefit from this methodology. For example, San Jose, California has a large and diverse minority population, but is quite segregated. How can we use inter-community spaces to create a neighborhood identity that is reflective of all its resident groups? This is the primary challenge the Diffuse Mosaic City can tackle.

The organization of this thesis takes the reader along a journey that will create the context for the research, tell the story of Villa Victoria, explain the approach for data collection, interpret the data and culminate with a set of recommendations. The second chapter is divided into sections that survey, among other things, the Invasion-Succession theory in sociology, public open space urban design and its anthropological implications. In the third chapter, the relevant story of Villa Victoria is recounted to provide context. The fourth chapter outlines the collection methods that were used to gather the supporting data. The fifth chapter has two main components, which are the results and recommendations. The results are divided into three parts: an inventory of all the public open spaces, a spatial analysis identifying the inter- and intra- community zones and a discussion on the community building interventions presented during the resident workshops. The following section lays the generalizable and Villa Victoria specific recommendations. Finally, in the sixth chapter there is a discussion of the results and concluding thoughts. At the end of this journey the reader should have experienced the story of a community and understand the potential for community building, even if it is undergoing a transition.
3 Urban Renewal was a 1954 Federal legislation funding the complete redevelopment of blighted urban areas.
THE PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR PLACE-MAKING IN TRANSITIONING NEIGHBORHOODS

The relationship between the social behavior of multi-ethnic groups and the built environment in transitioning neighborhoods is an interdisciplinary issue. To understand the various layers of this topic, different scholarly lenses must be employed to explain the research question of how public spaces can be a cross-community building tool in transitioning neighborhoods. The fields that will be covered are sociology, urban design, and landscape architecture. Each of these disciplines will be used to explore the following issues:

- Structural reasons for ethnic enclaves
- The positive and negative implications for the people living in them
- Neighborhood change theories regarding community dynamics in contested locations
- The current social mixing conditions in Villa Victoria
- Cross-cultural community building as a whole

Explaining the underlying reasons for the existence of ethnic enclaves is a sociological matter, because they are intrinsic to the residents’ collective cultural associations. The importance of diversity in civil society is at first an anthropological issue, but is specifically a political one, as it addresses the balance and plurality of ideologies in the community. Achieving social cohesion in cities despite countervailing forces is a common urban planning conundrum. Open spaces can facilitate community building when ethnic enclaves undergo demographic changes. The literature review will
seek to explain this argument, while also highlighting the gaps in the existing body of research that are addressed in this thesis.

2.1: Structural reasons for ethnic enclaves

The challenges of promoting social interactions among diverse populations have been well documented. David Ley has studied this issue and found that “scholars have questioned the extent to which it is realistic to assume that people from a highly diverse range of backgrounds, cultures and customs will actually mix. In fact policy makers have given little consideration to how these groups will interact as neighbors.” Joseph and Chaskin’s (2010) research further found that residents of a mixed-income and mixed-race community in Chicago reported few positive social interactions with their neighbors. Their research found that when given the choice, people would probably not want to mix. This dilemma is explored in Cheshire’s (2006, 2007) research, where he argues that forcing neighborhoods to be mixed in social and economic terms is treating the “symptoms of inequality, not the cause…” Dealing with the underlying systemic issues leading to self selected segregation may lead to mixing. It has to be a desirable choice for members of an integrated community to openly interact, versus a requirement.

Diversity at the superficial level runs the risk of being short lived. Take for example our school system – “it is less integrated now than in 1970.” What this means is that passing Civil Rights legislation, without implementing policy for the proper execution of it leaves us where we are today, as more communities poor and rich continue to self-segregate. However, that does not mean that diversity should be an ideal that is ignored or forgotten. Diversity is not enhanced by gentrification when low-income communities are displaced. It is a condition of equal access and equal opportunity to be truly judged on the content of our character and not on our ethnicity or income or any other divisive quality.

The ingrained segregation of the United States is a reflection of structural inequity. Spatially mixing communities without addressing the systemic problems seems to perpetuate the self-segregation. However, strategic use of the public space to initiate these conversations is a starting point. Identifying the places for these conversations is a mapping exercise that can inform the layout of the Diffuse Mosaic City- where do we cross-culturally engage and where do we seek our own? This question will help support communication and design interventions for the overall improvement of people’s engagement with each other and place.
2.2: Ethnic enclaves as a source of cultural identity and social capital

The maintenance of cultural identity as a tool for community empowerment and mobilization is an argument for community isolation or exclusion. Multiple features that create an enclave such as, businesses, aesthetics, cuisine, site names and so on reflect the dominant identity of a community, which helps fortify an individual's identity. Having a strong sense of self through the identification of a dominant characteristic, in this case ethnicity or race, helps one explore other facets of a personality or identity. As Marc Abrahamson puts it, “The homogeneity of enclaves with respect to the dominant status translates into opportunities for people to establish their other identities and provides one explanation for why many people are reluctant to leave enclaves.” In Villa Victoria, this is certainly the case.

The value of being with a community of 'your own' is that you don't have to justify your existence or identity, particularly if the identity is closely tied to a marginalized or minority community. Furthermore, being in an ethnically defined neighborhood allots a community member the opportunity of being perceived as a more complex person than simply representing a race or ethnicity, which may be the case in a more diverse place. However, as Villa Victoria's resident population changes, to include other ethnicities, the community is now having to come to terms with maintaining that sense of self while acknowledging a growing Asian population. At this time, aside from the children who play together regardless of background, residents have very little interaction across groups. For the African American and Chinese communities in the Villa, they are minorities within a minority ethnic enclave. This impacts how and where they develop their community.

Were it not for the residents' strong sense of identity and place, they would not have been able to mobilize and protest for development rights of their community. It was this ethnic and place based identity that made their efforts possible. Also, were it not for the existence of the enclave, the residents may not have been able to harness their collective identity for social justice against urban renewal. The demolition of the West End district in Boston is a notable example of a failed attempt to protect a neighborhood against redevelopment. The residents, when interviewed, said that they did not believe that the city would ever go through with the razing project. It wasn't until it started, that residents had to come to terms with the loss of their neighborhood. Furthermore, the West Enders did attempt multiple times to combat the plans for the area, but there was inconsistent leadership and West End representatives didn't always lead, a distinct difference from the Parcel 19 organizers. The residents of what would become Villa Victoria were the leaders of their mobilization, but they also leveraged non-resident support. The combination of a robust
social network outside of their district, coupled with local mobilization was a unique and important contributing factor to its success.

Wealth creation within a supportive network is another key element in the perpetuation of enclaves. Alejandro Portes has spent significant time studying immigrant communities. Particularly, the impact of social capital on, among other things, the “enclave economy” which is immigrant owned businesses that thrive with the employment and patronage of the immigrant community. Furthermore they support human capital development of the immigrant workers. Ivan Light in Ethnic Enterprise in America argues goods and services that would fail in a general market flourish within enclaves because the entire purchasing base is nearby. This is why Latin, Chinese and Caribbean supermarkets are located in specific areas. Here again if the enclave didn’t exist it would be harder for the business owner to know where to invest thus limiting the chances for success. Which bring me to another point of support. Community members, once they know that ‘one of their own’ is in business there is almost this responsibility to patronize it because its failure would reflect poorly on the community. As a personal anecdote, when Vejigantes, a Puerto Rican restaurant, opened in Villa Victoria I was encouraging my friends to go to the restaurant with me because I want to share part of my Latino identity, but more importantly I want the restaurant to be a success.

2.3: Ethnic enclaves as a product and generator of social isolation

As an enclave becomes entrenched it also runs the risk of becoming disconnected from potentially beneficial networks. One of the reasons for Villa Victoria’s success was that the residents had help from others outside the Puerto Rican neighborhood. A little known part of their story is that socialist leaning Puerto Rican organizers helped in the mobilization efforts. Non-profit organizations within the South End connected John Sharratt, the principal architect, to the Emergency Tenants Council (the advocacy group for area residents). However, overtime the original tenant population started to dwindle because they either reached the income limit permitted for the affordable units or they passed away. The newer residents have been less interested or engaged in supporting the activities that extended their networks beyond Villa Victoria, such as the big brother or big sister mentoring program and the Channel 6 television programming. There are several reasons for this, among them is that they are not as aware of the area’s historical significance. Also, the newer residents don’t have the same positive perception of the community. Instead, they see it as low-income project or ghetto. Furthermore, there isn’t the imminent threat of losing their home. What this does is focus the attention toward individual concerns, where concentrated disadvantage decreases the capacity of neighbors to work together. This only serves to add to the divide and alienation of the community.
A criticism of social exclusion is that it embraces one's fear of the 'other' and therefore ensures that all groups outside and inside the enclave will always be the 'other'. Jimy Sanders in his paper, "Ethnic Boundaries and Identity in Plural Societies," suggests that territorial isolation leads to "[sharpening of] in-group members' self-identification and out-group acknowledgment of intergroup distinctions." Limited cross-community interactions encourage groups' ignorance of one another, which can lead to stereotypes. The focus on the differences maintains the separation among groups, thus limiting the opportunities for fruitful cross-community building; deep-rooted stereotypes may encourage distrust.

One's cultural identity cannot be denied or erased, but it can evolve. Glazer and Moynihan's Beyond the Melting Pot speaks to this very issue saying that even though distinct ethnic identities persisted into the fourth generation, they were not necessarily the same as the first generation's ethnic identity because it had evolved to compensate for host country conditions. Over time citizens develop a hybrid ethnicity (i.e. Irish-American or African-American), which reconciles the old world and host society. These are referred to as "situationally constructed ethnic identities."

2.4: Neighborhood Change Theory

Invasion-Succession theory as a term to explain neighborhood change dates back to the 1950s with Robert E. Park's 1952 book, Human Communities: the City and Human Ecology. It builds on research from Roderick D. McKenzie in his 1924 paper, "The Ecological Approach to the Study of the Human Community." Its basic premise is that upon the introduction of a new group to an established social structure conflict will arise for the territory, which will lead to competition to see which cohort will prevail. If the existing bunch remains then the invasion is halted and the remaining new comers either leave or join the existing social structure. On the other hand, if the newcomers become the dominant group the pre-existing group will leave and thus the area is succeeded by the recent arrivals.

Duncan and Duncan in 1957 further dissected the theory into parts that neighborhoods will experience as they undergo a transition. The four stages are: penetration, invasion, consolidation and piling up, but their research also suggests that a neighborhood may not experience all stages nor will they be in a particular sequence. However regardless of the remaining party the one that survives will inevitably take stock to attempt to solidify the hold over the territory.
In the 1960s and 1970s Gerald Suttles took on this topic in books, such as *The Social Order Of The Slum: Ethnicity and Territory in the Inner City* and *The Social Construction of Communities*. In the former he shows how strongly identified ethnic neighborhoods are not defined by the homogeneity of the resident population but rather by an overpowering ethnic identity. In the latter he explores generally the theories of city making originally proposed by Park and Burgess in the 1920s, but goes on to challenge the original thinking using cognitive maps as a means for understanding the individual perception of space and how to best navigate through it. Kevin Lynch also explored cognitive mapping in the landmark, *The Image of the City*. In The Perceptual Form of the City project, which led to the book, research associates had Boston residents draw their own cognitive maps of the cities neighborhoods. Likewise, the proposed research seeks to engage the residents of a community to define their own neighborhood maps, thus acknowledging the power and importance of neighborhood mapping through the people most impacted by transition to see the paths they use, how they create space for themselves and their community, and how they see other groups use space. Furthermore, the research seeks to apply methods for interpreting the data in a manner that provides opportunities to address the conflict during a transition.

The issue of knowing when a community has hit the tipping point and is in a transition has been elusive. It is a topic that can only be answered on a case-by-case basis. In Villa Victoria for instance the Puerto Rican population was upwards of 80-90% of the total resident population. In the late 2000s – early 2010s it went below 70% residents, which is when residents started to sense a change. It is that perception that ignites the conflict between the existing and incoming groups. The Latino community was never the only group in Villa Victoria, but once its status of dominant group began to feel less pronounced in numbers, even though it is strong in spatial identity, the competition for the Puerto Rican community began.

### 2.5: Cultural identity and social mixing in Villa Victoria

The cultural identity of Villa Victoria has been historically tied to Puerto Rican immigrants. Through the urban design, architecture and programming. Their culture back home was still very much a part of the day-to-day lives of the founders. Like many other Americans, they left Puerto Rico because there were better employment opportunities abroad. Once the pioneer settlers established a landing place it made it easier for others to follow the same migration pattern. Their network was already there, everyone spoke Spanish and a support system to allow for their adjustment to their new home was also there. It made the process of coming to the mainland a little bit easier. Over time a strong ethnic community identity arose, even as the area continued to be disinvested by absentee landlords,
slumlords and the city. This condition furthered the solidarity within the enclave because they were all experiencing the inhospitable living conditions together. So when they were being informed that their neighborhood might be redeveloped and they would be relocated it was almost unfathomable because their community was so place-based. They had nurtured their own ethnic enclave. This phenomenon is precisely the topic of “Immigrant enclaves and ethnic communities in New York and Los Angeles.” In it the authors, John R. Logan, Wenquan Zhan, and Richard D. Alba, discuss the evolution of the immigrant enclave as the spot for new arrivals, and overtime becomes an ethnic neighborhood where residents may opt to stay, not because of economic constraints, but because of the cultural value they receive from the area.  

Immigration literature, 1950s and onward, suggests that immigrants aren't looking for assimilation; they are looking for improved welfare for their families, which includes the passing of culture to their offspring.  

For some it means working in and through their immigrant community. This is an intra-community building exercise. This allows for resident groups to claim ownership and hence investment in their homes. In the context of Puerto Rico this issue of the immigrant experience in the United States is unique because, although it is a United States territory, the perception of the Puerto Rican immigrant is still that of an outsider. Ana Y. Ramos-Zayas looks at this very issue in her study of Chicago Puerto Ricans. She looks at the topic of “cultural purity” amongst Puerto Rican immigrants or individuals born on the mainland and people that have been born and lived in Puerto Rico.  

Being considered an outsider by Islanders affects the desire for mainlanders to be overtly Puerto Rican in the United States, which does not ingratiate them to native born and raised Puerto Rican's who feel that Puerto Rican-ness is not through “displaying flags,” but through the social knowledge of current events and practices. However, this type of self-expression is endemic of the Puerto Rican community in the United States. By consequence it also affects the perception that other community groups have of them as overly patriotic.  

The literature suggests that multiculturalism is an important driver towards equality. The idea that we are all better through social inclusion because it leads to community unity is an ideal studied by Frederick Steiner's Human Ecology: Following Nature's Lead, among others. Steiner concludes that it is through unity that society can become more equitable. By expanding access to opportunity to more groups, a higher quality of life can be enjoyed by all. As such, empirical studies from various researchers (Ingrid Gould Ellen, 1998; Barretta A. Lee and Peter B. Wood, 1990; Michael T. Maly, 2000; John R. Ottensmann, 1995) have shown that stable, diverse neighborhoods have documented the ability of integration and stability to co-exist. Specifically, in Wendy Sarkissian's research in 1978 she, “Identified the various goals of social mixing: to raise the standards of the lower classes,
to encourage esthetic diversity and cultural cross-fertilization, to increase equality of opportunity, to promote social harmony, to improve the physical functioning of the city (better access to jobs and services), and to maintain stable neighborhoods, whereby one can move up or down in housing expenditure and remain in the same area. This provides the framework of the desired goals of social mixing. It justifies why diversity should be a pursuit in urban design and community buildings. Despite the virtues of ethnic enclaves residents should seek to go beyond its culture to embrace and reap the benefits of socially mixed neighborhoods.

Following up on the social inclusion goals of improved access to everything, one such example is a better-connected network. 'It's who you know', right? If that is the case then it is important to have a network that will help connect you to jobs, education and services. Herein lies the value of social capital. Alejandro Portes in his research on social capital finds that the concept has evolved over time with the research from Pierre Bourdieu, Glen Loury, and James Coleman. Based on his review of the previous literature he points out that academic research is coalescing around social capital as "the ability of actors to secure benefits by virtue of membership in social networks or other social structures." However if everyone in one's circle is at the same level, with the same contacts then the network is significantly reduced. Indeed, social capital, as much as it can yield positive outcomes, can also have negative consequences, which Portes identifies as "the exclusion of outsiders, excess claims on groups members, restrictions on individual freedoms, and downward leveling norms." It is only by bridging beyond, that more economically advantageous opportunities can be found. Scholars, such as Xavier De Souza Briggs and William Julius Wilson, also look at issues of bonding and bridging social capital to improve outcomes for low-income and immigrant communities. Building this network of advantage takes time and initiative. For minorities this is a bit more difficult because of structural divisions that have sought to deprive communities from equal opportunity. For example between 1934-1962 "the Federal Housing Administration underwrote $120 billion in new housing, of that less than 2 percent of that went to nonwhites." Some refer to this as a '$120 billion head start' on white advantage. This is what happens when diversity and equality aren't an urgent political issue. The network that has been built up because of this activity excludes immigrant and minority groups. As such they have had to depend on each other as they build a network that will enable improved access and opportunity.

It is through the development of the internal social capital that the low-income development can have increased prominence within the greater South End district. As the old adage goes, there is strength in numbers, and that couldn't be truer than when dealing with low-income community issues. As it is though, the different groups in the Villa have distanced themselves, thus having few
opportunities for interaction. Creating a reason and method for positive dialogue may help ease tensions and support a compromise between the emerging (i.e., Asian community) and the existing (i.e., Puerto Rican community) groups. The execution is important because it will affect the result of the interaction. What was meant to be positive could result in increased tensions.

When tensions are ignored situations arise, like that experienced in Castle Square (a multi-ethnic community in the South End). In 1997, the internal cultural strife of Castle Square was outlined in *Castle Square Wrestles with Issues of Race and Culture.* The article speaks about discrimination against youth in some of the after school educational programs. Furthermore, this case study shows that children are a strong motivator for action because families have a vested interest in their well-being and success. That is an angle for cross-community building.

### 2.6: Public space's role in community building

Outdoor public spaces can both be the destination (i.e., landmarks) as well as the thruway (i.e., paths) between two locations. If the public space is the thruway then droves of people may be intersecting one another with little opportunity for interaction. If it is the destination then it becomes a social gathering spot, potentially serving different community groups. These conditions invite the possibility of fostering cross-community interactions. “The creation of new spaces relevant to the needs of a range of social groups delivers a better quality of life.” Indeed, providing for the various needs of diverse resident groups within a city makes urban life more enjoyable. Scholars have studied how universal design could get us closer to creating more inclusive spaces. Others have taken on the task of evaluating culturally influenced design. Understanding what makes a good public space for an array of social groups, and, specifically, what makes it comfortable enough to allow its diverse users to engage in community building is the focus on this section. The issue of safety is paramount because it can often be the source for detracting potential users. Promoting flexible design of the open space thus encouraging the patrons to define the use ensures that the area will respond well to changes. Great design of the outdoor space in and of itself is not enough. The strategy for community engagement outdoors involves two things: amenities and programming.

A public space's patronage is significantly impacted by its perceived safety. What makes a place safe may be different by community group. For example, parents may want limited entry points to a playground for the security of their small children, a hallmark of defensible spaces. Non-pet owners may feel pushed out of a public space because of their discomfort with dogs off their leash. For neighborhoods that have been victim to gun violence in a public space, the residents fear that
gun violence will strike again in the same place thereby casting a shadow on what could potentially be a wonderful community building location. However, there are basic crosscutting requirements for safety. Research conducted by Robin C. Moore and Nilda G. Cosco found that a dominant perception for inclusiveness in park design was safety. By and large the individuals they interviewed in their study concluded that safety encompasses “comments such as ‘user friendly’, clean and ‘beautiful, like out of a magazine’ could be interpreted to mean that physical safety was assumed to be covered in an environment perceived as high quality.” Furthermore, high quality spaces provide a socially secure perception, which attracts a diverse user base. Jane Jacobs’ seminal book, The Death and Life of Great American Cities, pays particular attention to the need for surveillance with residents’ ‘eyes on the street’. Emily Talen in her book, Design for Diversity, supports this theory and promotes natural surveillance by having buildings fronting the public space. She argues that by orienting the front of buildings toward open spaces instead of the sides of buildings and avoiding garages as park frontages, it acknowledges the value and role of public urban spaces as locations for enhancing the social welfare of a community. Unfortunately, in low-income communities riddled with crime, residents living in homes right in front of a criminal act may still not say anything out of fear. A way to combat this is through promoting high visibility park design. What this means is that the area is heavily populated by pedestrians, cyclists and drivers that the burden does not fall solely on the area residents to police the site. Creating populous, highly visible, and easily accessible open space that is clean and well manicured certainly helps to develop a safe area.

Programming and amenities serve the purpose of adding to a location’s safety and potential for cross-community interaction. Interestingly enough, Clara Rishbeth in her paper, “Ethnic Minority Groups and the Design of Public Open Space: An inclusive landscape,” readily admits that, “Although this paper has been primarily concerned with the physical design of public open spaces, in many case studies recreational programs have been the key to attracting diverse user groups.” This is a recurring theme because in research conducted by July Ling Wong in her paper, “Culture, heritage and access to open spaces,” she finds that “cultural festivals enable the expression of culture and a sharing of culture with the mainstream population.” Her paper also finds that spaces can be welcoming through activities that enable various communities to cultivate a sense of belonging by ‘marking a space with memory.’ An example is Cambridge Massachusetts’ annual Greek Festival. Although the Greek population is much less than what it used to be there is still the remembrance of the communities’ previous prominence through the festival. In all of this, amenities must be provided to make the programming possible. For example, seating, water features for children, comfortable and meandering walking paths are all amenities that enhance the programming possible in the public space. In fact, the amenities can make the site a destination and from there introduce...
programming to encourage cross-community interaction. The Berkeley Community Garden in the South End is a good example of a place that provides area residents with an amenity—gardening space, thus making it a destination that also serves to build community amongst the users. In an effort to bring outsiders, it is open to the public, and the gardeners will host events that attract its diverse population (refer to figures 2.1-2.3).

Flexible design allows a community group to appropriate space without disenfranchising others. As stated in the introduction, cities are dynamic places. Allowing for dominant groups to use and exert some sort of identity over a place is useful for intra-community building as shown in the usefulness of ethnic enclaves. However, that particular community group may leave. As Wong points out, "for those that can relate memory and history to elements in space, a cultural vision is embodied. For those who cannot, it is just a space." Flexibility in design permits different groups to imbue a place with a cultural vision. Keeping with the principles of designing for safety and security all other components of the public space should focus on universal design. According to the Center for Universal Design, Ronald D. Mace “coined the term ‘universal design’ to describe the concept of designing all products and the built environment to be aesthetic and usable to the greatest extent possible by everyone, regardless of their age, ability, or status in life.” This does not require retrofit but thoughtful design at the onset of a plan. By using universal design guidelines, flexibility in the open space becomes inherent because it assumes a diverse user base. This is beneficial from the standpoint that the design then becomes open enough that different groups can modify the space to meet their particular needs. For example, movable chairs. Having the opportunity to configure chairs or other sitting furniture can allow groups to congregate for games, meals or performances.

Figure 2.2: Mayor Menino Visits Berkeley Comm. Garden for Boston Shines. Source: city tweet stream

Figure 2.3: Berkeley Comm. Garden Annual Potluck, 2012. Source: BCG Facebook page

Figure 2.4: Painter visits garden. Source: BCG Facebook Page
The literature about cross-cultural community building in the public space mostly focuses on interventions that can attract diverse user groups. So far the research has shown that the design can only create the conditions for cross-community engagement, but it is through the programming that it can actually happen. The interventions usually fall within four categories: art, commercial, education and social. Community public art is one method for attracting residents as art makers and consumers. Commercial events, such as farmer's markets where all participants can bond in their shared interest of fresh food, is another method of cross-community building. Educational events can be collaborations with local institutions to share resources with area communities. Pop-up Children's Museum of Boston is one example where the museum partnered with the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (an organizing non-profit in Dorchester, Massachusetts) to share the institution's resources with residents of the community (see figure 2.4). It was an opportunity to educate them about the museum and hopefully encourage area families to venture out of their community to visit the museum in Boston's Seaport district. Other interventions can be purely social. A Community picnic is an event for residents to interact over a shared meal. Another example is an annual dance party held under a bridge in Somerville, Massachusetts called Meet Under McGrath (MUM) (see figures 2.5-2.6). Here people from different areas and social groups can bond over their shared desire to dance.

2.7: Designing for cultural identity and social mixing: toward the Diffuse Mosaic City

Based on the analysis herein I propose that we think of the city as a Diffuse Mosaic City. Public spaces have points of penetration, even overlap, as well as points of separation. And the level of overlap is varied based on the quality of the
interaction. I think this lends itself beautifully to thematic mapping because it is spatial mapping for social interaction to inform community building in diverse, even contested areas.

To understand the relationship between inclusion and exclusion studying the city from the micro-scale is immensely important. It is through those observations that a map displaying the areas of overlap or sharp edges will reveal itself. It is important to have both because they provide benefits for a community. For example, the sense of identity, confidence building and ownership are critical for fair and equitable exchanges. By having a strong sense of self you can value your needs and wants with equal footing to anybody else. This is a tool to help prevent exploitation. At the same time one cannot live like a hermit. Interactions with the outside world are useful and essential. But keeping those interactions at a superficial level will not do because it prevents the creation of a just and civil society where the disparity between the haves and have not’s continually increases. Hence, the Diffuse Mosaic City.

Locating the spaces of overlap and how to judge the overlap is a question of method. For example, what if different groups occupy a space at different times? There is sharing of space, but with little direct interaction between the groups. It is possible that there is an unspoken agreement on usage based on patterns or habits established by the various user groups. For example, a park may be shared by elderly and school-age children, but at different times because the elderly may prefer the periods when children are at school. When there is interaction how do you judge the depth of the interaction? The design and use of the public space can play a role in identifying the different levels of cross-cultural engagement. By introducing different concepts (i.e., design and programming) into the public space it will be possible to measure the amount and type of interactions that occur.

Research conducted in Seattle’s Chinatown-International District is a good example of the existence of diffuse zones within a neighborhood. During the planning process for this area several issues surfaced around the history, identity and groups represented within the community. The Chinese representatives were concerned about the labeling of the district. Specifically, they wanted “Chinatown” to remain in the name, as an acknowledgment of the community’s role in the area’s history, and that it remains a cultural center for them despite its declining population. The researchers found that “there was little sense of conflict over where the boundaries of these areas [the “Little Saigon,” “Chinatown,” and “Japantown” of the district] might be or whether or not they overlap […] The [planning] board also came to the conclusion that the idea of ‘hearts,’ or ‘cores,’ and ‘spines’ was more important than boundaries.” This indicates that there are iconic landmarks that depict central cultural zones, but community identity beyond that spatial core or spine becomes
more diffuse, which is why different community groups were apt to overlap in boundaries. These overlapping points are the inter-community zones.

This literature review attempts to tell the story of why communities self segregate, the implications of that decision, and how the dynamics change when the demographics of the neighborhood begin to shift. What the literature shows is that a balance between intra- and inter- community spaces in the physical sense are important for the healthy development of diverse neighborhoods. The Diffuse Mosaic City proposes to use space strategically to create sustainable mixed communities.
ENDNOTES

7 The Lost Neighborhood, Vimeo (online film), directed by Sarah Berkovich (February 19, 2010; Boston, MA: Sarah Berkovich, 2010), http://vimeo.com/9644587.
23 Ibid.
28 Date is based on the time stamp for the demographic data provided to the researcher. Interviews informed the perception of change and matched the period when Puerto Rican resident population dropped below 70%.
32 Ibid, pg. 38.
37 Ibid, pg.6.
38 Ibid, pg.15.
41 Ibid, pg.187.
46 Vikas Mehta and Jennifer K. Bosson, “Third Places and the Social Life of Streets,” *Environment and
50 Emily Talen, Design for Diversity (Burlington: Architectural Press, 2008), 184.
54 Ibid, pg. 48.
55 Ibid, pg. 50.
AN ETHNIC ENCLAVE IS FORMED, A COMMUNITY IS CREATED, A NEIGHBORHOOD IS FOUNDED AND THEN RESIDENT DIS-ENGAGEMENT AND DEMOGRAPHIC SHIFT

In this section I will briefly review the history of the South End and Villa Victoria to explain the context of the case study used in this research. For the purposes of this research the changes to the greater South End district will be discussed, but not addressed in much detail, so as to focus primary attention on Villa Victoria’s internal dynamics. The South End was originally designed for Bostonian upper-middle and upper-classes. However it underwent a decline leading to low income tenements, which attracted immigrants and low-income residents. The disinvestment in the area caused it to become a target for urban renewal. The Puerto Rican residents in the South End responded with grassroots mobilization, which led to the founding of Villa Victoria. Since it was founded the resident make-up has changed from, almost exclusively, Puerto Rican to a more multi-ethnic neighborhood. Over the years resident participation in Villa Victoria neighborhood initiatives has declined, leading to an increasingly dis-engaged population. Understanding its history through the present explains the changes the neighborhood has undergone and how the inhabitants have responded.
The original intent of the South End was to provide an attractive residential area for Boston's upper class. By the late 1800s, Boston had outgrown itself due to an influx of immigrants. The overcrowding served as a catalyst for the wealthier residents to relocate to the suburbs, such as Newton.

The Back Bay, which was built after the South End, was completed in the last decades of the 1800s, after the Civil War, and soon began to compete for the same wealthy population. Additionally, during the financial crisis of 1873, the so-called Long Depression, the South End saw a sharp decline in land investment. Moreover the price of the parcels were simply too high, as the architect Donald Freeman explains, "the price of the land had been set at an inordinately high rate to insure a uniformly upper-class population: the city found itself with acres of underdeveloped land on its hands." To fill the properties the strategy had to change. Consequently, the real estate became available to low or moderate-income families, thus paving the way for low-income and immigrant settlements.

By the turn of the century, the South End was home to immigrants and the poor. Many of the beautiful row houses became apartments or rooming houses. The first immigrants to reside in the South End were Irish. The other immigrant enclaves that would form throughout the first half of the century were composed of Greek, Syrian, Chinese, Eastern European Jews, West Indians, and Puerto Ricans. Immigrants from each of the groups tended to cluster near each other with little interaction between each of them. The size of the South End is a major reason why it was possible for multiple ethnic groups to establish enclaves that touched but did not interact, much like Park observed in his research describing the city as a mosaic of little worlds that do not interpenetrate. There was simply enough space for different groups to carve out their own area, much like the Puerto Rican immigrants did with Villa Victoria. Today, Villa Victoria has become mixed, and yet it still resembles the characteristics of the segregated South End, in that even within close quarters the different ethnic communities have low levels of interaction. Even though the South End, from the outside may have appeared to be quite diverse and intermingled, the reality was that each culturally defined community kept to itself, their intra-community zone. Villa Victoria although smaller is no different.

Accordingly, this led to the creation of the Puerto Rican enclave known as Parcel 19 (which would later become Villa Victoria), as defined under the 1965 BRA urban renewal plans. As stated by Miren Uriarte-Gaston's dissertation, Organizing for Survival: The Emergence of a Puerto Rican Community, both agricultural and industrial companies recruited Puerto Ricans, at the same time that the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico was encouraging its rural citizens to migrate from
the island because they were suffering from a shortage of agricultural work in traditional farming towns. Most of the migration occurred in the 1950s through early 1970s. Like the immigrant settlers preceding them, they tended to coalesce around an area populated by people from their home country, and for many of them, people from their hometown, such as Aguadilla, Luquillo and San Lorenzo. The standard migration path had men coming first to the area and then bringing their families or other relatives. Having a central landing location facilitated the transition into the United States because they came to a place that shared the same language, customs and geographic origins. They concentrated within a 20 to 25 acre area bounded by West Newton Street, Tremont Street, West Dedham Street, and Washington Street. Parcel 19 also included property by Upton Street between Tremont Street and Shawmut Avenue, and up to Union Park Street between Shawmut Avenue and Washington Street. This area became known as the Spanish section of the South End (refer to figure 3.2). By the late 1960s the Puerto Rican population had a well-defined and strongly connected community in the South End. Their connection to the place they inhabited was very important for the Puerto Rican community because the residents had made close personal ties to each other that they did not want to lose. Unfortunately, the absentee landlords neglected the property maintenance in Parcel 19.

The lack of care for the buildings, inexpensive rents and limited employment opportunities for South Enders continued the decline of the South End. Over time, the area became home to illegal activities such as, gambling, prostitution, and drug trafficking. Moreover, there was a large homeless population. Before long, parts of the South End were deemed blighted which gave the city's Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) federal funds with which to conduct 'slum clearance' and redevelop it as part of the federal Urban
Renewal legislation passed in 1954.¹²

During the time of Urban Renewal (1950s-1970s), there was major concern that the richer homeowners were leaving the city behind for the suburbs, thus reducing the tax revenue needed to maintain it. Boston wanted to reinvent itself to prevent further decline with the ultimate goal of attracting people back to the city; the Urban Renewal law provided the financial support to do it. The areas that were run-down received ‘slum’ designation, which meant that the area had been deemed blighted or decadent.¹³ This label made the site a candidate for federal funds to redevelop it by the city. A prime example of this was the demolition of the West End district of Boston in the late 1950s. The story of this area has been well documented by Herbert Gans in *The Urban Villagers*, where he discussed the diverse neighborhood that was displaced as a result of urban renewal.¹⁴ To combat urban decline the Mayor at the time, John Hynes, took on major projects, such as the Central Artery, the Prudential Center, parking under the Common (Boston’s main open space) and the reconstruction of the West End. In 1950 the General Plan of Boston had labeled the West End an ‘obsolete neighborhood’. Capitalizing on the Urban Renewal initiative the city changed the designation to ‘blighted’ to permit slum clearance. This label was made by Boston planners and then supported by the Mayor, the City Council, the Catholic Archdiocese and all of Boston’s daily news outlets.¹⁵ Despite the best efforts of the residents they were not able to prevent the destruction of their neighborhood, as they knew it. Many of whom were displaced with little relocation support. To many in the South End, the West End served as a cautionary tale of what could happen to respectable low and middle-income residents.

The BRA had multiple urban renewal plans for different parts of the South End.¹⁶ Several community groups, such as the United South End Settlements, had campaigns to combat the proposed projects.¹⁷ One of the sites that the BRA identified in 1965 was Parcel 19, the predominantly Puerto Rican neighborhood. However, the inhabitants would not allow themselves to be scattered by the urban renewal initiatives. They united and created Villa Victoria, literally translated as victory village.

The first step in creating Villa Victoria was the founding of the Emergency Tenants Council (ETC). In 1967, concerned residents of Parcel 19 started to meet at Saint Stephen’s Church to voice their fears of the impeding urban renewal and build a list of demands to be included in a dialogue with the city. Minutes from the meeting reveal the community’s simple concerns for low rents, a good supply of housing for large families, and stores in or close to the area (i.e. grocery market, delicatessen, laundromat and hardware stores).¹⁸ Additionally, the inhabitants wanted
the urban renewal project to include restoration of neglected apartment buildings and cleanup of local junkyards. The ETC was officially founded in January 28, 1968 when 500 residents in attendance at the church meeting voted to create an organization that would fight for the rights of the community's poor tenants. The burgeoning organization quickly articulated its mission as follows: “to combat poverty and the deterioration of the community through the participation of the community in the planning and development of low cost housing, with the object of preventing the dispersal of residents, limiting the dislocation caused by Urban Renewal and in general improving the housing conditions of the community residents.” With the founding of this organization, the Puerto Rican community popularized their rallying cry: “No nos mudaremos de la Parcela 19!” (English translation “We shall not be moved from Parcel 19”).

The Emergency Tenants Council proceeded to petition the Boston Redevelopment Authority and private landlords for complete sovereignty over development of Parcel 19. Grassroots organization efforts throughout 1968 and 1969 supported the ETC's efforts. After many demonstrations and rent boycotts the ETC celebrated a small victory when they were able to gain control of a property from an absentee landlord that covered a full block on West Newton Street. This allowed the ETC to demonstrate its developer capabilities. After gaining ownership of the property, they rehabilitated 106 units for poor families. When the ETC pursued the BRA for development rights of Parcel 19 they were able to refer to these 106 units as an example of what the organization could accomplish. By the time the ETC entered into negotiations for Parcel 19, they had renamed themselves ETC Developers Corporation to become the sponsor developer of the project. Because the BRA wanted to dispel their image “as a tool for the affluent bent on displacing the poor,” they eventually acquiesced to the ETC in 1971, but not without a few stipulations. For example, the ETC would have to raise the funds for the development within 90 days of the award and the Mayor's office could employ veto power on the main points of the development. They were able to finance the Villa Victoria project through government lending programs, such as 221(d)(3) (mortgage insurance for rental and cooperative housing), Housing Authority Turnkey Project (finance model to build and sell back to the Boston Housing Authority), 236 (mixed income federal financing) and Massachusetts Housing Finance Agency (now known as MassHousing). The creation of what was to become Villa Victoria was underway.

The cultural identity of the community inspired the design of the development. Architect John Sharratt was the principal architect for the community plan and design of the buildings. The ETC Developers Corporation was so intent on imbuing the space with a strong sense of Puerto Rican identity that they flew Sharratt to the small town of Aguadilla (refer to figures 3.5-3.7). They did not even let Sharratt explore San Juan, only the rural parts of Puerto Rico because the leadership of
the ETC considered the capital too American. Most of the immigrants were from countryside villages; they wanted to reconnect with the home country and provide the parcel with a sense of cultural permanence. Consequently, the design of Villa Victoria ascertained the founders’ Puerto Rican culture and nationalist political identity. Ana Y. Ramos-Zayas studies this in her book *National Performances: The Politics of Class, Race and Space in Puerto Rican Chicago*. In it she discusses the complementary relationship between political and cultural nationalism for Puerto Ricans in Chicago, but is instructive in understanding the design motivations of Villa Victoria. She describes political nationalism as a centralized political unit with a uniformity achieved through legal rights and citizenship. Ramos-Zayas defines cultural nationalism as a “vocabulary to discuss, challenge, and constantly reconfigure views of class, race, space, gendered identities, and migration histories.” These two concepts, cultural and political nationalism, take on a spatial form by which the Puerto Rican community can demonstrate its “cultural endurance” and “opposition to mainstream oppression.” No matter what might happen in the future, Villa Victoria would showcase the organizing influence of the Puerto Rican community in a prominent American city to other Puerto Rican communities in the United States and worldwide. Representatives from Venezuela and France have come to Villa Victoria to learn more about their model for affordable housing development. The unique design features such as the bright pastel colors, pitched roofs, and a welcoming plaza came from Puerto Rico. The city and the BRA, however, wanted a design that would respond to the area. To satisfy the South End’s aesthetic, Sharratt defined an appealing combination between the two. Consequently, he described the row houses as having a mix of “the South End’s steel rod iron and rails, [and] the brick bases and the steps…, but as you go up [the house’s façade] you turn to plaster and the brighter colors and the pitched
The development was completed in five stages. The planning for the development of each stage took careful coordination with the residents because they were relocated within the site during the construction of their home so no one was displaced during the demolition of existing buildings. The first stage was a rehabilitation of townhomes located on Tremont Street and Shawmut Avenue, which yielded seventy-one units. The second stage was the building of Viviendas La Victoria I, which required the clearing of buildings on West Dedham, West Brookline, Tremont Street and Shawmut Avenue; a total of 181 units were made, evenly split between low and moderate income families. The third stage was the Plaza Betances (refer to figures 3.10 and 3.11) and the 19-story Unity Tower adjacent to the plaza on West Dedham Street, which provided about two hundred subsidized units for the elderly and disabled. The fourth stage was the construction of Casas Borinken and the rehabilitation of brick townhomes. The fifth and final stage was the building of Viviendas La Victoria II, which provided 163 new units and included the refurbishment of a few traditional South End townhomes on West Dedham and West Newton Streets. According to the ETC Developers Corporation the project was finished in the mid-1970s. It was aptly named Villa Victoria or victory village to commemorate the ETC’s feat. Once completed, the development included 435 dwellings housing about 3,000 low to moderate-income households. All the Parcel 19 residents that wanted to stay received a home according to their needs and income. Because the residents were heavily involved in the planning process through community meetings and membership in ETC, the new development was a reflection of the residents input.

The ETC, besides creating the ETC Developers Corporation
also founded Inquilinos Boriquas en Accion (IBA), or Puerto Rican Tenants in Action, to address the social needs of the area. The Villa Victoria leadership cared about investing in the physical (place) and social (people) aspects of the community. They used the word Boricua, a Taino term that refers to the Indigenous people of the Caribbean, in this case Puerto Rican, to indicate their nationalist leaning tendency. It was a political statement, an exertion of their cultural roots within the United States. IBA created social, educational, and artistic programming for neighborhood residents. With IBA, Villa Victoria is a comprehensive affordable housing experiment in community development. It has been a part of the project for almost 45 years.

From the 1970s through the 1980s Villa Victoria enjoyed active resident participation and civic engagement. Many of the original founders were active in the on-going development of the site as well as supporting the nascent IBA. It was during this time that Villa Victoria had its own public access TV channel and produced a range of material such as youth programming and immigrant rights news journals. Also during this time John Sharratt’s design of the development won several architectural awards (e.g., Boston Society of Architects – 1977 Design Excellence). Many of the residents remember this time fondly because they were reaping the benefit of their long and hard fought battle to stay on parcel 19, finally Villa Victoria.

By the early 90s, however the Villa had started to regress. It saw the start of gang and drug related violence. Aside from the local violence there were also internal strife amongst the leadership and board that contributed to a gradual decline in resident involvement in community works. Not to mention that parts of the development started to fall into disrepair from normal wear and tear.

By the late 1990s planning for the rehabilitation of Villa Victoria was underway. Preservation of Affordable Housing (POAH) served as the development consultants for this project. They helped get financing for the project through section 8 mark-up programs, where some units were turned into market-rate to get mixed income funding and they also leveraged debit and tax credits to cover the remaining costs. It would not be completed until the mid to late 2000s. The rehabilitation included new kitchens and exterior work to four buildings: Las Viviendas (181 units), Viviendas La Victoria (201 units), Casa Borinken (36 units), Parish House, and the introduction of two new parks: Draper’s Park and the Gazebo Courtyard. At the same time, but separately, IBA was working with the city to finance the remake of Plaza Betances.

As of 2013 Villa Victoria is a middle- to low-income neighborhood in Boston’s trendy South End district. Over time the South End has become an upper income population destination thereby displacing residents that had come to the area for low priced housing many years ago. The design
and purpose of Villa Victoria was to provide a safe community that the residents could retreat to, escaping the illicit activities that used to occupy almost every street corner. Now, however, the South End is much safer. For example, between 2004 and 2008 total crime fell by 16%. And yet the perception of crime is still very present within some of the residents, which only serves to make residents even more insular. This inward focus has translated to greater dis-engagement where residents are more and more disconnected from the Villa’s activist roots. Mario Small’s book on Villa Victoria’s social capital also points to the newer cohort of residents who are not familiar with the history much less have connections to the people that were a part of the original mobilization. In 2013 ETC Developers Corporation and IBA merged in response to its growing desire to focus on social services and the maintenance of Villa Victoria instead of developing in other locations, which is what ETC was doing. Through this merger IBA hopes to focus its energy toward re-engaging its residents. In the meantime though, inward focus, loss of communal history and neighborhood changes has created the civic disengagement of today. As a result, there is a growing hostility coming from the older Puerto Rican residents who are concerned about the future of the Villa.

Even though the residents are predominately Puerto Rican that does not mean that they all are. The development has always had other ethnic groups represented. In fact in the founding documents, the bylaws stipulated racial and ethnic minimum quotas because the city was concerned that it would become a Latino ghetto. The chart below provides a recent snapshot of the changes in racial and ethnic make-up of the development, revealing that Villa Victoria’s Latino (mostly Puerto Rican and some Colombians and Central Americans) population has been on the decline while the Asian (mostly Chinese) population has been on the rise.
Figure 3.12: Chart shows demographic data for the past three years. The first date on the chart is based on the IBA: Villa Victoria Demographics web page, which is estimated to have been last updated on April 12, 2010. The second date is based on the date the Maloney Property Manager submitted demographic data to the researcher.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other Villa Victoria Resident Data¹</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Demographic Indicator</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty Level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Head of Household</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Household Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age Breakdown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schooling Completed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Figure 3.13: Table shows demographic data that is based on the IBA: Villa Victoria Demographics web page, which is estimated to have been last updated on April 12, 2010.
The African American population is relatively unchanged. The White residents are relatively new to the development. Over 40% of the population in Villa Victoria is non-Puerto Rican. This raises questions about where the Puerto Ricans are going, where the new population is coming from and how this affects the social and spatial aspects of the development as different residents groups attempt to create their own community within Villa Victoria. The Puerto Rican community has transitioned toward settling in Springfield, the fourth largest city in New England.\(^8\) In fact, the Latino workshop participants commented on how their families are living in areas outside of Boston because there are more home ownership possibilities that are reasonably priced. Still, others commented that some of their friends who went over the income limit (-$36,000 – based on resident feedback) couldn't stay in the area because it was too expensive and found better rental prices in the suburbs. The Asian community however still relies heavily on Boston's Chinatown as the arrival city. Some of the Asian residents from the workshops mentioned that they had lived in Chinatown before coming to Villa Victoria. The main draw for them was that it is close to Chinatown, but the residential units are cleaner and better priced.

Crime data for Boston shows that the peak years of violence were 1975 – 1989 (reported crimes ranging from 63,500 – 80,500); all areas of Boston since then, including the South End, have seen a reduction in crime.\(^9\) However, when random acts of violence occur, it calls into question the safety of the housing development. In early September 2011, a 17 year old resident was shot dead simply for responding in the affirmative when asked if he lived in Villa Victoria. Allegations connect the death to gang violence between Villa Victoria and Mission Hill in Dorchester.\(^10\) A death of this kind had not happened in over 10 years, which made it all the more heinous. This type of violence discourages investment and increases fears of the neighborhood. It also discourages outdoor social engagement for fear that other violent outbursts may occur adversely affecting innocent bystanders as was the case in September of 2011.

Loss of history and apathy are concerns for the mature and established IBA and ETC Developers Corporation. In a case study of the Villa Victoria Center for the Arts, IBA found that the largest challenge “as the population of the community has changed, [is that] the Center has to be responsive to the change in demographics without forgetting its Puerto Rican heritage.”\(^11\) As a result, a major initiative from IBA that resulted from their strategic planning process is “the need for preserving this rich history so that the strong community fabric that has developed will remain.”\(^12\) The substance of this initiative is under construction at the time of this writing. The research conducted herein seeks to inform the direction the initiative should take in preserving the development's history while at the same time embracing the changing demographics of Villa Victoria.
Figure 3.14: Map of Villa Victoria with the yellow line showing the original Parcel 19 boundary and the red line showing the study area for the research which focuses on residential property owned by ETC/IBA and managed by Maloney Properties. Source: Bing Maps
ENDNOTES

6 The current design of Villa Victoria and distribution of population groups across the development prevents clustering. However in later sections we will look at how groups will still create intra-community zones.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
17 Interview with Professor Langley Keyes, 2.21.2013.
19 Ibid, pg. 38.
20 Ibid, pg. 39.
21 Ibid.
22 Interview with Architect John Sharratt, May 9, 2013.
26 Carmen R. Lugo-Lugo, review of *National Performances: The Politics of Class, Race and Space in Puerto
27 Interview with IBA CEO Vanessa Calderon-Rosado, PhD. January 5, 2012.
29 Interview with Architect John Sharratt, May 9, 2013.
32 Researcher located 42 boxes of archived footage (~50 tapes per box) covering a range of materials from the 80s and 90s.
34 Interview with Patricia Belden from Preservation of Affordable Housing (they were the development consultants for the Villa Victoria rehabilitation in the 1990s) on May 17, 2013.
35 Ibid.
37 Interview with Architect John Sharratt, May 9, 2013.
AN INVESTIGATION INTO PEOPLE AND PLACE

To better understand the public space conditions in Villa Victoria two primary methods of data collection were used: on-site observations and workshops. The on-site observation was chosen because it is meant to explore the spatial elements of the community. Understanding the physical conditions that shape public spaces in the development establishes a basic appreciation for the amenities provided, begins speculation of how these spaces are being used, and identifies opportunities for improvement. Furthermore, completing the on-site observations first through sketching, photographing and noting the volume and types of passersby informed the design of the workshops. Workshops, the second method, connects the human experience to the outdoors. The residents were able to clear up questions and explain the reasoning behind observed behavior. Informal interviews were also conducted to supplement the main methods described above. Social mapping was used to interpret the on-site and workshop data collected. It is an attempt to link the social behavior with the urban design.

On-site observations of the Villa's public spaces helped frame the workshop's conversation and mapping exercise. This created a catalogue of the area's outdoors, which identified potential inter- and intra- community zones. Interviews and mapping were also used to gather data. The residents who took part in the workshops completed mapping exercises to explain the relationship they have with the outdoors. Specifically, they discussed how they defined their neighborhood (spatial
boundaries of Villa Victoria), the core of the development and the public spaces used by themselves and others. Additionally, they reacted to suggested public space interventions (e.g. art installations, programming events or urban design changes) for cross-community building. This chapter presents a detailed description of the preparation process for initiating the study, an overview of the data collected and the evaluation procedure of the data.

4.1: On-site observations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Procedure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feb. 22, 2013</td>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>11:30am - 2:20pm</td>
<td>Locate all public spaces, sketch and observe people’s use</td>
<td>Started at O’Day Park and zigzagged northeastward toward Upton Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar. 14, 2013</td>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>2:00pm - 4:30pm</td>
<td>Take photos of the area’s public places</td>
<td>With camera, started at O’Day and covered the same locations visited on 2/22/13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2012 – March 2013</td>
<td>Weekdays</td>
<td>Afternoons and early evenings</td>
<td>Maintain a presence in the neighborhood, engage residents, looks for things that may have been missed</td>
<td>Walked around the development to various destinations; spoke with members of the neighborhood</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.2: Observation schedule. The researcher, between 6.10-3.13, would often go to the Villa for community events, such as art gallery openings, youth program volunteering, and IBA meetings. It was important to have a presence to continually build the trust of the residents. Further details will be provided in the appendix.

The goal was to get an objective understanding of the various options for public interaction that are available, and to observe how they are currently being used, and by whom. This provided the appropriate foundational information for the focus groups. The table (figure 4.2) lists the on-site observation schedule. These observation periods identified the different types of public spaces and informed their categorization in Villa Victoria. While observing, particular attention was paid to large pedestrian paths and playgrounds. Some of these gathering spaces are depicted in sketches, which include a survey of activities that occurred during the observation period. Activities, such as the direction in which people were walking, what playground equipment was used and where people stopped to talk to each other were recorded. At the same time, where possible, the gender and race of the passerby were guessed and recorded on the sketches.

On-site observations also included photography. The photographs taken allowed the researcher to re-examine the places visited to see if any details might have been missed while on-site. Using
photography added another layer of observation and analysis that created a greater awareness of the neighborhood’s public spaces and its communities. There are different scales at which to photograph. The wide angle photos provided a perspective of the entire open space, while eye-level photographs attempted to capture what a person walking in the community would see, at the scale they would see it. Pictures at this scale captured clues as to how users of the public space are appropriating it (i.e. painting graffiti art, discarding trash, drawings on the sidewalk).

4.2: Workshops

The workshops allowed community residents to voice their opinions about the public spaces, and how they would like them to be used. It also allowed the researcher to determine how people perceive their community and neighborhood. This section outlines the process for preparing a workshop, hosting it, and collecting the data.

When working with a community, relationship building is an essential tool for obtaining access to the resources that will yield the desired data inputs. Villa Victoria is anchored by IBA, a strong and well–organized Puerto Rican leaning social services institution. They support many of the community engagement initiatives within the neighborhood. Therefore, they were instrumental in providing the platform for obtaining access to residents. First, permission from IBA to conduct the research had to be granted. Next, the administrative leadership team provided the contact for the Resident Activities Director. She is responsible for the adult programming in the neighborhood, which is usually hosted in the Villa’s community room. To schedule the workshops, the director had to sign-off on the activity. In the interest of reducing the barrier to participation, three workshops were held, one for each of the three main languages spoken, Spanish (for the Latino community),
The workshop dates were scheduled in advance to allow for publicity and recruitment of resident participants. Once the dates were agreed upon, the promotional flyers were designed. Once the flyers were approved, the outreach portion of the process began. Several common areas were identified as ideal locations for posting flyers, such as the convenience store, the laundromat, the social services office, the community room and the entrances in the apartment buildings. Where possible, flyers were also distributed directly to the residents. In the meantime, the workshop agenda and materials were prepared and assembled.

The workshop was split into two parts: mapping and discussion. For the first part, each resident received three sheets of paper: a map of Villa Victoria, a map of the South End, and a regional map of the greater Boston area (refer to the figures 4.5-4.7). Residents were asked a series of probing questions regarding the location of their social network, their outdoor socializing spots and their perception of the other communities' use of the public space. Additionally, residents were asked to locate the borders of Villa Victoria in relation to the rest of the South End. By understanding the heart of community zones and the hard edges, it was possible to identify how people delineated their neighborhood space. After that, qualitative questions were posed that covered an array of topics from surrounding neighborhood changes to testing a variety of outdoor interventions. The goal was to determine what the different factions within the neighborhood were, and which interventions would create the conditions needed for cross-community development.
The workshops occurred during a one-week period, one and a half hour each with a meal provided. Sharing dinner or lunch was a useful icebreaker and a helpful tool in attracting residents. The food was served first and then the workshop activities commenced. During the mapping exercise and open conversation, pictures of the residents and notes of the participants' comments were taken by research assistants. The researcher facilitated the exercises and conversations. Below is a breakdown of the participants by ethnicity, gender and age. These are the metrics provided because most residents seemed to divide themselves amongst these three identifiers.

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**Workshop Participants Demographics**

![Bar chart showing gender and estimated age split of individuals that attended the workshops.](chart.png)

Figure 4.8: Chart shows the gender and estimated age split of individuals that attended the workshops.

Note that the distribution of male to female ratio is not the same across ethnic groups. In the Chinese sessions, there were no male participants and in the African American session, there was only one male participant. Conversely, the Spanish workshop was tilted toward male representatives. However, the most vocal participants in the Latino workshop were the women. Most of the female participants in all the focus groups were working mothers so that weighed heavily on their perceptions of safety and community building. The males in the Latino workshop, on the other hand, were primarily retired. The Chinese families interviewed noted that the male head of household worked long hours and spent their free time at home. As for the African American workshop the gentleman that attended worked nights, while the other women there were single head of households. Since the goal of these workshops was to elicit qualitative input from residents
on public space use the gender gap is interesting, but not of major concern because the participants are themselves primary users of the public space and some of them also have children (teenagers and younger), such that it was representative of the patrons of the neighborhoods’ public areas.

The Chinese workshop did not occur in the same way as the others. On the day of the workshop, other than the translator, no one showed up, so the approach had to be slightly modified to encourage resident participation. Luckily, the translator was a Villa Victoria resident so she agreed to complete the workshop mapping and questionnaire and was able to convince her mother to participate as well. Fortunately, another Asian resident from her household offered to do the workshop activities. In all, obtaining the six participants took four meetings over a period of three weeks following the original workshop date.

From general observations of the workshops, certain themes about the resident make-up were revealed. The elderly were the most involved and vocal residents for the African American and Latino groups. The Chinese workshop participants did not seem to be as concerned with the issue of community cohesion, but were willing to participate in the workshop because they wanted to learn more about the community. The Latino workshop had a few people that were from Colombia and Central American countries, but the overwhelming majority of Spanish speaking residents at the workshop were from Puerto Rico. Most of the Latino residents were retired in contrast to the other workshops’ residents. Community integration was more of a concern for the more established groups (e.g., Puerto Rican and African American) in the area than for newer residents (e.g., Chinese). The comfort level with the mapping exercise was contingent on age and familiarity with mapping technology (e.g., GPS). The Latino workshop participants had difficulty reading the maps, which made the session run longer than the others.

When I met with IBA’s director for the Empowerment program (the same person that is responsible for resident programming) to schedule the workshops, she mentioned that a complaint from the Latino residents was the lack of follow through on initiatives presented by outsiders. Specifically, they wondered what was the point in participating in academic studies of the area if they were not seeing anything come from their time and efforts. As a result, the director explained that they are trying to be more particular about what research they allow in the Villa to ensure it is time well spent for the residents and IBA. Therefore, in an effort to address that issue an artist interested in working with communities was invited to the workshops as an opportunity to create an art piece based on their comments. During the workshops, it was important to be clear about expectations. The first step was explaining that the impetus of the research was a response to current community conditions and
not simply an academic exercise for an outside researcher. Next, the researcher explained that several photos were going to be presented in hopes of discussing possible interventions to gauge interest level, but that in no way guaranteed that the pictures were examples of interventions that would be implemented in Villa Victoria. Finally, it was made clear to them that the basic findings from this study would be presented to IBA as the social services provider for the Villa, but what they did with that information was out of the scope of this research. At the end of the events, each resident was presented with a 4x7” aerial photograph of their homes as a complimentary gift for participating in the workshops (see figure 4.9). This enabled me to gain the residents’ trust and interest in the work being done for the neighborhood. This method is not intended to be exhaustive, but rather to engage a swath of the community to identify the different categories of users and their experiences to inform the findings and recommendations of this thesis.

4.3: Interviews

Informal and semi-structured interviews of scholars in public art, sociology and urban planning supplemented the literature review of the theories behind the design of the community, the social dynamics affecting community building, and the value of public space interventions. The process
of outreach was through email and phone calls. Questions were carefully tailored to match their expertise. Some were audio recorded while others were written notes. Most interviews were about one hour. Following each interview, thank you notes were sent, because relationship building is important in this setting also. The goal was to gain greater contextual and academic understanding of the physical and social dynamics being investigated in the neighborhood from an expert perspective.

4.4: Mapping

Mapping was used as a tool to marry the spatial data with the social data collected. By doing social mapping, which is what this thesis will call it, the data shows where the heart of a community or ethnic sub-community is, where its edges are, and where it becomes more diffuse, overlapping with the other groups within the community. The physical environment and the people that inhabit it are inherently connected. Using this type of mapping attempts to demonstrate how this relationship can be shown in a cartographic manner. The goal of social mapping in this thesis is to interpret the workshop data by displaying it on a map of Villa Victoria. It recommends ideal areas for intra-community interventions and other locations that lend themselves toward inter-community building activities. The previously stated methods of workshops, interviews and observations inform the process of mapping. This is the purpose of social mapping and why it is an essential method for this thesis.
ENDNOTES

1 Additional details regarding outreach are in the appendix.
2 Additional information on the artist collaboration is available in the appendix.
CHAPTER 5:
RESULTS & RECOMMENDATIONS

THE PUBLIC SPACE HAS INTRA- AND INTER- COMMUNITY ZONES AT VARYING DEGREES
NURTURING BOTH IS CRITICAL FOR THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF A DIVERSE COMMUNITY

Using the methods described in the preceding chapter, the results describe the findings generated. This chapter is split into three sections: spatial inventory results, community mapping results and outdoor intervention results. Each section contains a general introduction, a map or chart and a brief summary of the results. These will be analyzed in the discussion chapter that follows the recommendations.

5.1: Spatial inventory results

Based on the observations, Villa Victoria has a total of 13 open spaces falling into seven categories. Public open spaces were designated as such based on criteria that reflected design and social indicators, which are defined in the table, figure 5.2.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accessible</td>
<td>Users can easily reach or go through</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Offers activity space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programmable</td>
<td>There are events happening, planned, or possible in this space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible</td>
<td>Modifiable based on group needs through physical interventions (short- or long- term modifications)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacity</td>
<td>Can accommodate medium to large groups of people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sitting space</td>
<td>Provides a place to either sit or lean on for comfort or space to add</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5.2: Criteria for identifying public open spaces.

Once an open space was identified, it was classified into the following categories:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public Space Category</th>
<th>Definition of Category</th>
<th>Item name in Villa Victoria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Playground</td>
<td>Area has play equipment</td>
<td>O'Day Park, Courtyard Park and Draper’s Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gazebo Courtyard</td>
<td>Enclosed open space with greenery</td>
<td>Gazebo Courtyard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paths</td>
<td>Open gathering space that is also used as a thruway between streets. It is larger than a standard sidewalk (average width is 6 ft.)</td>
<td>Pole Path, Brookline Street Path, Betances Path</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gardens</td>
<td>Plots of soil are cultivated with vegetation (either flowers, vegetables, or fruits)</td>
<td>Youth Garden and Unity Garden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Un-programmed Open Spaces</td>
<td>Space is wide enough to allow 4-5 people congregate and there isn’t a designated activity on that site</td>
<td>Open Lot and Graffiti Alley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gated Sidewalks</td>
<td>Wide space in between homes that are gated on both ends and children use to play</td>
<td>Gated Sidewalk (North) and Gated Sidewalk (South)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plaza Betances</td>
<td>Open concrete space with seating space and large enough for people to congregate for events (i.e., concerts)</td>
<td>Plaza Betances</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5.3: Categorization of public spaces identified in Villa Victoria.
Figure 5.4: Map of the public spaces identified in Villa Victoria according to type.
5.1.A: O’Day Park

O’Day Park is owned and operated by the city of Boston. However, it is within the study area because of its accessibility and use by Villa Victoria residents. O’Day Park is a mini-park. According to Clare Cooper Marcus and Carolyn Francis in *People Places*, a mini-park is a “small, one to three house-lot sized park (sometimes known as vest-pocket parks), principally for local, pedestrian-oriented use. They are used primarily by children and teens.” The dimensions of this park are 175 ft. by 175 ft. Based on the observations the description holds true for this site, however there is also a mini-quasi amphitheater, which is used by adults and elderly residents. There are about 11 areas of distinct activity. They are as follows (see figures 5.6-5.9): basketball court, handball court, two tables with two immovable chairs each with a checker table inset, play apparatus (includes a slide, pole and climbing board), swings, concrete benches, plastic seating, mini train and house set, picnic table, water feature (has the shape of a fire hydrant) and hop-scotch area.
During the observation period of February 22nd, 2013 from 12:15-1:30pm (a typical weekday afternoon) a total of six individual interactions occurred in the park. The table below summarizes these exchanges.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>COMMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12:15pm</td>
<td>An elderly Latina woman walks through the park from the NE corner to the SW corner to access the W. Newton Street entrance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:07pm</td>
<td>2 girls (approximate age of 5 and 7) came to the park each girl accompanied by 1 adult male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:09pm</td>
<td>The girls went to the swings where the men pushed them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:11pm</td>
<td>The girls went to the jungle gym equipment. Concurrently, the two men spoke to each other while throwing snowballs toward the handball court</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:12pm</td>
<td>A white male with an infant girl came to the park and placed her on the infant swing. He was in front of the baby as he swung her back and forth at a steady but slow motion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:30pm</td>
<td>A black male walked southward, away from W. Newton Street crossing the park toward Brookline and Shawmut Streets</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5.10: Table showing the social behavior observed on-site.

The social dynamics in the playground between the adult males observed between 1:07 - 1:12pm is worth discussing here. The two men that came with the two girls, from the outside observer's perspective, were friends, which is why they reflected each other's actions (i.e., swinging the girls and throwing snowballs at the same time). However, the white male had no connection to the other two. This was clear when the observer noticed that the entire time that all three men were within the same spatial context they never even exchanged pleasantries. The white male spent the entire time relating to the infant through facial expressions. From 1:12pm until 1:30pm the two Latino men and the white male never spoke to each other. It was an observable divide that existed between the two parties. Nonetheless, it is clear that this park attracts different user types; therefore the prerogative should be identifying methods for engaging them for cross-cultural community building.

O'Day Park has a checkered past which taints residents' perception. For example, there is a rock commemorating the death of a Villa Victoria resident in the late 90s. Also, residents, during the workshops, suggested that drug dealing might have occurred in that area. As such no one group has laid claim to this public space, but different community groups use it during the day. Most resident groups are quick to point out that they do not interact with the park at night. However crime has reduced and safety conditions have improved. This is a potential inter-community zone, which can be used for cross-cultural community building. Helping to improve the perception of the space and annexing it so that all user groups can share it would greatly benefit all residents. Furthermore it would begin to dispel safety concerns thus improving the overall perception of Villa Victoria.
5.1.B: Draper’s Park

Draper’s Park, located on the southwest corner of Shawmut and Upton Streets, is a mini-park in the area. To the northeast, Upton Street defines the park’s edge. It was built during the rehabilitation of Villa Victoria during the late 1990s – early 2000s. There are two parts to this park. The playground is meant for older children (late elementary and middle school) with European inspired abstract play equipment. The tot lot is meant for younger elementary school children with one multi-functional piece of play furniture; it has two gates for access. There is also a table set with a checkered pattern inset and two immovable chairs. According to a representative that served as the development consultant for the project, multiple Villa Victoria youth were taken to various parks to gauge their interest in the design and play equipment to help select the items that would be placed in Draper’s park. The tot lot is 50 ft. by 40 ft. and the kids’ playground is 100 ft. by 60 ft. During the observation period of February 22nd and March 13th, which was representative of a standard weekday.
afternoon, there were three people in the kids’ playground – one female and two male children. It was interesting to note that the abstract play equipment was not being used even though that had been an attractive feature during the development period. In fact the oldest of the two boys and the woman where playing baseball with a bat and ball they brought to the park, while the younger boy would fetch the ball or play in the tot lot.

This is a quasi inter-community zone because parents of all types come to this park, regardless of whether or not they live in the Villa. On this site it would be helpful to observe further to identify the volume of users on the site during a warm day. However during the observation period it was in use. It would also be useful to see children interacting with the abstract play equipment.

Figure 5.15: Close-up photo of tot lot play equipment. Photo by Jenny Larios Berlin
5.1.C: Courtyard Park

Courtyard Park was discovered after the first observation date, on March 13, 2013. It is a playground tucked in a courtyard where three of the four sides are homes (interior to the development). The fourth edge is a private parking road for residents. Unless you are a resident within this cul-de-sac there would be little to no reason to go to this park. It is only accessible through the small sidewalks leading to the courtyard and the apartments that surround it. It is 80 ft. by 70 ft. There is ample seating and sightlines, while providing privacy because of its location. When the researcher was in the area visiting, she stopped by this site and found a couple of male adults playing with a few children (two girls and one boy), blowing bubbles. Site observation during the summer would provide additional understanding of how the site is used during that period. However, it is clear from the observations that residents living next to the park use it.
This is an example of a quasi inter-community zone meant for targeted community building by spatial proximity. That is, it is only meant for the residents abutting the park and therefore it is a tool for community building between the groups in that area. Furthermore, it focuses on the uniting force of providing a safe place for children to play and engage with each other. However, like Draper’s Park it is mostly a space for children, which could accommodate gatherings focusing on children’s activities.

Figure 5.17: Photo of Courtyard Park. Photo by Jenny Larios Berlin
5.1.D: Gazebo Courtyard

The Gazebo Courtyard is relatively secluded and difficult to enter because there are only two 5 ft. wide sidewalks (on the east and west side) granting access, which are anchored by buildings thus preventing a clear view into the area. Additionally, the southern side of the Gazebo Courtyard has a fence that meets a resident parking side road; there is no gate to access it from the parking street. It measures 150 ft. by 50 ft. Immediately after entering there were two pushcarts full of bags and roughage on the SW corner. One was toppled over while the second stood upright. At the edges of the courtyard residents had created ad hoc gardening beds, which indicates that some courtyard residents may appreciate a mini-community garden. At the time of the observation it was winter, so there was no active vegetation in the garden bed, but the remnants indicated its use. The posterior
of the buildings border the courtyard. Some units have back doors leading into it. This courtyard is composed of two grades separated by stairs in the middle of the courtyard. On each side is a mirror reflection of a gazebo and tree plantings. There is a small sidewalk granting access on both, eastern and western, sides of the block. Children's bikes were stored in the courtyard near the residences' back door.

This area is too private with limited access. It is designed as an amenity for the residents abutting the courtyard. However its interior open design minimizes the risk of encouraging undesirable behavior. The typology is such that the O'Day park fence next to the basketball court overlooks the northern edge of the courtyard. The north and southern edges have sightlines straight through the courtyard. While analyzing the site there wasn't any indication that illegal activities, such as outdoor alcohol drinking or drug use, were happening. The buildings surrounding the courtyard all have windows overlooking the area, which helps provide surveillance, and there is also a security camera. One of the lamppost bulbs was broken, but it was not recent because the broken glass was not within the vicinity. What would help this area is to replace the bulb and maintain it clean by removing rubbish, such as the abandoned pushcarts. Some residents use them for collecting recyclables. However those carts are in the individual's yard. Returning to the site in late May showed that the carts had been removed. So long as they are stored in the residents' yard then it would keep the courtyard open and clean, thus making it more attractive and appealing. Also the design is such that it can be adapted for different uses by the users themselves. For example, it is a private-public space in that courtyard residents could have their children playing there while they garden, sit or talk to neighbors. Non-residents like myself would feel out of place because the only reason you would even walk into the courtyard is by mistake, out of curiosity or to meet someone that lives in one of the abutting buildings. It is not a destination for non-residents nor does it seem to be a destination for residents living in units beyond the courtyard.

Figure 5.19: Photo of the Courtyard looking toward the basketball courts. Image by Jenny Larios Berlin

Figure 5.20: Photo of the Courtyard looking southward toward the parking lot. Graphic by Jenny Larios Berlin
5.1.E: Pole Path

The Pole Path's namesake is based on an annual event hosted on this site. Each year since the founding of the development the community has hosted Festival Betances, a Puerto Rican cultural festival. One of the events of the festival is a greased pole climbing competition. The first team to reach the apex wins. This is a tradition from the small towns of Puerto Rico. This open space is a mix of sidewalks, trees and triangular patches of mulch. To the south it borders O'Day Park and to the north it borders a sidewalk that connects Aguadilla and San Juan Streets. It is 170 ft. by 50 ft. large. All users stuck to the edges, either the fence by O'Day Park or the sidewalk linking the streets. In total, two people traversed the path by the fence and nine people crossed on the sidewalk by the streets. Three people walked by the eastern edge of the open space. The observation period here was from 1 to 1:30pm.

Based on the observations this area qualifies as an inter-community zone. It is a connection between
two main roads within the development (San Juan and Aguadilla Streets) and begins the promenade that goes from the Pole Path to Plaza Betances, through the gated sidewalks. The Path attracts residents and non-residents. Some may stop by the park or continue un-deterred. That is to say that the site can be a meeting place (node) as much as it can be a moving space (path), which increases the options for activity. Furthermore, none of the workshop participants claimed it or ascribed it to another group. Even when it is used during the Betances Festival, for the pole competition, it is only for a short time as most of the festival activities take place in Plaza Betances. Therefore, although it may seem like the cultural specificity of the pole could alienate other community groups, it hasn’t had that impact amongst them. In fact, during the 2012 competition African American residents and non-residents of all types were in attendance to watch the event as a cultural showcase. As soon as it was finished the event goers quickly migrated back to the Plaza as if to say that the pole competition is a minor aberration in the festival activities.
5.1.F: Brookline Street Path

Brookline Street Path is a walkway that cuts the traffic flow of Brookline Street. It is a stoned sidewalk anchored on both sides by two trees and elevated 'planters' that serve as backless benches. The design of the planters is slightly concave to create a small semicircle, an informal gathering space adjacent to the corridor. Its dimensions are 170 ft. by 40 ft., which makes it wider than average sidewalks to allow for foot traffic and sedentary activities. According to Cooper Marcus this would be considered a sidewalk plaza in the urban setting. While making sketches, the observer sat next to one of the trees on the southwest corner to observe the activity in the area. Between 1:30 and 2pm there were 11 instances of groups of individuals crossing the path. The observations are summarized in the table (figure 5.26).

There were 7 instances of individuals walking toward Shawmut Street while the other 4 instances
were people walking toward Tremont Street. In total there were 11 men and 5 women. Two of the 5 women were walking their dogs. Next to the planters is a chained section of grass on both sides of the path; the dogs would go there. During the observation period there weren’t any individuals congregating in the seating areas, except the observer. Since the researcher knows some of the community members, some of them stopped to converse in the middle of the eastern edge of the walkway. This hints toward the activity that would occur during the summer, where similar interactions come to pass as individuals sit on the planters with a cool drink enjoying the warm weather. This walkway has gates to the north and south. These fences divide the gated sidewalks from the Brookline Path. There aren’t any homes facing toward the walkway, which makes it feel a bit secluded.

This is a quasi inter-community zone because it partially meets the specifications of cross-cultural community building. Specifically, it lacks visibility onto the area from resident’s homes. Also, unlike the Pole Path that abuts O’Day Park, which experiences activity year round, community engagement in the Brookline Street Path area is heavily dependent on the weather. This area is relatively under-activated during the cold weather because few people will sit on the planters. It doesn’t have any residential frontage, which means that there aren’t direct sightlines to this area for community surveillance. Furthermore, what used to be an open walkway from O’Day Park down to Plaza Betances is now blocked by gates on either side of the Brookline Path. This creates a perception of separation between the path and points north and south. Furthermore, it is bordered by street edges on the east and west. Drivers will sometimes take the road curves at faster than recommended speeds because they have little traffic. Traffic calming measures would help in this case, such as crosswalks. Both sides of the walkway are at the curve point of the two U-shaped roads within the development,
so visibility is low. However residents wouldn’t want to open the walkway to vehicles because they feel that would cause accidents between pedestrians and vehicles. In fact, that is the primary reason that the streets are designed that way. At the time that John Sharratt was working on the design of the development a little girl was run-over on Brookline Street. The U-shaped road was a preventative measure.⁵
This area is just south of Plaza Betances. The original design of this site was similar to the Pole Path with a mix of concrete sidewalks, mulch and trees. It was changed with the renovation of Plaza Betances. It was modified to match the aesthetic changes of the Plaza. Children play by the elevated flowerbeds and residents who live near the path use this area. It measures 140 ft. by 30 ft. Some of the Latino residents will take their lawn chairs out and socialize. But the group that has taken over the northwest corner of the path is the Asian community. Other residents acknowledged that Asian families would play badminton with each other, especially during the summer months. As a result, this is a designated Asian intra-community zone. During the workshops all groups acknowledged it as a gathering space for the Asian community for playing games.
5.1.H: Gated Sidewalks

The gated sidewalks area is very similar to the courtyard park in that it is meant as an open space primarily for the people living within it. The area provides a safe place for children that live within this enclosed space to play. The gates however were not part of the original development. They were added in the 1990s as a safety precaution at the behest of the residents who felt that gang and drug related violence was escalating. There are two of them. The first one goes from Pole Path to Brookline Path and the second goes from Brookline Path to Betances Path. This is a 170 ft. by 40 ft. linear flexible area. Children will either ride their bikes or play between the gated area and their front yard. The children who live within this area will play together. A non-resident or someone not living within the gated area would have little need to go there unless they want to cut through. The original design did not have fences because the intent of the design was to create a pedestrian spine between O’Day Park and Plaza Betances. However with the addition of the gates, these walkways are obstructed. This again is a quasi inter-community zone because it provides a space, like the courtyard park, for area neighbors to engage and build community across groups. However it is quite secluded and too small to be a gathering space for multiple community groups. As a result, it wouldn’t be considered an inter-community zone for the whole development.
5.1.1: Unity Garden

During the site observation period the Unity Garden located on the corner of W. Dedham and Shawmut Streets was closed. This is a gated area with a lock. However through the fence I was still able to identify different types of use. It is about 70 ft. by 70 ft. large. There are 2 columns and 6 rows of allotments. During the observation period, which was winter there was no activity. However, the hints of use were the gardening tools stored in shelves above the allotments. There were also planters on the western corner of the garden, which had dried plants in them. At the time of observation the garden looked like it hadn't been used in a while even though you saw elements of previous use.

All resident groups interviewed acknowledged that the garden was predominately used by the Asian community for as long as they could remember, which for some is over 10 years. As a result, the residents didn't indicate that the Unity garden had ever been a contested area that had undergone a transition from one group to the Asian community. This is that community's intra-community zone, much like the Betances Path is another Asian intra-community zone. This does not mean that all Asian residents garden, but rather there is a spatial identity for the community from which to draw upon to create a perception of belonging. It is a strategy for making Villa Victoria their home. In this place I recommend increasing its year around usability so that the Asian community isn't limited in the use of their space.
Figure 5.38: Map highlighting the Youth Garden.

5.1.J: Youth Garden

The Youth Garden fronts West Dedham Street, which is an active portion of Villa Victoria by residents and non-residents alike, but adds little to the overall attractiveness of the development. In this most recent iteration of this space, it has four flowerbeds surrounded by trees and a wooden representation of the Puerto Rican flag. This is all behind a fence, measuring 40 ft. by 60 ft. The first time the researcher attempted to enter the garden she walked down the adjacent sidewalk, down the stairs and back up another set of stairs. It wasn't until the second time that she noticed that there was an opening in the gate that once unlocked allowed access. How many other people miss this? It would help to see this during the summer to see if it is activated more than when it was observed.
However in the summer of 2012, when the researcher was on-site, it was also under-utilized. Creating opportunities to activate this location without warranting extra maintenance work help increase the value and utility of this site.

Although this has been referred to as the Youth Garden none of the individuals interviewed in the workshops pointed to this location as an intra-community zone for the youth. This could very well be an example of a failed attempt to build an intra-community space for the youth because any youth programming seems to be sporadic and inorganic. Based on this condition and its current isolated design, it is a designated inter-community zone because it is unclaimed and with some modifications could become a gathering space for a diverse set of residents in an intimate and easily accessible location. In fact, right across the street is the Unity Tower, which is home to elderly and disabled residents. It would be nice to provide seating area within close range of their domiciles. By eliminating the current fence, adding benches and incorporating a gated barrier in the back (it would prevent children from falling) it would instantly make it more welcoming. Furthermore, it could become an inter-community zone with non-residents as well because it is located next to a restaurant on West Dedham Street, which has high pedestrian and vehicular usage. Plaza Betances is so strongly connected to the Puerto Rican community that it detracts other people from frequenting it, but by having this right across the street without the same spatial stigma would allow for more people to use it.

Figure 5.39: Image of Youth Garden. Photo by Jenny Larios Berlin

Figure 5.40: Image of Youth Garden. Photo by Jenny Larios Berlin
Figure 5.43: Looking SW toward Plaza Betances. Photo by Jenny Larios Berlin

Figure 5.44: Image of the original Betances Plaza. Photo by Jenny Larios Berlin

Figure 5.41: Map highlighting Plaza Betances.

5.1.K: Plaza Betances

Plaza Betances is named after Ramon Emeterio Betances, an icon in Puerto Rico’s history. He is an example to Puerto Ricans as a defender of the poor and a fighter for Puerto Rico’s independence, thus garnering him the title of “El Padre de la Patria” (Father of the Puerto Rican Nation). The founders of Villa Victoria were very intentional in their naming choice for the Plaza. They felt the name both paid homage to their homeland, while also resonating with their struggle to have Villa Victoria. This is an example of a Puerto Rican community on the mainland asserting its cultural and political nationalism, as Ana Y. Ramos-Zayas discusses in her research. Figure 5.44 shows an image of the original design of the plaza measuring 90 ft. by 160 ft., which was remodeled in 2008. Its original design was heavily inspired by the central meeting place of small towns in Puerto Rico. According to John Sharratt, while visiting Aguadilla, he noticed how the town’s plaza was its focal point and the location for a range of activities, including commerce, socializing and community events. This design focused on flexible gathering spaces with
informal and formal seating structures and multiple tree plantings to provide shaded areas for the seating. The original design also had a pedestrian focus. Although there was a ring road around the plaza, 3 of the 4 sides were cobblestone material thus passively implying that the road had a low speed limit and was primarily meant for pedestrian use.  

Since the renovations, however the private road surrounding the plaza is asphalt to match the material on West Dedham Street, the bordering road on the northern side of the Plaza. It is 70 ft. by 150 ft. in size. It is rectangular in shape. It is marked by patterned stonework. In one section of the plaza there are concentric circles of different thickness, which are demarcated by stone colors like burgundy, yellow and dark brown. There are four elevated landscaped green sections. Black metal immovable chairs dot the interior sides of the greenery. On the east and west edges of the plaza are two tables with two chairs each. The new design has reduced the amount of seating spaces. Also, there are fewer trees for shade. Today, it has a bare and relatively flexible open space.

During the observation period from 2 to 2:30pm, three people crisscrossed the area. Even though it is a shortcut from one corner to the next few people used it. There was more foot traffic in the other paths than the Plaza.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>COMMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 2:00pm | • African American male walks from NE corner of the plaza to SW  
|       | • Women walks from NW corner of the plaza to SE |
| 2:01pm | African American male walks from NW corner of the plaza to SW |

Figure 5.45: Social behavior observations for Plaza Betances.

Plaza Betances was officially re-opened in 2008 after it was completely renovated. Public safety officials told *Boston Globe* reporter, Justin Rice, that the Plaza was marked with drug dealing, open loitering and drinking. The original design felt maze-like, thus making it difficult to monitor illicit activities or homeless people spending the night. This is what another writer had to say about the original design: “The original Plaza Betances, with its tall trees, concrete nooks with games tables and tucked away benches, was designed 40 years ago [from 2008] …” Part of the redesign was due to normal wear and tear. In 2006 work started to address the “disrepair-broken concrete and loose bricks [that] dotted the landscape.” In contrast the new plaza is much more open with fewer shaded seating areas. Some of the rationale for making it more open was due to safety concerns regarding
activity in the ‘tucked away benches’. However in making it safer and more open the adverse result is that its user groups’ needs feel ignored. One resident said, “It doesn’t quite meet all of our needs,” adding that residents were frustrated “by the lack of shade in the new plaza and the lack of places for people to sit facing one another.” According to a 2008 Boston Globe article about the renovation, residents were displeased. A resident recalled how the older design would have people playing dominoes under the trees and impromptu meetings or performances on the staging area (refer to figure 5.46). These of course are all concerns that could have been brought up in the design process had the residents felt more involved, which was not the case in this instance according to certain residents. As a result, although it is considered the heart of Villa Victoria and prominently displays part of Puerto Rican history in Boston, it isn’t fully embraced. For Sharratt, when asked about his thoughts on the redevelopment of the Plaza he asked what the residents had to say about it. He feels that community input is an important factor in successful design and concluded that their distaste is indicative of a failure to meet resident expectations. Even though the Puerto Rican community may prefer the older design it still patronizes the current design. According to other racial groups in the community they recognize it as the heart of the development as well as the Puerto Rican center of the community. This is why it is not an inter-community zone. It is too closely linked to the Puerto Rican community. In fact it is the designated intra-community zone for the Puerto Rican community. It is really only patronized by other groups when there are free large-scale community events. Furthermore, it was the only public space depicted as the Latino intra-community zone.
5.1.L: Open Lot

The Open Lot is an un-programmed public space, which is any outdoor location annexed for individual uses (i.e., playing games) even though it may not have been designed or programmed for that purpose. It measures 40 ft. by 60 ft. In the specific context of Villa Victoria, un-programmed public space were areas identified by residents as being used but are usually parking lots. One, such example is the parking lot that has a crate tied to a tree to serve as a basket for basketball. Right next to that is the extension of the surface parking, but during the warm weather on weekends and weeknights, the Asian community uses it to play games, particularly badminton. Based on this feedback from residents, it is a designated intra-community zone.
5.1.M: Graffiti Alley

Graffiti Alley is the colloquial name (it was used by Chinese youth in the workshops) for this thruway located next to the Villa Victoria Center for the Arts and measures 20 ft. by 140 ft. It is occasionally closed; when it is open, people use it as a shortcut between W. Newton Street and Aguadilla Street. The alley itself has a grade separation between the two streets, so it is possible to see the graffiti artwork on either side of the streets. This is considered an un-programmed public space because it is being used for artistic expression even though it has no intended or stated purpose. Much like the other un-programmed public space, individuals have annexed this space for an undesignated activity, and it is also a flexible space, which makes it possible for individuals to repurpose the location. This site was rarely mentioned during the workshops, but when it was, it was described unfavorably. One interviewee said that part of the reason she found W. Newton Street unsafe was, in part, to graffiti alley because it seemed unkempt and gave the impression that illegal behavior may be happening there. Regardless of whether that is true or not, perception is a powerful tool for affecting usage of a public space. In fact because this area is sometimes locked and it is right next to an active cultural center, very little happens there today, but it is difficult to change people's mind from a bad to a good perspective on a place without some initiative. That is what graffiti alley is suffering from, but it doesn't have to remain that way. This is a quasi inter-community zone because it has the potential to attract graffiti artists and turn it into an area of
creative expression between area youth and artists. Additionally this would remove the current stigma that surrounds this place.

5.2: Community mapping results

The maps below are the result of the first half of the community workshops. In the mapping exercises there were three main issues discussed: Villa Victoria’s boundaries (first three maps), the heart of the development (fourth map), and the location of the inter- and intra-community zones (fifth and sixth map). Each map will have a small section describing key points of interest.

Latino Workshop Participants: Villa Victoria Boundary Map

Figure 5.53: Map shows boundary of Villa Victoria according to Latino Workshop participants.

5.2.A: Latino Workshop

The Latino residents in the community came to a consensus on the boundary of Villa Victoria. It is pictured in figure 5.53. Before the workshop participants drew their lines they wanted to talk about
it first, deferring to the elders of the community. This was unlike the other workshops. It shows these residents are very familiar and comfortable with each other and that the session was simply an extension of their regular socializing. Their map is the most compact of all the workshops. It is also the closest to the study area. The elders in the workshop had a high confidence level of the area boundaries, thus feeling a strong sense of affiliation to the spatial boundaries of the neighborhood.

**African American Workshop Participants: Villa Victoria Boundary Map**

![Map](image)

Figure 5.54: Map shows boundary of Villa Victoria according to African American Workshop participants.

**5.2.B: African American Workshop**

The African American workshops had five residents in attendance and of the five, there were three different boundary lines drawn. They are depicted in figure 5.54. Of all the resident groups, they are the only one that selected Blackstone Park and Blackstone school, which are part of the original Parcel 19 development site, but not part of the Villa Victoria residential development. In fact they
were the only group to begrudgingly remark that Blackstone feels like a pet park nowadays, which they consider unsanitary.

Chinese Workshop Participants: Villa Victoria Boundary Map

Figure 5.55: Map shows boundary of Villa Victoria according to Chinese Workshop participants.

5.2.C: Chinese Workshop

The Chinese workshop participants had a much looser definition of Villa Victoria. Many of them were unclear about the question; they knew where their apartment was, but weren’t sure how that related to the larger Villa Victoria. They did not have a sense that Villa Victoria was its own entity.
or somehow different from everything else. The boundary renditions made by the participants are depicted in figure 5.55. If the basemap had had more of a zoom out view it is the belief of the researcher that the residents may have encircled Chinatown because many of the residents still go there for their goods and services. As the map is now, it shows that the boundary lines drawn extend toward Chinatown. This indicates a disconnect with the Villa Victoria neighborhood (i.e., the study area).

Workshop Participants: Villa Victoria Boundary & Core Map

Figure 5.56: Map shows boundary of Villa Victoria according to all Workshop participants.

5.2.D: Synthesis of all workshops

This is a representation of all three workshops. The pink line is for the Latino workshop. It is solid colored because there was only one input for the entire group. The other two workshops did not have
consensus therefore they are dashed lines and represent an amalgamation of the different resident inputs. Additionally, this map also identifies the heart of Villa Victoria as Plaza Betances. This is an interesting finding because in selecting this area as both the intra-community zone for the Puerto Rican community as well as the core location for the entire development it shows that the identity of the location is closely tied to the Puerto Rican community. It would be good for residents fearing they are being invaded to know this because it may assuage their fears of feeling unrecognized. Reconciling the two will be covered in the recommendations section of this chapter. There is a way of acknowledging the history that preserves the intra-community space while also serving as the core for all residents.

**Inter- & Intra- Community Zones**

The Diffuse Mosaic City

Figure 5.57: The Diffuse Mosaic City is a visual interpretation of the inter- and intra-community zones. Graphic by Jenny Larios Berlin

Figure 5.58: Map points out the locations best suited for Villa Victoria wide cross-community building and the intra-community zones for the three largest residents groups. Graphic by Jenny Larios Berlin

### 5.2.E: Intra- & Inter- Community Zones

These maps are the spatial manifestation of the Diffuse Mosaic City model. In these maps are the intra-community zones that each group should strive to conserve and develop its own identity, as well as the inter-community zones, which should be used for cross-community building. It is important to note that the African American community uses their front and back yards as their identity space. By inviting a large swath of Villa Victoria residents to a picnic or barbecue, it may spill into the sidewalk thereby becoming a quasi public-private space for developing the African American community. The diffuse and inter-community zones are the locations where the cross-community interventions may be hosted or placed.
5.3: Proposed intervention analysis

After completing the on-site observations various ideas of how to encourage the current usage or re-imagine the location came to mind. These were informed by current community building events nationwide and interviews with community activists. These were presented in the workshops to see how the residents would respond to each. This section has each proposed intervention, clustered by either changes to the physical space or events that could be hosted in the designated intra-community zones for identity reinforcement or inter-community zones for cross-community building.

5.3.A: Urban design or public space interventions

5.3.a.i: Greenhouse Gardening

In the development there is a Unity Garden, which is unused during the winter season. In all three workshops, Latino, Chinese and African American, the general consensus was that the garden is predominately used by Chinese elders. According to the African American workshop participants, the gardens are used to grow vegetables. In the spring, walking through the development it is clear that some residents are preparing their front yard for planting. Gardening could be a year around affair if there was the infrastructure to support it. Creating a greenhouse for the winter months in
the Unity Garden would support gardening activities throughout the year. When this picture was presented to the three workshops there was mixed reception. The Latino community, although intrigued by the idea, was concerned about its implementation. Specifically, they were concerned about whether the residents abutting the garden would accept a greenhouse next door. The African American community was interested in the idea as a way of extending the gardening season for the Chinese community, but none of them said it would be something they would use. They expressed concern over the soil quality. In their opinion it might be a public health concern that should be addressed so that when residents garden they know they are doing so under safe health conditions. The Chinese workshop participants were very supportive of the greenhouse and welcomed the idea of year around gardening, particularly, as an activity for the Chinese elderly population.

An intervention such as this would greatly support the burgeoning Chinese community in Villa Victoria. Public health concerns notwithstanding it is a worthwhile intervention that helps establish the Chinese community’s identity in the public sphere. It is also one that does not come into conflict with any of the other ethnic groups in the neighborhood because no other group in Villa Victoria aligns itself as strongly to gardening. The act of building the greenhouse could serve as a multi-generational community building exercise within the Chinese community in the Villa. This activity would encourage inter-generational community building within one’s ethnic identity thereby facilitating the expansion of social capital. This intervention would help establish the Chinese community’s intra-community zone.
5.3.a.ii: Enhanced Park Seating

The above picture is taken from a section of O'Day Park, where a change in the design of the benches is the proposed intervention. This image clearly shows the benches facing the play equipment in the direction of Villa Victoria. If a child were playing on the swings, the parent would not be able to sit on these benches because they would not be able to see him/her. The benches can only be used for sitting and observing in one direction. The suggested intervention proposes to either eliminate the backs of the benches so people can sit as they please or split the direction the benches face. That is, some can remain with their backs to the swings while a few benches change with their backs to the tot lot. Another modification is to widen the seating space leaving the back in the middle so that people can sit on both sides at the same time. This has the added benefit of increasing sight lines throughout the park to provide more opportunities for the monitoring of the public space. This suggestion was universally welcomed.

There was some feedback on things to consider before moving forward however. For example, some were quick to point out that having a back is more comfortable and would want to conserve that. At the same time, they liked the idea of some benches having their back toward the Villa so
they could see the swings and the rest of the park. Others pointed out that the tot lot is for smaller children, whom require more supervision than children on the swings. Therefore there should be ample seating for parents to watch over the kids playing in the tot lot. These are all considerations to take when approaching the design, but all agreed that the benches as they are now could be better positioned for greater visibility throughout the park.

As William Whyte so succinctly said in *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*: “People tend to sit where there are places to sit.” With an appropriate width and dimension of the bench, there can be a back in the middle but a sitting area wide enough that two persons, on either side of the bench, can be accommodated for. This would greatly increase the amount of people that can sit and enjoy the park, while looking on both sides of the park. High visibility is important because it increases the safety perception of a place. Before one can even begin to build cross-cultural community there has to be a sense of safety. This intervention would be a step in that direction.
5.3.a.iii: Gate Modifications (less and shorter)

The above picture is from the Brookline Street Path looking northeast toward the Plaza Betances. This is looking into one of the gated sidewalks leading to the plaza. The suggested intervention in this case was the reduction in height or removal of the gates. This was a suggested intervention because the gates were added at the time of increased safety concerns in the late 1980s – early 1990s. Now that the safety conditions have improved, offering the residents the option of re-opening the paths was presented for their consideration. There was general consensus that the gates should stay because the residents felt they need to take safety precautions, which, for them, the gates provide.
One of the participants in the African American workshop commented that she lives in one of the two-gated sidewalks. She really likes them because, although she doesn't lock them, she closes them so that her children can play while she watches them from the large window in her living room. She added that once she took her daughters to the Children's Museum and in her rush to depart had not realized that she left the door open. By the time she came home and realized what she had done, she quickly entered her home to see what damage may have occurred. To her relief everything was intact. She feels a large part of the reason why her things were unharmed was because she lives within the gated sidewalk. In the Latino workshop, one of the women participants commented that they are useful in slowing down people running away from illicit behavior. She recounted anecdotes of a time when there used to be illegal activities near or at O'Day Park. When chases occurred through the community, the gates would obstruct the getaway paths. She did not specifically site instances of when this happened or how recently.

Two teenage residents from the Chinese community felt the opposite. They argued that having the gates felt more dangerous because while walking home after sunset, the lighting is either malfunctioning or there is too little by the gates thus making it difficult to see if there are people lurking behind them. Furthermore, they find it irritating when they are going in the direction of the gated sidewalk and find that it is locked. In fact that is part of the reason why the policy has changed. Residents living within the gated sidewalks can close, but not lock them so as to give all residents access. Too frequently the locks had to be replaced because they were tampered with to allow thruway capabilities for pedestrians.

Having the gates creates a symbolic gesture of perceived safety. Although the residents have their reasons for keeping the gates, the community would benefit from modifying the gates it has. It would be impossible to remove them all, and it would not be the right approach because residents are so tied to them. However, the gates maintain a sense of fear. The gates remind residents that they are not safe. As such it is a cyclical argument for keeping them: they are there to keep me safe, if they aren't there I won't be safe. This is not true. The argument for having them so children can play in the sidewalk is the primary reason for recommending shortened gates that would provide for children at play, but would begin to wean residents from a dependence on the gates as a crime deterrent. Also it would minimize concerns of people hiding behind them because of their reduced height. The concern when having omnipresent gates is that the residents become prisoners themselves of a perceived fear and lack of safety. It can also encourage further isolation, which may prove to be unhealthy for improving resident outcomes and social capital development. Villa Victoria would benefit from shorter fences.
Originally considered a benign recommendation, the thought of having picnic facilities with barbeque stations in and around the development ignited a healthy debate among Latino and African American residents. As much as some residents seemed delighted by the idea, there was an equal amount of residents who felt it would encourage loitering and other potentially undesirable activities. One of the residents in the Latino workshop spoke up saying that she wouldn't want it. She then proceeded to describe a story that outlines her concern. Imagine that there is a family, mother and son, having a cookout, and she with her son walk by. What if there is conflict between the two boys that the mothers don't know about? She postulated that having a facility like this could lead to altercations between individuals. Once she said that, the other residents chimed in saying that this could lead to unsafe forms of loitering that could result in violence and criminal activity. I asked if it were nearby, like Blackstone Square would that be a better location. They were amenable to it, but only slightly. Although not as contentious of an issue as it was for the Latino workshop participants, the African America residents echoed similar concerns. They felt that safety and security had improved, if they introduced picnic tables, however, it may retard some of the improvements made.

Other residents however felt that picnic tables would be a good idea. The Chinese residents seemed
amenable to it. They wanted the facilities close to un-programmed open space or a park where younger children could play while the adults socialized. When the researcher spoke to one of the African American residents after the workshop she felt comfortable enough to say that she didn’t necessarily agree with others at the workshop. In fact, she was emphatic about saying that if such facilities existed she would be one of the first to use it all the time and invite all residents to join her. She said that she didn’t want to live in fear. Further, her premise is that security improves when proactive steps are taken to occupy the public spaces and reclaim them for law-abiding neighborhood residents.

There are multiple ways of implementing picnic facilities that can address the concerns of security conscious citizens, while also providing an amenity that residents would like to have. Pop-up Barbeque stations is a way to engage resident groups in an outdoor activity while not introducing a permanent change to the public landscape that could be breeding ground for unwanted loitering. Further study in the summer months of current loitering activities would help determine whether the concerns voiced by some members of the Villa are warranted. A good way to test those concerns is by installing short-term BBQ facilities and observing the type of use, by whom and when to create a complete picture of the benefits and concerns. This would allow IBA to know where is best to place them and for how long. For most if not all of the African American residents they acknowledged that they don’t have a public intra-community zone. In fact when I asked, where does the African American community hang out in the Villa, one of the participants smirked and said, “In their house.” When I asked her to elaborate she said that danger is everywhere so she feels more comfortable being in her backyard or front yard with her friends. This is where they place their intra-community zone. In this way the African American community has a quasi-public/private manner of enjoying the outdoors. That is to say that the residents will have outdoor events in their yards and invite people from the community with which they want to engage. However considering how much BBQs are a community-building event for the African American resident population, providing these facilities would create an opportunity for this group to claim a public identity space connected to an intra-community activity. Where it gets placed will require careful planning so that it becomes the African American community’s identity space in an organic way, much like the gardens are for the Chinese community. Using the Diffuse Mosaic City model and observing the African American community during intra-community building events would inform the placement of BBQ facilities for them.
5.3.a.v: Outdoor Art Exhibit

Community art in the public space can both be an intervention or an event. In this context the approach is to consider it as part of the urban form and the interaction it can attract from resident to artwork and from resident to resident. When participants saw figure 5.62, it received lukewarm reception. Questions about what type of artwork and where it would be placed immediately surfaced. This concern could easily be addressed by using the Diffuse Mosaic City model to see the inter-community zones available. In the Chinese workshop there was little interest. At one point one of the young adults in the workshop quipped that Chinese people don't go out of their way for art. Adding that the focus is academic investment and wealth creation. Parents might appreciate it as an activity for their children, but not something they would patronize. The Latino community was open to it as an activity across age groups. The participants said that the elderly and youth would enjoy it. The African American residents seemed interested in seeing the result but not interacting in the process. The process, participants, and spectators would all need to be carefully choreographed. As it is this intervention does not seem to gather much support or interest.

Although there is literature that supports the development of arts programming for cross-cultural
community building it requires intentional participation for social capital development within and out of the neighborhood. Assessing the resident population, as has been done in their research, finds that the Villa Victoria community does not find great utility in art as a tool for cross-community building. In general the residents did not see an inherent value in art to appreciate it for its process or outcomes. This perception would need to change for art to be a means of cross-community development in the neighborhood this point of inquiry would need further research.

5.3.B: Event Interventions

Unlike urban design interventions, these aren't changes to the public landscape. Instead they are suggested events that would be hosted with the goal of having cross-community interactions. This does not assume that after hosting even one of these events that Villa Victoria will have a multi-ethnic community. It is a multi-ethnic neighborhood with little interaction. The goal of these interventions is to begin to interact in a little more substantive manner than greetings along the road. Ultimately, this will help Villa Victoria reconcile its history with the on-going evolution of its cultural identity. But before we can know what unites everyone the residents must first have an incentive to want to know one another and reap the benefits from those interactions. What follows is a list of recommended items.
5.3.b.i: Food Pocket Festival

The picture above it from the annual Taste of Boston event hosted at the Villa Victoria Center for the Arts. This picture prompted residents to think about a food themed event. Every culture has an ‘on-the-go’ food item, usually marked by a starch exterior and a sweet or savory center. For example in Puerto Rico they have empanadas (fried meat pies), in China they have Baozi or steamed bun (rice flower bread filled with meat or vegetable) and in the African American ‘soul food’ tradition they have hushpuppies (balls of deep fried cornmeal with onion, peppers and garlic). As I explained the concept the workshop participants gave the idea a very positive reception. We referred to it as the Food Pocket Festival. Furthermore, they liked the idea of hosting the event outdoors instead of indoors so that more people would be attracted to the event. What they liked most about this idea is that it gave them a chance to try traditional home cooking from another culture. At this event the goal would be to try as much new food as possible. A way to encourage this is to give participants a passport and for each dish they try, they get a stamp. There are multiple ways of promoting a rich cross-cultural experience. This is just one example.

A resident in the African American workshop used this opportunity to suggest a flea market. She
feels that there are many talented residents in the Villa and that it would be beneficial to have an
opportunity for them to sell their goods. This idea, like the food pocket festival, is worth exploring.
They create an opportunity for sharing items that reflect a culture and an individual’s taste. This
could also serve as an opportunity for building social capital by seeing what skills residents have that
they could use to help each other; for example, tailoring, catering or carpentry.
5.3.b.ii: Family Film Festival

The picture is an example of a film festival, which residents considered as something they could do in Villa Victoria. In fact, this has happened before in Peter’s Park not too far from the Villa. Also at some point IBA did host a film festival by O’Day Park, which was also successful. Upon seeing this picture they quickly reflected on those events and instantly said that it would be great to re-ignite these types of events for the community. Many felt that it was good for children and adults to get out and have fun with family and friends during a warm summer night.

A summer film series would be the best approach to show a variety of films that all resident groups could feel welcomed to attend. It could be a collaborative process of choosing the films. Through community organizing, different resident groups would have an opportunity of ‘hosting’ and inviting other communities to share. In an effort to be inclusive each group would have the opportunity to choose a film. That could be informative as to cultural sensibilities as these resident groups assimilate to American culture by mere virtue of being the United States.
5.3.b.iii: Outdoor Group Exercise

The picture above depicts (figure 5.65) a scene of Tai Chi in New York City. This is an activity that the Villa residents can do outdoors. Although not everyone was in agreement that it should be Tai Chi, many concurred that some outdoor exercise activity would be welcomed. This is particularly true for the elderly. One of the Puerto Rican residents commented that the elderly population has already started doing Tai Chi in the community room. Expanding from there would attract more residents. Some of the Chinese youth said that Tai Chi was too linked to the older generation, which would detract them from doing it, but if it were something more modern (i.e., yoga), then they would be interested. This opens the potential for a wealth of outdoor impromptu physical activities. For example, pop dance party for youth and children, Tai Chi for the older generation (across cultures) and Yoga for all interested.

Events like these require the care of targeted community building. It is impossible to attract all resident groups, but finding commonalities that cross cut culture will make these events successful multi-cultural/ethnic events. This would lend itself well as a series that occurs at different times of day and day of week such that a variety of residents will be able to attend. On this point it is important to note that during the Chinese workshop one of the participants commented that working Chinese adults have little time for extracurricular activities because most of them have two
jobs. Therefore when they are off they are attending to family issues and chores. Finding the period that is family time and incorporating community activities into them, such that family time and community time are one, will allow for cross-cultural community building.
5.3.b.iv: Food Truck Eatery

Food truck themed events can be a great way to get people out of their homes. At the workshop figure 5.67 was presented to suggest events that bring people out to eat in the public space. The reception for this idea was tepid at best. Most people felt that if food trucks were going to be in the area, then they should sell at reduced prices. During the Chinese workshop participants said that dinner is family time and that they shy away from eating out for dinner. They prefer home cooked meals. This is a point of commonality, particularly, between the Puerto Rican and Chinese cultures. As such they weren’t sure when and for what purpose they would want to attend a food truck event.

After speaking with the different workshop participants, the food truck phenomenon isn’t something that the residents are particularly interested in. Each year between late summer and early spring the city hosts the Berklee Beantown Jazz Festival in the South End. A large attraction is the food trucks with their array of Vietnamese, Soul food and Mexican fare. However, it doesn’t seem to provide the same appeal as it does for members of the greater South End neighborhood. This could be a useful complement to another event. For example if the development were to start a regular film festival during the summer, food trucks serving dessert treats might be a welcomed correlated offering.
5.4: Final recommendations

In this section, the implications of the work completed are discussed. Specifically what do the findings suggest as a strategy for Villa Victoria's community building efforts? More broadly, neighborhoods that are in transition will be able to refer to the generalizable recommendations contained herein. Along the way, opportunities for further research will be pointed out.

5.4.A: Villa Victoria Recommendations

The Diffuse Mosaic City holds that inter-community zones are the points of focus for cross-cultural community building. For Villa Victoria, those places are primarily Pole Path and O’Day Park. The interventions that would be most conducive toward creating a cross-community destination in these locations are an urban design intervention like moveable seating furniture and an event intervention, such as a food pocket festival. Incorporating moveable seating furniture draws on Whyte’s research into the social aspects of interactive spaces, and enables a way for residents to customize their space. This increases the sense of personal ownership of an otherwise public space. A food pocket festival is a potluck-type event where participants are encouraged to bring foods representative of their culture that consist of a starchy exterior that encloses a sweet or savory filling (e.g., Spanish empandas, Chinese bao buns, or Jamaica patties). Since most cultures have such a food item in their diet, this would be an inclusive, sharing event.

Establishing Pole Path and O’Day Park as the cross-community building areas will take time and a dedicated effort. For years, O’Day Park, and the adjacent Pole Path, have been clouded with a perception of being unsafe to the point that parents don’t allow their children to play there during warm summer evenings. The interventions suggested are a starting point in reclaiming this space for families. Resident engagement to overcome violence and claim space for the neighborhood’s children can be a powerful unifying theme. To that end, the food pocket festival should occur during the summer when children are on summer vacation. Further, by including the neighborhood’s elders in the event planning, this can bridge a generational divide. It should happen more than once throughout the summer so that all residents have an opportunity to experience the festivities. Other activities to supplement the event could be added such as community public art making and performances from the children's youth program. Identifying which types of activities would best complement the food pocket festival is a suggested area for further study.

The sitting furniture can become part of the area’s landscape during summer days. The seating
furniture, to start, should only be made available during the daylight hours and either stored or locked after sunset because it may be negatively used in the evening, which would be counter-productive toward changing the perception of the area. How they are used and by whom might be a fruitful on-site analysis for continual process improvement of this open space intervention by future researchers.

Reclaiming spaces for cross-community building empowers residents to develop a sense of ownership. Therefore, establishing a set of metrics for measuring the performance of the event (see figure 5.68) and methods for collecting feedback (i.e., surveys and questionnaires) to inform future events on the site should be employed during the food pocket festivals. Collecting this information from residents gives them the opportunity to take part in the decision-making process. This would support the on-going establishment of the area as an inter-community zone. A detailed analysis of the different strategies for imbuing a community group with a sense of ownership is beyond the scope of this present work, but would be instructive because it would further develop an understanding of the basic elements for successful cross-community building. An analysis of this kind, like this thesis, should aim to be interdisciplinary drawing upon geography, landscape architecture, planning, sociology and anthropology. The more that scholars conduct research of urban issues in a crosscutting manner, the greater the potential for generating comprehensive answers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metric</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resident Organizers</td>
<td>Counts all the people that played a role in putting together the event (this includes distributing flyers, entering food, donation of equipment, setting-up event)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizer Demographics</td>
<td>Taking the count of participants and dividing them into different community groups they represent (i.e., an Asian male teenager and a Puerto Rican retiree)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>A count of all the people that attend the event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendee Demographics</td>
<td>Taking the count of attendees and dividing them by different community groups they represent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographic scope</td>
<td>Where is the attendee coming from? Is the person from the Villa, and where in the Villa do they live? Or from outside the Villa, and what neighborhood do they come from?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Interests</td>
<td>Asking event attendees what was their highlight of the event and collecting a matrix of all the responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeat Participant</td>
<td>Understanding if the attendee has been to the event before and/or are they planning to come again</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referral</td>
<td>The manner in which attendees heard about the event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worth recommending</td>
<td>Surveying participants to know if they would recommend the event to others, and why/why not</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5.68: The table outlines suggested event metrics for continual improvement of event delivery.
Another important issue to the Villa Victoria community was the desire to preserve the community’s history. According to the findings, all resident groups agreed that Plaza Betances is the heart of the development. At the same time they also identified it as the intra-community space for the Puerto Rican community. An outdoor exhibition space that recounts the history, located in Plaza Betances, is a magnificent way to educate residents about the founding of the Villa. The Puerto Rican community, by inviting the other groups to their zone to tell them about their particular history, can build an awareness among other ethnicities. The other resident groups may realize that they are now a part of an important place. This, like the food pocket festival, should be an event that happens more than once and during the summer. It could include hallmarks of the Puerto Rican culture such as performances that cover storytelling of Villa Victoria’s founding, musical performances from tenants and traditional dance. To supplement the historical exhibit there could be a semi-permanent commemorative trail, like The Black Heritage Trail in Boston’s historic Beacon Hill District, which was home to many freed slaves and recounts their impact on the abolitionist movement. Similarly, the Villa Victoria Heritage walk would have plaques marking where the leaders of the movement lived, meeting places of importance and other historical markers. The outreach and incentives need to be well planned to encourage non-Puerto Rican residents to attend and participate. Here again, the event should be measured against pre-determined performance metrics to test its effectiveness. The exhibit could be up for weeks at a time, during the summer, with one or two performances (i.e., storytelling or dance) in the evening right after dinner, when families are most prone to go for a walk or let their children play before ending the day.

5.4.3: Generalizable Recommendations

This thesis attempts to provide a holistic picture from which to collect generalizable knowledge of community behavior in open spaces. Neighborhoods can use the Diffuse Mosaic City model to identify their inter- and intra-community zones to help focus the areas on which to deploy a strategy for building cross-cultural community. The findings led to an attributes table of what makes an inter- and intra-community zone. They may already exist in other areas and it is just a matter of recognizing them. Or, it could be that there are certain design features that neighborhoods can refer to when considering how to make a space more universally appealing. The resident outreach process used for this research is another key component that leaders within their community can replicate. Several techniques are described in the methods section, and community organizers can choose which approach best fit the needs of their residents. Testing this approach in other locations would help validate the model. Do other neighborhoods have inter- and intra-community zones? Would interventions on the inter-community zone generate cross-community building? This thesis suggests
that they do exist, and with resident participation to install an intervention in that space, they can be used to build a more inclusive neighborhood identity. The next step in the research is to test this proposed theory some place else.
ENDNOTES


2 Interview with Patricia Belden from Preservation of Affordable Housing (they were the development consultants for the Villa Victoria rehabilitation in the 1990s) on May 17, 2013.

3 Interview with Architect John Sharratt, May 9, 2013.

4 Interview with Architect John Sharratt, May 9, 2013.


6 Interview with Architect John Sharratt, May 9, 2013.


9 Ibid.


11 Interview with Architect John Sharratt, May 9, 2013.

 CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

THE PUBLIC SPACE HAS A VITAL ROLE TO PLAY IN THE HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL CAPITAL, A PRIMARY BENEFIT OF DIVERSITY AND EXTENDED SOCIAL NETWORKS

This chapter will analyze the principal results of this thesis' research and their implications for study of ethnic enclaves undergoing transition. Specifically, what are the major patterns observed, what is the literature that explains the causes, and what does that mean for filling in the gaps regarding community building in transitioning neighborhoods?

The results of this research delve into a social group's perception of space and how that translates into its uses and identity. The mix of social behavior and physical analysis yielded important results. We learned that neighborhood boundaries, even in locations with strong edges distinguished through architectural features, might not be readily obvious to its inhabitants. Ethnic enclaves are not homogeneous but are marked by a dominant ethnic group whose identity is linked to the core landmarks of the area. Not all public spaces are inter- or intra- community zones. That is, the physical analysis found that there is a spectrum amongst them, thus making some public spaces better equipped to support intra- and inter- community building than others. Inter-community zones are spaces un-claimed by a specific group. The reason they are unclaimed is that they are
either marked by a reputation for being unsafe, it has not been programmed in such a way that residents can begin to imagine the potential of an inter-community zone, or the area is used by multiple groups already, but with little to no interaction amongst them. This suggests that within the inter-community zone category there should be a quasi inter-community zone sub-category thus delineating locations by which scale they are best suited for cross-community development (i.e., building, subdivision, neighborhood, etc.). Safety in public space is an incredibly important theme for all users because it prevents users from occupying or fully enjoying the public space. Successful public spaces are flexible in their design, which allows the patrons to appropriate the area for sporting, gaming or socializing activities. Finally, hosting events in the inter-community zones seem to be the preferred method for cross-community building among residents because they feel it would create opportunities for interaction and relationship building. Residents need a pretext for interaction, not just a place, because research has shown it is much easier for residents to separate into their intra-community groups.

6.1: Major patterns of the results

There are multiple patterns worth highlighting in the data. They split into two main categories: place-making and community building.

6.1.A: Place-making: urban design, safety, comfort and flexibility

Safety for Villa Victoria tenants takes on multiple definitions. Residents want a place that is free from drug and gang violence. They also want a place where their children can play freely without fear that they will be harassed. Particularly during the summer, tenants would like to be able to gather in the evenings with the same level of safety that they have during the daylight hours. Security with surveillance cameras and gates frame their perception of safety since residents feel that the area is unsafe and therefore needs such equipment. This is a constant reminder of perceived unsafe conditions, while assuming that these items serve to make the area safer. Eliminating the equipment that serves as a constant reminder of unsafe conditions would serve to improve the feeling of safety. Furthermore, residents have traded their amenities for perceived improvements in safety. For example, the erecting of tall gates throughout the development eliminates the convenience of easy accessibility. Plaza Betances no longer has the seating that so many members of the community spoke fondly about during the workshop because it was thought to have attracted unwanted loitering. The design should endorse the desired amenities to attract residents such that it will detract those engaging in unlawful activities. The results show that residents would use the open spaces more if
there were programmed. This would improve safety perceptions as well because the open spaces would be used for community activities.

Welcoming users into the public space requires that the urban design provide comfort. For the residents this can be accomplished through seating and clear visibility into the public space, but at the same time offering nooks for small group socializing. To that end, another feature of comfortable urban design includes a feeling that the users of the public space are local. This is particularly important for mini-parks and areas designated for neighborhood use, which is the context of this research. All patrons of the open space do not need to know their names, but they should feel like they could greet each other and know that they may see each other in another context as they walk through and around the neighborhood.

Flexibility in design and use of public space was another key theme found in the research. The more flexible it was the greater the use and appropriation of the space. The public space does not need to have equipment that lends itself to a diversity of activity but it should allow the users to imbue it with their own activity. O'Day Park has good and bad examples of this. Some of the furniture and play equipment is quite static; however, the paved section between the Center for the Arts and the playground is open and multi-functional as a result. Many residents pointed out that the teenagers tend to converge in Peter's Park, north of Villa Victoria, because it is large, open and flexible for a variety of activities, whether its socializing in the open spaces or, playing basketball or tennis, all of which are in close proximity. Due to Villa Victoria's dense design, they cannot have a park as large as Peter's Park within the development. However they can attract the youth by taking some initiatives to make the inter-community zones more flexible for the youth to comfortably assemble within the site. The diversity of activity should also translate into a multi-generational public space, where people of all ages can find uses. Cooper Marcus in People Places found that the elderly community near San Francisco's Portsmouth Square Park simply wanted seating near the entrances so they could watch the passersby, while the teenagers wanted a plan where they could talk outside of plain sight. These design elements are not mutually exclusive. The Pole Path and the Brookline Street Path lend themselves well to people watching because they are active thruways within the development. While with appropriate movable furniture in the Pole Path or accentuating the concave seating in the Brookline Street Path the youth might feel more comfortable collecting in those spaces. Another element of flexible design that residents appreciated was the manner in which a place could be appropriated. For the Chinese community an open area can become a badminton court, for the African American community their yards turn into event spaces for eating and socializing and for the Latino community the Plaza can become a domino playing spot. This type of re-purposing of space
does not cause a heavy burden on maintenance and management because it is contingent on the user group. Furthermore this allows the zone to change over time from inter- to intra- or vice versa, depending on the community needs at the time.

6.1.B: Community building: social capital development within and amongst community groups

Preserving a community’s history while embracing its transitioning nature can only be successfully accomplished through community building. Change although feared is also a basic condition of the city. We saw this with the changing demographics of Villa Victoria. However, places have a history. In this case, the Puerto Rican identity is closely tied to Villa Victoria. Therefore, the treatment of the place and its ongoing relevance to the Latino community is of great concern. To learn that all residents concede that there is only one central location to the neighborhood, and that it belongs to the Puerto Rican community is a major signal that, subconsciously or not, non-Puerto Rican residents accept that the neighborhood has that identity. Even if the population continues to dwindle, so long as that space is connected to the Puerto Rican community and they continue to support the area services, regardless of where they live, the identity will remain. Just as the Chinatown-International District in Seattle case study showed, Chinese and Japanese residents came from all areas to this district because it was still a central gathering spot for their community.²

Each workshop generated different boundary maps, and even within the group, there were variations. There are general trends among the workshop participants that speak to their perception of how connected they are to the spatially defined Villa Victoria neighborhood. The more diffuse the definition of Villa Victoria’s boundaries the greater the detachment with the neighborhood. The manner in which the boundaries were decided was contingent on the comfort level residents had amongst each other. For example, this aspect of the mapping exercise was in itself a community building opportunity because the Puerto Rican residents conferred on where to draw the lines. The Puerto Rican community, who because of their role as the dominant group, feel the greatest sense of invasion, produced the most compact definition of the Villa. The African American community, which has maintained a steady presence in the Villa from its inception, was the most aligned to the original Parcel 19 development site. The Chinese community, on the other hand— the fastest growing group and perhaps most detached from the development because many of them still go to Chinatown for goods and services had the loosest definition of Villa Victoria, even though some of them have lived there for over a decade. There was not a sense of attachment to Villa Victoria.
Through the social and physical analysis, the public space could be arranged in a spectrum between inter- and intra-community zones. Figure 6.2 describes the attributes of inter- and intra-community zones. Taking these attributes, figure 6.3 places all the identified public spaces in Villa Victoria and places them along the spectrum. It's clear that intra-community groups are binary. A particular public space either is, or is not, an intra-community zone. There are no degrees because the moment a group self-identifies or another group aligns the area to a community group it becomes an intra-community zone. The same location may be an intra-community zone for multiple groups simply because groups may congregate in the same area at different times of day, year, week, etc.

Inter-community zones, on the other hand, vary in the degree to which they are suited for hosting cross-community building events. As a result, the diagram in figure 6.3 shows locations, such as the Gazebo Courtyard and the Courtyard Park, on the quasi inter-community side of the spectrum. They are not well suited for cross-community building for the entire development, but might be wonderful locations for cultivating neighborly behavior amongst the families that abut these locations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inter-Community Zone</th>
<th>Intra-Community Zone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Easy to access</td>
<td>• Can be a private/quasi-public space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Must be a public space</td>
<td>• Community self identifies or others recognize it as a groups congregation space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Different community groups are using the space with little to no interaction</td>
<td>• Other groups have little to no interaction with the space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Area may have a negative reputation (i.e. unsafe perception)</td>
<td>• Enables group specific socializing and activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Small amount of furniture for gatherings to create a sense of space</td>
<td>• Flexible to allow users to adapt their needs to the space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Large enough that it can accommodate various people for events</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Flexible design that it can be easily programmed for events</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6.2: Attributes of Inter- and Intra-Community Zones.
Figure 6.3: Diagram organizing public spaces by Inter-, Quasi Inter-, and Intra-community zones.

During the second half of the workshops when we discussed interventions in the public space many general patterns across groups emerged. Residents felt that events had the greatest likelihood of attendance and participation from the tenants. Events with free food seemed to be the most appreciated. Film festivals were desirable evening summer events for the entire family. In all of these interventions the goal was to build on a common theme that all groups could appreciate so that the event did not seem like hegemony. Residents felt that the interaction should be organic. Most of the residents seemed to coalesce on the following community issues – family, child welfare and safety. These issues can be foundational for developing a Villa Victoria community group.

6.2: The implications from the results

Overall the literature finds that immigrant communities that exist because residents choose to live there rather than feeling like it is an option of last resort display characteristics that support healthy development of cultural identity, social capital and low crime rates among youth. However, if residents have the perception of the ethnic enclave as a ghetto from which they cannot escape, then it becomes a place of dis-engagement and ripe for downward assimilation. Portes and Rumbaut looked
at this phenomenon, and how it related to immigrant youth in U.S. neighborhoods as they face the challenges of social peer pressure. They found that without a strong support network it was easier for youth to succumb to downward assimilation, such as dropping out of school, joining gangs, or participating in the drug subculture. An example of this is the founding of Mara Salvatrucha, which has its roots in Los Angeles and was founded so that Salvadoran youth could protect themselves against bullying from other groups in their neighborhood. This thesis does not focus on youth gang violence and all that that entails. The purpose of this example is to show how the U.S. neighborhood context of bullying lead to the downward assimilation of the youth that founded Mara Salvatrucha. To avoid the perception of being ghettoized and the negative ramifications that it implies suggests that the recommendations of place-making and community building be heeded because these can lead to successful outcomes for the betterment of individuals and the overall social fabric in urban areas. Furthermore, it asserts that Villa Victoria is not an option of last resort, but a stepping-stone toward opportunity.

In Gieryn's 2000 review of the literature covering sociology and place-making, he argued that there is a wealth of research that explores the interaction between them, but have been rarely noted as such because they simply are not positioned that way. However, based on his findings there is an underlying model for place-making: geographic location, material form, and investment with meaning and value. These three elements provide a good foundation for explaining the place-making and community building trends found in the data and discussed in the previous section. First, the place must be a geographic location that can be seen, accessed and used. Second, material form is the “stuff” in the geographic location that provides the “physical guts” of the site. Third, investment with meaning and value refers to the label of the place that is given by one group, but must be recognized by others. The identification of the place may be linked to the cognitive and emotional connections affiliated with the location and material forms of the place. Of these three elements, the third is most labile because a place’s meaning is dependent on the groups connected to it, which, as shown in this thesis, can change over time. Gieryn’s framework provides a model for explaining why the zones identified in Villa Victoria fulfill important roles for the communities living there.

In Aguilar-San Juan’s study of Vietnamese communities, he described material form as the architectural design, the layout of a neighborhood, street signage, monuments and public art. Similarly, Villa Victoria’s founders imbued the neighborhood with strong cultural symbols in its material form. For example, the pitched pastel colored roofs of the Villa Victoria casitas are modeled after Puerto Rican architecture, the Plaza Betances design is based on rural town neighborhood layout and street names, such as San Juan and Aguadilla Streets reflect important locations in Puerto Rico. However, each group has a space that they can attribute meaning and at the behest of the users
add their own material form. Although not specifically covered in "A Space for Place in Sociology," material form can be temporary in nature. As a result, non-Puerto Rican residents can create "a place" for themselves through impermanent material form, such as outdoor furniture, collapsible play equipment or landscape modifications to the gardens.

The need for place relates to the importance of community identity. The Little Saigon's, Chinatowns, and Little Italy's in cities nationwide (e.g., Boston and New York) all speak to a group's need for cultural identity. Providing these places speaks to immigrant communities' rejection of assimilation. Scholars considering the great immigration during the 1920s found assimilation inevitable. In 1926, Park summarized the immigrant-adaptation and race-relations cycle of "contacts, competition, accommodation, and eventual assimilation." However contemporary literature is looking at how a lack of assimilation and acculturation is supporting the development of social networks and institutionalized forms of collective action that help overcome the costs associated with immigration and minority status. This could perhaps explain why Asian minority groups are gravitating toward Villa Victoria, a community founded by immigrants with systems to support them in an environment that is clean, close to Chinatown and reasonably priced. Perhaps there is something to be said for ethnic enclave commonalities among immigrant neighborhoods (i.e., support structure, respect for cultural identity, and commensurate minority status). Also, by Villa Victoria having two main immigrant groups they enrich and help each other through a measured acculturation process, which supports healthy diversity among groups. As the ecological hypothesis suggests, there is an inverse relationship between segregation and socioeconomic achievement among minority groups. This would seem to contradict the literature supporting immigrant concentrated communities, but both can be reconciled as my research shows healthy communities need space for both.

The home base for a community group may not be where they live, but could be an area that is close to their residence. This reflects the settlement pattern of immigrants looking for reasonable housing in close proximity to their affinity group. In the case of the Asian community in Villa Victoria, they are only about one mile away from Chinatown. This could explain why their boundary map was less defined and skewed toward Chinatown. A group's desire for intra-community development builds a stronger social capital and civil society (see research by Jimmy M. Sanders, Alejandro Portes, Robert Putnam). However it doesn't end there because the United States is a mosaic of different groups that are together in one country and, following the metaphor, have the capacity to create an image that is reflective of equal rights and equal access by fostering diversity that builds the social welfare of all. Maintaining segregation will not get us there. Building on the common threads that can become self-evident through cross-cultural interaction will lead to organic and self-sustaining diversity, hence the
Diffuse Mosaic City. Interaction spaces and their programming create opportunities for community building, which will slowly affect the perception and stereotypes that groups hold about each other.\textsuperscript{15}

The demographic transition of the neighborhood is due in large part to the reduction of immigration from the Puerto Rican community, while the Chinese community is the second largest group to immigrate to Massachusetts.\textsuperscript{16} Furthermore, 38\% of the Chinese immigrant population in Massachusetts is in Boston.\textsuperscript{17} As of 2008, Puerto Rican citizens in Massachusetts were split between Springfield and Boston, with a 15\% greater portion of residents living in Springfield.\textsuperscript{18} This implies that the current arrival city for Puerto Ricans is Springfield. Villa Victoria, as a result, becomes less relevant as an arrival location for Puerto Ricans. The situation can be summarized with Conzen’s assessment about immigrant neighborhoods:

The existence of residential concentration can shape ethnic identity but ethnic identity cannot predict continued residential concentration. Under twentieth-century conditions, even a structured ethnic community can maintain close patterns of interaction without residential concentration... Residential concentration thus becomes only secondary variables in predicting ethnic consciousness.\textsuperscript{19}

Based on the above quote and my research, the ongoing perpetuation of Villa Victoria’s Puerto Rican identity depends on the network it forges to the greater Puerto Rican community. Maintaining a relationship that brings community members back for social or cultural reasons to the intra-community zone, also the core of the neighborhood, will support the network development. Villa Victoria’s long-term success will be in addressing the invasion-succession model that explains the transition and using compromise to embrace the new growing community in the area to strengthen the Puerto Rican core within the development. This means that supporting and embracing the Chinese community can also serve to empower the Puerto Rican component because they can extend their history through this new resident cohort. This is why the thesis recommends historical programming at the Puerto Rican intra-community zone, which is also the core of the development.

What Villa Victoria needs to avoid is a scenario of superficial diversity with concealed antagonism. Multi-ethnic neighborhoods run this risk because residents are all living within close quarters, so from the outside it would imply a diverse place. However, internally a hierarchy of groups arises, which leads to jealousy over the treatment of one group over another. A resident in the African American workshop commented on this very point, when she said that she felt uncomfortable going into the Community Room when the Puerto Rican residents were there because she did not feel welcomed. The Chinese residents are the silent growing minority, simply keeping to themselves with limited interaction with the other groups. While passing out flyers for the workshop the
researcher had an informal conversation with an elderly Puerto Rican male. While we spoke about the workshop he insinuated that the person running the computer center, who happens to be African American, is racist and doesn’t welcome the Puerto Rican community to the center, while being preferential toward the African American community. Whether it is true or not is not in the scope of this thesis, but it highlights how perception can affect stereotypes and the social cohesion of Villa Victoria. This alludes to a concern over intra-community building, feeling that it is the manifestation of discrimination or racism. However, with a transparent strategy that acknowledges the Diffuse Mosaic City and the need for intra- and inter-community building these issues can be avoided, and the opportunities for cross-community building become richer because there is not a feeling of animosity for the intra-community initiatives. It is not easy to open the lines of conversation to foster a truly diverse community, but not doing so only leaves a disengaged and potentially disenfranchised neighborhood population. Unfortunately, some Villa Victoria residents seem to be displaying antagonism. To turn this tide requires resident engagement for inter-community building.

Research shows that neighborhoods with immigrant concentrations have a negative correlation with adolescent violence. Desmond and Kubrin make that assertion in their paper “The Power of Place: Immigrant Communities and Adolescent Violence.” They use Chiswick and Miller’s definition of immigrant concentration as “the tendency of immigrants to concentrate geographically by ethnicity or country of origin within the host country.” In it, they surmise that:

Immigrant communities can buffer residents and youth from adopting deviant lifestyles in urban communities that are linked to larger structural conditions of disadvantage and discrimination. More importantly, a common ethnic subculture helps to generate social ties among residents, which is a critical factor in the relationship between neighborhoods and crime.

Their research looked at the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health to examine this relationship within the Latino, Asian and foreign-born subgroups. The desire for a safe and secure community is common to all resident groups interviewed in the workshops. This paper shows how intra-community building is essential for youth. By doing so successful inter-community building can occur because all resident groups have a healthy foundation from where to build a diverse community. Dispelling the stereotype that immigrant communities are unsafe, and instead focusing on their potential for improving outcomes for the youth, could be that unifying thread upon which to build a cohesive cross-cultural Villa Victoria community. Instead of keeping the youth apart, as was suggested by one resident when she recounted her reason for not wanting picnic facilities, the focus instead should be on what the community can do to build the social capital needed to encourage the safe and healthy development of their youth. Leveraging on the concentration of the
different groups in Villa Victoria and then focusing on the youth as a common cause would greatly support community cohesion. By keeping them apart the underlying issues that provoke the division are not being addressed and perhaps even perpetuated because a safe inter-group space is not being created.

There are multiple ways to leverage the inter-community zone for cross-community building. Among the successful strategies discussed is community art. The residents did not seem overly interested because the impression was that it was merely a nice activity for the youth; they did not see a greater value to it. One resident said that Chinese adults are not interested because the perception is that art doesn't make any money. For other residents there was a general intimidation because, based on their perception of art (i.e. painting, mural, or singing), they felt ill equipped to use artistic means for cross-community communication. However, when a resident from the African American session suggested a flea market, noting that many residents have creative skills that they could use to sell items, the session participants did not recognize the connection between this and artistic expression. Perhaps it is a matter of how art is introduced to the adults that will yield greater adoption because it can foster community and help open conversations that may otherwise not occur, thus helping to dispel harmful stereotypes. The type of art generated can have a significant impact on its capability to build bridges across cultures. The network building capabilities provide tangential benefits such as improved access to resources and networks that can increase the positive outcomes of low-income community members.

According to Robert Putnam social capital is defined as the elements of a social organization, such as its networks, "norms" and trust that supports their coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit. Successful development of social capital puts organizations in a stronger position to confront poverty and vulnerability, resolve disputes, and take advantage of new opportunities. For Villa Victoria the greatest potential for successful cross-community development is its youth. The minority youth face multiple challenges, such as peer pressure. Having strong and positive social capital may deter them from downward assimilation and instead encourage the adoption of activities and behavior that will produce positive outcomes. Art can be that outlet to start the discovery process.

Art is a malleable tool that responds to the community needs. It can affect spectators just as much as the artists. This is important because not all residents will be part of any project, but they may interact with all projects, with the right placement. The National Housing Institute's article from 2000 clearly states that: "Community development organizations now recognize that art and cultural
activities can be useful tools toward building a community’s identity, meaning and spirit.\textsuperscript{18} The arts in all forms can support cross-community building and attract commerce. Neighborhood-focused art can fulfill various goals for community development that addresses people, money, and place. For example, the Boston-based organization, Artists for Humanity aims “to bridge economic, racial and social divisions by providing under-resourced youth with the keys to self-sufficiency through paid employment in the arts.”\textsuperscript{25} The youth learn skills like entrepreneurship, marketing and sales, while keeping them engaged and off the streets where they could get caught up in less constructive activities. It is for these benefits that more organizations are turning to arts programming.

A case study of the impact of art to revitalize a community is Project Row Houses in Houston Texas, started by artist Rick Lowe. The mutual commitment from the artist and the community has led to the improvement of not only the space but also the neighborhood members. Their success is based on the principle that art, and the community it creates, can be the foundation for revitalizing depressed inner-city neighborhoods. This principle is in part based on the philosophy of German artist Joseph Beuys (1921 – 1986) who coined the phrase “social sculpture,” which transformed the idea of sculpture as an art form into a social activity.\textsuperscript{26} In their work they have been able to execute strategies for place-making that renew the commitments of residents to their neighborhood, and in doing so create a sense of ownership and belonging. This area however is predominately African American. How can these positive benefits be realized in a multi-cultural and racial neighborhood like Villa Victoria? Luckily, the area has a community development organization, IBA. Their potential to create cross-community interaction cannot be understated. However to do this will require some change that may irritate the Puerto Rican community because it could easily be perceived as leaving behind the original founders in favor of the new group. This is where community organizing, resident involvement and transparency is key. If the Puerto Rican community understood that this was actually a strategy to combat their very fears, while at the same time moving Villa Victoria toward a more inclusive and supportive community, then they might be welcoming of initiatives that supported the intra- and inter- community building of the multiple groups living in Villa Victoria. For Villa Victoria to build a representative voice of the community, IBA has to spearhead and support these transformational suggestions. They will need organizers reflective of the multi-ethnic resident population.

There are several art strategies that can be used to engage individuals cross culturally. Barnaby Evans, founder of Waterfire in Providence, RI used the uncovered Providence River that runs through the city to ignite the citizens’ imagination about how the city can itself become a work of art. In an interview with Mr. Evans, he claimed that Waterfire is successful because it can reach people of all ages and types. His answer is something that applies to all art that aspires to transcend social
divisions. The art must be clear in action, but open to a variety of non-judgmental interpretations. The internalization makes the art universal and because it is not trying to outwardly express a particular point of view, it allows all the users to comfortably vocalize their experience knowing that it is just as valid as anyone else's. This allows all users to bond in the experience without necessarily sharing the interpretation. Mr. Evans added that another alternative is to create art that is so outlandish that people bond in their collective amusement at the absurdity of the event. One such example is a one-man band playing guitar, harmonica, drums, and et cetera, all while standing upright. It is a sight that all people would find pleasing and in that moment create a shared experience among the viewers from which to draw a sense of commonality. Focusing on the points that unite versus those that divide will help determine the interventions necessary for Villa Victoria to create a stronger citizen coalition to meet the demands of creating a safer and desirable community environment.

Through architecture and urban design it is possible to create a canvas, which residents will want to maintain and support because of their participation or connection to its production. There will be a sense of investment in the material that is produced. On this point, having an on-going program that produces short-term interventions will encourage participation over time. What happens with permanent artwork is that the original developers leave. However, if the art is continually replaced, while also producing a catalogue of the previous work created, it is possible to have a mix of the old and new. This keeps the previous art producers engaged and also helps to attract new participants. The adoption of arts programming by the community, in collaboration with IBA, can also be an on-going beautification initiative. William Whyte in The Social Life of Small Urban Space echoes this view, where he claims that by making a space that is so attractive to legitimate users it will encourage undesirables to move on. By consequence, it will also discourage illegal activity.

The report Leveraging Assets: How Small Budget Arts Activities Benefits Neighborhoods explored the various benefits of arts for a community. The range of benefits is summarized in figure 6.4. Of the items covered in figure 6.4, special attention should be given to items #8, #19 and #20, Arts activities help address local problems by providing space for cross-cultural dialogue, Arts activities create a bridge between American culture, immigrant culture and homeland cultures, and Arts activities enable a sense of belonging to a neighborhood by providing a structure for meaningful social interaction, respectively. Through public space interventions and urban design improvements Villa Victoria residents can achieve social cohesion for the well-being and stability of the neighborhood.
FIGURE 6.4: Table shows all the important benefits of arts programming for community development. Source: Leveraging Assets: How Small Budget Arts Activities Benefit Neighborhoods

6.3: Concluding remarks

The Diffuse Mosaic City is a model for understanding the public space that identifies community-building opportunities in neighborhoods undergoing a cultural transition. This model employs spatial and social analysis of a community to understand where and how various groups intersect each other. The making and remaking of public space thus becomes a tool for community building in transitioning neighborhoods by leveraging the existing inter- and intra-community zones.

Invasion-Succession theory, a classical sociological model of neighborhood change, states that as a new group enters the area, competition between the existing and entering groups will result. If the
groups are unable to agree on a compromise, then the new group will take over (i.e., succession) or the existing group will prevail and thus halt the invasion. The Diffuse Mosaic City model has argued that through strategic use of public space for community building a compromise between conservation of the historic group and acceptance and incorporation of new groups may be reached, thus preventing the succession of a new group at the expense of the historic group.

Villa Victoria has been a useful case study for this research because its founding Puerto Rican community is reacting to the change in demographics brought on by recent waves of Asian immigrants. Many of the Puerto Rican residents wonder how they can maintain their rich history while embracing the changes. To understand the manifestation of neighborhood change in Villa Victoria, workshops were hosted for the Latino, African American and Asian communities. These workshops encouraged residents to think critically about their neighborhood, and specifically helped them evaluate how the neighborhood’s public spaces are being used. Their feedback was cross-referenced against a spatial analysis to select the inter- and intra-community zones. As the research in this thesis suggests, community groups need a zone that reinforces their group identity. At the same time, there are communal areas that embrace a multi-ethnic tone, which can be used to create a place-based identity that binds multiple resident groups. In Villa Victoria, these inter- and intra-community zones were identified, and this thesis found methods to maximize their utility for achieving neighborhood cohesion.

The Diffuse Mosaic City model has a function beyond Villa Victoria because it offers a starting point to approach building social capital across class and demographic divides. For Villa Victoria, greater social capital across resident groups means that they could develop a stronger civic presence. Community leaders whose neighborhoods are experiencing transition can use the Diffuse Mosaic City model to ease tensions in contested areas by implementing specific programming initiatives. With greater sensitivity to the issue of neighborhood change and mechanisms for supporting cross-group dialogue, the goal should be to build truly diverse communities.
ENDNOTES

5 Salvatrucha/o is an informal term describing an individual from El Salvador. Mara Salvatrucha (translated: Salvadoran Gang), also know as MS-13, is the name of a transnational gang organization started by Salvadoran immigrants in Los Angeles.
8 Ibid, pg. 465.
22 Robert D. Putnam, “The Prosperous Community: Social Capital and Public Life,” The American Prospect,
27 Barnaby Evans interview February 23, 2013.
APPENDIX I: COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Intended audience: Individuals interested in community oriented research.

Purpose: Describe in detail the process that I took to engage the neighborhood, design the workshop, recruit support, schedule, and host the community workshops in Villa Victoria.

Goal: That you, the reader, will have a better understanding of the time, energy, and flexibility needed to successfully work with a community.

Part I: Initial Community Engagement
I have been involved with Villa Victoria since early 2012, when I did my mid-term paper for Introduction to Urban Design and Development at MIT. The assignment was to select a place and do an urban design analysis of the site. As a first generation Latina, I wanted to know more about Latino communities. So I thought I would start with the ones within the vicinity. But I wasn’t sure where they were. When I would visit friends in the South End, I noticed a place with different looking architecture that reminded me of Spanish influenced stucco and Latin American pastels; my professor said that it was Villa Victoria. That’s when my relationship with Villa Victoria started.

While doing my research I went to visit the IBA offices to see if I could interview anyone that could help me learn more about the community. To my surprise, even though I went to the office unannounced, the executive assistant welcomed me and scheduled me to meet with the CEO. The friendly nature of the staff was instantly disarming. Furthermore, as I learned about the history of the neighborhood’s founding, I became very inspired by the capacity of a Latino community to band together for the preservation of home and culture.

After finishing my mid-term paper I proposed a documentary project to the CEO, to tell the story for other Latino’s to hear and learn about the power of grassroots mobilization. To kick-off the documentary project, I hosted a time-line workshop where participants could recount the stories they know about the neighborhoods’ establishment. During the summer of 2012 I filmed additional material for the documentary. For example, I collected footage of the Betances Festival, the annual Puerto Rican community festival that started in 1968 to commemorate the establishment of Villa Victoria.
It was during this time that I noticed other ethnic and racial groups populated the area. It seemed that the non-Puerto Rican groups were a silent minority. During informal conversations with Puerto Rican residents they would often talk about community dis-engagement and loss of heritage. These observations helped me formulate my thesis proposal. Before I started, I spoke with IBA's CEO because I was curious to know if this research was of interest for the community work they are doing. Luckily it was, and she gave me the approval to proceed. With her blessing I went about designing my qualitative research approach.

Key takeaways here: It pays to build relationships early. Build your research on the needs of the community. Every interaction with residents or community leadership is a learning opportunity.

Part II: Designing the Workshops
I started by putting together a basic outline of what I wanted to know or thought might be helpful to know around boundaries, gathering spaces, desired design features, etcetera. I used my thesis proposal to focus the topics I wanted to cover in the workshops. Once I had a draft I began the editing process with my advisor, who has extensive qualitative methods experience having worked with affordable housing developments. After several iterations I was able to have a full agenda complete with visuals and hand-outs.

Other things I considered when designing the workshop were resident appreciation, managing expectation, language issues and creating resident comfort for an open and honest conversation. I decided to have three different language specific workshops. I reasoned that people felt more comfortable speaking in their native language, and doing so would almost guarantee having all the major populations represented (i.e., English – Africa American, Spanish – Puerto Rican and Cantonese – Chinese). To show resident appreciation my advisor suggested a gift. After thinking about it I settled on a picture of the neighborhood. Another professor who focuses on reflective learning told me about a workshop he hosted where he invited an artist to produce a work of art based on the experience. Inspired by that recommendation I thought it would be nice to do the same. In designing the workshop I attempted to figure out how to incorporate this part. However, because the suggestion was late into the workshop design process it was tagged on, with little modifications. As a result, it was not accounted for as well as it could have been. I also planned to provide a meal. As for managing expectation, I planned to explain to residents the intention of the research (to gather information to provide to IBA, but what they would do with the information was out of my hands).
Key takeaways here: Start designing the workshops early. Find an experienced advocate to guide your process. Last minute modifications should either be fully realized or not added at all.

Part III: Recruiting Support
For all of the workshops I needed an artist and a second pair of hands to help support my facilitating. From other work, I had met an artist interested in community art. Leveraging that relationship I was able to get his participation at all three workshops. For the Spanish session, besides the artist, I was able to connect with another graduate student (she is Puerto Rican, from the island) working with Villa Victoria. During this session I had two people, but that was not the case for the English workshop. Unfortunately the graduate student that had helped me was not available so it was just the invited artist and myself. There were fewer people (five) for the English (i.e., African American) workshop, so it was more than manageable.

For the Chinese workshop I needed to recruit a translator. The process for obtaining one was a bit of an ordeal. In speaking with some of the residents I learned that most Chinese spoke Cantonese. Having been in China I learned that Cantonese is vastly different from Mandarin, and would therefore need a Cantonese-speaking translator. At first I reached out to a local Asian activist to see if she would be interested in being a part of the workshop. At first she was, but she wanted to do more with them than I had planned, so to keep things focused I had to seek someone else. Then, I connected with individuals that I knew were doing community work in Boston's Chinatown to get their recommendations. I got the contact for a couple of translators, who never called me back. Then another friend of mine introduced me to someone working at the Asian Community Development Corporation (ACDC), but the contact never responded to my emails. At this point I was starting to run out of ideas, but then I remembered that the Youth Program at IBA had two Asian students who might be willing and able to help. I contacted the Youth Program Director and explained that I would be willing to pay an hourly rate for one of his students to be the workshop's translator. Finally, a reply! He told me that he had presented the idea to his students and one of them said yes. As I started to prepare for the event, the student began to question her translating acumen and rescinded her acceptance. However, in doing so she arranged for the second Villa Victoria Youth Program student to step in. Luckily the second student worked out.

Key takeaway here: figure out the different people that need to attend your community event to support your research and recruit early.
Part IV: Scheduling the Workshops

I had to move the dates of the workshops three times to accommodate for resident outreach. The Programs Director suggested that I give myself a week to distribute flyers before the event. Also she recommended that I host the workshops the same week so that there isn’t a sense of exclusion because they are uni-lingual.

In the end though it wasn’t the flyers that brought people to the workshops. For the Latino workshops, I was simply scheduled into a slot that was already dedicated community time for the Latino residents. In this way there was already going to be an audience. For the African American workshop, I primarily depended on a resident who has the honorary title of Villa Victoria’s mayor. She is African American and well liked by most Latino and African American residents. I spoke to her about my research and my goals for the workshop. Because she is also an employee of IBA she was interested in helping to make sure that the African American voice was heard. She reached out to her network to encourage people to attend. I unfortunately did not have an advocate for the Chinese community, and it showed because no one attended that event.

Key takeaways here: It’s important to have a marketing strategy, but it is not the most relevant for getting attendance. For the dominant community group within an area, use the infrastructure available to maximize resident attendance. For groups less represented, find an advocate to vouch for you and bring you into their community. Backing into the date for the workshops was not too helpful because I was not aware of how long collateral development, advocate support and resident engagement would take. Therefore, give yourself extra time and talk to experts because they can help you make a realistic timeline.

Party V: Hosting the Workshops

Although I planned for the workshops to last an hour, in retrospect that was not enough time. The Spanish and English workshops went for about 1.5 hours. It would have gone longer if we went through every question. I had to cut some of the questions regarding changes outside of Villa Victoria, which was fine since the research was focused on internal conditions. Another issue that made them run long was resident comments. Some people spoke a lot more than others and could easily dominate any conversation. Managing these individuals was a difficult task because it was good to get their thoughts, but not at the expense of alienating others. I would often interject with a reflecting statement and then transition to someone that I saw gesture that they wanted to make a comment.
The mapping exercise was easier for some participants than others, which also made the workshops run longer. In the Spanish (Latino) Workshop the maps used did not have any color-coding, but based on the difficulties they had navigating the maps (e.g., orienting north), I decided to add color to help residents distinguish the main landmarks of the area for the following workshops. For example, using standard land-use colors, the commercial area on W. Dedham Street was colored red, the Plaza and O'Day Park were colored green, and institutional locations (i.e., IBA office, ETC office, community rooms and the Arts Center) were colored blue. This seemed to help the other sessions.

The day of the English workshop, what turned out (as hoped) to be predominately African American, was a slushy cold day. The fact that I even had people attend despite the terrible weather conditions was a testament to my advocate. Were it not for her I doubt anyone would have showed up. Some of the residents even commented on how bad the weather was and that I was lucky that they were there. At the same time had the weather been better I am confident that my advocate would have been able to bring in more people.

As stated in the thesis, no one showed up for the Chinese workshop, so how did I still manage to get six residents’ input? A lot of maneuvering and quick thinking. First, since no one showed up but the translator, who is a Villa Victoria resident, I thought I would take her to dinner as a thank you for showing up. I took advantage of this opportunity to ask her if I could do the workshop exercises with her. She agreed and we went through the process. After we finished I asked her if her mother or father would be interested in participating to which she said that her mother might be. After following up with her I was able to get feedback from her mother on the workshop questions. Then I went back to the other Asian student in the youth program (the one who had first committed to translate) to ask her if she would be willing to do the workshop. To my surprise she said yes and invited me to her house for dinner. Her family opened their home to me. It was wonderful to share a meal and talk about the community. While we were having dinner I asked the student if other members of her family (mother, grandmother and sister, who were there) would like to participate. Luckily her mother and grandmother agreed. The student’s sister was not able to because she had homework, but offered me her contact information because we hit it off talking about community development. Eager to get another young adult’s feedback I followed up with the student’s sister and learned that she works for the Children’s Museum as a community ambassador. Part of her work is to invite families to the museum for a family dinner night. Since I have a young son, I offered to be that family for her, and concurrently we arranged a time for me to do the workshop exercises with her. In the meantime, I was doing community work for the youth program and used that period to
bring a gift to the student who invited me to her home. An Asian friend of mine recommended that I gift the family some fruit as a gesture of gratitude. I also learned that three is a lucky number in the Chinese tradition. As a result, I put together a fresh fruit gift reflecting the suggestions I received. In all, I spoke to six women representing two families in a three to four week period. I wasn’t sure that I would get all this input, but constant follow-up, flexibility and outreach paid off.

Key takeaways: Use your contacts as much as possible and openly ask for help. Be flexible with people’s schedule and create opportunities for you to be available and near the study area. Adapt to each context so that you can find common ground with each group you are working with. Be transparent and thankful to your supporters to create long-term advocates.

Closing thoughts: An agent for inter-community building
In this process I was putting myself into different community contexts to learn from them. What that also means is that I had to represent different parts of me to connect with the participants. For example, with the Puerto Rican community I focused on my El Salvadoran cultural heritage and my upbringing as a Latina. With the African American community I focused on my youth, living in neighborhoods with large African American communities. With the Chinese residents I spoke with I focused on my business and academic experience. Basically, I read my audience, responded to their interests, and connected them to mine. Once the connection was made, the goal was to show them my interest in what they had to say and listen.
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