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Navigating Gentrification: Exploring the Relationship Around Immigrant Integration, Sense of Belonging, Social Capital, and Success

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**Navigating Gentrification: Exploring the Relationship Around Immigrant Integration,
Sense of Belonging, Social Capital, and Success**

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2024

MERRIMACK COLLEGE

CAPSTONE PAPER SIGNATURE PAGE

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OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

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IN

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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AUTHOR: Patricia Stocker

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Abstract

Gentrification and its impact on immigrant communities are complex and evolving phenomena deeply intertwined with the racial and immigrant histories specific to each city. Hwang (2015) argues that gentrification perpetuates racial and ethnic inequality across urban landscapes, highlighting the need for comprehensive approaches to address its effects on immigrant populations. This study examines the intersection of gentrification, immigrant entrepreneurship, and community development, emphasizing the significance of fostering a sense of belonging and social capital within immigrant communities. Building on existing research, this capstone proposes a community project aimed at welcoming immigrants, integrating them into local communities, and facilitating their success in the United States. This proposed initiative seeks to connect residents with immigrant-owned businesses through storytelling, art, and community engagement activities. Through a qualitative research design, collecting data from interviews of key stakeholders in the community, this project was able to discern relevant information by posing questions surrounding the importance of integrating immigrants into a city where they are otherwise removed socially and economically. All respondents found that the project cultivated community pride, enhanced interpersonal relationships, and through exposing the public to historical and cultural contexts, created a positive reaction to foreign concepts. Through this effort, gentrified neighborhoods can move closer to realizing the goal of empowering immigrants, promoting collaboration, achieving economic stability, and encouraging resilience among diverse community members.

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Navigating Gentrification: Exploring the Relationship Around Immigrant Integration, Sense of Belonging, Social Capital, and Success

The fear of immigrants in the United States is real and with more than 40 million people living in the U.S. born outside of the country (Budiman, 2020), this segment of our population is suffering from profound feelings of isolation and a deficiency of social capital. Cities throughout the United States are gentrified and segregated; the businesses in these areas are often experiencing economic despair. In 2018, data from the Annual Business Survey revealed that immigrants accounted for approximately 18 percent of business owners with employees; and 23 percent without (Gotliboym, 2022). But immigrant status introduces two significant factors into the challenging environment of small business - ethnic and legal disadvantages. Ethnicity serves as an external basis for discrimination, where cultural and physical differences render ethnic groups more susceptible to exploitation (Bonacich, 1987). Immigrants perceived to be racially similar can be targets of discrimination due to religious conflicts and ethnocentrism. Immigrants of color are targets of racism and endure the detrimental psychological and physical effects of racism to a far greater degree than White immigrants in the United States (American Psychological Association, 2012).

Immigrant status, as a legal designation, parallels ethnicity in terms of the discrimination and limitations it entails. Immigrants often endure a probationary period before eligibility for citizenship, which interferes with their ability to apply for government grants and loans, and they can't operate legally. Both ethnic discrimination and legal disadvantages work together to weaken the position of immigrant entrepreneurs (Bonacich, 1987). The reality of immigrant enterprise in American society is one marked by oppression, evident in the challenging lives of small business entrepreneurs.

Gentrification and its links to immigration and related factors exhibit distinct and evolving dynamics within neighborhoods, deeply rooted in the racial and immigrant histories specific to each city. Hwang (2015) argues that gentrification perpetuates racial and ethnic inequality across urban landscapes.

Sense of belonging, social capital, and success are intertwined elements that can impact immigrant businesses. A strong sense of belonging within a community can develop trust, collaboration, and mutual support among immigrant entrepreneurs, as well as other members of the community, contributing to the development of social capital. This social capital, built on shared norms, values, and networks, becomes instrumental in accessing resources, information, and opportunities crucial for business success. A supportive community environment strengthens immigrants' confidence, resilience, and determination, empowering them to overcome challenges and achieve their entrepreneurial goals. Initiatives aimed at enhancing social capital, such as community centers and collaborative projects, can strengthen interpersonal relationships and cultivate trust among individuals from diverse backgrounds. For local businesses, embracing diversity and actively engaging with their communities can lead to accessing new markets, driving innovation, and fostering community pride which will contribute to the economic prosperity and social cohesion of the neighborhoods they serve. Recognizing the inherent worth of each individual and embracing collective strength are essential for promoting inclusive and thriving communities.

The objective of this study is to present a comprehensive community project proposal showcasing how immigrants across cities in the United States can be welcomed into society, integrated into their communities, and thrive in a nation that has asked to bring it its weary. This capstone project will introduce a comprehensive community initiative that aims to connect local

residents with immigrant-owned businesses, utilizing storytelling, art, and community engagement to foster social capital and a shared sense of belonging.

Literature Review

Fear of Immigrants

Xenophobia, the fear and hatred of strangers or foreigners or of anything that is strange or foreign (Tummala-Narra, 2022) exists in the United States. With the influx of one million newcomers to the United States yearly (Budiman, 2020), Americans are in fear — fear of immigrants and the more crime they will bring (Hwang, 2015); fear of losing control of their social and economic life; fear of how these newcomers will fit in; and fear of how foreigners affect their lives (Johnson, 1996). And this is nothing new. From the very beginning of our nation, colonialism attempted extermination of the indigenous when their land was stolen through violence, broken treaties, and false truths. Immigration laws of the 1800's stopped Irish from entering the country based on their Catholic beliefs in a primarily Protestant Anglo-Saxon America. The Quota Act of 1921 restricted people from China, Japan, the Philippines, and later immigrants from Arab nations (Funk, et al., 2018). The Roosevelt administration refused a Jewish ship to enter American shores even while knowing of the Nazi persecutions in Germany (Johnson, 1996). And most recently, anti-immigration legislation was passed in Arizona, Utah, Indiana, Georgia, and Alabama (Funk, et al., 2018). This fear of immigrants has caused foreigners to congregate en masse in their own communities in American cities which in turn causes greater segregation and more fears to manifest. Poverty-as-risk, a term formulated in Toronto's 1990's dominant conception of poverty (Saberri, 2022), associates changing demographics of a city due to an influx of immigrants, as a threat to imperial capitalist order. Immigrant neighborhoods are deemed degraded and dangerous. By excluding an entire

community because of their birthplace; because of misguided perceptions, businesses in these neighborhoods are unable to flourish as abundantly as those in popular, high traffic areas. Grant and Thompson, in their 2014 research of immigrant businesses and their rights to urban spaces, discuss a “more geographically sensitive and nuanced understanding of immigrant entrepreneurs and a reconsideration of their rights to the city” (p.1).

Community Exclusion

Gentrification, the revitalization of neighborhoods that were previously neglected and in decline, attracts middle- and upper-class residents who can afford these new communities, but there is a clear connection between local neighborhood transformations and broader patterns of racial inequalities. Cities across the nation are being white-washed and ethnic groups are being segregated to their own neighborhood, even to the extent to which some of its immigrant populations have been incorporated (Hwang, 2015). These are generally areas that have not seen the same renewal as their affluent counterparts. Gentrifiers feel absolution through “diversifying their neighborhood” and that the arrival of minority groups often spur the economy (Hwang, 2015). “Gentrification, and the redevelopment process of which it is a part, is a systematic occurrence of late capitalist urban development. This is not to say it has never occurred before, only that it has never been so systematic” (Smith, 1982, p. 132). The renaissance of these neighborhoods require a percentage of affordable housing, and they are generally regulated to be built around each other, leaving working class people, many immigrants, to live, work, and socialize in their own community, not often visited by their white neighbors. How this affects ethnic groups mentally and socially has been an area of theory and research.

Economic exclusion is a multifaceted phenomenon in which specific groups face barriers to fully and equally engage in the economic activities of their city, leading to prolonged

economic hardship and an inability to improve their financial situation or provide opportunities for their children to overcome it (Greene, et al., 2016). Economic exclusion is distinct from income or wealth disparities, which can stem from and indicate exclusion. Groups such as communities of color, immigrants, refugees, and women are especially impacted by this exclusion (Greene, et al., 2016). Poor-quality jobs in marginalized communities are characterized by stagnant low wages, unpredictable hours, lack of job security, and limited career opportunities. This issue is prevalent and increasing in high-income countries, with globalization and technological advancements potentially exacerbating the situation. Economic vulnerability refers to the exposure to financial risks, where households lack assets to cope with emergencies like job loss or health crises. Social safety nets intended to support these households are either inadequate or have weakened in recent times (Greene, et al., 2016). Verver et al's 2020 study, "Ethnic boundary dynamics in immigrant entrepreneurship: a Barthian perspective" explored the significance of ethnic boundary dynamics in immigrant entrepreneurship, focusing on interactions between 'ethnic' and 'mainstream' economies, internal variations within ethnic communities, and the socially constructed nature of ethnic boundaries. These ethnic boundaries lead to members of these immigrant communities turning to entrepreneurship to fulfill their American dream of success.

By not being included in community events, immigrants often suffer from social exclusion. "Social exclusion refers to inability of a person to participate in basic day-to-day economic and social activities of life" (Chakravarty & D'Ambrosio, 2006, p. 397). Social exclusion is not synonymous with poverty or inequality, although they are closely related. While poverty refers to a lack of material resources, and inequality refers to disparities in wealth or opportunities, social exclusion encompasses a broader range of experiences (Atkinson, 1998). It's

about feeling marginalized or deprived in various aspects of life, regardless of one's income or social status. It's a multidimensional phenomenon that affects individuals and communities in profound ways. Addressing social exclusion requires tackling structural barriers and creating opportunities for all individuals to participate fully in social, economic, and political life (Sen, 1976).

Exposure Theory

The Mere Exposure Effect, extensively researched by Robert B. Zajonc in 1968, had its roots in earlier suggestions by Gustav Theodor Fechner in 1876 and William James in 1890 (Elsevier's Dictionary of Psychological Theories, 2006). This phenomenon describes how repeated exposure to a stimulus can lead to an individual developing an enhanced or increased liking or positive attitude towards it (Zajonc, 1968). Moreland and Zajonc (1982) argue that mere exposure can influence attraction under a variety of conditions and that repeated exposure to individuals appears to significantly affect attraction, even without direct social interaction. This exposure may influence how we perceive others as being similar to ourselves. This effect on perceived similarity could happen through direct influence from frequent encounters, independent of changes in attraction levels. Styliadis, et al. (2021) discuss the economic and socio-cultural benefits of repeat visitors to tourist destinations. Financially, repeat visitors tend to spend more money due to longer stays and participation in various activities, thereby boosting local economies reliant on tourism. Socioculturally, interactions between guests and hosts facilitate cultural exchange and appreciation, enhancing locals' intercultural understanding. When both residents and tourists engage in such interactions, they co-create value and increase their satisfaction levels. To foster contact and interaction with local residents, encouraging short trips and participation in community events is recommended.

Sense of Belonging and Sense of Community

Baumeister and Leary, in 1995, described the need to belong as the innate and powerful human drive to establish enduring, positive, and meaningful connections with others. This theory has roots in evolutionary processes, as our ancestors who prioritized building and sustaining social bonds were more likely to survive and reproduce compared to those who were less social. Thus, individuals often engage in behaviors aimed at developing social acceptance to reduce the risk of feeling rejected. “Immigrants and their children negotiate conflict, identity, belonging, and emotional health within the parameters of constraint delineated by xenophobia and racism” (Tummala-Narra, 2020, p.54). Sense of community is a “sense belonging and identification (that) involves the feeling, belief, and expectation that one fits in the group and has a place there, a feeling of acceptance by the group, and a willingness to sacrifice for the group” (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p.10). One component of that is integration and fulfillment of needs or reinforcement; success brings people together. A neighborhood in economic decline thus can lack a sense of community. Another important factor is shared emotional connection which is “based, in part, on a shared history. It is not necessary that group members have participated in the history in order to share it, but they must identify with it (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p.13). As cities are cultivating more ethnically diverse populations, immigrants new to a city don’t have a shared history, but they can make it. There are historical examples of successful integration by religious minorities and large immigrant groups in the United States, despite facing prejudice. These groups were able to integrate by reshaping the American mainstream (Waters & Gerstein Pineau, 2015).

Social Capital

This lack of sense of belonging leaves communities feeling no connection throughout their neighborhoods, and a lack of social capital amongst its members. “Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition-or in other words, to membership in a group-which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a "credential" which entitles them to credit, in various senses of the word” (Bourdieu, 1982, p. 248). Success is more likely in civically engaged communities (Putnam, 1995) and when Alex de Tocqueville visited the United States in the 1830’s, he was quoted as saying “Americans of all ages, all stations in life, and all types of disposition are forever forming associations. There are not only commercial and industrial associations in which all take part, but others of a thousand different types - religious, moral, serious, futile, very general and very limited, immensely large and very minute” (Putnam, 1995, p. 2). Belonging to these groups allows individuals to garner social capital which “refers to features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (Putnam, 1995, p. 2). Researchers have identified efficient and adaptable “industrial districts” formed by interconnected collaborations among workers and small entrepreneurs. These networks serve as the foundation for cutting-edge industries like Silicon Valley’s technology sector (Putnam, 1995). Gentrified cities, with ethnic neighborhoods whose members are struggling to gain social capital of a higher caste, often strain economically, lose their sense of belonging, and sense of community, and become the very sector the gentrifiers have assumed they would be.

Economic Capital

Bourdieu (1986) argues the complex relationship between economic capital and other forms of capital, such as social and cultural capital. Social capital, made up of social obligations “connections,” which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital. While economic capital serves as the foundation for all other types of capital, these other forms of capital, though derived from economic capital, often conceal their origins and manifest unique effects. Understanding the functioning of capital requires moving beyond two limited perspectives: economism, which oversimplifies by reducing all capital to economic capital, and semiologism, the term used by Ferdinand de Saussure to characterize the science of studying verbal and nonverbal signs (Danesi, 2006), which overlooks the fundamental role of economics in social exchanges. Bourdieu (1986) discusses recognizing both the economic roots of various forms of capital and their distinct effects and manifestations. Investing in social capital is advantageous as individuals who possess social capital can establish systems that encourage collaboration among partners. These systems incentivize active contributions from all participants, leading to significant economic benefits for everyone involved. By doing so, individuals can prevent "free-riding" behavior, where some individuals benefit from the efforts of others without contributing themselves, which could diminish overall gains. Individuals who are adept at navigating social networks effectively address collective action problems, thereby making their social networks a valuable asset or form of capital (Svendsen, et al., 2010). “The most material types of capital—those that are economic in the restricted sense—can present themselves in the immaterial form of cultural capital or social capital and vice versa” (Bourdieu, 1986, p.248).

Inclusionary Approaches

Storytelling and Tours: To ensure the survival of ethnic communities under these circumstances, it is imperative to implement strategies for their inclusion within cities that have historically segregated them. Multi-media community based art projects have been explored as possible solutions. Rice and Mundel, in 2019, conducted a study that examined the impact of using a dynamic multimedia storytelling approach (digital art and video) to question prevailing depictions of non-conforming bodies and cultivate environments that are more embracing and inclusive. Participants of the workshops felt empowered and alive upon telling their stories, but a question that the researchers posed was “what is our responsibility as listeners to the stories that are shared?” (Rice & Mundel, 2019, p. 144). Natasha Freidus and Michelle Hlubinka of Massachusetts Institute of Technology described that “Digital storytelling for reflective practice is a valuable, transformative tool for personal, professional, organizational, and community development. As stories are shared, the sense of community itself is strengthened. Once complete, the stories serve as objects which mediate relationships” (Freidus & Hlubinka, 2002, p.26). A paper published in 2019 on bridging the gap between American Medical Centers (AMC) and marginalized communities who had a history of mistrust with the organization, concluded that through collaborative community tours, cross-community communication was improved, and awareness of community needs and assets was raised. Evaluation results indicate positive outcomes, supporting the effectiveness of community tours in bridging communication gaps and building trust (Irby, et al., 2019).

Business Promotion: Marketing for small businesses is crucial. It allows entrepreneurs to reach new customers, generate leads, and bolster sales while establishing brand presence and authority. Yet, small business owners as a whole generally hold a negative view of business

education which is intensified when it comes to marketing. This is due to their perceptions of marketing, including its nature, potential outcomes, and associated costs (McCartan-Quinn & Carson, 2019). By providing free marketing through a community based art project, immigrant business owners will be able to promote their enterprise with little financial investment while reaping the benefits of exposure. Through integrated art projects, city marketing efforts concentrate on highlighting specific profiles of ethnic shopping districts. Ambitious neighborhoods devise strategies covering mobility, environment, culture, sports, public health, and security. Neighborhood branding endeavors seek to counter negative stereotypes and enhance community perception (Altrock, 2022).

Community Events: Community events are successful as inclusionary measures and promotional tools. By utilizing branding techniques, media relations, volunteer involvement, public art, and promoting sustainability, festivals successfully create an emotional connection between participants and a neighborhood's spirit. By managing citizens' experiences and cultural perceptions, events establish memorable connections associated with positive elements. A high level of loyalty is demonstrated, with participants becoming promoters of the event (or small businesses) by sharing positive impressions and recommendations with others (Dospinescu, 2014). Rich, Misener, and Dubeau (2015) concluded that participatory events in marginalized communities integrate immigrants and refugees by fostering community connections, building skills, and providing opportunities for further engagement in community activities. Various initiatives such as multicultural centers, youth centers, self-help programs, and street festivals foster social and ethnic integration. Recognizing that economically deprived areas often suffer from transformations and unemployment, the program also aims to boost local (often ethnic) economies through qualification partnerships (Altrock, 2022).

City of Salem

As of 2021, 14% of Salem, MA residents were born outside of the United States. Hispanics were the second largest ethnic group behind Whites (Data USA, 2021). According to City-Data (2020), The Point neighborhood had a non-white population of 69.7%, whereas Salem overall was predominantly white, at 75% (U.S Census, Bureau, 2020). The majority of the city's foreign-born residents reside in The Point, primarily from the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and African countries. In 2012, 20% of the neighborhood's residents fell below the federal poverty guidelines, compared to 11% for the entire city (Urban Land Institute, 2024). Immigrants represented 14.3% of business owners in Greater Salem in 2019. Approximately 1,400 immigrant entrepreneurs generated \$41.5 million in business income for the region (American Immigration Council, 2023).

Capstone Focus

This capstone project aims to empower underserved immigrant communities who have struggled with a sense of belonging, a sense of community, and a loss of social capital, through gentrification. By organizing a community tour and storytelling program, this Community Based Participatory Research project, will incentivize community members to patronize ethnic businesses they often avoid out of fear and misinformation, to engage with restaurant owners, to learn of their journeys through storytelling videos, to discover their similarities. By participating in a restaurant and storytelling tour this project endeavors that the community will conduct future business in these establishments. This study will explore the idea that economic revitalization brings a sense of pride, and that inclusion and the sense of belonging will allow immigrants in segregated neighborhoods to succeed and become part of the America they dreamed of when they first entered our borders.

Methodology

This capstone project seeks to empower the marginalized Point neighborhood of Salem impacted by gentrification, exclusion, and economic insecurity. Through a Community Based Participatory Research approach, this project aims to address the issues of a sense of exclusion, belonging, community, and social capital loss. By organizing a community tour and storytelling event, with an incentivized passport element, this community integrated project encourages community members to support ethnic businesses, engage with restaurant owners, and learn from their stories. Through this Community Based Art Project, business owners in The Point neighborhood will increase their social capital and positive associations while experiencing economic advancements and a feeling of inclusion.

The spring El Punto Restaurant and Art Tour is a way for North Shore residents to enjoy the sites and tastes of the El Punto neighborhood of Salem while boasting all that The Point community has to offer. The annual event was promoted on Salem Access Television and stakeholders' social media sites, tourism sites, and throughout the community. Restaurants and supporters were prominently mentioned. The tour attracted 40 participants and, depending on the level of support, the tour hopes to attract 75 participants in 2025 with numbers to increase yearly. Negotiations with Salem Five, a local bank in Salem, are already underway. This program will be funded in part by the City of Salem and urban and community development grants from North Shore Community Development Coalition (NSCDC).

The art portion on the tour allows participants to explore connections to the culture of El Punto through the murals, landmarks and architecture while learning interesting historical facts about what has been the traditional home for numerous immigrant groups to Salem. Participants will learn about the history of the neighborhood, from the beginnings of Le Pointe through the

stories of the French Canadian workers in the mills, to the Great Salem Fire and the rebuilding of the neighborhood, to western Europeans immigrants settling in the Point, to becoming recognized as a National Historic District to a predominantly Latino influenced barrio known as El Punto. Tours will be conducted by resident Ambassadors of the neighborhood who have a unique connection to The Point and will be trained in storytelling techniques by NSCDC staff who have conducted the open air mural tours in the past.

Six restaurants in The Point community were featured during the event. As tour participants walked through El Punto's streets, they learned about the history of the community through the murals and restaurants along the way. By focusing on the vibrant culture and cuisine of these small businesses, participants were ready for sampling and celebrating at the end of the event. Each participant received a passport at the beginning of the tour at North Shore Community Development Coalition's community building, Espacio. This was the jump off point where participants met a seasoned chef from a home-based catering company, heard his story, sampled this food, were given a "swag bag", and were broken off into four tour groups. The tour looped through the neighborhood, took in the sights and tastes of the neighborhood, and returned to Espacio they were able to sample the participating restaurants' cuisine. Each restaurant will receive a \$400 stipend to cover the cost of their food paid for by NSCDC. The passport will then be the source of collecting stamps each time they spend \$25 within two months at each restaurant. Each participant who completes the passport will receive an El Punto Restaurant and Mural Tour T-shirt and mug and will be entered into the grand prize drawing which will be admission to the NSCDC Summer Celebration (with an admission price of \$100). Through this passport program, it will incentivize community members to return to The Point neighborhood restaurants, ensuring a sense of belonging and financial gain for the immigrant entrepreneurs.

Each passport included QR codes that linked participants to a video of each restaurant owners' story. The videos tell their journeys, where they shared their hopes and dreams and what it means to be a part of Salem. The videos were uploaded to YouTube, posted on social media sites, and are continually airing on Salem Access Television. Through these stories, community members will feel connected to this immigrant community and see that their journeys are not unlike their own.

The target audience for this project were community members who do not regularly visit the Point neighborhood and existing and potentially new donors of the event. Through heavy social media campaigns on the NSCDC sites, as well as through Destination Salem, Salem Access Television, the city of Salem, community partners, and personal social media accounts, the tour was heavily promoted to ensure a new enclave of unaware community members would participate.

Community and Participants

The Point neighborhood is alongside the Salem Harbor, on 195 acres a few blocks south of downtown Salem. The neighborhood is also known as El Punto, especially by the community's many Latino residents with roots in the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico. In 2020, the neighborhood was home to 3,373 people. Just south of downtown Salem, the Point is east of Lafayette Street, south of the South River, west of Congress Street, and north of Chase and Leavitt Streets. "The Point" refers to a relatively flat point of land in the neighborhood geography between the South River and Salem Harbor. The Point neighborhood is an often neglected area of Salem, with most visitors and area residents venturing into the city with the idea of patronizing the Salem Witch Trials' attractions, this marginalized neighborhood was chosen as an area of study to incentivize visitors to experience the rich culture The Point has to

offer. Restaurant participants included Harbor Sweets, Li'l Devil, Spitfire Tacos, La Delicia, Crave, and Ray Adeas with the intention of including different restaurants as the tour became more widely known and conducted twice a year.

Four community leaders reviewed the proposal. They included:

1. Identifies as a 27-year-old Latinx male with 2.5 years in community building. He is the Constituent Services Director/Latinx Affairs and LGBTQ Liaison for the city of Salem's mayor's office.
2. Identifies as 41-year-old White male with 11 years in community building. He is the Vice President, Community Business Banking at a large bank in the focus area and is on the Salem Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors
3. Identifies as a 40-year-old Black female with over 20 years in community building. She is the Deputy CEO of a large nonprofit in the focus area.
4. Identifies as a 32-year-old Latinx female with over 7 years in community building. She is the Community Building Director for a large nonprofit in the focus area.

Project Theme

This capstone project seeks to empower the marginalized Point neighborhood of Salem impacted by gentrification, exclusion, and economic insecurity. Through a Community Based Participatory Research approach, this project aims to address the issues of a sense of exclusion, belonging, community, and social capital loss. By organizing a community tour and storytelling event, with an incentivized passport element, this community integrated project encourages community members to support ethnic businesses, engage with restaurant owners, and learn from their stories. Through this Community Based Art Project, business owners in The Point

neighborhood will increase their social capital and positive associations while experiencing economic advancements and a feeling of inclusion.

Materials

Data collection for this project included a recorded Zoom interview of all the community leaders who reviewed my slide deck presentation. The slides were designed on Canva with images used from NSCDC and the free stock photo website, Pixabay. The interviews were completed within an hour. The presentation (Appendix A) included 9 slides describing the goal of the project, a description of the art segment tour, the restaurant segment of the tour, the prizes (both participatory and grand), the passport, and the storytelling feature, as well as a wrap up slide to remind the reviewers the intent of the integrated community project. The interview protocol (Appendix B) consisted of 10 questions. The first question was an overall initial reaction to the proposal followed by question 2, with subsections, relating to the probability of the project bringing a sense of community. Question 3's focus, with 4 subsections, revolved around social capital. Examining whether the project succeeded in a feeling of inclusion was the subject of Question 4, with 4 subsections. Question 5 asked if the project increased a liking to The Point through exposure. Question 6, with a subsection, queried if by using their knowledge of and experience within the community, reviewers thought the storytelling and art aspect was a good tool to engage the community. Question 7 revolved around the passport aspect of the project and if they thought it fostered a sense of community pride and solidarity among residents and what was their sense based on previous patterns of behavior. Reviewers were asked if there needs to be continued reinforcement to build meaningful connections in Question 8. Question 9 asked what the creative aspects the reviewer would add to this proposal to make it better; if any one idea needed anything to make it better. The final query asked if there were any final thoughts

regarding the project with community dynamics and history in mind. All reviewers were asked if I could follow up with them in the event I needed any clarification.

Procedure

Reviewers were recruited through face-to-face contact and through emails. Once potential interviewees were confirmed, the interviews were scheduled and then conducted and recorded on Zoom. Interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes. Once complete, interviewees were thanked for their time and the recorded data was stored on file on my personal computer. Detailed notes were also taken by me during the interview process. The data was then transcribed to a handwritten workbook for coding, categorization, and theme development. By reviewing the answers, common themes of inclusion, social capital, sense of belonging and community, exposure theory, storytelling and art as participation, and community pride became apparent and were the framework for my findings.

Results

Respondents were asked whether they thought a project like this would promote a sense of belonging. Two stated yes while two said maybe. Interviewee 1 said the neighborhood already feels it, but it will bring people together more. Interviewee 2 said the art portion of the tour will bring about more of a sense of community than the restaurant aspect. He thought that it would bring support to the residents but not members of the community as a whole - not the restaurant owners specifically. Interviewee 4 wondered if some of the restaurant owners “could see it as a fishbowl or some could see it as an investment”.

All interviewees agreed that a project like this would build social capital. Interviewee 1 said there are “no downsides” except maybe bringing more traffic so it must be promoted as walkable otherwise residents may see it as a nuisance. He also said, “the program will bring

business owners together”. Interviewee 2 said it “builds bridges of acceptance” for both participants and business owners but may not “elevate businesses”. Interviewee 1 also said the passport feature will encourage participants to revisit the neighborhood. Interviewee 4 said the passport will bring an opportunity to reinvest in the community. The tour will allow residents to meet the donors and donors can interact with the community.

When asked if the project would bring about a sense of inclusion three said yes, believing that it will bring about a sense of pride from The Point residents and business owners.

Interviewee 2 questioned if The Point residents felt excluded. He asked if the residents of The Point feel they need the rest of Salem or do they want something that’s just theirs? “The egg that needs to be cracked is ‘do you want to be a part of Salem, or do you want to just exist in Salem?’” He felt “societal headwinds and cultural norms” may make it difficult for business owners who don’t currently engage with the Chamber of Commerce or other nonprofit organizations.

Respondents 1 and 2 addressed the issue of community exclusion. The other interviewees did not comment. Both mentioned the consequences of The Point neighborhood restaurants not being included in other popular food tours of Salem and that this project would bring them the exposure and inclusion they were denied.

All interviewees agreed that exposing the public to this segregated neighborhood through this event, participants would feel an enhanced liking and positive attitude towards it and it would drive members into the local economy. Interviewee 1 said yes, especially if you’re new to the community and don’t have any previous negative thoughts. Interviewee 2 said The Point will not just be a place to ride through but to visit. History and art will be linked to the restaurants.

Interviewee 3 said people will feel more engaged in the history of The Point. It will change their assumptions of the immigrants of the neighborhood. “It will increase awareness and interest”.

When asked if this storytelling and art project would be a successful strategy for creating a sense of inclusion within a city that has historically segregated immigrants, all respondents said yes. Interviewee 1 said it would not be a tour without the storytelling aspect, both murals and videos are important. It will “provide an alternative way to connect” and provide “more identity”. Interviewee 2 noted that “murals are breathtaking” and they all tie it back to the community. He did not agree that the restaurant portion of the tour would encourage inclusion unless the businesses were linked more to the murals, such as having food trucks at each mural site. However, he did add that, “the flow of the event is a no-brainer”. Interviewee 3 said, “often people who have concerns learning history or culture” would be more open to it. Interviewee 4 stated that storytelling humanizes the project - storytelling that includes why immigrants want to be entrepreneurs. She noted that the narrative should include “the disparities of becoming a business owner and the systemic oppression”. Interviewee 4 loved the idea of the QR code linked to the storytelling because participants could “take something with them to learn more”.

All interviewees agreed that this project would cultivate community pride, all stated yes. Interviewee 1 said that as a resident he’d feel pride and as a business owner he’d say “Hey, look at my restaurant!” and Interviewee 2 said “if my culture and history” were part of an event, “that’d be cool”. Interviewee 3 said it's an “element of celebration”.

Initial Thoughts: All interviewees had positive initial reactions. There were concerns from the nonprofits on how to pay for it. Thought there would need to be a planning committee with specific aspects and tasks assigned (there is, but not mentioned in the proposal

presentation). One nonprofit reviewer questioned if the tour would romanticize Dominican Republic culture.

The banker was mostly concerned if residents wanted outsiders. Interviewee 1 loved the idea the most and thought it would help draw people away from downtown. He and Interviewee 2 thought marketing heavily would be important to bring people to the event who do not usually visit Salem. “What rocks can you turn over?” to find a new audience. Interviewee 1 mentioned marketing through 'Destination Salem'; top spot on Google search (Things to do in Salem) and adding a visible logo of the El Punto Tour that all participating restaurants could have in their restaurants saying “I am part of the El Punto Restaurant and Art Tour”. Add a sandwich board in front of the restaurants with balloons. Add a painted walking line along the tour for participants to follow like “Boston’s Freedom Trail - but you’d have to get a counselor to sign off on that”. He also thought that there should be one “legacy restaurant” but did not mention one by name when prompted. He thought one more well-known restaurant to draw people in would be advantageous.

Regarding the project presentation itself, two people asked who the target audience is for engagement. Interviewee 2 thought the event may reach people that may not come. He thought that the presentation should have focused more on the art. One person (Interviewee 4) asked what is the mission and the goal? Both nonprofit reviewers thought there should be more of a focus on specific tasks and who would pay for it.

Discussion

All reviewers saw this event as an uplifting event for the community. The proposal to conduct a participatory art project in The Point was perceived as a program to create pride and exposure to an otherwise marginalized community and to bring about mutual benefits to

residents and participants alike. As McMillan and Chavis (1986) argued that to sustain a positive sense of unity within any group, the relationship between individuals and the group must be rewarding for all members. Community leaders expressed their belief that such a project would enhance a sense of identity and belonging among residents. Respondents also highlighted the potential for this project to build bridges, a notable factor that contributes to the social capital of the community.

Zajonc (1968) described mere exposure as a crucial factor in changing attitudes toward the unfamiliar. Bourdieu (1986) suggests that social capital is the combined resources that individuals possess or have access to through their connections within established networks of relationships and are akin to possessing a credential that grants them credibility and access to various benefits. The storytelling, art, and participation aspect was the conduit for those experiences. Some interviewees noted how this project would couple history and art with everyday life in The Point. This integration serves to deepen people's connection to their community and build relationships among individuals through shared appreciation and experiences. The initiative for a participatory art project in The Point was accepted with the aim of creating pride and visibility within a community that is often overlooked, and to generate mutual advantages for both residents and participants. McMillan and Chavis (1986) emphasized the importance of creating rewarding relationships between individuals and the group to maintain a positive sense of unity. Community leaders expressed their belief that such a project would enhance a sense of identity and belonging among residents and highlighted the potential for this project to build connections, an important factor to the social capital of the community.

Overall, the El Punto Restaurant and Art Tour will expose community members who are not otherwise familiar with this marginalized neighborhood of Salem, Massachusetts to the

culture and history of the immigrants of the Dominican Republic. Through this participatory art and storytelling event, both the business owners and community members will acquire more mutually beneficial social capital that will elevate the neighborhood through positive business and neighborhood branding (Altrock, 2022). Narratives humanize the project, particularly those that delve into immigrants' motivations for entrepreneurship, addressing the challenges of business ownership and systemic oppression. As Freidus and Hlubinka (2002) argued, sharing stories not only enhances the sense of community but also serves as a medium through which relationships are mediated. All respondents agreed that the storytelling and art project would effectively foster a sense of inclusion within a historically segregated immigrant community. Interviewee 1 emphasized the importance of storytelling combined with the murals to create connections and enhance identity. Interviewee 2 commended the murals for their artistic contribution to community ties but suggested stronger integration of the restaurant component with the art. Interviewee 3 suggested that incorporating more history and culture into the project could appeal to a wider audience. Interviewee 4 highlighted the humanizing aspect of storytelling, advocating for narratives that address the challenges faced by immigrant entrepreneurs. A few of the respondents appreciated the idea of QR codes linking to storytelling as a means for participants to further engage with the restaurants and the neighborhood.

The El Punto Restaurant and Art Tour will expose community members, who are not otherwise familiar with this marginalized neighborhood of Salem, to the culture and history of the immigrants of the Dominican Republic. As The Point neighborhood restaurants are excluded from other popular, and highly publicized, food tours in Salem, the exclusionary measures may lead this community to feelings of marginalization (Sen, 1976), and through this proposed

project, systemic obstacles will be addressed and avenues for universal engagement will be cultivated.

Through this initiative, community pride will be expanded, and the often-neglected Point community will feel a sense of belonging and inclusion. However, as with any project, there are concerns about funding, responsibilities, partnerships, and community support. As noted in the interviews, community involvement is pivotal for the project's success. Therefore, one key recommendation for a community based project like this is to consult both existing residents and recent immigrant populations to secure backing and enhance awareness. The primary goal of this project is to help promote a stronger sense of community and create greater inclusivity, objectives that hinge on community support and engagement.

Limitations of the Project

A small sample size of community members may not be a proper indication of what the neighborhood is experiencing. Business owners and residents should have been included in the study. This was a small neighborhood in a relatively small city which limits both the reviewer and entrepreneur pool thus results could be skewed. Collecting data after several projects are completed as well post-event surveys would be beneficial.

Implications for Future Projects

Considering the uncertainty about The Point neighborhood's interest in a tour, gathering input from both restaurant owners and residents would be instrumental in garnering more inclusive data to determine if this project would bring a stronger sense of community and belonging. There needs to be more research done to see if adjustments should be made to the logistics of the tour, such as tying the art and food more coherently together, adding a well-known restaurant to anchor the tour, and adding visible components to make the tour route more

recognizable. Further research will need to be conducted on the impact of a tour on the infrastructure of the neighborhood, such as parking, public transportation, and walkability. Half of the interviewees stated that not all of the participating restaurants were representative of the culture of the neighborhood and further research should be done to include more businesses indicative to the immigrant population.

The presentation needs to contain more information on the funding sources for the project. Although the mention of community partnerships and sponsorships were mentioned, that aspect needs to be made more clear. Because there was some confusion on the storytelling portion from one reviewer, further description of the QR code in the passport should be more explicitly described. The art portion should include one more slide. A clearer statement of the mission and target audience should be included in the presentation.

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Appendix A



EL PUNTO RESTAURANT AND ART TOUR 2025

PATRICIA STOCKER
MERRIMACK COLLEGE

RESTAURANT AND ART TOUR



The spring El Punto Restaurant and Art Tour is a way for North Shore residents to enjoy the sites and tastes of the El Punto neighborhood of Salem while boasting all that The Point community has to offer. The annual event will be held in May. It will be promoted on Salem Access Television and stakeholders' social media sites, tourism sites, and throughout the community. Restaurants and supporters will be prominently mentioned. Depending on the level of support, the tour hopes to attract 75 participants in 2024 with numbers to increase yearly.

GOALS



The goal of the El Punto Restaurant and Art Tour is to bring to The Point community a sense of belonging and build a stronger community base through exposing North Shore residents to the food, art and history of this neighborhood. Through this Community Based Art Project, business owners in The Point neighborhood will increase their social capital and positive associations while experiencing economic advancements and a feeling of inclusion.

ART

The art portion on the tour allows participants to explore connections to the culture of El Punto through the murals, landmarks and architecture while learning interesting historical facts about what has been the traditional home for numerous immigrant groups to Salem.



RESTAURANTS



Six restaurants in The Point community will be featured during the tour. As tour participants walk through El Punto’s streets, they will learn about the history of the community through the murals and restaurants along the way. By focusing on the vibrant culture and cuisine of these small businesses, participants will be more than ready for sampling and celebrating at the end of the event.



Possible participants: Harbor Sweets, Li'l Devil, Spitfire Tacos, La Delicia, Crave, Ray Adeas, Tipico

PASSPORT



Each participant will receive a passport at the beginning of the tour. North Shore Community Development Coalition’s community building, Espacio, will be the jump off point where participants will meet a chef from a neighborhood restaurant, hear their story, sample their food, and be split into tour groups. The tour will end at Espacio where tour participants will sample the participating restaurants’ cuisine. Each restaurant will receive a \$400 stipend to cover the cost of their food. The passport will then be the source of collecting stamps each time they spend \$25 within a given period of time at each restaurant. Once their passport has been filled, they are then entered into the grand prize drawing.

PARTICIPATORY PRIZE



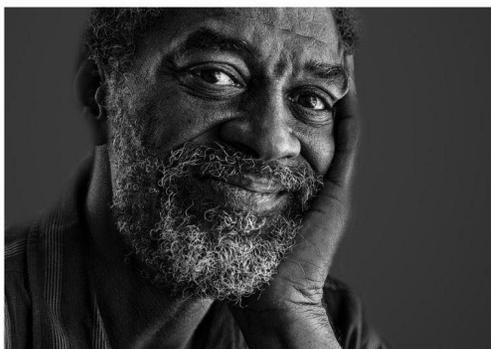
Each participant who completes passport will receive an El Punto Restaurant and Mural Tour T-shirt and mug! This will be donated by one of our community sponsors.

GRAND PRIZE

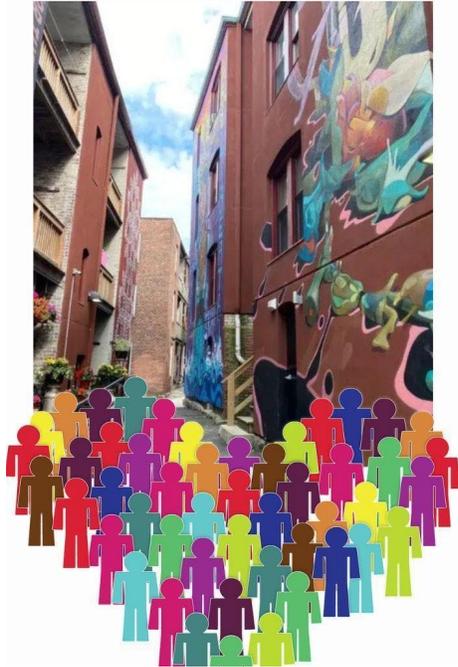


Each participant who completes their passport will be entered into the grand prize drawing which will be admission to the NSCDC Summer Celebration (or to a community partner's event with a price tag of over \$100).

STORYTELLING



Each passport will include QR codes that will link participants to a video of each restaurant owners' story. The videos will tell their journeys where they can share; their hopes and dreams and what it means to be a part of Salem. The videos will be uploaded to YouTube, posted on social media sites, and will air on Salem Access Television.



The El Punto Restaurant and Art Tour Community Project aims to introduce new visitors to The Point neighborhood. Through learning of the history of this largely immigrant community and experiencing all that it has to offer, participants will return and invest in its economy thus allowing residents and business owners to feel a sense of belonging, pride, and inclusion.

Appendix B

Comprehensive Community Project Proposal Interview Questions

1. What is your initial reaction or initial thoughts to the proposal?
2. Does this project bring about a sense of community?
 - a) Will members of The Point feel that they are part of a supportive and dependable community?
 - b) If so, how?
 - c) How can we do it better?
3. Will this project increase The Point community's social capital?
 - a) Does it build a space of trust between community members?
 - b) Is this project mutually beneficial?
 - c) If so, how?
 - d) How can we do it better?
4. Will this project bring a feeling of inclusion among The Point Community?
 - a) Will they feel more welcome and connected?
 - b) Will they feel like they belong?
 - c) If so, how?
 - d) How can we do it better?
5. Do you think exposing people to The Point increases their liking or positivity to the community?
 - a) What are your thoughts on that?

6. Using your experience and knowledge of the community, is the storytelling and art aspect a good tool to engage the community?
 - a) What are your thoughts on that?
 - b) What else can we include during the tour for engagement?
7. Participating in passport programs provides opportunities for social interaction, networking, and collaboration as people come together to explore and support local businesses, cuisine, and art. In thinking about this project, do you think it fosters a sense of community pride and solidarity among residents?
 - a) What's your sense based on previous patterns of behavior within the community?
8. Projects like this can't be a one-and-done initiative. There needs to be continued reinforcement in order to build meaningful connections. What are your thoughts on that?
9. Now that I have shared my project pitch, I'd love to hear about what creative aspects you would add to this proposal or perhaps taking any one of the ideas and making it better. Thoughts?
 - b) What can we do better?
10. WRAP UP: Do you have any final thoughts or considerations you would like to share with me regarding this project? Are there aspects of the community dynamics or history that I haven't considered?

Thank you for your time today and I appreciate all your thoughtful feedback. I will be going through my notes over the next few weeks and if it's okay with you, I would like to be able to follow up with you in the event I need some clarifications. [YES / NO]