

**MAPPING CULTURAL AND NETWORK ASSETS
IN THREE CHICAGO COMMUNITIES***

**PROPOSAL FUNDED BY
THE ROCKEFELLER FOUNDATION**

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

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* Part of a Collaborative Project: please see The Field Museum proposal from Alaka Wali, submitted separately.

Introduction

With this proposal, the Team Engineering Collaboratory (TEC) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) seeks funding for a twelve-month ethnographic and network analysis, incorporating asset-mapping techniques, to examine the social, cultural, artistic, and network resources of recent Mexican immigrants in Chicago. The proposed project is primarily geared to the Creativity and Culture program at the Rockefeller Foundation and will also contribute to The Rockefeller Foundation's Arts and Culture Indicators Project. It will provide data for cultural indicators in general and document the role of arts and culture in community building. It will also complement other planned or ongoing studies of the impact of transnational flows of labor and economic resources by providing baseline data on the ways in which immigrants create strategies for survival and security by drawing on their social assets and their networks of interaction. We propose a collaborative project between the Team Engineering Collaboratory (TEC) at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign and the Center for Cultural Understanding and Change at the Field Museum in Chicago (CCUC). The proposed project will use an innovative methodology combining TEC's state of the art network asset mapping exercise (NAME) with CCUC's social and cultural asset mapping approach (See proposal submitted separately).

Research Problem and Objectives

Mexican immigration to the United States over the past four decades has been a major force for changing social and cultural patterns in urban areas in the United States as well as in the sending communities in Mexico. The demographic trends show an accelerating increase in numbers, but there are also qualitative differences emerging between more recent transnational flows and earlier immigrant waves. The Rockefeller Foundation's new initiative on North American Transnational Communities offers the opportunity to better understand the implications of these new patterns in order to better formulate policy and programs to address the needs of transnational populations. This collaborative proposal focuses specifically on identifying the cultural, artistic, and networking practices and capacities of recent migrants from Mexico because we believe that building interventions that incorporate peoples' cultural and social capital will be more efficacious and sustainable in the long-term. The focus on cultural, artistic, and network assets will complement research on the economic impact of migrant activities and research addressing their use of social services or degree of integration into normative institutions. Identifying cultural, artistic, and network assets, we propose, will be critical to the overall project because it provides understanding of the nature of identity formation, community building strategies, and creative potential of immigrants.

Immigrants have always been upheld iconically as the "builders" of this nation, but relatively little remains known about the ways in which current patterns of more fluid border crossings (rather than permanent immigration and settlement in the United States that was the previous pattern) impact immigrant life and the lives of others in both sending and receiving communities. Most attention has been paid to economic impacts of migrants (for example what contribution remittances are making in home communities) but less attention is being paid to maintenance or innovations of cultural

practices (for example how are kinship networks being stretched by transnationality, or are new networks emerging; how do hometown associations function to maintain social ties). The proposed effort will enable us to extend our prior theoretical multi-theoretical multilevel understandings of the social motivations for why individuals and institutions within transnational immigrant communities create, maintain, and dissolve various network links with one another (see Monge & Contractor, 2003, *Theories of Communication Networks*, Oxford University Press). Our prior and ongoing National Science Foundation funded research has identified several key motivations that apply to small, well-defined *work-related* networks. These include the role of (i) self-interest, (ii) social exchange, (iii) collection action, (iv) proximity, (v) homophily (birds of a feather), and (vi) balance (friends with friend of a friend). While this will serve as a starting point, our goal in this proposed project would be to use ethnographic and network techniques to identify the various motivations that are salient within the larger, more fluid, *personal* networks of transnational immigrant communities. Understanding these factors, events and processes will help us to understand immigrants' agency in securing livelihoods and contributing to civic life. In turn, this analysis will help develop new policies, both for promoting creativity and economic well-being.

The Research Setting

CCUC has recently conducted a two-year study of adult informal arts throughout the city. That study provided a base of knowledge on how arts practices build skills and civic capacity across twelve different case studies. The proposed collaboration with the UIUC research team will expand on that work by focusing on community building and networking via arts and culture in three specific geographical areas. We propose to conduct joint research in three major areas of Chicago: Suburban Cicero, Pilsen, and South Chicago-East Side. Each of these areas is a major node of Mexican settlement (although currently, it is interesting to note, Mexicans are actually quite dispersed throughout the metropolitan region). Interesting differences between these neighborhoods permit gathering of comparative data on nuances or complexities in the patterns of behavior. For example, South Chicago-East Side, located on the South East side of the city, was the site of the first settlements of Mexican immigrants dating to the late 19th Century. Today, according to research CCUC has previously done in the region, new Mexican immigrants are moving into the neighborhoods and pursuing different economic and cultural strategies from the older immigrants. Pilsen is widely perceived as the cultural heart of Chicago's Mexican residents, the location of many artistic groups and institutions; it is also central to Mexican political organizing. Suburban Cicero, just West of Chicago, has hardly been studied and represents an example of the uneasy tensions that are arising as Mexicans move out of the City proper to settle in areas known for institutional practices of exclusion.

Research Design

Principal Investigator Noshir Contractor and a senior research scientist will design the network data collection strategy and work with PI Alaka Wali and co-PI Rebecca Severson, who will develop the ethnographic data collection methodology for analyzing immigrant networks.

Contractor will supervise the (i) development and customization of the network asset mapping exercise (NAME) for the three communities, (ii) design web-based software that combine collection of ethnographic and network data by the field researchers using the IKNOW (Inquiring Knowledge Networks on the Web) technology developed by Noshir Contractor's Team Engineering Collaboratory at Illinois, and (iii) co-manage the field research team of six graduate level researchers over a research period of four months.

Prior to undertaking full scale field research, the research team will conduct reconnaissance research in the three neighborhoods to identify places and sources for encountering recent immigrants and to get a sense of the social context. We will conduct focus groups with invited participants representing a cross-section of community activists, leaders, artists, and others who have knowledge of immigrant communities. The information from the focus groups should help us to identify sites, events, activities, individuals, and organizations that will permit entry into the immigrant communities and networks.

Specifically, the reconnaissance will help us define the *boundaries* of networks (which stakeholders should be included in the network), the key *nodes* within the networks (who are the key informants about the network), the key *attributes* that we need to map about these nodes (size of events, budgets for organizations, frequency of events, etc.) and the most influential *relations* (flows of job-related information, social support, cultural flows, etc.) within the transnational immigrant networks. Furthermore, we hope that first consulting with community leaders will allow us to obtain active participation from the Mexican community in Chicago for the research project. It is our hope that this research will be seen as useful as a pilot for those who are working on the Arts and Culture Indicators Project. Additionally, in this preliminary period, we hope to access existing arts and culture data as well as published and administrative data (including data perhaps being gathered by other researchers participating in the North American Transnational Communities Initiative) that will provide broad picture statistics.

All of this preliminary work will enable us to more rapidly conduct an assessment in each of the three regions of the cultural, artistic, and network assets of immigrants. Standard ethnographic techniques such as participant-observation, semi-structured and open-ended interviews, and additional focus groups will be used to elicit information including arts and cultural practices and local meetings of migrant organizations such as hometown clubs, federations, and indigenous associations as well as other events attended by migrants such as church services, political meetings, and neighborhood gatherings. Key informants identified will be interviewed and finally focus groups will be conducted (some deliberately structured and others held at places where people already congregate). As researchers collect data in the field they will enter field notes – and invite the participants to directly enter their perceptions of the network (using innovative graphics software) directly into web-enabled PC tablet notebooks equipped with *AtlasTI* software for qualitative data base management and IKNOW web software for real time network visualization and analysis.

Researchers will coordinate data collection with the Field Museum Collaborator's ethnographic data analysis team and we will also use photography, video, and audio recording to document artistic and creative processes. We have found that multi-media strategies for research and dissemination of research findings are very effective for

communicating and for affording new insights and going back to the community for validating these insights

At the end of the field research period, the team will analyze collected data and produce a multi-media research report, incorporating the visual and audio documentation and network graphs and asset maps. All student researchers will be bilingual and work half-time over a research period of nine months. Two students will be placed in each of the three sites. They will also contribute to the analysis of the ethnographic data. The U of I Collaborator will provide one student for the ethnographic team, one to develop the technological infrastructure for the network asset mapping exercise and one student will be in charge of the network analysis and interpretation. The CCUC will provide 5 ethnographic field researchers and ethnographic data analysts. Throughout the research periods, interns will share data and work as a team, which will be facilitated by weekly meetings held at The Field Museum with remote participants occasionally joining via conference call.

Procedures

The asset maps created by CCUS will be overlaid on UIUC's Network Asset Mapping Exercise. To obtain information on network patterns of social organization, we will use analysis of social networks to explore patterns of social organization among migrants using the IKNOW (Inquiring Knowledge Networks on the Web) technology. The technology provides an innovative approach to capturing participants' perceptions of network structures in their communities, aggregating multiple perceptions into consensus network structures, visualizing these network structures and providing real time analysis of various properties of these networks. These properties include the network's ability to scan for new information, absorb new information, disseminate information located in one pocket of the network within the larger network, and the robustness of the immigrant network. The network assets collected via the Network Asset Mapping Exercise will also serve as the starting point of a dialog such that researchers and participants can then validate or expand understandings of these emerging patterns by testing them in new settings or with additional informants.

Expected results

We expect the research to result in the following outcomes:

- 1) Supplement data being collected by others regarding the Arts and Culture Indicators Project and serve as a pilot to test methods and theory.
- 2) Uncover whether migrants hold multiple identities, and how these are expressed in their artistic and cultural practices.
- 3) Gain a better understanding of how arts and cultural activities are embedded in social and organizational forms, including hometown associations, kinship networks, other voluntary associations, and new arts organizations or networks.
- 4) Identify the relationships between newer immigrants, their arts and cultural practices and social assets and those of older immigrants or the wider society (i.e. mainstream institutions).

- 5) Develop a scalable methodology for mapping, integrating, and analyzing cultural and network assets so as to better inform policy makers and other stakeholders about resource allocations in transnational immigrant communities.

Capabilities and Qualifications

The research proposed here fits well with program of research at the Team Engineering Collaboratory. Over the past 10 years, the Team Engineering Collaboratory has conducted several projects funded by NSF, NASA, and other funding sources to develop theory, methodology, and technologies for enabling networks in communities in *three* arenas:

1. *Discovery*: Helping communities discover their existing communication and knowledge networks (for instance, “If only the immigrant community in Pilsen knew what the immigrant community in Pilsen knew”).
2. *Diagnosis*: Helping the leaders of a community diagnose the “health” of the network. That is, identify the networks absorptive capacity, the connectedness among those who share common or complementary interests, the bottlenecks, liaisons, or isolates in the network.
3. *Design*: Helping the community collectively identify strategies to “design” or tune a network to accomplish their goals more effectively. Designing a network includes identifying links or nodes that need to be re-structured, but it also includes identifying the social incentives and the technical infrastructures that will make it likely for the network design to be successfully implemented.

This project is unique in the collaboration between the core expertise of the Team Engineering Collaboratory and the expertise of our collaborators at CCUC. To our knowledge, no projects have integrated these two methodologies (asset mapping and network analysis) in the manner proposed here.