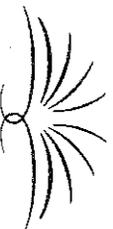


**Immigrants** AND THE  
**Revitalization**  
OF **Los Angeles**

DEVELOPMENT AND CHANGE  
IN MACARTHUR PARK

Gerardo Sandoval



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*For the public good*

of the low-income community. To my surprise, I was wrong in my initial expectation. Ten years after both the infrastructure project and the revitalization program were completed, the immigrant Mesoamerican community was stronger than ever. The community is now a safer, cleaner, more vibrant space. Affordable housing has increased, and the population has access to the subway, an important regional transportation system that, in turn, has opened new labor markets to them. The projects have come to fruition, and the community has improved.

Redevelopment is an exciting field within city planning, as it represents institutional efforts to create concrete social changes in an expedient manner within a spatially defined area. Redevelopment brings all of planning's specialties and tools to bear in an area to "improve" that space. Hence, redevelopment policy and practice are linked to transportation, economic development, design, housing, environmental planning, community development, land use, etc. and integrate these factors into efforts to change low-income marginal spaces. Analyses of redevelopment projects are, thus, at the cutting edge of planning theory and practice. This study is a critical case that has an unusual outcome and contributes to theory based on the validity of that unique empirical finding that "shakes up" the field as it is contrary to the established norms and expectations and hence contributes to new knowledge. Combining a case study approach with a form of grounded theory, the present study documents the mechanisms by which the Mesosamerican immigrants' community of the MacArthur Park neighborhood could survive and thrive when a large-scale redevelopment project appeared likely to destroy or displace it.

If this case study sheds new light on redevelopment policy, since it affects emerging immigrant neighborhoods in the U.S., then such knowledge could be harnessed by city planners entrusted to help create social and physical change in communities, especially immigrant communities. Their planning work might, then, be more likely to actually serve the public good. I hope that the positive experience of MacArthur Park's community, and that of the city planners, politicians, and all of the others who worked with the community, will pave the way for others.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

City-planning professionals have been deeply involved in efforts to redevelop low-income neighborhoods. Attempts to "improve" marginal areas have generally led to the displacement of the areas' low-income residents, and part of the resulting hostility has been directed at city planners. This difficult relationship has been a key theme within the field of planning and remains so today.

Redevelopment is supposed to revitalize marginal areas experiencing disinvestment by changing the institutional structures within those places and intervening in markets within those neighborhoods. Such interventions have historically been led by elite business interests from the central business district (CBD) with the intent of reclaiming the marginal areas for their own economic benefit. New investment in housing stock, infrastructure, and public amenities has led to increased apartment rents and, thus, to displacement of low-income populations living in these neighborhoods. At times, such as during the heyday of urban renewal in the 1950s-1960s, this contentious process has involved forceful removal through the power of eminent domain, although, too often, the "highest

and best use" of the land really meant the economic interests of the city's political elite and the CBD's economic elite.

The redevelopment literature is awash with studies focusing on the detrimental effects redevelopment has had on marginal neighborhoods. Most such studies present grand structuralist narratives focused on the political and economic relationships within cities. Others focus on agency, mainly to show that low-income groups have managed to organize resistance to large redevelopment projects. Such resistance leads either to stopping the large projects or to disrupting the communities.

The Mesoamerican immigrant neighborhood of MacArthur Park in Los Angeles may be unique in not following the patterns outlined previously, and that difference—that anomaly—makes this case study potentially important. How was that low-income immigrant neighborhood able to absorb a large-scale redevelopment project—centered around a new subway station—and actually make the redevelopment work to the benefit of the neighborhood? This book takes a revelatory case study approach to tell the story of how the changing Mesoamerican neighborhood adapted to the city's redevelopment pressures and actions. I argue that a process of co-evolutionary adaptation occurred between the Mesoamerican endogenous institutions and the city's redevelopment/revitalization institutions. Using a complex adaptive systems conceptual framework to understand changes in the neighborhood and in the institutions affecting it, the book describes how agents and institutions both endogenous and exogenous to the neighborhood evolved as they adapted to each other. The process of neighborhood change has not been framed this way previously. Researchers have missed much of the complexity and power of the political and economic dynamics in immigrant neighborhoods, as well as the potential that such dynamics hold for revitalizing cities.

At its core, this study considers how a low-income immigrant community was able to take advantage of a large-scale redevelopment plan. Its main finding reveals that immigrant capital, along with the community-based organizations' (CBOs') grassroots power and the citywide Latino political power, interacted to facilitate the survival of this immigrants' milieu.

This research focuses on how a Latino immigrant community used its various forms of capital (social, political, financial, and cultural) to revitalize the neighborhood. From an institutionalist perspective, I have studied how city agencies (planning agencies and local political institutions) interacted with Latino communities in implementing redevelopment plans. This research contributes to broader theoretical debates regarding redevelopment and neighborhood change, which are current and critical issues within the field of city planning. It also contributes to our understanding of community roles and of the participation of community agents. The research stresses organizational change within neighborhoods. And, most importantly, it sheds new light on how agents in neighborhoods adapt and, in some cases, eventually co-evolve.

The research method used took an institutional approach, as I conducted a revelatory case study. I conducted thirty-two in-depth, open-ended, semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders involved in endogenous and exogenous institutions shaping the neighborhood, including representatives of CBOs, local businesses, residents, informal workers, city politicians, city-planning staff members, and police, seeking to understand and explain the mechanisms the immigrant community used to make redevelopment work for its members. I built upon existing and seminal research in areas of ethnic diversity in neighborhoods, especially research related to the concepts of ethnopolis and global cities. Research related to immigrant capital, with an emphasis on social capital, was critical for situating my search in a broader field of knowledge within urban sociology. And, finally, the emerging field of complexity theory (and, more specifically, complex adaptive systems [CAS]) provided the necessary theoretical foundation to comprehend the relationships between and among various agents in the neighborhood.

My findings reveal that various forms of capital (social, political, financial, and cultural) present in immigrant neighborhoods may not only increase the neighborhoods' attractiveness as targets for redevelopment but may also help them sustain their immigrants' milieu despite such challenges. To sustain their community in the face of large-scale, top-down redevelopment, endogenous institutions and agents in MacArthur

Park needed the help of local government, and, in fact, important agents within local government also sought to maintain the ethnic makeup of the neighborhood. The case study of MacArthur Park shows that the processes of adaptation and co-evolution between the neighborhood's endogenous organizations and city institutions could proceed because three critical factors—immigrant capital, CBO grassroots networking power, and Latino citywide political power—converged to sustain the Mesamerican immigrants' milieu. The book's contributions are important to the development of public policy as it relates to redevelopment and issues of neighborhood revitalization. In particular, the book addresses new contributions to emerging forms of local economic development in an increasingly globalized world. Redevelopment specialists need to consider new spatial relationships, such as the often strong transnational linkages found in immigrant communities. Redevelopment in low-income communities has to be addressed with attention to cultural continuity and the particular possibilities for adaptation that exist in these communities. Planners, in their training and practice, need to acquire and safeguard the ability to assess and build upon the strengths and resources of multicultural neighborhoods. Planning for multicultural constituencies needs to be taught in planning schools as the next generation of planning practitioners tries not to repeat the mistakes of past planners.

Chapter 1 will briefly introduce the problem outlined by the book and will stress the scholarly context and frame the research, highlighting the relevance and importance of the case history materials and providing an interpretive view to understand the neighborhood. The book's contribution to the field of city planning is addressed.

Chapter 2 traces the historical contestation between the immigrants' milieu and the gaze of redevelopment. A central theme within that history has been the constant effort to target and implement revitalization programs in immigrant neighborhoods. As the CBD elite seek to capitalize on regenerative low-income areas, this has historically placed low-income immigrant neighborhoods in an ever-shifting struggle for the maintenance and survival of their communities. Many immigrant ethnic neighborhoods, however, possess a rich mixture of social, financial,

political, and cultural capital ("the immigrants' milieu"), which both attracts the "gaze" (Sartre, *Le regard*), as explained in the text) of redevelopment and offers potential resources for the neighborhoods' survival. This contestation has greatly influenced the field of city planning, and it has persisted throughout three time periods: during the mid-nineteenth century as planning emerged as a profession, during city planning's heyday in the 1960s urban renewal projects, and today as cities revitalize their CBDs in the face of globalization.

Chapter 3 describes the conceptual framework and provides an overview of the methods of the study. Complexity theory argues that social phenomena occur in a nonlinear, dynamic, and evolutionary manner, with small changes sometimes leading to large and unpredictable outcomes. A complex adaptive systems approach explains how populations of agents adapt to their changing environments. Mechanisms of variation, interaction, and selection lead to higher levels of adaptation by agents. The neighborhood is represented as a global ethnople, "gazed" upon by elite downtown business interests seeking to capitalize on redeveloping the area. The endogenous institutions respond to pressures from the city's exogenous institutions, and agents interacting within a complex system develop, through mechanisms of variation and selection, the possibility of co-adaptation and, ultimately, co-evolution.

To investigate MacArthur Park's unique situation, an in-depth revelatory case study method was used, focusing on neighborhood change through the agents involved in the main neighborhood institutions (both endogenous and exogenous) affecting and affected by that change. The main study question was the following:

Was the Central-American community in MacArthur Park able to co-evolve with the city's public agencies and not be displaced by the large infrastructure redevelopment plans for the area? If so, how and why was this co-evolution possible? What were the mechanisms underlying the process?

The most important sources of data were the in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted with thirty-two key stakeholders involved in the

redevelopment planning and project and in the community responses to it. Interviewees included politicians, planners, Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) staff, police, other city and county officials, community development organizers, businesspeople, and others. That source of data was complemented by a demographic analysis of the neighborhood, a content analysis of the city's planning documents, and a media analysis. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and then coded using qualitative data analysis software. Themes that emerged through use of the software helped in analyzing the redevelopment process and in organizing and writing the detailed case study.

Chapter 4 tells MacArthur Park's revitalization story, as a narrative of the most important changes in the past twenty-five years. It focuses specifically on the city institutions' series of eight plans for revitalizing the neighborhood and on how those plans evolved and adapted in response to pressures both from the community and from Los Angeles' political structure. The chapter tells the story chronologically and intentionally excludes formal analysis, showing that this narrative case study of revitalizing a low-income neighborhood is one in which an immigrant neighborhood has taken advantage of a grand redevelopment effort. Several processes were involved. Latino politicians took over the council district and pressured other city institutions to pay more attention to the area. Networked CBOs pressured local politicians and engaged residents in revitalization efforts. The new resources brought to the neighborhood by the Community Redevelopment Agency helped bring further attention and still more resources to the area. And, most importantly, the revitalization process drew upon—and, to a great extent, was based upon—the social, political, financial, and cultural capital that had developed in MacArthur Park as the global ethnopolis of New Mesamerica in Los Angeles. The case study narrative serves as the main empirical foundation of the study.

Chapter 5 focuses on how and why city agencies were willing and able to increase regulation of the informal activities in MacArthur Park. A city's usual response to dealing with informal activities (especially in areas that are designated for large-scale redevelopment) is to suppress and destroy those informal activities. Something different was done in

MacArthur Park. There, LA city agencies engaged local CBOs as mediating organizations that interacted with informal workers and tried to formalize their activities. The chapter describes and analyzes how the neighborhood's day laborers and street vendors were engaged in the city's efforts to regulate MacArthur Park's immigrants' milieu and how the "*migueros*" (providers of counterfeit identification and immigration documents) were not. The city intended such engagement to legitimize previously informal activities, increase social order in the neighborhood, and, ultimately, increase the city's control over the immigrants' milieu. The chapter discusses both the opportunities for and the limitations of formalization. The efforts to regulate informal activities provide crucial examples of co-evolutionary processes within the neighborhood.

Chapter 6 describes and analyzes the infamous Rampart Division and the LAPD's evolution from a warrior-cop mentality (detrimental both to the LAPD and to the community) toward a community-policing model (which led to increased safety). During the 1980s and 1990s, MacArthur Park was the hub of L.A.'s drug market and one of the nation's most violent neighborhoods, inundated with gangs such as Marra Salvatrucha-13 (MS-13). The warrior-police strategies of the Rampart Division led to abuses of immigrants and to corruption within the department and its Community Resources Against Street Hoodlums (CRASH) units. The new chief of police since 2002, William Bratton, made an effort to change the hostile relationship between the LAPD and the community by initiating the Alvarado Corridor Project, which helped the Rampart Division transition into using community-policing strategies that greatly lowered crime rates in the neighborhood and increased the sense of safety within and around MacArthur Park. The community-policing strategies now applied by the Rampart Division are evidence of co-evolution between the division and the neighborhood agents. Interactions between diverse stakeholders, such as the police, CBOs, agents of the business community, and other city agencies, helped the LAPD develop new mechanisms by which to serve the neighborhood and contributed to selection among various potential stakeholders. The chapter also discusses the May Day melee events of May 1, 2007, and the controversies surrounding them.

It argues that the show of force by the LAPD—the very forceful clearing of generally peaceful protesters that reevoked a strong backlash against the LAPD by both the media and immigrant rights groups—was carried out not by Rampart police but, rather, by officers from an elite riot division in downtown LA.

Chapter 7 analyzes New Mesamerica's social, political, financial, and cultural forms of capital and provides insights into how those forms of capital helped sustain the neighborhood in the wake of large-scale redevelopment. The chapter represents the synthesis of New Mesamerica's emergence and evolution. The importance of the neighborhood's social capital becomes clear through the analysis of how a CBO initiated a housing forum that brought together over one hundred fifty community people, including the area's city councilor and his staff. The story of La Curacao Business Center, which houses more than ten CBOs as well as several transnational commercial organizations and the Guatemalan consulate, reflects multiple facets of the community's economy and organizations. Identifying the networked power of community organizations and how they maintain such power in the neighborhood helps to understand MacArthur Park's political capital. Considering how the city councilor's office interacts with local community members yields other political insights. The financial capital established in MacArthur Park is considered from several points of view, first in terms of the neighborhood's ethnopolitan economy (the immigrant economy, transnational connections, and ethnic niche economy) and then through the organization and experiences of a transnational credit union set up by a local CBO. Finally, the cultural capital that marks MacArthur Park as New Mesamerica is examined through consideration of how agents in MacArthur Park, with the help of the local city councilor's office, are going about labeling the neighborhood "New Central America Town" and trying to give it an officially recognized and promoted Central-American cultural identity.

The concluding chapter revisits the theoretical framework and its main hypotheses and answers the main research question as follows: Immigrant

neighborhoods possess various forms of capital (social, political, financial, and cultural) that can help them sustain their immigrants' milieu. To sustain their communities in the face of large-scale, top-down redevelopment, however, they need the help of local government, with important agents within the local government also seeking to sustain the ethnic makeup of the neighborhoods. In the MacArthur Park case, the councilor's office in LA provided legitimate institutional and political power to pressure other city institutions such as the planning agency, the MTA, and the redevelopment agency. In the case of MacArthur Park, the process of co-evolution between the neighborhood's endogenous organizations and the city's organizations could proceed because three main variables—immigrant capital, CBO grassroots power, and Latino citywide political power—converged to sustain the Mesamerican immigrants' milieu.

The book finishes by summarizing the main findings as they relate to the occurrence and mechanisms of co-adaptation and co-evolution in the MacArthur Park neighborhood. These new understandings lead to some reflections and to five key lessons, which directly address the initial problem that inspired this study: the redevelopment paradox of displacing low-income populations through large-scale, top-down projects. These five lessons include (1) encouraging interaction among stakeholders involved in revitalization; (2) increasing affordable housing in an area targeted for redevelopment; (3) encouraging both informal and formal types of interaction between the community and planning institutions; (4) encouraging diversity (variation of agents and strategies) within redevelopment projects; and, lastly, (5) encouraging large-scale redevelopment projects in areas identified as being likely to sustain the new capital investment without social disruption or displacement of the already present community.