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Assets of recent Mexican immigrants to Chicago detailed in study

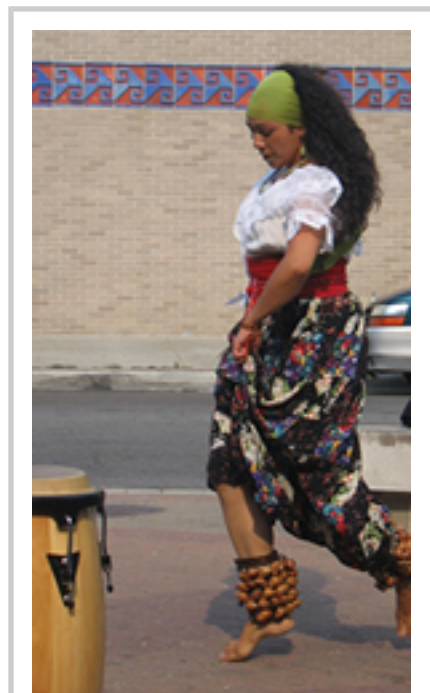
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CHAMPAIGN, Ill. — A new study finds that recent Mexican immigrants in Chicago possess a wealth of artistic, cultural, and networking assets and that those assets contribute to the social, cultural and economic well being of many Chicagoland neighborhoods, organizations and institutions.

In fact, the artistic and cultural activities of Mexican immigrants who arrived in Chicago after 1994 stimulate the local economy, especially in the music industry and service sector.

So say the authors of the new "Creative Networks: Mexican Immigrant Assets in Chicago" study, which is a joint project of The (Chicago) Field Museum's Center for Cultural Understanding and Change (CCUC) and the Science of Networks in Communities (SONIC) research group at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.



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Photo by J. Mumm, Field
Museum

Street dancer.

The Rockefeller Foundation funded the yearlong study through its Creativity and Culture Program. The geographical areas the researchers began with were the West Chicago suburbs, including Aurora; South Chicago; Pilsen and Little Village; the West Corridor; Albany Park; and the North Side. Later, the researchers incorporated comments from Mexican immigrants throughout the city.

The research team's findings will be released during an event for the news media at The Field Museum on Nov. 14. A Web site showcasing the research findings will be introduced during the event.

"Mexican immigrants help to build up the rich, vibrant life and character of our city," said Alaka Wali, director of the CCUC and one of the study's primary investigators. "They make significant contributions that lead to growth, both economic and cultural."

Noshir Contractor, the other primary investigator and director of the SONIC group at the U. of I., noted that the immigrants' arts and cultural associations "play important 'brokering' roles – second only to social service organizations – in resource-exchange networks, including exchange of clients, information, expertise, volunteers and materials."



Click photo to enlarge

Photo by H. Anderson, Field Museum

Pilsen neighborhood sidewalk.

"In particular, these associations often act as liaisons, linking different types of organizations together, creating pathways among social services, community centers, arts institutions, businesses, mass media and other organizations important to facilitating access to the social, political, cultural and economic life of the city for the Mexican immigrant community," said Contractor, a professor of [speech communication](#) at Illinois.

Hank Green, a senior investigator on the SONIC team and a research scientist in the [National Center for Supercomputing](#)

[Applications](#) at Illinois, added that the findings “reinforce ethnographic evidence that arts and cultural associations are vital connection points into the social, civic, political and cultural life of Chicago.” Green and Heather McClure, research associate with the Latino Research Team at the Oregon Social Learning Center, co-wrote the study report.

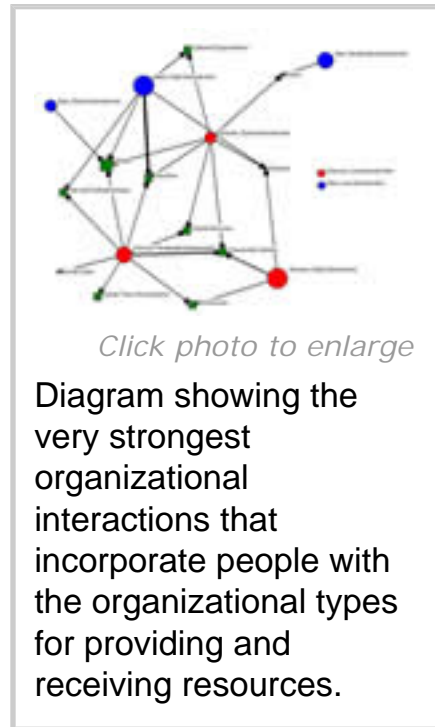
The research team also found that:

- Recent immigrants’ social, cultural and networking practices – both formal and informal – help them build individual and collective identity, bond with other Mexican nationals, build bridges to other U.S.-born groups, and overcome a variety of social barriers;
- Church, school and primary service-based informal arts played “unique and important” roles as catalysts for Mexican immigrants’ development of leadership skills and financial power that ultimately contributed to the expansion of institutional networks both in the Chicago area and between Chicago and Mexico.

The aims of the study were to identify the cultural, artistic and networking practices and capacities of post-1994 migrants from Mexico; to analyze how these practices act to buffer challenges or obstacles immigrants face as they “traverse the transnational landscape”; and to understand how changes in immigrants’ cultural practices and network formation affect their identity, community building and creative potential.

The researchers concluded that at a time when citizens and elected officials across the U.S. are wrestling with immigration issues, their findings have “important policy implications.” They made several policy recommendations, including:

- Increase access to the arts and support local artists in



Chicago's Mexican community;

- Support institutions such as churches, social service organizations, public parks, libraries and small businesses that serve as “critical networking sites” for Mexican artistic and cultural practices;
- Support school-based efforts to use arts and cultural education, and increase arts education and networking opportunities for teachers;
- Create mechanisms to improve information sharing, improve services to immigrants and strengthen support networks;

For more information about the study and the Nov. 14 event, contact Greg Borzo at The Field Museum at 312-665-7106; gborzo@fieldmuseum.org.

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