Proceedings of the 8th Annual Conference
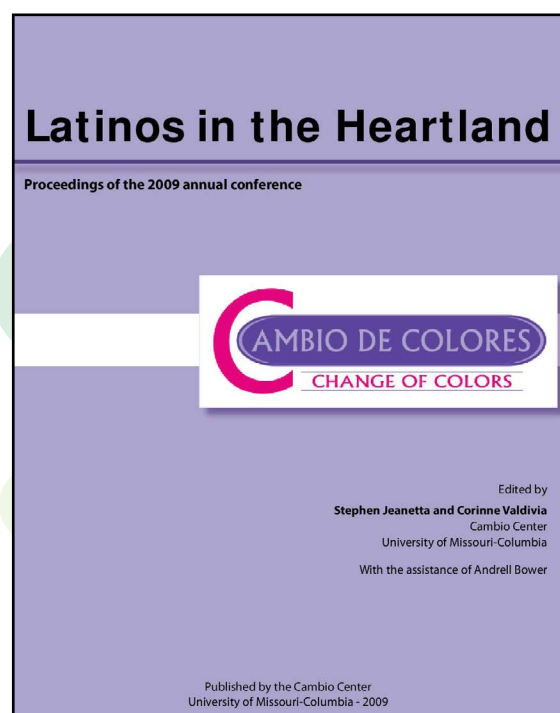*Latinos in the Heartland*

A multistate conference about integration of immigrants
May 18-20, 2009 in St. Louis, Missouri
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Developing Social Capitals: Latino Immigrants in Three Rural Missouri Communities

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Latinos in the Heartland

Proceedings of the 2009 annual conference

CAMBIO DE COLORES
CHANGE OF COLORS

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Cambio Center
University of Missouri-Columbia

With the assistance of Andrell Bower

Published by the Cambio Center
University of Missouri-Columbia - 2009

Abstract

The current study employs the sustainable livelihoods strategies model to examine the integration process in three rural communities in Missouri. Community development specialists and rural economists have widely used SLSM, which has evolved since original development in the 1980s. The framework represents the relations among several variables (e.g., human capital, social capital, economic capital) to explain people's livelihoods. This presentation will focus on the development of social capitals among Latino newcomers. Participants were Latino adults, 24 men and 26 women, who resided in one of three rural communities in different areas of the state. Focus groups interviews in Spanish were conducted with males and females separately in each community.

The presentation will describe the categories that emerged from the analyses related to the process by which Latino newcomers build relationships within the community. Specifically, we highlight the common venues for developing relationships and accessing resources within the community. Implication of the findings for community building will be discussed.

Keywords: Latino human capital, Latino social capital, Latino integration

Introduction

The next four papers are derived from a study that began in 2006 of three rural Midwestern communities. The goals of the research are:

- To develop a better understanding of the newcomers' integration process with a focus on the assets and resources they bring with them
- To document factors that impede or facilitate integration
- To inform decision makers about policies that can contribute to positive community developmen that begins to recognize the opportunities and address the challenges of community integration

The project has focused primarily on the roles of identity, acculturation, social and human capital and the context of reception in the integration process. The theoretical framework for this study is the Sustainable Livelihood Strategies Model. SLSM recognizes the economic, human, cultural and social capitals individuals bring with them and incorporates the context of reception or community climate as a critical factor affecting the economic and social integration of newcomers (Valdivia, et al). An analysis of the integration process using SLSM will help identify factors that contribute to strategies conducive to newcomers' asset accumulation, reduce vulnerability to risks and explain how newcomers become part of their new communities.

Methodology

The research has two phases, a first qualitative phase to define the issues and the concepts critical to the framework, and a second quantitative phase to measure factors and outcomes of strategies. The qualitative data collection was conducted in 2006 and 2007 and included focus groups, individual case study interviews and a Photovice project. The focus groups explored the economic and social factors that the newcomers contributed to the integration process. Seven focus groups were conducted, one for men and one for women in each of the three communities, plus a second focus group for men in one community after low turnout due to inclement weather and a level of diversity less than what the research required. Individual interviews were a way to explore the life stories of the newcomers; 15 interviews were conducted with newcomers across the three communities. Photovoice sessions were conducted to explore the context of reception from the newcomers' perspective. Eight participants in each community took a series of photos to answer the following questions: What exists in the community that facilitates or contributes to your integration in the community? What are the barriers to your integration in the community?

Focus groups

The first two papers, "Perceptions of Community Climate among Latino Immigrants in Three Rural Communities in the Midwest" and "Developing Social Capitals: Latino Immigrants in Three Rural Communities in the Midwest," were developed from the focus group data. The purpose of the focus groups was to gain a better understanding of how newcomers were connecting to the resources they needed to survive and grow and to learn more about how newcomers gained access to health care, education, housing and employment resources. Doctoral students facilitated the focus groups and conducted them in Spanish. Each focus group was transcribed into Spanish and then translated into English.

Fifty-two Latino immigrants participated in the focus groups. Twenty-five were female and twenty-seven were male. The average age was 39.93 and the average length of stay 12.04 years. Sixty three percent were married with 2.79 children. The sample was considerably older with more time in the U.S. than the average migrant but the goal of the sampling was to examine the range of experiences. There were younger, single, newer immigrants included in the sample from each community, which better reflects the norm for newcomers.

The third paper, "Networks and Context of Reception in Accumulation Strategies of Latinos in Rural Communities of the Midwest - A Quantitative

Analysis," develops the quantitative model, with variables constructed with the findings from the focus groups and Photovoice research. Specific variables constructed were the social and cultural capitals. They were tested with an external/community variable of context of reception, with the community climate represented by the racial profiling index. Social capital, cultural capital and human capital are measured through their regression on income earnings of nativeand foreign-born Latinos for three regions, tested with the Census data. Results will show how findings from the qualitative research inform the development of variables of acculturation, capitals and climate that make it possible to measure their impact on income earnings of Latinos in the Midwest.

Household survey

The development of a household survey began in 2008 and continued into 2009 using existing elements from SLSM and additional elements created for social capital, cultural capital and the context of reception developed from analysis of the qualitative data.

The fourth paper, "The Importance of Social Networks on Latino Immigrants' Well-being in Rural Missouri," is based on a preliminary analysis of the data currently being collected in a household survey and uses Structural Equation Model methods to assess the impact of social network use on well-being of Latinos and comparatively assess the differential impact of social networks on Latino immigrants' wellbeing based on the type of work they have, irrespective of where they live.

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▶ Developing Social Capitals: Latino Immigrants in Three Rural Missouri Communities

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The process of integrating into a new community has many social elements. Integration includes learning the norms of the place you are moving to, identifying places to work, finding a school for the children and accessing health care services. It also includes finding space in which the immigrant can preserve the traditions they bring with them and learn how to participate in the community in ways that help them contribute to shaping what the community will become. Social networks have been characterized as a form of capital and are studied in rural development as assets that contribute to the livelihoods of rural people (Flora 2001, de Haan 2001). Networks often facilitate the movement of people by providing the information and resources needed to settle at the destination (Roberts 1995). The study of social networks within the context of newcomer integration into rural places is focused on how newcomers create and use networks to settle in communities, access resources and make contributions to the development of places in which they settle.

Social Capital

Social capital is the use of networks to gain access to information, financial capital and other resources difficult for many individuals to access on their own (de Haan 2001). Portes (1995, p. 8) defines social networks as "sets of recurrent associations between groups of people linked by occupational, familial, cultural, or affective ties." In the context of community integration, social networks might provide access to information such as doctors who speak Spanish or employers who hire Latinos. Financial resources accessed through social networks might include funds needed during an emergency or loans for a car.

Social capital consists of both bonding and bridging social capital (Gittell and Vidal 1998). Bonding social capital includes the connections individuals form within a group, often as a means of mutual support. Networks and relationships that immigrants or newcomers form among themselves are important forms of bonding social capital because through these close networks with other immigrants, they are able to provide mutual support to each other to meet their needs. Bridging social capital is focused on the relationship among different groups. In the context of integration, bridging social capital is focused on how newcomers connect to other groups within and outside the community that can help them grow and develop. These relationships can be powerful because they might provide access to information, resources and opportunities not accessible to them within their own group (Narayan, 1999).

Social capital is explored in this paper using a typology developed Bullen and Onyx (2005) that identified eight aspects of social capital shared across five rural communities; four relate to the structure of social relationships, and four relate to their quality.

Figure 1. Aspects of social capital

Structure of social relationships	Quality of social relationships
1. Participation in local community	1. Proactivity in a social context
2. Neighborhood connections	2. Feelings of trust and safety
3. Family and friends connections	3. Family and friends connections
4. Work connections	4. Work connections

A qualitative analysis of focus group data was used to identify factors within the structure and quality of social networks and their relationship to bonding and bridging social capital as they relate to community integration.

Quality of Social Relationships

The quality of social relationships among newcomers is shaped by their ability to be proactive socially, feelings of trust and safety, relationships with family and friends connections and work connections (Bullen & Onyx, 2005). The qualitative aspects of family and friends connections and work connections will be discussed with the structure of social relationships.

Proactivity in a social context

There is little evidence of social proactivity except within the context of the family. Women participants rarely socialized beyond the family except at church. Even when they work, women do not have much of an opportunity to socialize. The isolation of women was a theme that repeated itself over and over. Men tended to socialize more often. Parks, church and home were mentioned as important places for social interaction. There was little evidence of participation in the broader community except through work, church and school. Education is a strong motivation for social interaction. Education for children was mentioned many times as a primary reason, after work, for moving to these communities.

Feelings of trust and safety

Relationships with health care institutions and law enforcement were most often mentioned as affecting newcomer perceptions of trust and safety. If the law enforcement and health care institutions had good relationships with the newcomers, they positively affected their feelings about the place. Some expressed fear of getting sick because they did not trust that they would be able to get effective care, thus affecting perceptions of well-being. Several people moved to the rural communities from more urban parts of the U.S. and mentioned safety as a reason for moving to the rural areas. Some simply felt welcome.

> "Wherever I go, I am happy. And I do not know how to speak English. I don't know anything, but when I go to a store to buy something, and I do not know how to say something, it never fails that someone will arrive and if they see me struggling, they lend a hand."

Structure of Social Relationships

Newcomer participation in the community, neighborhood connections, friends and family and work connections all shape the structure of social relationships (Bullen & Onyx, 2005).

Participation in local community

Newcomers described limited contact with key community institutions that could help them sustain and develop their family, such as banks, educational institutions and health care programs. One community has a community center that provides resources for newcomers and plays a key bridging role. Participants in the other two communities mentioned churches as primary community connectors. They also provide basic resources such as English classes and job referral networks and act as safe places to interface with the host community. Church is a place of support but also a place to connect to each other and serve the broader community. Barriers to community engagement included language skills, legal status and access to resources. Perceptions of community life affect participation.

> "This place is theirs. Don't cause trouble because these people will get angry, so this is their place and we won't have problems, because here it's not like Mexico. Here you are free, here you make the right choices and if you behave, the world is yours, if you behave badly, bad things will happen to you..."

Neighborhood connections

There were few instances of newcomers creating linkages in their neighborhoods that might serve as bridges to the broader community. Language, cultural differences and perceptions existing residents held about the newcomers as well as perceptions newcomers held of the host community tended to discourage the formation of these relationships. However, they did occasionally happen.

> *"I also know an American lady that helps us a lot. She loves my children, and she says she's the second mother of my. When she can, she buys shirts for them, sweater. It has been 2 weeks since she talked to me going to her house because she had clothes for my children. I went and she gave me 2 pants, 2 sweatshirts. She says, 'They are new.' She speaks a little Spanish."*

Family and friends

Relationships among family and friends are important in terms of establishing sources of bonding capital that provide access to resources and support. These networks are the key form of social capital newcomers use to adjust to the new place and serve as the primary source of information about the community.

> *"...help with the children comes from friends, I have my daughters, my mother takes care of my daughters when I am working with my wife."*

Family and friends relationships shape both positive and negative perceptions of the community. Family and friends tend to be the primary sources of information about the community. Perceptions about law enforcement, health care, education, places to shop, insurance and other resources are often based on the limited experiences of the people in family and friend networks. Sometimes the quality of the information is poor and could negatively affect newcomer perceptions of community resources, effectively making it more difficult for newcomers to trust important community resources. Thirty-seven themes have been identified so far about newcomer perceptions about the community.

Resources in the community are accessed through connections with family and friends. Often, a relationship with a family member or someone at the church is how a person gets their first job in the community.

> *"The truth is, when I arrived here I didn't count on a job, but thanks to some relatives and [a volunteer from a local church] that she was able to contact a company, where I started to work making 6 dollars an hour."*

Work connections

The men make their social connections outside of the family through associations at work. They have a greater tendency to socialize with colleagues after work. The women do not socialize through work the same way men do. The reason given was that when they were not working, the women had to get home to their "second job" of taking care of the family. This adds to feelings of isolation many of the women expressed.

Some employers also link newcomers to resources for housing, health care and education. Sometimes, the employer is even a key provider of resources such as insurance, loans and educational resources.

> *"When I came by contract here in this job, I asked for information about everything and they gave it to me. Things like where I had to take my kids to school and such. I asked them about everything."*

Conclusions

One pattern that has emerged from the focus groups is the newcomers have formed insular networks among fellow Latino newcomers. The positive effects of these insular networks help provide some safety and stability as newcomers make their way in a new place. They facilitate the immigration of

other friends and family to the community and help people connect to work. The challenge is that these networks are not broad and might isolate the newcomers from the rest of the community, which limits their opportunities for growth and development. Programs that help the networks of newcomers better understand the communities to which they are moving and connect them to others in the community who can facilitate access to key resources would help the integration process. Language, cultural differences and misconceptions about community norms are barriers to building relationships across the community and complicate forming those relationships. In addition, the local community climate could either foster an environment in which these relationships could be more easily formed, or it could present barriers to the integration process.

The isolation of women was one theme that cut across the communities. The women described few opportunities for social interaction outside the home and expressed a desire for more social interaction. Efforts to link women to create social networks of women might facilitate their development options locally and aid in the overall integration of newcomer families.

There were few bridging resources that were identified by any of the newcomers. One community had a Latino community center. In this community, the center plays a linking role between people and resources, often by serving as an intermediary between the newcomers and resources. Work and church are the primary places newcomers connect to community resources. However, although the churches do serve as community contacts, the newcomers are segregated many times at the churches because of language differences. Other than through their relationships with Pastors and lay members, there might not be a lot of community contact through the churches.

The relationship between the bonding and bridging social capital suggests that since there are few bridges to the broader community, newcomers rely heavily on family and friends as information sources about the community. One challenge to this system that appears in the data is that newcomers have limited access to and understanding of the community and its resources and are forming perceptions about the place, institutions and resources based on incomplete information. These perceptions could seriously impair their ability to trust the social structures in the communities in which newcomers are moving and slow the integration process.

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