

Engaging the Social Capital of Immigrants to Create Sustainable Communities

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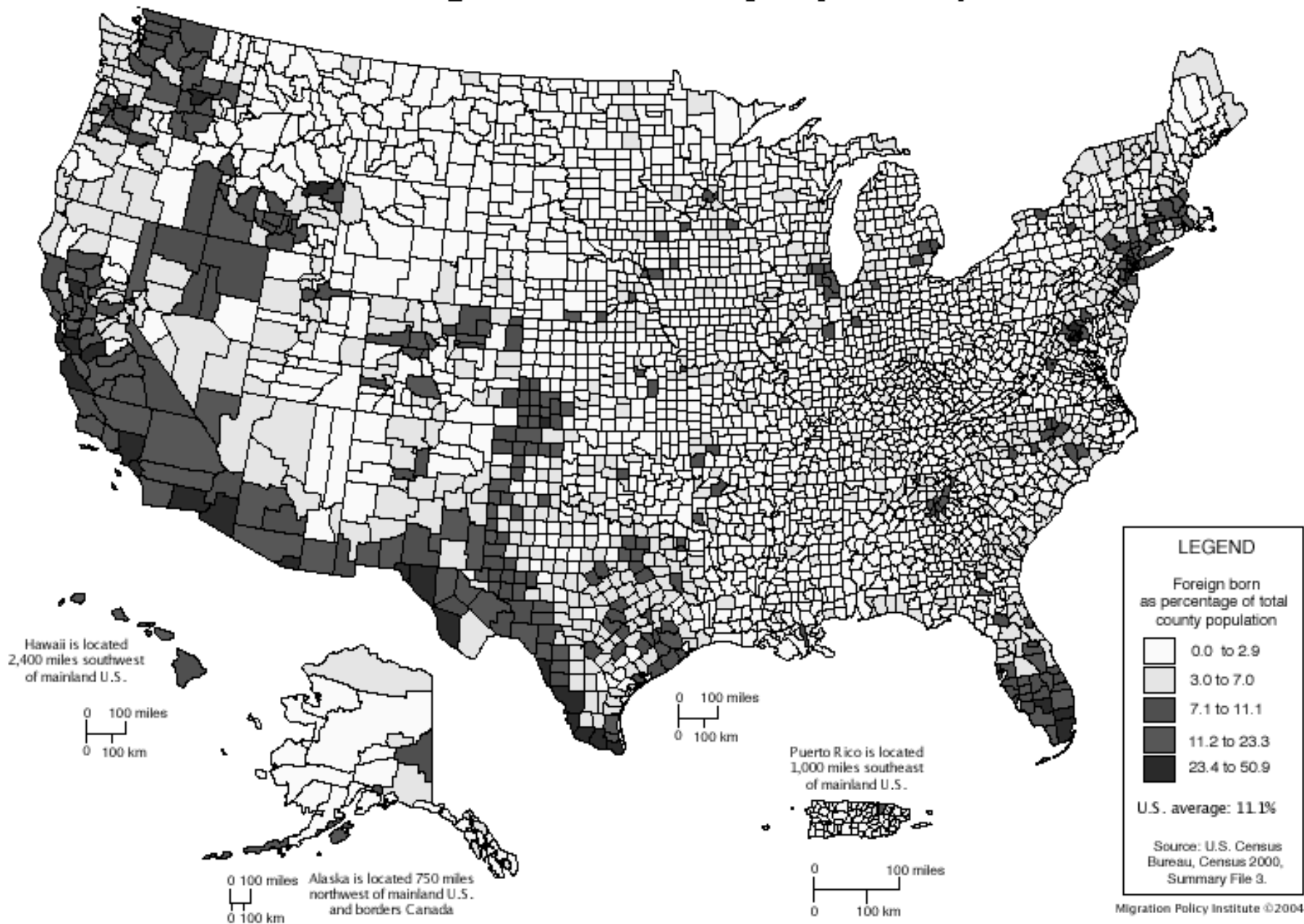


Our Nation: Then and Now

- In 1970, one out of 20 residents was born abroad. In 2000, one out of nine residents was born abroad.
- In 2000, there are 31 million foreign-born residents in the U.S.
- The immigrants today are more diverse in ethnicity, language, education, income, and profession
- It is easier for immigrants today to maintain a bicultural identity



The Foreign Born In the United States As Percentage of Total County Population, 2000



Goals of Paper

- To increase awareness about the importance of engaging the social capital of immigrants
- To share a framework for conceptualizing the dynamics between the social capital of immigrants and traditional American institutions in order to build sustainable communities
- To stimulate the sharing of lessons and ideas for engaging the social capital of immigrants in your work



Sources of Information

- Scientific literature
- Interviews with leaders from the Indian, Vietnamese, Salvadoran, and Chinese communities in the Washington metropolitan area
- Field experiences in diverse communities across the nation



What is Social Capital?

Resources and assets that emerge from social ties and interpersonal relations among members of a particular group or community



What Role Does Social Capital Play In Building Sustainable Communities?



* Other ingredients for civic participation include time, money, education, psychological orientation towards participation and trust, opinion leaders, and community organizers



Social Capital and Civic Participation



Social capital is related to the practice of civic participation among immigrants

- Ensures that the basic needs of members are met
- Promotes the identity, culture, and language of immigrants
- Controls members' social boundaries by providing opportunities for them to interact only with each other
- Provides connection to the home country
- Becomes an avenue for helping immigrants understand their new world



Civic Participation and Sustainable Communities



- Civic participation is the act of practicing citizenship
- Citizens and immigrants have the opportunity to share their ideas with decision-makers through civic participation
- American citizens and immigrants fulfill their civic duties by participating in activities like voting and charitable work
- Civic participation is an important indicator of immigrant integration
- Citizens and immigrants without access to opportunities for civic participation will continue to be marginalized



Forms of Social Capital among Immigrants

Old institutions and social ties in new settings

Rotating credit associations, sports clubs, and alumni associations affiliated with high schools and universities in the home country.

Old institutions and social ties in new settings with new functions

Religious institutions.

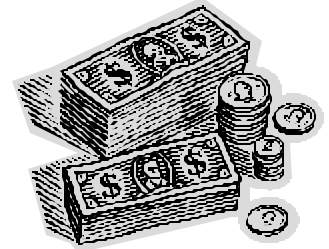
New institutions and social ties with new functions in new settings

Benevolent associations, hometown associations, linguistic organizations, merchant associations, and professional associations.



Old institutions and social ties in new settings

Traditional institutions and social ties brought directly from the home country and reinstated without change in function.



Rotating credit associations are known as *kye* (Korean), *tandas* (Mexican), *susu* (Trinidadian), *hui* (Chinese), *mujin* (Japanese), *esusu* (Yoruba)

- Provide small-scale capital
- Provide more accessible alternative to mainstream financial institutions
- Foster members' economic stability



Old institutions and social ties in new settings with new functions

Traditional institutions and social ties that change in response to the new needs and concerns of their members.



Religious institutions

- Provide sense of importance by allowing lay leaders to occupy religious positions
- Serve as sites for recreational, cultural, and educational activities for second generation immigrants, to allay parental fears that their children may become too “Americanized”
- Provide referrals or answers to questions about community services
- Promote gender equality
- Organize the community and creates a governing structure resembling a nonprofit organization



New institutions and social ties with new functions in new settings

As a result of the resettlement process, new institutions emerge alongside traditional institutions to assist their members.

Benevolent associations

- Provide support to members of its immigrant community
- Unite members through shared nationality and shared identity
- Indirectly impacts psychological orientation towards trust and participation

Hometown associations also known as *comunidades* (Salvadoran), *fraternidades* (Guatemalan)

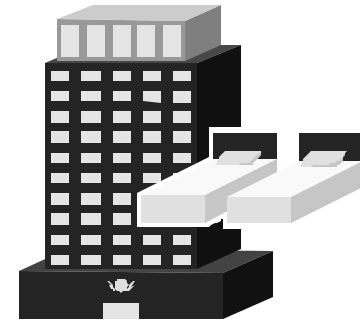
- Help raise funds hometown projects
- Campaign for politicians in hometown or country of origin
- Reinforce ethnic identity and connection to hometown
- Have an indirect impact on psychological orientation towards trust and participation



New institutions and social ties with new functions in new settings (cont'd)

Professional and merchant associations

- Protect the rights of members to practice their professions and trade their merchandise (e.g., American Physicians of Indian Origin, Indian Hotel Owners Association, Korean Grocers Association)
- Indirectly impacts psychological orientation towards trust and participation



Implications for Engaging Social Capital of Immigrants: Where do you start?

- Acknowledge unfamiliar forms of social capital
- Acknowledge their importance in building sustainable communities
- Learn about the many forms of social capital among the immigrants you engage
 - What are the natural gathering points?
 - Which individual or group do the immigrants typically turn to and for what types of support?
 - What do the immigrants typically do to maintain their cultural traditions and identity?
 - What did the immigrants do in their hometown to help their neighbors?
 - What were the immigrants' experiences with politics in their hometown and country?

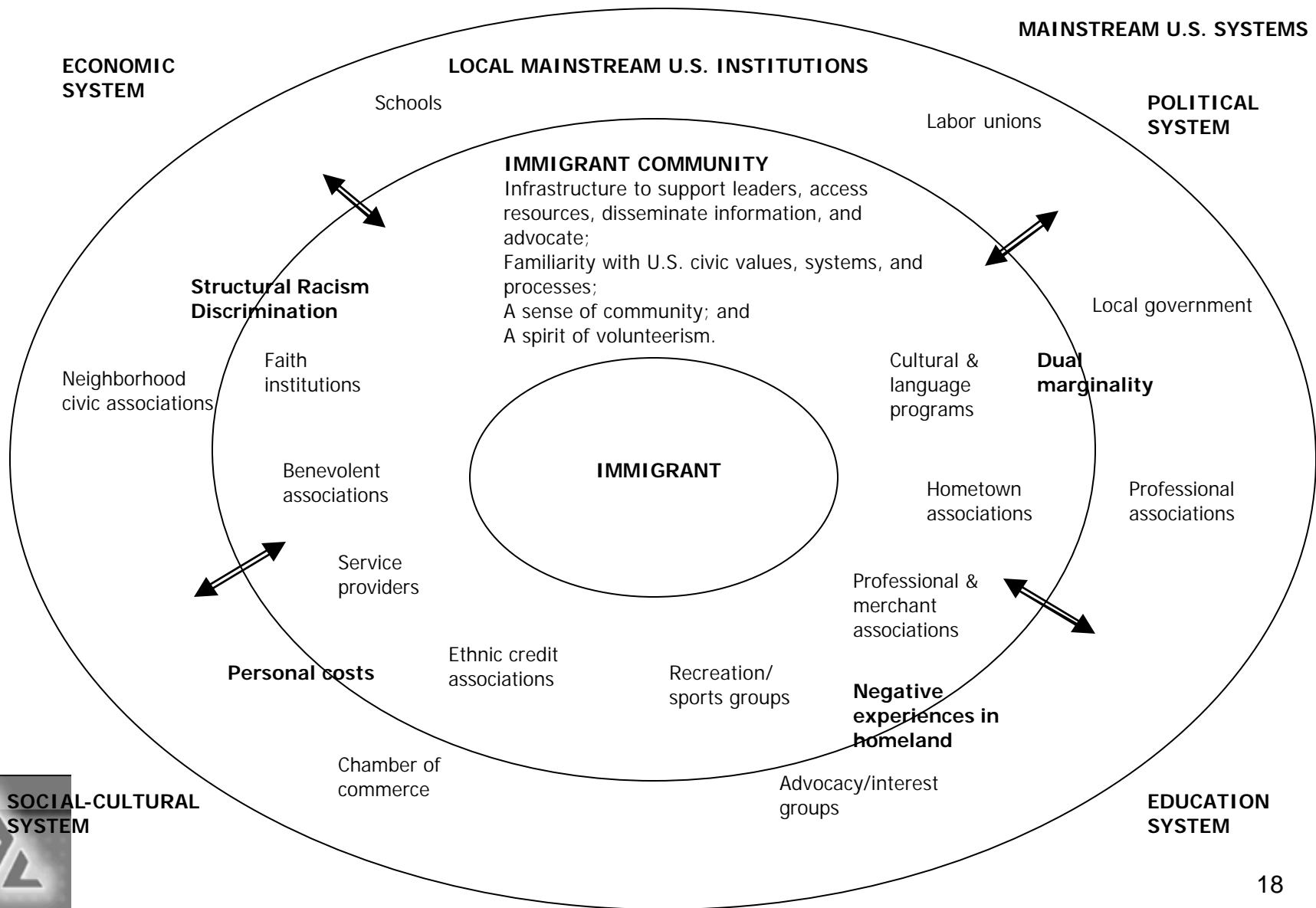


Implications for Engaging Social Capital (cont'd)

- Identify bridge builders
- Build the capacity of traditional institutions that are struggling to adapt to their new environment
- Provide opportunities for institutions to interact
- Focus on the role of traditional and new institutions in building sustainable communities



Conceptual Framework for Engaging Immigrant Social Capital in Building Sustainable Communities



SOCIAL-CULTURAL SYSTEM

Stories From the Field

- The Eastern Philadelphia Organizing Project in Philadelphia transformed the traditional *bodega* structure (grocery store) in Dominican communities into an association that functions as a convenor and uniting force for the disparate groups of Dominicans throughout the city
- *Mujeres Unidas y Activas* built on gender traditions in the Latina culture by mobilizing the women around issues that are generally considered to be in the women's private sphere. Through educational workshops in self-esteem and empowerment, the women moved out of the private sphere into the public arena and began to take on broader challenges.



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