

TAMBAYAN PUBLIC SPACES IN SUBURBIA FROM FILIPINO-CANADIAN PERSPECTIVES

/tam. 'ba.jan/ [Filipino] "a place for hanging out"

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ABOUT THE RESEARCH

Suburban public spaces are important resources that allow people to exercise, partake in recreational activities, and socialize. However, research has shown that public park design is heavily influenced by European culture. Thus, can sometimes alienate users who may come from other cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Moreover, in suburban Canada, research suggests ethnic populations are excluded from planning decisions, resulting in tensions stemming from incompatible uses and space usage that attracts municipal opposition. This research aimed to understand how immigrants from one of Canada's largest ethnic minorities, Filipinos, use and appreciate public spaces in Suburban Canada through a focus group and key informant interviews. Two suburban neighbourhoods with high concentrations of Filipino residents were selected as study sites. The neighbourhoods selected are Lawrence Heights in Toronto and The Maples in Winnipeg. The focus group and interviews revealed how public spaces played an important role in how they adjusted to life in Canada. This research uncovered an important finding that Filipino immigrants' perspectives on public spaces are shaped by culture and social norms. Among the Filipinos interviewed, personal connections to a specific space play an important role in determining the 'publicness' of spaces.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Why are Filipino immigrants selecting suburban neighbourhoods over urban centres?
2. What are the places Filipinos consider as public spaces? How are these spaces used by Filipinos and what improvements, if any, can they suggest to better suit their needs?
3. What are the findings learned from this study that can make diverse neighbourhoods become more inclusive?

KEY FINDINGS

Community needs take precedence over personal needs when it comes to public spaces

When asked "what improvements can they suggest to make public spaces better suit their needs?" respondents in Toronto and Winnipeg both expressed concern for seniors in their area. Considering that none of the study participants are seniors, this is an interesting finding which reflects their concern for the vulnerable populations in the area.

Private ownership of a space does not influence their perception on whether a place is public or private.

Perceived public spaces ranged from community/publicly-owned spaces such as community centres, basketball courts, and parks, to privately owned places like malls, ice cream shops, cafes, among others.

Tambayans are considered as "happy places" by some and "safe spaces" by others

The results from the focus group in Winnipeg and the key informant interviews in Toronto revealed how tambayans affect their ability to socialize and interact with the broader Canadian society. In Lawrence Heights, settlement caseworkers reported how tambayans were seen as safe spaces by the immigrant youth. Gathering in these spaces became coping mechanism that created communities of affirmation, care, and belonging. Similarly, in the Maples, respondents shared feelings of happiness when they were asked to describe the tambayans in their area. Additionally, the Maples respondents said tambayans played an important role in helping them make friends and adjust to life in Canada.

CONCLUSION

This research sheds light on why people's understanding of public spaces. The research critically examined how public spaces do not reflect the needs of Filipino immigrants. The research aims to start a conversation in how public spaces can be reimagined by inviting new forms and uses for these spaces. Adding parks as default public spaces in areas with populations with different understanding and appreciation of public spaces may not be the best use and practical use of that space. The conversations with Filipino immigrants in Winnipeg and caseworkers in Toronto demonstrate the importance and complexity of public spaces for immigrants. Without actually having ownership of these spaces, the youth in Toronto and the respondents in Winnipeg were still able to carve spaces in a foreign land as their own by making a personal connection to these spaces.

