LATINO URBANISM:

A Case Study of the Meaning and Use of Streets as Place

in the Dominican Community of Washington Heights,

New York City

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Latino Urbanism: A Case Study of the Meaning and Use of Streets as Place in the Dominican Community of Washington Heights, New York City.

By

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ABSTRACT

This study examines Latino presence in the United States, with a focus on the Dominican community living in Washington Heights, New York City (Duany 1994, 2008). The research reveals the struggle of this community to claim public space (Angotti 2012), and create place to engineer a familiar environment to fulfill their needs for social, recreational and commercial spaces.

The study’s objective is to show the importance of cultural meaning, that manifested in patterns of use, spatial practices, and material characteristics that derived from a particular history, time, and place. The research incorporates theories of Latino Urbanism (Rojas 2010), Placemaking (Rios et al 2012), and concepts of streets as places (Francis 1887, 1989).

This three-pronged approach seeks to understand how place is constructed through everyday practices, past experiences, attachment, and the memories of a group’s sense of community. The analysis extends from a study of the physical elements of space and its relationship to social use. This helps in generating a demographic and experiential perspective of the everyday space.

This study uses observation-based studies and behavioral mapping techniques to evaluate and explain patterns of use of streets by the Dominican community in Washington Heights, New York. In order to do so, an in-depth analysis of existing site conditions was conducted which resulted in approaching the site in different scale contexts. At a general level, Latino demographics in the U.S. showed a significant increase in the past decade, resulting in changes of how public spaces were used. Due to these changes, first, the transnational identity and practices of the Dominican community became self-evident. Second, these practices expose the need to retrofit the current built form to adapt it to the needs and wants of this community. Third, there was a drastic (and quite obvious) change that emerges forging a “new identity” (or lack thereof) of the street character as it merged with the area of study. This suggests how Broadway (the main downstreet or what others call the neighborhood) has been neglected and arguably mistreated. The study provides further details about the lack of accommodations to safeguard pedestrians, designated bike access routes and space for social and cultural interchanges on the streets.

The study addresses the practical question of space use, Latino placemaking, meaning, and experience of the site through the eyes of a Dominican culture residing in the area. As designers continue to experiment with new landscapes in a transformable contexts, the study helps to merge cultural forms and practices with design specificity vis-à-vis territorial inhabitation of space, place and meaningful use. The study reveals how Latino urbanism is taking place in Washington Heights, and how cultural preferences are experienced in the struggle for public space and placemaking.

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1 Latinos are people of Hispanic ancestry, commonly referred to natives of Latin America and their descendants in the United States (Irazabal & Farhat 2008).

2 For the purposes of this essay place is the setting for the everyday and the location of ideas and practice that create a narrative of meanings (Rios et al 2012)
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Dominicans are one of the fastest-growing groups of Latinos in the United States and fastest-growing segment of the population in New York City (Ennis et al 2011). For Dominicans the experience, use and interactions in public spaces means to socialize and interact with neighbors in the public realm. The space serve as a medium to assimilate into mainstream American culture. The fact that public space has not been designed to be adaptable to support uses other than the norm, can result in malfunction and degradation of the urban form as well as a lack of attachment to place. This study argues that culture can contribute to the design of public urban places and preserve a healthy city form and environment.

Research shows that design is often misguided or misused due to the subjectivity of the designers and, more precisely, due to the different cultural backgrounds of the users. The lack of micro-level details not taken into account when designing (e.g. cultural values and timeframe elements) has the potential to adversely affect the social and spatial quality of the space. In an effort to fill this void and add socio-cultural elements to the design process, the research develops both a theoretical and practical response to this lack of cultural emphasis. The purpose of this study is to get a better understanding of how the designed landscape responds to cultural adaptation and placemaking (or not).

Latino urbanism and placemaking approaches can help carry cultural and social meaning in the everyday landscape. This is relevant in the design process as a response to issues with users and use.

PROJECT STATEMENT / GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

How can the design of streets as public open space aid in placemaking and convey cultural meaning and use?

The goal of this study is to explore how the Dominican community of Washington Heights, New York City uses and interacts with streets as public open space, and to gain insight on how the street to cultural adaptation and placemaking.

The goals will be accomplished by:
• Obtaining a detailed study of demographics, pattern changes, and socio-cultural characteristics of the Dominican community of Washington Heights;
• Conducting observations on general and distinctive socio-cultural patterns for this community;
• Analyzing the relationship between patterns and use; and
• Proposing recommendations for design implementation based on the analysis of patterns and use.
Latinos are the largest and fastest-growing minority group in the United States (Rios 2010, Rios et al 2012) and this group is rapidly changing the nation’s ethnic diversity at a fast pace representing more than 50% of the population change from 2000 and 2010 (Ennis et al 2011). To many, Latino presence in the U.S. is the latest chapter of ethnic succession in urban America. (Figs. 2 - 5).

Latino heritage in the Americas began with the Spanish “discovery” of the New World and the subsequent contact with its indigenous people. Later the infusion of other ethnicities to the mix helped to create a distinct Latino culture – a blend of European, African and Native Americans. Prior to the 18th century, this culture in North America typically referred to Spanish colonies in what is now the continental United States and also Mexico. After the 1800s; people from South and Central America and the Caribbean were key social actors shaping the continuously evolving Latino culture.

Although Latino heritage is primarily linked to notable populations in the western part of the U.S., census data reports emigration and intermigration of Latinos settling in new places throughout the country, with significant increases in the Northeast and South. According to the 2010 Census, Latinos in NYC had become the second most numerous race/ethnic group in this city comprising almost 30% of the total population compared with approximately 20% for non-hispanic blacks and about 30% for non-Hispanic white (Ennis et al 2011, Bergad 2011). As a sizeable group, they are beginning to have a significant impact on the American landscape and the character of city place from a cultural, societal, economic and political stance (Rios 2010).

This said, however, Latinos have fought for the “right” of the city. One example of the long history of Latino struggle for this right is that Latinos identity has become embedded in New York City’s public spaces and neighbor-
neighborhoods even while they are being contested (Angotti 2012, 2012). Dominicans as part of this Latino group are not the exception. Their culture, identity, appeal of merengue\(^1\) music and other forms of Dominican popular culture has been captured in the city space even though most scholars and researchers have neglected the study of this cultural identity in the U.S. from a design standpoint (Duany 1994, 2008).

Interestingly and somewhat surprisingly, the first non-native American settler in the isle of New Amsterdam was a Dominican sailor-turned-merchant by the name of Juan Rodriguez in 1613. Rodriguez landed on the island of Manhattan a year before the first European settlers and twelve years before the founding of the island. In order to honor his memory and the Dominican contribution to the City, a tribute was organized; the local municipal government agreed to name a section of Broadway in Washington Heights from 159th to 218th streets in his name (Fig. 6).

This said, the first true wave of Dominican immigration started in earnest after the second U.S. military occupation in the Dominican Republic in 1965 - known as Operation Power Pack (Labadie 1993). The Dominican diaspora immigrated to many places in the United States, with major concentrations in New York City, New Jersey, South Florida, Providence RI and Philadelphia PA. A less dense population concentrated in Chicago IL, Washington DC, Houston, Los Angeles CA, Portland OT, Kansas City KS, Orlando FL and New Orleans, LA (Fig.7).

As of the 2010 Census, Dominicans made up the largest Latino group in Manhattan, NYC (Ennis et al 2011). New York City’s neighborhood of Washington Heights hosts the largest Dominican settlement in this city as well as the United States (Duany 2008), comprising almost 50% of the total Latino population in NYC (Bergad 2011). Washington Heights is often referred to as “Quisqueya Heights” by native Dominicans - Quisqueya being the former name of the Dominican Republic prior to Spanish colonization (Fig. 8).

Like other immigrant clusters, many

\(^1\) Merengue is the national dance of the Dominican Republic.
Dominicans choose to stay together within the same geographical location. In Washington Heights, where they have established their community, a distinct Dominican identity has emerged and continues to flourish. The neighborhood has become a hotbed of cultural diffusion and interchange of Dominican culture. Many restaurants offer ethnic eateries, local stores often advertise in both Spanish and English; church services are frequently held in keeping with Dominican traditions, and medical assistance is not only available in “standard” Spanish but in the Dominican dialect of Spanish (Fig 11,12). The language on the street is Spanish, and the Dominican flag flies proudly next to the American one from apartment windows and store fronts (Fig. 9,10).
Figure 13 Race Distribution in Washington Heights, (US Census Bureau 2012)

Figure 14 Washington Heights Total Population, (US Census Bureau 2012)

Figure 15 Median Age in Washington Heights, (US Census Bureau 2012)
LATINO URBANISM & PLACEMAKING

Latino urbanism is defined as an emerging approach to design that responds to Latino lifestyles, cultural preferences, and economic needs (Lara 2012). Latino urbanism has been discussed by numerous professionals in the field as a means to look at how Latinos retrofit their neighborhoods to make places unique and special. Rios defines Latino urbanism as the expression and instrumentality of culture in the public realm. Rios indicates: “culture serves as a creative force to instigate a shift in the use, identity and meaning of public spaces”. This helps in identifying place and related place meaning of a struggling urban landscape. This study draws from this concept by highlighting how the selected site’s unique spatial history and the everyday life practices of residents that retrofit the built form to satisfy economic, social and cultural needs.

Many have used the concept of Latino urbanism in terms of urban politics (Davila 2004, Diaz 2005), and its relation to contemporary paradigms like new urbanism (Mendez 2003). However, absent from this discourse is the expression and instrumentality of culture in the public realm. In other words, Latino urbanism encompasses more than just the political aspect of the urban form; it is a catalyst of representing use, meaning and identity of Latino culture. More precisely, it offers a model for urban improvisation and reinvention that addresses the issues of public life, social justice, and the economic needs of the diverse urban dwellers and embraces the everyday acts of individuals, families and communities (Rojas 2010). Latino urbanism does not focus on creating and allocating for one specific culture, rather understands how people use space with their cultural values (Rojas 2010). It provides innovative ways for sustainably retrofitting cities and suburbs from the ground up through the enforcement of vibrant urban environments, supportive, creative and adaptive urban form, integrated public and private space, developmental opportunities for all social groups, and space constructed by the people and for the people.

Placemaking can be constructed individually or by groups. Place refers to territorialized local communities and identities, collective memories associated with territory, claim of authenticity by local actors, phenomenological association with locales, and social relationships among people in territorial communities (Rios et al 2012, Rios 2010). Place is the space where Latino citizenship is being produced as they struggle to build community, and gain social and political standing.

Figure 16 Placemaking Elements and Process (Author)
making is also the construction of meaning, and is the mean of production of the locale, space, action and identity (Fig 16). This is the creation of a parallel identity (Rios et al 2012).

What makes a public space distinctly Latino is the social and cultural norms that manifest in patterns of use, spatial practices, and material characteristics that derive from a particle history, time, and place (Fig. 17). As Rios exposes in his research about placemaking in Latino communities, Latinos space making has three types of spaces. These spaces have implications for the planning and design of urban space, and how spatial production contributes to the process of affirming cultural identity and raising group consciousness. The three types of spaces according to Rios are adaptive, assertive and negotiative spaces.

• Adaptive Spaces exist on unclaimed environments that are appropriate for everyday use including vacant properties, streets and parking lots. These sites are also appropriate for spontaneous, improvisational, and creative uses. An adaptive space could provide a space to share a “common sense” of territorial identity with a homeland other than the one that is currently being inhabited, like Las Casitas. Here vacant lots are converted into culturally specific community gardens as the setting for playing dominos, pig roast, and salsa, and activities (Aponte-Pares. 1997).

• Assertive Spaces emerge when space is politicized to challenge dominant symbols and codes. Assertive spaces express an insurgent identity, especially when minority groups’ claims are not represented. These are spaces that express an explicit cultural identity. These spaces also challenge existing codes and symbols, resulting in changing meaning of public open space such as Los Angeles’s Old Plaza and Olvera Street or Paseo Boricua in Chicago’s Humboldt Park neighborhood (Estrada 1999).

• Negotiative Spaces represent the leading edge of cultural interchange in the public realm. These spaces move beyond symbolic representation of a particular group towards the formation of polyvalent communities and the recognition of plural understanding. This type of space is characterized by transcultural iconographies, hybrid aesthetics, and recombinant cultural forms. E.g. borderlands between Mexico and US (Herzog 2001).

The success of these spaces is measured by personal experience of its users. In the case of adaptive spaces, Latinos adapt the urban fabric to produce placemaking. For example, “The Casitas” project has been a useful Puerto Rican effort that showcases their identity in a subtler way without interfering with designed environments (Aponte-Pares 1997). Assertive spaces, on the other hand, tend to be culture-centric. For instance “El Paseo Boricua” is a retrofitted strip that celebrates Puerto Rican culture excluding other ethnicities to be represented in the space. Lastly, negotiative spaces supports cultural interchange where many groups could interact, but does not showcase culture as one of the underlying elements of identity of its inhabitants, resulting on meaningless and unidentifiable spaces (Fig. 18).

These characterizations of spaces provide a foundation to understand how Latino placemaking can be identified. In New York City, one of the most segregated cities in the US for blacks and even more so for Latinos, the history of Latino placemaking has developed as a function of the displacement of Latino communities and other immigrants groups (Angotti 2012).
### Rios’s Latino Space Making

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Adaptive</th>
<th>Assertive</th>
<th>Negotiative</th>
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<td>- Everyday Use</td>
<td>- Politicized space</td>
<td>- Leading edge of cultural interchange</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Vacant Properties</td>
<td>- Express insurgent identity</td>
<td>- formation of polyvalent community</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Streets</td>
<td>- Express explicit cultural identity</td>
<td>- Recognition of plural understanding</td>
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<td>- Parking Lots</td>
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<td><strong>Results</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Culturally specific space</td>
<td>- Transcultural iconographies</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Shared common sense</td>
<td>- Hybrid aesthetics</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>- Recombinant cultural forms</td>
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<th><strong>Examples</strong></th>
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<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Casita Rincon Criollo at 157th St. and Brook Ave. Bronx NY 10456 Mother’s Day, 2012, Photo by Molly Garfinkel" /></td>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Humboldt Paseo Boricua Gateway, Chicago IL. Sept 6, 2008 By Zol87 (Flickr.com)" /></td>
<td><img src="image3.png" alt="New York City" /></td>
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Figure 18: Rios’ Latino Space Making (Author)
STREETS AS PLACES

Mark Francis states, streets can shape public culture and provide the environment for the social life of the city. (Francis 1987, 1989). Streets are an important part of the landscape of everyday life. Social life occurs along streets providing meaning to people, inviting access for all and encouraging use and participation. Streets are an integral part of everyday life in myriad forms. Often Latinos retrofit the auto-oriented built form to make it pedestrian friendly through their behavior pattern. For Dominicans living in Washington Heights the street is where social life takes place. Jane Jacobs one of the early advocates of democratic streets made planners aware of the “eyes on the streets” a key elements in the process of constructing place (Jacobs 1961). The high pedestrian volumes in Latino neighborhoods help support and facilitate transit use, from biking and illegal shuttle service, to bus and subway services.

Kevin Lynch, another writer of urban life, posits in the essay entitled “A Theory of Good City” that we have five basic public space rights: presence, use and action, appropriation, modification and disposition (Lynch 1981). These rights provide an effective measurement of the street’s publicness and democracy rights that Dominicans have embraced on the streets of Washington Heights. Simple amusements like walking, talking, eating, and performing sport activities also gives a street a diverse life. Unfortunately, planners have attempted to transfer these activities to parks, restaurants, and public buildings. Many scholars and practitioners believe that we need to bring people back to the streets (Francis 1987, 1989). A good example of Lynch and Francis’ ideas are found on the streets of Los Angeles; they provide Latinos a space and opportunity for economic survival by allowing them to sell items or labor. Vendors temporarily transform the urban landscape by adding a rhythmic activity on the streets. Nowhere else in the urban landscape of Latino Los Angeles is the use of space so evident and celebrated (Rojas 2010). Some argue that a public street should have a healthy relationship between the private and semipublic life inside buildings and outside in the public (Fischer 1981). Whyte (1980) also agrees with this concept and indicates that “dead” uses such as businesses without display windows and office, parking garages with blank walls should not be placed along the public street.
The methodological approach to this research study is qualitative. It relies on using observation-based and behavioral mapping techniques that evaluate and explain patterns of use on streets as places of social interaction. The focus will be on observing sociocultural patterns of the Dominican community in the area of Washington Heights, New York.

The study site is Broadway from 155 St to Dyckman Street, extending throughout the entire strip of Washington Heights focusing only on the front facade of each block along Broadway. The area presents a considerable population, and provides a base to conduct observations on spatial quality and characteristics of physical form, behavioral patterns and meaning; (fig.19).

Qualitative inquiries are inherently multi-method, which reflect an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Data was collected over a seven month period using street observation, mapping, photographs, and document analysis. Observations included patterns of use by block, recreational quality, activity settings, and spatial character of the site. Participant observation techniques like people tracking and counting were employed to view and engage in the

Figure 19 Study Site, Broadway 155 ST. to Dyckman ST. (Author)
interactions, actions, and behaviors of participants in the sidewalks and streets where Dominicans reside. A camera was used to capture key features of the site. A total of over two-hundred photos were taken and archived. These images were used for data inventory analysis and patterns classification and interpretation. Photographs of built form, storefronts, outdoor activities, and materials were taken. Document analysis included diagrams of circulation, land use, environmental quality, physical character and components of the site, charts, and observation questionnaires; developed to assess uses on the site.

The site was visit five times during different seasons, including weekdays and weekends. The visits were between five to six hours in length. During each visit, notes were taken of how people used the space (i.e. behavioral mapping). Information on traces left behind by users, flow and movement, and people counting were used to determine which were the most used and populated areas on the site.

In addition to the observations, a variety of documents were gathered from the public domain as well as from organizational records, including newspaper articles, magazine articles, census data, videos and photographs, minutes from meetings, conference, organization charts, bulletin boards, and web sites.

All the project data and observations provided a foundation for developing meaning and use diagrams of streets as places. Observations were analyzed based on Rios’ concept of Latino space and placemaking, Rojas’ Latino Urbanism, and Francis’ public street for public use (see Fig. 20). Observations were coded to relate to the research goals. Next, the texts and diagrams with similar codes were grouped together for more focused analysis. During this phase of focused coding and grouping, different study scales emerged, giving way to three scales with rich descriptions and commentary. The write up of the results and the analysis was addressed in a macro to micro scale fashion, and integrated in the discussion followed by the key recommendations.
The site inventory was divided into three scales. The first scale comprised the general identification of location, zoning, accessibility and spatial elements that were found within the community. The second scale is a result of the previous scale. The focus was on Broadway and its key city elements. It extended along the neighborhood from 155th Street to Dyckman Street. The third scale centered on the core of this community; from 168th Street to 181st Street.

The site inventory was conducted with physical maps, photographs, sections, and use patterns to identify use, spatial characteristics, experience and meaning.
GENERAL IDENTIFICATION OF WASHINGTON HEIGHTS

Washington Heights is 2.5 miles long by 0.5 miles wide, bordered by parkland (Fig. 22). Neighborhood parks are within a 10 minute walking distance from most residential areas. It hosts one of the most important transportation facilities of the northeast the George Washington Bridge Bus Station, providing connections to numerous transportation hubs, terminals, corridors and junctions. Its location allows for easy accessibility to and from New Jersey, the Bronx and downtown Manhattan (Fig. 23).

Approximately 65% of the land is built up and zoned as mid-rise apartment buildings. Preserved parkland represents about 20% of the total area (Fig. 24). The remaining area is designated for transportation. Parallel to Broadway are Saint Nicholas and Amsterdam Avenues which provide mixed uses to its residents. Commercial overlay districts also take place along residential zones (Fig. 25). These are small retail and service shops districts that serve the immediate needs of surrounding residential communities. In most cases, this commercial overlay districts take only two stories for commercial activities.
SITE ANALYSIS

SCALE 1

This scale analyzed circulation, accessibility, zoning and land use. At this level, residential and commercial land use contributed to a sense of vibrancy on the streets. Commercial overlays districts were located on three out of the four main arteries that connected southern portions of Manhattan to Washington Heights and Inwood, particularly on Broadway, Saint Nicholas and Amsterdam Avenues.

There were separations and barriers in the neighborhood due to components of the urban form or physical barriers. Entering the neighborhood at 155th Street, the presence of Trinity Cemetery offered an edge where the site started. The number of people on the streets was less in comparison to other areas of the neighborhood, but the quality of the street space was considerably better in terms of accommodations for users to stay and socialize for longer periods of time. Broadway Mall, a key identity of Broadway starts at Columbus Circle in midtown Manhattan and extends north to Washington Heights where it is the center artery of the neighborhood and where people have the opportunity to interact.

Figure 26 Analysis Diagram Study Scale 1 (Author)
At 168th Street, New York Presbyterian hospital was the Broadway Malls end and the more populated and vibrant zone began. At 178th Street, the George Washington Bridge and Bus Terminal literally cuts through the neighborhood separating what can be called the north and south parts of Washington Heights. Here, the character of the area became more transit oriented, traffic and safety was a major issue. On the north side of the station a few more blocks shared the same characteristics and the commercial and transit oriented pattern ended. The last element was the 181st St. shopping district connector to Interstate 95 and the Bronx. North of the 181 St. Shopping district marked the beginning of a more residential area (Fig.26).

The inventory showed the preference of users to open space oriented towards facilities and access. These physical barriers were all related to Broadway. Trinity Cemetery, New York Presbyterian, George Washington Bridge & Bus Terminal and the 181st shopping districts were facilities and areas that were service oriented, with an expected major inflow and outflow of users. 182nd Street and above was more residential and community oriented with less street and commercial activity. Access to neighborhood parks, government institutions and churches along Broadway were in this area.

The use of public recreational space and playgrounds was affected by access to these facility and gender and age of users. Based on behavioral mapping in neighborhood recreational spaces, mothers with toddlers, kids under the age of 12, elderly, and dog owners had preference for recreational open space. Teenagers, young adults and some adults preferred an immediate social space to be accessed from their place of work, residence or school. Here they socialized. Store fronts along Broadway, residential buildings entrance and sidewalks; specifically from 168th to 182nd St, were places where socialization happened.
SCALE 2

BROADWAY FROM 155TH ST. – DYCKMAN ST.

Broadway from 155th St. to Dyckman St. was selected as the area of study for this scale 2. Broadway is considered the “Main Street” or “Downtown” area of the neighborhood and is one of the most transited streets in the area; this street’s connection with other key points in the community makes it highly used by its residents and visitors (Fig. 28).

Broadway has become a global brand and defining feature of New York City. Broadway is also important for Washington Heights.

In the past decade, areas along Broadway have been converted to pedestrian zones under Major Michael Bloomberg to optimize traffic efficiency (Ballon 2012). However, north of 155th Street where Washington Heights begins, traffic is chaotic, noisy and largely unregulated.

The focus at this scale was to identify physical characteristics on Broadway and its relationships to use. Observations where conducted in sets of five blocks resulting in seven areas of study (see appendix).

Following this process, four sections emerged based on physical components described on the previous study scale found along Broadway. At this scale the study viewed streets as places to identify elements in the process of placemaking. In each section, observations were conducted based on Lynch’s public space rights: presence, use and action, appropriation, modification, and disposition (Lynch 1981).

The mapping process consisted in observing each of the seven portions for 40 minutes to identify the volume of people on the street, how the sidewalk space was used and traffic patterns, width of the sidewalks, settings for users to stay, street planting and other accommodations were also observed and documented (Figs 29 - 33).

This scale identified which places were used the most and categorized them based on the concept of street as place. The mapping technique was used as a way to assess the presence, use, appropriation and disposition of the public space.

The sections for this scale were:

Section 1
155th St. – 168th St.

Section 2
169th St. – 178th St.

Section 3
179th St. – 182nd St.

Section 4
183rd St. – 190th St.
Figure 28 Broadway, Study Scale 2 (Author)
Figure 29 Broadway’s Spatial Inventory (Author)
Space Composition & People
First Section 155th St. to 168th St.

Figure 30 People and Space Composition Section 1 Study Scale 2 (Author)
Space Composition & People
Second Section 169th St. to 178th St.

Figure 31 People and Space Composition Section 2 Study Scale 2 (Author)
Space Composition & People
Third Section 179th St. to 182th St.

Figure 32 People and Space Composition Section 3 Study Scale 2 (Author)
Space Composition & People
Fourth Section 183th St. to 190th St.

Figure 33 People and Space Composition Section 4 Study Scale 2 (Author)
SITE ANALYSIS

SCALE 2

The study of Broadway showed that its character changed throughout the neighborhood.

The first section of Broadway offered a relaxed ambiance. The density of buildings was moderate, sidewalks and the streets themselves were ample enough for people to sit, stay, and experience the environment, small squares and the mall. It allocated space for walking, going to school, waiting at the bus stop, bringing goods to customers, and getting people from place to place. Although it accommodated sitting and staying, the social aspect of these spaces was very low. The quality of space to socialize and meet was very low since they were located on the tips of the mall.

On the second and the third sections of Broadway, more vibrant activities took place. This portion was a reflexion of placemaking and Latino urbanism. The number of users increased due to the Latino-themed stores along the streets, access to subways and interstate transportation. The street changed to a two-way street that increased traffic and reduced safety for pedestrians. Users transformed the sidewalks to accommodate people watching, seating and lingering for longer periods of time.

Based on the activities taking place on street sidewalks, one can assume that the existing buildings’ interior and exterior layout did not foster social interaction, like the open space to which Dominicans are accustomed in their home country. Social activities were intrinsically tied to Dominican culture and raised fundamental questions about what it means for a Dominican to take ownership of a place. In order to take ownership of a space, it has to be modified by its users and stamped with personal appreciation for aesthetics, elements, and activities. As the literature stats, the meaning of a place is defined by the values embedded within it. The users of this area have implanted their ideas of what a public space should be given the limitations of space that they have encountered. The appropriation of sidewalks in this portion becomes more aggressive with stronger presence of street vendors selling Dominican foods like “empandas, sweet beans and a Dominican version of Italian ices called frio frio”. These traces are a demonstration of how this community took action and used the space and how it was appropriated for their cultural and economic needs (Fig 34 - 36).

The fourth section was mostly residential with some commercial overlay districts. The character of Broadway remained the same with some minor variations in sidewalk width. Street planting was more evident and younger when compared with previous sections. Park areas in this section were accessible through Broadway. Space for seating and socializing was also found along access points to Gorman and Fort Tryon parks. Street vending was rarely found, and opportunities for optional activities increased.
Space Composition & People Analysis

Figure 34 Analysis Space Composition and People Study Scale 2 (Author)
Space Composition & People Analysis

Street Setting

Section 1

Section 2

Higher Volume of Activities, Less Accommodations

Scale 2

Diagram not to scale

Figure 35 Analysis Street Presence and Setting Study Scale 2 (Author)
Section 3

Higher Volume of Activities, Less Accommodations

Street Setting

New York City Green Street Program

Street Vending

Benches

Sidewalk

Park

Payan Park

Fort Tryon Park

Gorman Park

Broadway

Mitchel Square

West

East

SCALE 2

Diagram not to scale
Space Composition & People Analysis

Circulation

Section 1

Most Transited Area

Section 2

Figure 36 Circulation Analysis Study Scale 2 (Author)
SCALE 3

BROADWAY FROM 169TH ST. – 181 ST

This scale studied Broadway from 169th St. to 181st St and showed how Dominicans adapted the urban fabric to produce placemaking as well as urban improvisation models (Fig. 37). As Rojas previously stated, reinvention was implemented to address the issues of public life, social justice, and the economic needs of the everyday acts (Rojas 2010).

The analysis was based on the relationship between open space, edges and people space (Fig. 38). To document this relationship, an inventory of building use, store fronts / location and pedestrian use and circulation was conducted (Figs. 39, 41-46, 48-53). The inventory provided new insight into the type of place and allowed for the analysis of the physical components of the space. Then, relationships between traces found along the way, people tracking and appropriation as well as disposition and modification of the space were found. All of these observations provided data to support or dispel the notion of placemaking.

Figure 37 Location Study Scale 3 (Author)
Figure 38 People Space Study Scale 3 (Author)
Building Use

Figure 39 Building Use Study Scale 3 (Author)
• ACTIVITIES, EDGE AND STREET RELATIONSHIP

- Social
- Recreational
- Commerce

Figure 40 Biking on Street (Author)
Figure 41 Meeting (Author)
Figure 42 Recreational Use (Author)
Figure 43 Playing Dominos (Author)
Figure 44 Biking on Sidewalks (Author)
Figure 45 Vending (Author)
Figure 46 Flea Market (Author)
• **EDGE CONDITION**

- Uninviting - Deteriorated
- Obstacles
- Boring
- Active

![Figure 47 Obstacle (Author)](image)

![Figure 48 Uninviting edge (Author)](image)

![Figure 49 Uninviting edge (Author)](image)

![Figure 50 Uninviting edge (Author)](image)

![Figure 51 Uninviting edge (Author)](image)

![Figure 52 Unappealing edge (Author)](image)

![Figure 53 Active sidewalk (Author)](image)
Dominicans transferred symbolic power and ownership of space by naming streets (Fig. 56), claiming space (Figs. 55, 57-59, 61) and celebrating their heritage in the neighborhood (Figs. 54, 60).

These traces are signs of Latino place-making that showcase their values and interest as well as the need for other amenities in their space.
SITE ANALYSIS

SCALE 3

This scale focused on the site where most conflict occurred and stressed the analysis of physical elements and social qualities where Latino placemaking was being produced. This occurred on Broadway from 168th St – 181nd St (Fig. 62-64).

The edge of the sidewalk played a big role in what kind of activities take place. On this site, there were 177 stores including medical offices, delicatessens, supermarkets, banks, multiservice agencies, hair and nail salons and restaurants, from which 85 (or 50%) were Latino related businesses. The greatest number of Latino stores were found in the northern portion of this site, specifically from 174th St. to 181st St. In this section, improvisation and reinvention of the built form was most frequently encountered.

During the summer time, fire hydrants were opened and kids played with water on the sidewalks. Male adults were speaking Spanish with peers, listened to merengue or bachacta music, played dominos, talked about offshore Dominican politics, and read Dominican newspapers like “El National”, “El Siglo” or “El Listin Diario”. Women took their children out on strollers, shopped at the local bodegas (i.e. delicatessens), and talked to their neighbors in front of their buildings. Teenagers walked in groups, listened to music, and performed on the streets. This said, however, other user groups could not enjoy their “front yard”, like children, the disabled and and/or the elderly.

This was a busy commercial and heavily traffic area with many residential buildings. It was the core of this busy Broadway Street where most people passed by and ran errands.
ANALYSIS

Major Traffic Issues
Uninviting Edge Condition
Problematic Intersections
Indistinct People's Space

Appropiation and Disposition of Streets as Cultural and Production Space

Figure 62 Analysis Study Scale 3 (Author)
### Activity Setting, Space & Accommodation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BLOCKS</th>
<th>Necessary</th>
<th>Optional</th>
<th>Social</th>
<th>Commercial</th>
<th>Cultural</th>
<th>Standing</th>
<th>Seating</th>
<th>Cafe</th>
<th>Intimate</th>
<th>Personal</th>
<th>Social</th>
<th>Public</th>
<th>Total Stores</th>
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<th>Notes</th>
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<td>2 Gas Station / Church</td>
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**Figure 63 Activities Setting, Space & Accommodation Table (Author)**
Analysis
Sites for Intervention

Support - Integrate Commercial and Social Spaces
Support a mixture of Use Social, Production & Transit
Support Cultural and Social Activities

Figure 64 Analysis Study Scale 3, Sites for Interventions (Author)
The Dominican population in Washington Heights has shown cultural persistence, ethnic identity, interethnic relations, language safeguarding and has reshaped city form in response to its “alien” environment. The social aspects of the space were the most important part of public open space for this community. It was used for cultural diffusion between their peers which the site was thoroughly lacking.

This neighborhood has become a transnational space, an American landscape reshaped by Dominican culture (Duany 1994, 2008) as a result of the need for social and cultural space. The observations from this research study revealed that site was in constant friction as people struggle to claim public space, sought alternative opportunities to socialize and relax, competing with stores for sidewalk space, and strove to make a living between tradition and modernization.

Throughout this study, all the ideas center on the concept of placemaking and Latino urbanism vis-à-vis culture and identity. In the process of creating place, culture and meaning were the primary ingredients of user needs as well as territorial identity and transcultural policies.

Place is the revelation of a rich historical evolution leading to current conditions. It derives from insight into personal meaning from long-term participants in the landscape who may not be the decision-makers in current urban development. It also emanates from patterns of use that reveal the landscape as a multi-functioning resource that people modify and adapt to meet their daily needs. This is what the Dominican community of Washington Heights portrayed in the urban form of this site. The integration of Dominican cultural assets provided a competitive advantage over other city neighborhoods. Planners should consider ethnic neighborhoods as city assets rather than liabilities (Loukatoiu-Sideris 1993, 2005).

One could ask, “why is this relevant to our field?” Or similarly, “why develop a design or a set of recommendations for one specific culture if these are becoming transcultural identities?” One reason worth considering is the trajectory of Latinos in the continental U.S. The American landscape is becoming increasingly more Latino. Additionally, Dominicans as a sub-group of U.S. Latinos have developed a transnational identity as opposed to a transcultural identity, where they maintain their customs as well as the adaptation to the new one (Duany 2008). The informal practice of the everyday life of Dominicans was the primary expression of a transnational identity. As for the case of Dominicans residing in Washington Heights, this neighborhood is the hub and the place where they feel at home, where they can relate to each other and participate in cultural activities.

Hutchinson expressed the following thought: “an identifiable set of activities result from distinctive subcultures- a set of cultural patterns which are somehow different from that of the majority” (Hutchinson 2001). The identification of these cultural patterns is a key element in understanding space users and programming. The meaning and use of public space differ from other culturally different groups (Marcus & Francis 1997). Meanings are by-products of location, attachment, association, facilities as well as services. These statements were clearly observed in Washington Heights, where the meaning of this place to its people was connected to its location – because there were other Latinos and other fellow Dominicans specifically - so they associated and developed attachment to this place.

Research studies by Dr. Ramona Hernandez from City University of New York’s Dominican Studies Institute analyzed the everyday life of the New York City Dominican community that resided in the boroughs of the Bronx and Manhattan. Their study was instrumental as it proved that the home and place of work appeared as spaces where it was more impor-
tant to socially interact than in a university or other formal educational setting. (Hernandez & Acevedo 2011).

In New York City, Latino placemaking developed as a function of displacement as it has been the case for Puerto Ricans (Angotti 2012). Struggle for social justice served as an important backdrop for placemaking and shape the collective memory in Latino communities. Professionals must learn to go beyond the existing formal mechanism for citizen participation and decision making and seek new forms of dialogue that are developing across ethnic and class boundaries, especially among the youngest generation. These were aspects that supported the implementation of Latino urbanism as a placemaking approach for this community.

As presented in the analysis at each scale, place was being produced at all time, but the setting did not support placemaking. An example of this was the use of public parks. The lack of access and integration of the culture and identity of this community resulted in placeless space used only by certain groups of users.

Gentrification was another issue. Developers were renovating rent-controlled buildings displace the low-income populace. Social equity and who has the right to public space is the most prevalent issue. Latinos are constantly making sure that their voices are heard by city planners. Their response to this is the appropriation and disposition of the public space in which they interact. Streets as well as its elements were considered space for public use.

Broadway is known as the “people’s strip” in many portions of Manhattan, and the same was true for Washington Heights although for different reasons. Space and street composition did not support other uses other than traffic flow. The analysis showed how densely used it was. A great portion of it was used as the social and cultural space for this community.

“The cultural hub” of the neighborhood extended from 169th to 181st Street. Social and cultural activities occurred in spite of less accommodation and more traffic conflicts. Sidewalks as sites of interaction defined common use areas and provided places for people to unite.

Latino urbanism provides a better approach on how to integrate immigrants, given that sidewalks – public space- conflicts that arose around vending and day labor sites. Another goal of this study was to understand why this happened here. Latino stores represented a sense of ownership and place for the community. Most of the activities took place at store fronts where space was being claimed and often adapted to accommodate social activities. Some of these activities and interest at the street level were walking, talking, looking around, sitting, standing and people going about their business in a setting where they felt like they belonged. Unfortunately seating space was rarely found around this area unless brought out by users. Sidewalks lacked room for activities other than walking or sidewalk café seating. The overall image was oriented towards traffic movement and circulation, not taking in consideration that place was being produced. The number of people on the streets as well as these activities made this area a place that could welcome people.

In summary, the observations of the 3 scales showed a variety of activities and uses at street level, most of which were directly related to groups and individuals adapting to existing conditions to current needs. Areas with the greatest activity and use were also the most heavily trafficked and commercial. In this spaces, conflicts between pedestrians, residents, vendors and business owners, in a limited sidewalk space, required the review of and recommendations for alternative design based on placemaking recommendations.
Three main concepts were discussed in this essay: Latino urbanism, placemaking and streets as places.

In the Dominican community examined, people claimed public space and exercised their rights. The result was the beginning of a placemaking process that brought vitality to place important to the community. Latino urbanism and placemaking was already ongoing in this community, but needed to be rethought at street level.

Streets and sidewalks served a social function. They transported people from point to point and provided opportunity for purposeful walks with options to stay, experience and comfort. Streets are people spaces that require the balance between vehicular and pedestrian use to create a friendly street environment.

This study showed that patterns occurred in certain locations: Latino storefronts, shopping areas, landmarks, and "cultural" spaces. Areas for placemaking can be designated to build:

- Vibrant urban environments. Allow for a mixture of activities in a defined space; e.g. George Washington Bridge Bus Terminal.
- Supportive, creative and adaptive urban form. e.g. “The plaza element” at 175th St.
- Integration of public and private space. Treat edges according to their designated specific functions.
- Developmental opportunities for all social groups in designated areas. e.g. the Flea Market at the 175th St. plaza and vending areas on certain sidewalks.

Rios’ concept of space making in Latino communities provided a base to understand how space in this Dominican community was created. Adaptive, assertive and negotiative spaces were helpful in identifying how space was used. However, this conceptual framework could not be implemented. Prior to analysis, anecdotal evidence suggested that the site had assertive and adaptive features, and no presence of negotiative features. The study revealed that the implementation of an adaptive or assertive space in this community could not be applied due to the site location, varied cultures and multiple services present in the site. The study revealed the need for “an improvisational space” that understand existing spatial use and landscape value.

Improvisational space, an idea popularized by landscape architect Walter Hood, emphasized creating versatile places for individuals and communities by combining a traditional design approach dependent on form, composition, and scale within an individual, social, environmental and political context.
Recommendations

Sites for Intervention

George Washington Bridge
I 95 North
181st.
180st.
179 st.
178 st.
177 st.
176 st.
175 st.
174 st.
173 st.
172 st.
171 st.
170 st.
169 st.

Integrate
Commercial and Social Spaces

Improve overall appearance
Reduce Speed,
Repel traffic
Friendly Ground floor
Invite users to stay

Improve ground floor

Designate, welcome users
The Plaza Element

Reclaim people space

Integration of Traffic calming devices

Designate, Deliniate Production, Social Cultural spaces

Figure 65 Recommendations (Author)
Use Pattern System

Space for commerce

Cultural Space

Figure 66 Implementation of the System, Conceptual Design Recommendations (Author)
Design recommendations consisted of implementing a system based on existing use patterns. The study identified three types of spaces common in this community: space to socialize, cultural space and space for commerce. The conceptual design mapped these spaces where they happened, thus designating a place for each group of activity (Fig. 66). Space to socialize was distributed through Broadway. It allows for people to stop, sit and interact with others without interrupting street and sidewalk functions (Fig. 67). Space for commerce was only present on certain blocks and was dependent on the relationship between the edge and the designated social space around it (Fig. 68). Cultural space was designated at one location and acted as a versatile space adapted to different functions and activities (Fig. 69).
The design consisted of designating people space and its relationship to other functions of street and sidewalks. It allowed for parking, bus stops and transit without interrupting pedestrian activities and safety. This was achieved by reclaiming people space of streets and sidewalks and designing them in a way that supports placemaking with it (Fig. 67).
The inventory of the site showed the presence of three types of street vendors that followed the characterization of unlicensed vendors, general vendors and truck vendors. Their presence on the site contributed to the vibrancy of this neighborhood. The design proposed a designated location for each characterization and specifications on size and distance in relationship to pedestrian use (Fig. 68).
Cultural Space

The Plaza

The cultural space was conceived as a versatile space that could be adapted to different social functions depending on the need of the community. It was a designated space where all components could be moved and rearranged to accommodate for appropriation and disposition of the space (Fig. 69).
More often than not, the urban landscape is embedded with qualities that serve the majority or ruling social class and thereby rendering itself superficial or meaningless for other key societal actors (Loukaitous-Sideris 1993, 2005). Considering the context of this study, this was crucial as it enabled a relevant analysis that generated new insights into community use. This context was not a void or anonymous place. The research proposed that these seemingly anonymous places were repositories for community values and meaning.

Latinos have put in question design and planning practices in New York City where the population continues to increase and space is very limited. Unlike some other social groups, their presence is highly noticeable. Latinos are transforming inner-city neighborhoods and inner-city suburbs into vibrant, reinvigorated places just different from other cultures. Dominicans, as the second largest Latino group in New York City, have impacted the landscape.

This study argued for a need to retrofit elements of the built form to satisfy the needs of this Dominican community. It highlighted where Dominicans used the streets as their preferred open space and landscape to socialize. This study showed that placemaking happened with or without professional planners and designers as suggested by Rios (Rios, 2010).

This study addressed how street design as public space aided in placemaking and conveyed cultural meaning and use. The study highlighted the importance of streets as public space to socialize, cultural space and space for commerce. It revealed how the existing conditions do not support Dominican placemaking in this community.

The study showed the need for space in which users could appropriate for their needs given that appropriation and disposition are characteristics of Dominican placemaking. The proposed design addressed this issue by proposing a system in which designated spaces allocated for the different aspects of placemaking found in this community.

The design intent was to designate where spaces could occur along this neighborhood. Places where identified based on the inventory and analysis of the site. The study showed designated places were programmatic and activity driven, allowing users to take disposition of the space.

The design was conceptual and developed as a potential solution for people to claim space. Most importantly, it hoped to show how this particular community could use it in a positive way. Conversely, this study did not address issues like cross-cultural segregation and gentrification. This investigation did raise some very interesting questions for future analysis. Additional research questions that could be explored in other studies were.

* What is the value of improving the physical structure of the site when placemaking is being produced given its existing conditions?
* Should the design be permanent or temporary?
* Could programmatic activities be implemented under the existing conditions of the site?
* Is it a question of programming or design?
* How can traffic issues be mitigated when at major arteries? Does it affect placemaking?
* What is the long term role of Dominicans in this community?
* Is gentrification affecting placemaking practices in the community?

Understanding and measuring these questions both quantitatively and qualitatively could help in developing a model for implementation in varied settings with similar contexts.


Department of City Planning, City of New York 2012 www.nyc.gov


**Technique: Behavior Mapping**

Behavior mapping, also known as activity mapping, allows you to study people’s activities in a specific area for a predetermined amount of time. Document stationary activities such as sunbathing, sitting, talking, and reading, as well as activities involving motion: walking, jogging, biking, etc.

### Counting
- **Location:** ___________
- **Observer:** ____________________
- **Date:** ___________ **Time:** ___________

<table>
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<th>AGE</th>
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Behavior mapping data collection form used to determine group and type of stationary activities.
## Technique: Counting

**Pedestrian Count Form**

Counting is a systematic method of gathering numerical data about people, vehicles, or anything else in a specific location. Use counts to determine such things as how many people enter at a particular place, how vehicles use the streets, and whether or when a particular path actually is crowded. Counts also can be useful in identifying area demographics (e.g. the percentage of people over the age of 60).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>North</th>
<th>South</th>
<th>Total</th>
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People counting form used to track and count people throughout the site and temporary activities.