

Salva la Iglesia:

Intercultural capital and the struggle for
community in a small town congregation

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Abstract

- The purpose of this study is to examine community response to crisis and the impact of intercultural interactions on the outcome of ethnic and religious group conflict. I seek to expand the traditional theoretical lens of forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986) to include a new way of examining community interactions as they relate to *intercultural capital*. I use a case study focusing on the San Martín Catholic Mission in Dayton, Oregon and the ways this particular community responded to the crisis of the Catholic diocese threatening to sell their property in 2010.
- I gathered data from a year of ethnographic fieldwork, participant observations in the setting, and in-depth interviews with six individuals involved in the church and related community groups. I analyzed the data using the expanded lens of capital theory to examine the resource networks built through this event and their effect on the communities. Themes such as changing roles of immigrants and minorities in the United States, changing gender roles in community activism, and changing levels of activism after community crises are resolved emerged from this analysis, which indicate the importance of social factors in affecting community response to crisis.
- The findings of this case study have implications for how communities may need to adapt to the changing demographic of the United States as the Latino population increases, and it provides insight into patterns of interaction between ethnic and religious communities in the future.

Research Goals and Questions

- **Goals:**
 - Explore the factors that affect community crisis response
 - Better understand how communities develop and adapt to social and cultural change
 - Expand the way we examine communities that exist within multiple and intersecting socio-cultural structures
- **Research Questions:**
 - What is the effect of crisis on community?
 - What social and individual factors influence crisis response?
 - What is the role of intercultural interactions in community response to crisis?

What is “community”?

- *Community* – “A group of people who are mutually committed to one another because they share common goals and values”
- Communities allow us to create a shared sense of identity and belonging
- Communities have intentionality, purpose, mutual commitment of members, collective identity, and shared goals and values
- Communities can be seen as social actors because they can accumulate resources, interact with other communities, and function independently from individual members

Factors that affect communities

- **Space and Place:** Physical proximity of members anchors a community in a particular place that symbolizes values and beliefs people experienced there. A place can be a “third space” that provides community members space to interact with one another on neutral, shared ground (Oldenburg, 1997).
- **Religion:** Intentionally brings together people who share values and beliefs and seek mutual support through love and fellowship. Provides spiritual fulfillment and often also serves as a source of social networking and other services (Wuthnow, 1994).
- **Ethnicity and Culture:** Shared cultural traditions, values, and similarity of life experiences among groups of people from a particular ethnicity increases the sense of belonging that members feel in a community. Community values are culturally influenced and differ based on the social-cultural context (Bellah, 1985).
- **Intersectionality:** Complex model of thought that takes into account how various factors such as ethnicity, class, race, and gender are layered and interact to mutually influence one another and social structures (Hill-Collins, 2000).

Forms of Capital (Bourdieu, 1986)

- **Capital:** resources and access to resources that enable groups or individuals to “accumulate and mobilize social energy.”
 - **Economic:** material resources, money
 - **Cultural:** knowledge and cultural competence that allows one to navigate a cultural system or society and that is unconsciously accumulated through our life experiences
 - **Social:** networks and relationships with others that bring together groups of similar people
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- **Intercultural:** consciously developed knowledge of another cultural or societal system that allows individuals and groups to understand and interact effectively with groups or individuals who are of a different culture from themselves

Methods

- This study draws from a year of ethnographic fieldwork at San Martín and in the Dayton and McMinnville area



- Participant observations in the setting: Mass at San Martín, community group planning committee meetings, and community events
- In-depth interviews with snowball sample of six individuals involved with San Martín and its community groups
- Additional sources of information included group Facebook pages, newspaper articles, fliers and documents, group websites and a YouTube video

Background and Setting

- “San Martín has always had a sense of community. People feel comfortable...People are very welcoming and very warm when you get there...and there's always something going on...It's in like almost all Hispanic communities. So, Hispanics like to party, and ... with our Hispanic community, there's always a party, there's always something to celebrate and it's all wholesome, clean fun... There was always that same warm, welcoming, Hispanic community – just like a Hispanic family. Your big, big Hispanic family.” – Andrea
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- **1974:** San Martín is founded and built by a group of Latino immigrant farmworkers
- **March 2010:** The priest of St. James announces San Martín property will be sold
 - Following the announcement, the Salva San Martín committee formed to organize the community and save the church. They organized protests and fundraisers and sent two of their members to Rome to present a formal appeal to the Vatican. Del Smith (CEO and founder of Evergreen Aviation) purchased the property and donated it back to the San Martín congregation.
- **December 2010:** Archbishop gives San Martín permission to keep their church
 - During and following the fight to save San Martín, multiple community groups formed including a Youth Group, Mujeres Latinas Luchando por el Pueblo, and Unidos: Bridging Community

Discussion

- **Space:** San Martín provided a safe space where community members could feel empowered and accumulate and share resources
 - “Having a church founded by immigrants was like a little safe space where people could go and not feel judged or feel like they belonged because a lot of the United States, if you're an immigrant, you feel like you don't belong. The masses were all in Spanish so people could understand...It was like their own little thing that they had that connected them back to their homes.” – Rosa
- **Religion:** San Martín served a larger role than just spiritual fulfillment
 - “[When they wanted to close it,] we got comments like, “Well, why are you even trying to save that church? It's just a building. Like, if you're going to be a devout Catholic, you don't need a building to pray to God or to have a relationship with God. Who cares? It's just a building. But I don't think people understood like, how much sweat and work went into that church; into making that building into a church. I think that's what was valuable for us.” – Paulina
- **Ethnicity:** Culture and cultural values were central to this experience and misunderstandings of cultural differences led to conflict
 - “It was just like a home away from home. It felt like Mexico because the traditions and everybody, they were first generation immigrants... That's why [my family went] – just the sense of community.” – Paulina
 - “I would say that [the priest] made a huge mistake by not understanding the cultural issues involved, by not understanding why this church was important to a particular group of people” – Julie

Conclusions and Implications

- To understand community crisis and resolution, we have to understand a multiplicity of social and cultural factors.
- As the United States becomes increasingly culturally diverse, developing intercultural capital and building bridges between ethnic communities and the broader social context will help to avoid and resolve misunderstandings and conflicts between communities based on cultural differences
- The community at San Martín highlights a changing role of minority communities – both in incorporating these groups more effectively into US society and in recognizing their influence over our shared future.
- We must move toward a more complex way of understanding communities and how intersections of social factors shape our individual lives, our communities, and our societies and use that knowledge to adapt to changes we encounter in the future.

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