

# The Processes of Creating an ‘Internationally Friendly Culinary Area:’ Assessing Cultural Tourism in Somerville, MA

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## Abstract

*Many immigrant restaurant owners in Somerville, MA are newer business and, lacking in economic resources, turn to social capital in order to maintain and grow their client base.*

*Several of these ethnic food businesses are also taking part in community events to promote their business. Hosted by community organizations such as East Somerville Main Streets, the Somerville Arts Council, and the Welcome Project, these events work toward the end goal of promoting the business and celebrating the diversity in Somerville to foster a welcoming environment. In this paper, I illuminate the various ways in which the community organizations are effectively and ineffectively promoting the ethnic food businesses in Somerville. Cultural tourism, if continued on its current path, could change the cultural makeup of the city and negatively impact its community members; I hope to highlight these disconnects with the goal of improving communication so that each member of Somerville's community can better understand one another.*

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## Preface

As a reader, the most important thing to recognize is an anthropologist's subjectivity. Through the analysis of culture, we bring our own biases, life experiences, and varying knowledge into our questions, ideas, and reactions.

I fully acknowledge and welcome this subjectivity, because I believe it to have a freeing quality. When we are no longer tied down by being objective observers, we can allow our personal histories, which I believe to be inseparable from our present selves, to impact and shape our study of the world.

This semester, I have let my research come from a place of compassion and mutual understanding of other's experiences. In this report, I strove to be an open, honest observer participating in the cultural sphere of Somerville, Massachusetts. Through conceding and accepting subjectivity, we are limitless in our exploration of the human condition.

## Introduction

With a population of about 80,000 within four square miles, the city of Somerville, Massachusetts holds one of the densest populations in the country. It also hosts one of the most ethnically diverse; located just two miles north of Boston, immigrants from all around the world, including Brazil, Italy, El Salvador, and Nepal, among many others, have come to call Somerville home.<sup>i</sup>

Somerville's diverse population does not go unnoticed; many city organizations and non-profits in the area have taken it upon themselves to celebrate this diversity through festivals, programs, and events, which both celebrate cultural traditions and hope to promote the many ethnic businesses in the area.

The key to many of these celebrations is food, which, as Somerville Arts Council Program Manager Rachel Strutt says "opens doors" to understanding culture.<sup>ii</sup> These events are forms of cultural tourism, which serve to change the area from a residential one into a destination popular for its diversity and ethnic businesses. One example of cultural tourism in Somerville was the East Somerville Main Street's Foodie Crawl, in which over 1,000 people came to East Somerville to try the "exotic" foods of the area. East Somerville Main Street organization (ESM) sold tickets online through their website and on Groupon.com to an event where participating restaurants gave samples of their food to hungry "foodies" interested in tasting what East Somerville has to offer. Cultural tourism has both positive and negative impacts on a community; thinking particularly in terms of the food businesses in Somerville, cultural tourism aims to promote the businesses to economically develop the area. These community-building efforts instill pride for the neighborhood in its community members. However, as some of the

organizations in Somerville have demonstrated, cultural tourism serves a larger purpose to brand the city, or a neighborhood within it, with an image making it an attractive tourist destination. This is problematized by the fact that the community organizations supposedly advocating for the local immigrant entrepreneurs utilize them for the overall success of the city, leaving the small business owner's needs secondary to the greater goals of the city.

Somerville is fortunate to have the governmental and non-governmental organizations advocating for its immigrant entrepreneurs. Through these programs, many immigrants are given voices in the community that would normally be silent. However, this disconnect between the community organizations and the immigrant entrepreneurs, in which the organizations promote the brand of Somerville rather than supporting the businesses that make up the brand, prevents cultural tourism from being successful. Continuing on this current path of cultural tourism could have a negative impact on the area through the fostering processes of gentrification, among other factors.

In this work, I provide a brief history of the new immigrant population to Somerville, mainly from Central America and Brazil. I will then focus on the various forms of social capital these immigrant entrepreneurs engage in to maintain their business and acquire customers, and compare it to the forms of social capital provided by cultural tourism. I will then outline some efforts of cultural tourism, and assess how effective they have been at supporting the immigrant entrepreneurs and promoting Somerville as a whole. Finally, I'll evaluate the future effects of cultural tourism in the city, and suggest ways in which communication can be improved to better the efforts made by both parties,

so that cultural tourism can be beneficial for both the immigrant entrepreneurs and the success of Somerville as a whole.

## Methodology

In this study, I hope to understand the immigrant entrepreneur experience and analyze the relationship between the small business owner and the community organizations advocating for them, assessing the extent to which cultural tourism helps and hinders their business and establishes a 'brand' of Somerville to the exterior community.

Research began in September 2011 through work in Tufts University's Anthropology class, Urban Borderlands. This work would not have been possible without the narratives of immigrant entrepreneurs and the community organizations in Somerville. At this time I have collected seven ethnographic interviews with business owners and community leaders, and I've had numerous informal conversations that have influenced my findings.

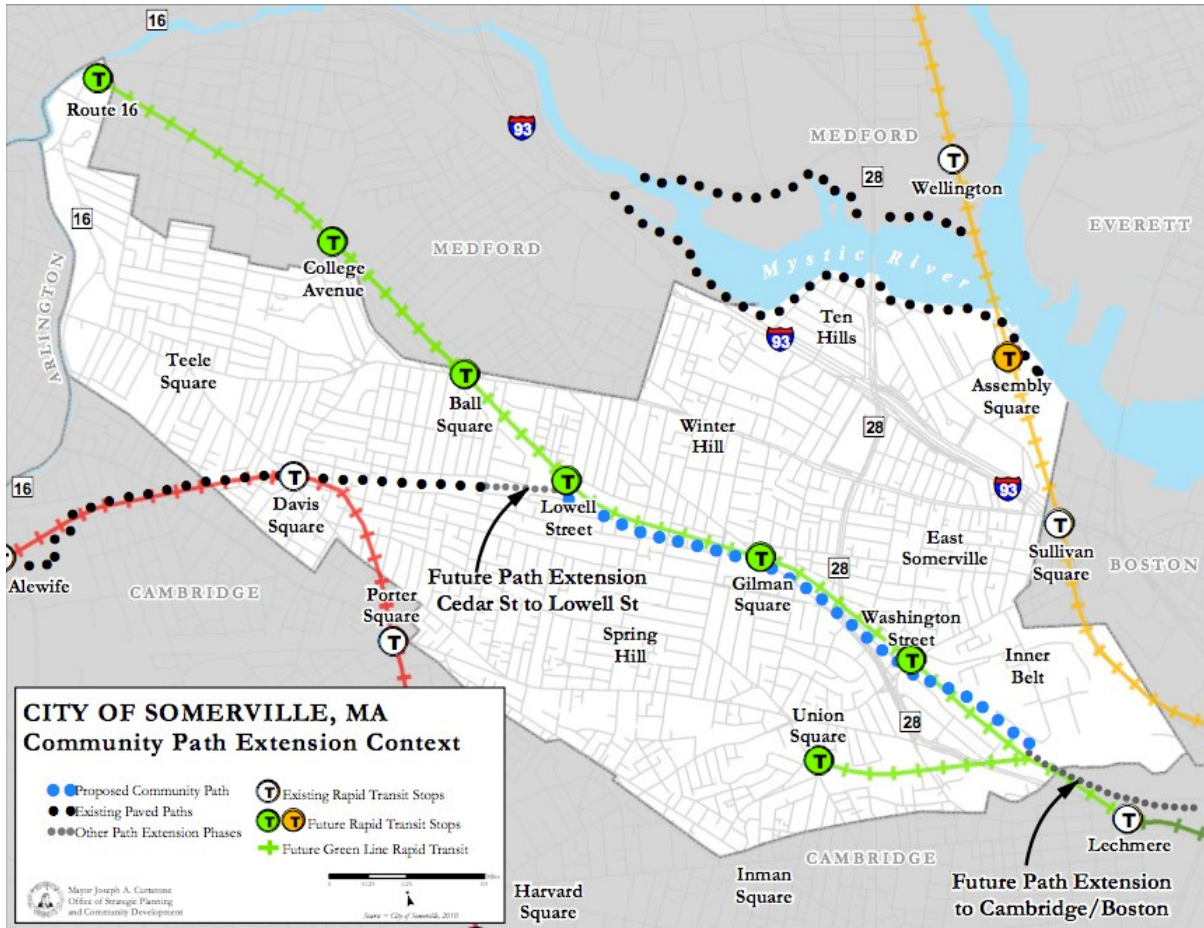
While seven informants does provide a significantly detailed picture of what it is like to be an immigrant entrepreneur and allow me to better understand the role of cultural tourism in the Somerville, I recognize that the small number of informants significantly limits my research and my ability to come to far-reaching conclusions. At this time, I'd like to modify any statements that I make to be situated within my personal knowledge and through the stories of my seven narrators; I understand that the research is by no means comprehensive, and that further research may alter my conclusions.



As a student at Tufts University, I have lived in Somerville for the past three years. My unique position living in the community as a semi-permanent resident has allowed me to understand the community atmosphere and the cultural dynamic of the city. I do admit that my knowledge of the area had been limited to West Somerville (Davis, Teele, and Ball Squares) prior to this semester, as I had previously found it difficult to break outside the hermetic community in which I live. However, through countless visits down Broadway into East Somerville, Magoun Square, and Union Square, I feel that I now have a more holistic understanding of Somerville's cultural climate.

Given the characteristics of my sample, I admit that my informants have inspired a more critical tone of the institutions in Somerville trying to brand the city. However, I understand that every immigrant entrepreneur in the area may not share this sentiment, and I have done my best to portray both sides of the story in my report.

## Framing Somerville, Massachusetts



Map of Somerville, MA.

Credit

<http://www.somervillema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Community%20Path%20-%20Somerville%20Context.pdf>

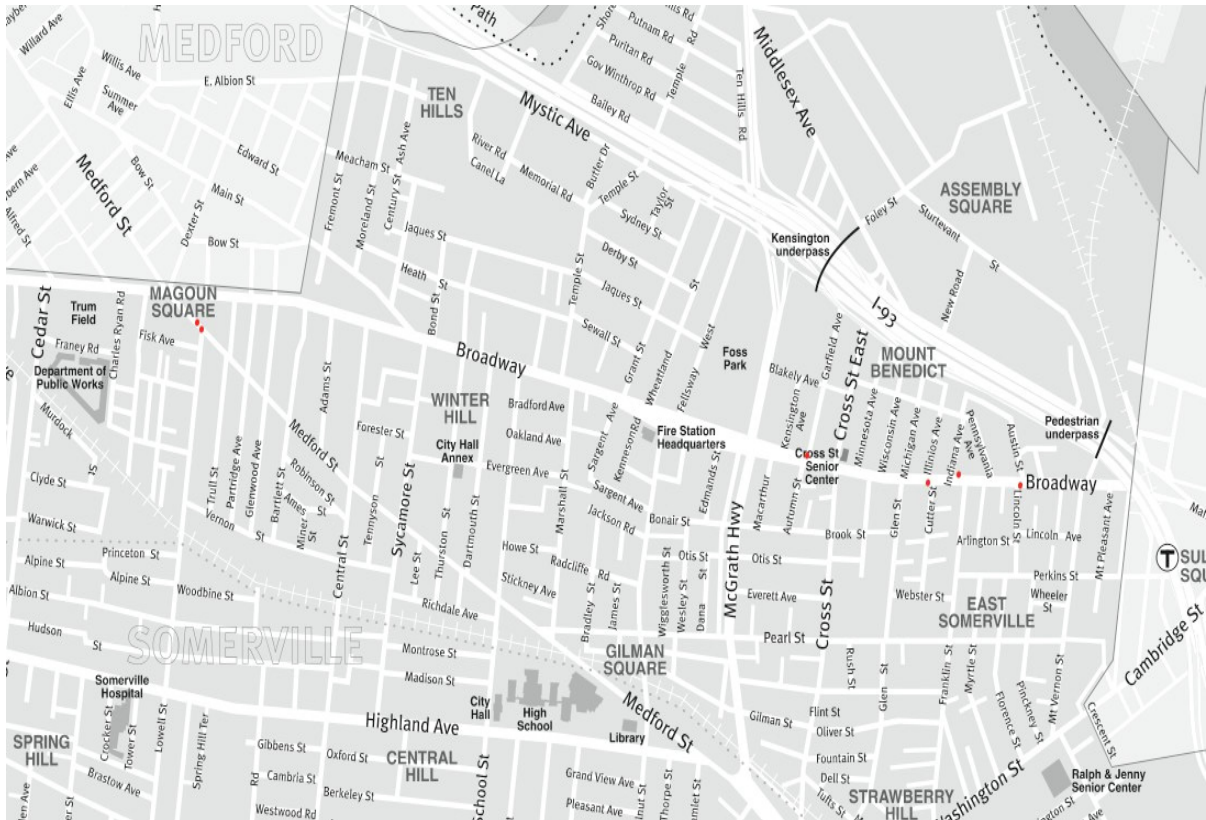
Somerville, Massachusetts is a city of 4.1 square miles located just north of Boston. With a population of just under 76,000 people, Somerville is one of the most densely populated cities in New England. Twenty-six percent of its residents are of non-White origin/European descent, making it one of the most diverse cities in the country.<sup>iii</sup>

Despite its small size, Somerville is further divided by neighborhoods, or squares. To the west are Tufts University, Teele, and Davis Squares, and on the southern edge of the city, bordering Cambridge is Union Square. Broadway connects Somerville east to west, bisecting Teele, Powerhouse Circle, Ball Square, Magoun Square, Winter Hill, and finally East Somerville to Sullivan Square on the eastern side of the city. Each square has its own distinct “flavor;” for example, Davis is by far the wealthiest and busiest square, helped along by the Red Line T subway stop coming in from Cambridge.

This report will be focused primarily on Magoun Square and East Somerville. Magoun Square has a population of approximately 15,000 people, and 31% of them are not of European descent.<sup>iv</sup> It is known for its sizable Brazilian population, most of whom come from the Minas Gerais district of the country. Somerville has the highest population of Brazilians in the Boston area; 9-10% of Brazilian immigrants call Somerville home, and about 25% of the immigrants in Somerville are Brazilian.<sup>v</sup> Over the past few years, there has been significant construction on Medford Street, which provides the bisecting line through Broadway, defining the square. This construction has impacted both the residents and the business owners in the area.

East Somerville is unique in its position in the city, because it doesn't have the geographic makeup of a square typical of Boston and its suburbs. Rather, it is an area of the city characterized by the eastern end of the long, four-lane Broadway. About 12,000 residents live in East Somerville, 47% of whom are foreign born.<sup>vi</sup> East Somerville is known for its ethnic diversity. This is represented through the various restaurants and retail stores dotted along Broadway, 42% of which are immigrant-owned.<sup>vii</sup> East Somerville is said to be the most diverse area of the city, but with some of the most low-

income residents. Previously seen as the “wrong side of the tracks,” district, East Somerville is trying to rebrand itself as a tourist destination, economically developing the area to celebrate its diversity.



Source: Shape up Somerville’s Street Map. Red marks indicate approximate location of the businesses in this report .  
<http://www.somervillema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Maps/CityMaps/StreetMap.pdf>

### *A Brief History of Somerville and its Immigrants*

Somerville, known today for its diversity, has historically had an influx of immigrants. Somerville has had to reconcile and transform its character after countless movements and population increases have changed the demographics of the city. Somerville’s immigrants make up two camps: the “old” Somerville, composed of Irish and Italian immigrants, and the “new” Somerville, constituted by the Brazilians and other

Latinos, including Haitians and Salvadorans. This report will focus on the “new” immigrant communities; specifically, the Brazilian and Salvadoran populations.

Somerville was originally part of neighboring Charlestown, but became its own city in 1841 out of frustration with the Charlestown government.<sup>viii</sup> The city has since transformed from a rural suburb of Boston to a bustling industrialized city, and soon began to attract many people, including immigrants from Latin America, Europe, and Asia. Many of these immigrants in this study joined the economy as low-skilled laborers, working jobs like cleaning and serving food, which is common when first entering the labor market.<sup>ix</sup>

Brazilian immigration to the United States has been a fairly recent movement. In his report entitled “The Brazilian Immigrant Experience,” Becker made a connection between Boston and the district of Minas Gerais, Brazil, citing the evangelical churches as one possible reason why mineiros are choosing Boston.<sup>x</sup> Brazilians began moving to the greater Boston area in the 1980s, due to the economic crash in Brazil and the political repression that followed.<sup>xi</sup> Similarly, the Latino movement to Boston follows comparable immigration patterns. In the 1970s and 1980s, during a time of extreme political instability in El Salvador, many Salvadorans came to Somerville seeking political asylum. However, because the United States chose to support the Salvadoran military at this time, Salvadoran immigrants weren’t well received.<sup>xii</sup> Many immigrants were discriminated against, and there was a great deal of job insecurity and even violence.<sup>xiii</sup>

To change the tone of the city, organizations like The Welcome Project began to provide a hospitable atmosphere for the immigrants in Somerville, and to desegregate the racial divide within the city. Additionally, in 1987 the “Somerville Sanctuary City

Resolution” was passed, which stated that the illegal immigrants in the city were entitled to the same rights as the other residents in the city.<sup>xiv</sup> This resolution marked a change and a step away from the prejudices in the city, as it postulated that a person’s status was not just cause for discrimination. In 1989 the resolution was extended indefinitely, undoubtedly aiding in the increase in immigrants in the subsequent years.<sup>xv</sup> Immigration is still a controversial topic in today’s political debates in Somerville, especially over whether to enforce immigration law. However, to this day Somerville remains a sanctuary city.<sup>xvi</sup>

Today, the immigrants in Somerville are contributing to the overall economy of the city. According to 2007 data marking economic trends in Somerville, the city has a local employment per capita rate of .27, which means that its economy is strongly correlated with its local population.<sup>xvii</sup> Regarding food-related business in Somerville, the economic report conducted by the City of Somerville shows that the food services industry is a top employer in Somerville, yet has the lowest wage rates of all the industries in Somerville (average of \$19,760/year, or less than half of the average income of the city).<sup>xviii</sup> Seventy-five percent of these establishments have 1-4 employees, and only twenty-five percent have over 21 employees.<sup>xix</sup> This suggests that many of Somerville’s businesses provide goods and services directly related to the needs of its residents. Given the high percentage of Brazilians and Latinos in the area, it can be concluded that the Brazilian and Salvadoran immigrant entrepreneurs have established businesses that serve the ethnic cohorts within the boundaries of Somerville itself.

The question remains not why Brazilians and Salvadorans chose to immigrate to the United States (because of the well-known myth of the American Dream and the

streets of gold), but rather why they chose Somerville. Although the fact that Somerville is a “sanctuary city” was most likely a factor for many, most of my narrators cited the affordable rent as the reason they chose Somerville. Orlando Aldana, owner of Los Paisanos Restaurant, said that he looked all around the Boston area, and even looked at the more favorable Davis Square in Somerville before settling in East Somerville. Raúl Pleitez, owner of Blanca’s Bakery across the street, said that he choose Somerville, “by accident,” because the space was available and the rent was affordable. Sometimes, immigrants come to join family members in the area, or just because other Latinos are there. Joe de Souza, owner of Modelo Bakery, said that Brazilians tend to congregate in one area, so that “everybody can get together.” Lucia Tauares, owner of Churrasco, agreed, mentioning that her reason for coming to Somerville was to be a member of the Brazilian community and the shared resources it offers.

More and more Brazilians and Salvadorans have been immigrating to Somerville in recent years and, as demonstrated by the numerous immigrant entrepreneurs in the area, have contributed to the economic development of the city. Despite the history of discrimination and segregation in the city, the immigrant population has remained strong in Somerville, and is now one of the most celebrated aspects of the city.

## Introductions to the Narrators

### Immigrant Entrepreneurs

#### *Orlando Aldana-Los Paisanos Restaurant:*

Jose Orlando Aldana is an El Salvadoran man who came to the United States when he was a boy to finish his education. He was born in San Salvador, where most of his family remains. After high school, Orlando married, started a family, and began working in the restaurant business as a dishwasher. He then rose the ranks to supervise in various restaurants, always with the hope of starting his own business. He settled on the first storefront he could afford, which happened to be in East Somerville. He opened the business 18 months ago, and says he is still in the process of building his business, from trying to install bathrooms and an air conditioner to trying to obtain the coveted wine and beer license in Somerville.

Los Paisanos is a sit-down and take-out restaurant located on 62 Broadway in East Somerville, Massachusetts. While the restaurant receives a great deal of automobile traffic through the lower end of Broadway and its proximity to the freeway, the area isn't very pedestrian-friendly, and isn't surrounded by other businesses in the form of a city square. The red awning publicly promoting the business includes the terms "international" and "Hispanic food," which accurately reflects the selection of El Salvadorian, Guatemalan, Honduran, and Columbia foods, among others. Los Paisanos Restaurant participated in the East Somerville Foodie Crawl on October 25, 2011.



*Joe de Souza-Panificadora Modelo Bakery:*

Joe de Souza was born and grew up in Minas Gerais, Brazil, but moved to the United States in 1988. For years, he worked as a painting and construction contractor. Although he still has this business on the side, his primary business is running his two Modelo Bakery businesses, in Somerville and Everett, MA. Joe's first experience in the restaurant business was when he purchased Joe this already existing bakery five years ago; since then, he has learned the ins and outs of being a business owner, working with his wife everyday at the bakery.

Modelo Bakery is located at 508 Medford Street in Magoun Square, Somerville, MA, an area well populated by pedestrians, residents, and cars alike. Magoun Square is shaped like an "X," with Medford Street intersecting with Broadway, which creates a popular hub where many businesses have accumulated.

The bakery fits in well with the surrounding community; it stands amongst many other ethnic businesses, including other Brazilian restaurants. The black awning announcing the business stretches around the corner to advertise on Lowell Street as well, and the windows are full of promotional ads in Portuguese, publicizing offers they have inside. While advertising itself strictly as a bakery, Modelo also offers Brazilian lunches and dinners, which are advertised on the extensive bilingual menu across the back of the business. Panificadora Modelo Bakery has not participated in community events hosted by the organizations in this study.

*Lucia Tauares-Churrasco:*

Lucia Tauares was born on April 3, 1971, in Brazil. She came to the United States with her husband and young daughter seven years ago, originally working as a maid. After deciding that she no longer wanted to clean houses, she purchased Churrasco in 2008, and now works here with her husband and daughter. Lucia chose Somerville because of the large number of Brazilians in the area, and has stayed for that very sense of community and resources she has from the Brazilian population.

Churrasco is located across the street from Modelo Bakery, at 505 Medford Street in Magoun Square, Somerville, MA. As a buffet business, Churrasco is a self-serve restaurant where both take-out and eating in options are available. Churrasco translates to barbeque in Portuguese; churrascos, which are very common in Brazil, are inherently meat-focused.

Churrasco has not participated in community events hosted by the organizations in this study.

*Raúl Pleitez-Blanca's Bakery:*

Raúl Pleitez is a Salvadoran immigrant living in Revere, MA, who came to the United States when he was 15 in 1994. Since that time, he has worked numerous jobs and has graduated from Salem University. He told me that he was the first person in his family to emigrate here, but that most are now in the U.S. with him. He opened the business, which is named for his late mother, a year and a half ago out of a desire to work

for himself. Raúl has worked with pastries since coming to the U.S., so he said it was natural for him to start a bakery as his business.

Blanca's Bakery is located on 85B Broadway in East Somerville, MA, on the cusp of Sullivan Square, across the street from Los Paisanos Restaurant. While the restaurant receives a great deal of automobile traffic through the lower end of Broadway and its proximity to the freeway, the area isn't very pedestrian-friendly, and isn't surrounded by other businesses in the form of a city square. Blanca's is one of the many Salvadoran restaurants in the area. The business is a modest one; one round table fits snugly in the corner of the business, and on the entire left side of the restaurant there are bar stools and a bar facing the wall, opposite the large case full of pastries.

Blanca's participated in the Foodie Crawl, hosted by East Somerville Main Streets, on October 25, 2011.

*Benjamín Arguedas-Maya Sol, Gauchao:*

Benjamín is Salvadoran man who emigrated here in 1999. He is the owner of Maya Sol, Gauchao, and Tony's Foodland. His sister also owns a restaurant on Broadway in East Somerville. He started Gauchao 10 years ago, and chose Brazilian cuisine so as not to compete with his sister, who owns a few Salvadoran restaurants in the same area. He still has numerous family members back in El Salvador.

Maya Sol, Gauchao, and Tony's Foodland are right across are right across the street from each other on Broadway in East Somerville. Maya Sol and Gauchao serve Mexican and Brazilian food, respectively. Benjamín said that he chose to open Gauchao first about ten years ago, and chose Brazilian food so as to avoid competing with his

sister's restaurants. Four years ago, Benjamín opened his second restaurant, Maya Sol, which he says doesn't compete with the other Mexican/Central American restaurants in the area because it also serves American food and is a larger space. Gauchao has a large Brazilian flag in the window, advertising its ethnicity. Maya Sol is an ornately adorned restaurant, with Mayan suns all around the interior. Both restaurants are available for take-out and delivery, although many choose to eat in and enjoy the ambiance.

Benjamín's restaurants have participated in the East Somerville Main Streets Foodie Crawl, and he is also a YUM card participant.

## Community Organization Leaders

### *Rachel Strutt-Somerville Arts Council (SAC):*

Rachel Strutt has served as the Program Director for the SAC for the past 10 years. A Tufts University alumna, she moved to Somerville 15 years ago after college for the cheap rent, and stayed because of the community feel she experiences here. She started off commuting into central Boston to work for a magazine, but soon got the job at the SAC, working within her own community. What she loves most about Somerville is the dynamic arts community and the strong "entrepreneurial spirit." She also loves the diversity of Somerville; she told me that her personal wanderlust can be easily satisfied with a trip to Market Basket or to one of the many international markets, where she likes to observe the language, the food, and the people.

The Somerville Arts Council is a governmental organization that began in 1985 as a means for giving out grants from the Massachusetts Cultural Council. While they still administer government grants, today the organization has moved on to bigger projects.

Some of these projects are food-related, like Nibble and the market tours of Union Square, while others are focused on other aspects of the culture, such as art. The Somerville Arts Council (SAC) hosts numerous programs per year, including Art Beat in Davis Square and the What the Fluff Festival in Union. It is a very small organization; Rachel says that only “2.5 people” work there- two full-time and one part-time.

*Warren Goldstein Gelb-The Welcome Project (TWP):*

Warren first moved to Somerville 25 years ago in 1986, citing the cheap housing and friends in Boston as his reasons for moving here. He and his wife moved here initially to work on a progressive community newspaper, the Somerville Community News. Through his work, he began to feel a connection to the city. In 2005, he was asked to be on the Board of TWP, and then assumed the role of Executive Director in the subsequent year.

The Welcome Project is a non-profit organization that began in 1987 out of an order to desegregate the Mystic Public Housing Development in 1985. Up until 1985, the Mystic, in Somerville, MA, was a segregated development, and The Welcome Project’s (TWP) goal was “peaceful integration.” Once that goal was achieved, TWP sought to change its aims toward other projects. TWP’s main mission is to build “the collective power of Somerville immigrants to participate in and shape community decisions.”<sup>xx</sup> The organization itself is still located at the Mystic Public Housing Development, although its projects stretch throughout Somerville. Some of TWP’s projects include the YUM: A Taste of Immigrant City project, which supports immigrant-run restaurants; various civic engagements projects such as the Mystic Community Garden; Adult Education

Initiatives, such as class offered for English Language Learners; and youth programs like the Liaison Interpreter Program of Somerville, which involves professionally training bilingual high school students to interpret at community events. TWP is also collaborating with our Anthropology class, Urban Borderlands, this semester as we learn more about what it means to be an immigrant restaurant owner in Somerville.

## Promoting and Being Promoted Social Capital and Cultural Tourism in Somerville

### *Acquiring Social Capital within the Latino and Brazilian Communities*

There is a significant difference in the way Somerville immigrant entrepreneurs promote themselves and the way that they are being promoted by community organizations. The main distinction stems from the intended audience of each marketing effort; immigrant restaurant owners use social capital to acquire customers, targeting their own ethnic groups, whereas the community organizations try to brand the city as a diverse destination where Americans should feel welcome to engage in the subcultures.

Immigrant entrepreneurs in Somerville rely on social capital to grow and maintain their business. Adler and Kwon have a comprehensive definition of social capital, as involving the “goodwill that is engendered by the fabric of social relations and that can be mobilized to facilitate action.”<sup>xxi</sup> This term can be appropriated to influence economic advantage and therefore be applied to the small business of Somerville. Social capital can be “converted” so that one’s social network can provide economic benefits.<sup>xxii</sup> Small business owners have used their social networks for their own economic gain, especially when depending upon friends and their ethnic cohorts to acquire more customers.

There are many different forms of social capital present in Somerville. Orlando Aldana, owner of Los Paisanos Restaurant, and Joe de Souza from Modelo Bakery both said that word of mouth is the best form of promotion. Raúl Pleitez from Blanca’s bakery has said that his main customer base is his friend network, who bring in their friends. Another form of social capital is the establishment of goodwill among the community at large. Joe told me he donates pastries to the local churches and, in doing so, promotes his business. By giving back to the community, Joe has gained new customers. These forms

of social capital demonstrate a reliance on others to promote their businesses, either by way of friendship or a positive customer relationship.

Social capitalism is a concept that locates the principal actor in a geographic location and with a group of people with shared values and norms. Levitt says that “social resources generate much of the capital, labor, and expertise that drive these businesses...they allow a small group of potential entrepreneurs to overcome the barriers to entry raised by their lack of experience, skills, and the opportunity structure.”<sup>xxiii</sup> Immigrant business owners lacking in economic resources to advertise and reach out to the public, have turned instead to their various ethnic cohorts; in Somerville, these are the Brazilian and Salvadoran communities. Through the tools of social capital, immigrant entrepreneurs create a relationship with their ethnic customer base that make them an attractive destination to other Salvadorans and Brazilians.

Social capital can also replace other forms of resources, such as financial ones, as a tool for acquiring customers.<sup>xxiv</sup> Many of the restaurants in this report are under three years old and are thus subject to economic turbulence and challenges while they establish themselves in the community. Without the economic capital available to them to promote themselves and improve business, many small business owners are turning to social capital as an alternative, to gain a loyal customer base. For those without the economic resources to spend money on advertising and market themselves, social capital acts as a substitute to help the business acquire more resources.

It is interesting to note that most of my informants shy away from the Internet as a tool of social capital. It may be that the Internet is a somewhat unclear or mystified entity; despite the fact that these services are free, both Joe and Lucia said that they didn't



want to create Yelp or Facebook pages due to the expense. Raúl said that he didn't use a Facebook page for his business, but that he advertized his business on his personal Facebook page. Only his friends will see this information, so he is promoting his business only to those he knows. This suggests that Raúl only wishes his business to be a place for his personal social network. However, not all businesses are only targeting the ethnic populations; Benjamín of Maya Sol has a website for his restaurant, <http://www.mayasolmexicangrill.com/>, with an online ordering option, to increase his clientele to include the American audience, who generally use the internet more than the Latino population.

Social capital is also often defined within a specific social group. This social group should have common norms, customs, and beliefs.<sup>xxv</sup> Ethnic groups, while not the only structure of people to fall under this definition, certainly meet the requirements. Immigrants in Somerville share not only the common ancestry and culture from their home country, but also share the communal story of immigrating to the United States, engaging in the shared struggle of starting a new life in a foreign land. As Adler and Kwon note, much more than shared norms play into the generation of social capital.<sup>xxvi</sup> Rather, it is the content of those norms and experiences, such as the shared challenges of being an immigrant, which fosters social obligation to patron these ethnic food businesses.

It is these very ethnic groups that make up the majority of the client bases of the immigrant restaurants in East Somerville and Magoun Square. These ethnic groups happen to situate themselves in a close geographic sphere; there are a large number of Salvadorans in East Somerville and in the whole Boston area, and many Brazilians have

congregated in the small and oft-forgotten Magoun Square. Because the origins of the business owners' social capital comes from the geographically-defined social structure, immigrant entrepreneurs of Somerville can capitalize upon their strong ethnic cohorts to gain new customers.<sup>xxvii</sup>

The idea of immigrant business owner using his ties in the community to augment his customer base is exemplified in the case of Maya Sol. Benjamín was the only one of my narrators who said that his customer base is made up by a diverse group of people including Latinos and Americans. He advertises to both groups through the radio and personal connections for the former and through the Internet for the latter. Although he serves food from all of Latin America, he calls his restaurant Maya Sol *Mexican Grill* because that is the type of food that most Americans are familiar with. Benjamín owns three businesses in the same block on Broadway in East Somerville, and his sister owns a few restaurants on the street as well. He is socially embedded within his community, because, as Rath mentions in her explanation of 'social embeddedness,' immigrant entrepreneurs, like Benjamín, engage in "ethnically specific economic networks."<sup>xxviii</sup> Benjamín opened a Brazilian restaurant so as to not compete with his sister's Mexican restaurants; in doing so, he and his sister share some customers, and have found it easier to share knowledge of running a business and disseminate information.

The business owners are both patroned by and tailor their business to their ethnic cohorts. Joe de Souza from Modelo Bakery said that 98% of his customers are of Brazilian descent, and Lucia said that she primarily serves Brazilians, but that Latinos have come in often enough that she has learned to speak Portuguese to interact with them. Often, I was the only person speaking English in these restaurants; Raúl Pleitez from

Blanca's noted that the majority of his customers are Salvadoran, and Joe de Souza from Modelo even said that many of his customers are from his state of Minas Gerais, Brazil. Peggy Levitt, in her study of Puerto Rican and Dominican immigrant entrepreneurs in Boston, stated that business owners, as ethnic salesmen, know their customers and interact with them regularly, which spreads word-of-mouth recommendations.<sup>xxix</sup> Through tailoring their business practices, restaurant owners establish the goodwill necessary to acquiring social capital.

Even the restaurant experience is tailored to the Salvadoran or Brazilian customer. This can be seen with the menu, displayed in the traditional way or up in large letters across the wall, in Spanish or Portuguese to better accommodate the native Spanish or Portuguese speakers. There are also TVs displayed in each of the restaurants, playing soccer games or *telenovelas*, and Brazilian newspapers in the corner. Joe says that he wants his bakery to be a place where people can come together, and a place that provides "what people miss" from Brazil. And these businesses seem to be effective at representing their home cultures; in a study conducted about East Somerville, 54% of the customers polled said that they visited the restaurant three to four times per week.<sup>xxx</sup> The main objective of these businesses seems to not only be to acquire new customers from within their ethnic subculture as immigrants in the U.S., but also to provide an environment that their customers can identify with.

Not only do the business owners specifically target their own ethnic population, but immigrants in the city also search for ethnic businesses, suggesting a symbiotic relationship between the customer and the business owner. According to Levitt, "the Latino customer expects to know the shop owner as well," which implies that the

immigrant customer is searching for a relationship with the business owner and a climate in which the immigrant can identify as that ethnicity.<sup>xxx1</sup> As owners of small businesses, many restaurant owners take on the role of manager, dishwasher, cook, and waiter. As public figures, they often get a good amount of time with the customer. Similar to one restaurant owner in Levitt's study greeting his customers with the familial *primo* (cousin), Orlando and his customers greet each other with the friendly *paisano* (friend, compatriot). This form of 'ethnic salesmanship' serves to create a positive atmosphere for the owner's ethnic cohort.

Every immigrant business owner interviewed stated that the main form of advertising, and sometimes the only form of advertising other than word of mouth, was the radio. While not exactly a form of social capital, it is important to note that the restaurant owners used this method of advertisement to target their own ethnic group; Raúl, Benjamín, and Orlando advertised on Spanish radio, while Lucia and Joe put ads on the local Brazilian radio stations. As their principal form of advertising, these immigrant entrepreneurs are choosing to appeal to their own ethnic population. Similar to Levitt's study in which she concluded that immigrant entrepreneurs would rather "follow the community's social rules and fulfill their social responsibilities," many of the businesses (with the exception of Maya Sol, don't necessarily believe that bigger is better) are content satisfying their economic needs with their ethnic cohorts rather than reaching out to the American public.<sup>xxxii</sup>

This form of promotion differs greatly from the ways in which the community organizations promote the ethnic food businesses in Somerville. These businesses are seen as potential sources of wealth and a means to develop the area economically. By

celebrating these businesses, community organizations in Somerville engage in cultural tourism to transform Somerville and its neighborhoods from spaces to places; from dodgy areas to destinations.

### *Promoting Ethnicity: Cultural Tourism in Somerville*

Due to the ethnic diversity of the city, many growth coalitions have been established in Somerville to define the area as a tourist destination. These coalitions, like the various community organizations analyzed in this study, are “the starting point for the commodification of ethnic diversity to promote tourist lifestyle consumption.”<sup>xxxiii</sup> These organizations situate cultural tourism within the larger industry of branding the city of Somerville.

Cultural tourism can be explained as the commercial organization defining a place as a destination to visit, based on the cultural expressions of the area. It is primarily favored in urban centers, because they are “the hubs through which human mobility is channeled, as well as a primary space in which the vast majority of immigrant settlement initially takes place.”<sup>xxxiv</sup> Cultural tourism in the United States wouldn’t be possible without the immigrants in the area, whose cultures are represented and, at times, commodified. The tourism industry in Somerville has allowed the immigrant restaurant owners, even those who need to rely on forms of social capital, to make an impact in the community. Ethnic diversity, once seen as a hindrance on society and a point of discrimination and violence, has now become one of its most celebrated aspects.

Immigrants engage in cultural tourism by way of being self-employed entrepreneurs. The majority of the immigrants in this study are in line with Rath’s idea,

which asserted that most immigrant entrepreneurs started their businesses not to establish a tourist attraction, but rather to become self-sufficient.<sup>xxxv</sup> For example, Raúl said that the most rewarding part of his business is being his own boss, and working for himself. Orlando and Raúl both worked in the food industry as low-skilled employees for years after coming to the U.S., and Orlando said that after twelve years in the food industry, he was eager to start his own restaurant with his own style of food. Many of these immigrant entrepreneurs are newly self-employed, which, as vulnerable enterprises, engage in cultural tourism with the hope of expanding their business.

There are various forms of cultural tourism present in Somerville. Just in my four months studying the issue, I was put into contact with three organizations, all of which employed some form of urban reimagining. One of these events was the Foodie Crawl, sponsored by East Somerville Main Streets. This event took place on October 25, 2011. Tickets for the event were sold on [www.Groupon.com](http://www.Groupon.com) and on the East Somerville's web page, <http://www.eastsomervillemainstreets.org/>. For the event, seventeen businesses, many of them immigrant owned including Maya Sol, Blanca's Bakery, and Los Paisanos Restaurant, made a few sample products to give away to eager customers. Over 1,200 "foodies," attended this event in East Somerville, which congested the area to the point where the businesses weren't able to keep up with the influx of people. This event marks the touring of East Somerville for the purpose of enjoying the cultural expressions of the neighborhood. The Foodie Crawl exemplifies cultural tourism, as it served an American audience to assert East Somerville's character as ethnically diverse and incites outsiders to tour the area, capitalizing on diversity for economic development.

Other forms of cultural tourism in Somerville are put on by the Somerville Arts Council (SAC). Based primarily in and thus focusing on Union Square, the SAC strives to celebrate the diversity and quirkiness of Somerville. While this is not exclusively accomplished through the utilization of the immigrants in the area, as the Arts Council does host numerous events that do not strictly focus on immigrants, the SAC's festivals can be described as cultural tourism. The SAC hosts events such as Brazilian food festival, a Haitian film festival, and weekly market tours of Union's Brazilian, Central American, and Korean markets, to celebrate the diversity of Union Square. Rachel also acts as the principal writer for the SAC's food blog, "Nibble." She believes that there is a strong connection between food, art, and culture, and so she tries to connect the three while simultaneously locating them into the context of Union Square. The blog posts normally focus on an ethnic restaurant in Union Square, but sometimes it will be a particular food (and where to buy it in Union), such as the post entitled, "Ode to Horchata."<sup>xxxvi</sup> Rachel said that she hopes to use the blog to help the restaurants in Somerville get more business. The Nibble blog is a form of cultural tourism because, even though it doesn't involve outsiders physically touring the area, it encourages them to visit in the future.<sup>1</sup> The blog promotes Union Square as a tourist destination by promoting the food and sharing the stories of the community members. The blog, as well as the festivals sponsored by the SAC, serve to brand the neighborhood as a tourist destination.

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<sup>1</sup> Author's note: I would like to recognize that, as a class, we have all engaged in cultural tourism this semester through the YUM Blog. We each wrote at least two blog posts focusing on a restaurant with whom we spoke for this research. Similar to the Nibble blog, the YUM blog celebrates the diversity of the area and encourages readers, most likely Americans, to visit the restaurants. As I will remark in the subsequent section, this may not be the best way to promote the ethnic entrepreneurs in Somerville.

A more distinct form of cultural tourism comes from The Welcome Project. Led by Warren Goldstein Gelb, TWP has created a YUM card, which costs \$10 and gives the customer a discount on food items at participating restaurants. There are currently seven businesses on the card, including Maya Sol, although The Welcome Project has gained a few new restaurants for the next issue of the card. The idea grew out of a different project, “Immigrant City: Then and Now,” which aimed to focus on the similarities and differences between the generations of Somerville’s immigrants (the Italians and Italians in the older, the Brazilians and Salvadorans in the newer), showcasing the contributions the newer immigrants make the city. Warren says that, “they promote the idea that there is a value and an asset to different immigrant groups that are in the city.” The main ways they contribute to the city, according to Warren, are by bringing new business, giving access to new foods and cultures, and by raising awareness of those cultures. He believes that there is a conversation to be had behind the food that each of these business supply to the community; through food, one can learn about the cultures, people, and experiences of the immigrants, and by learning about this, the immigrants become a part of, and thus “welcome,” in the community. Warren told me that he saw this as an “opportunity to connect the economic opportunity for the owner with our own need to raise funds for the programs,” and that through the card, others can recognize the other projects TWP is doing, with the overall purpose of making all members of the community feel included and valued. Warren’s program is cultural tourism, as it attempts to inspire outsiders to visit the ethnic restaurants of Somerville, celebrating the cultural expression of the city through food. Yet, the YUM card was created for the overall goal of supporting the immigrants through sparking a dialogue about ethnicity, while it simultaneously finances



TWP's other programming efforts, which are more directly related to aiding immigrants in Somerville.

These forms of cultural tourism were started by outside organizations, rather than by the immigrant entrepreneurs themselves. Different from the way immigrant business owners tailor their restaurants to their ethnic cohorts, activities and events sponsored by these organizations attract (whether intending to or not) an American audience, rather than serving as ethnic community building exercises. Rachel Strutt mentioned that the SAC's programs are meant to include everyone inside and outside of Somerville, but admitted that some of her programs are attended by the predominantly "yuppier" Somervillians. Similar to Rath's interpretation of cultural tourism in Boston, immigrant entrepreneurs in Somerville aim to assert ethnic identity, which doesn't coincide with the tourists and community organizers who see the community for its exoticism.<sup>xxxvii</sup> Community initiatives to advocate for these ethnic entrepreneurs focus largely on economically developing the area through establishing Somerville as a tourist destination, but by promoting these restaurants to Americans, they are advertising to a population of people who most likely won't become regular customers at these independent small businesses.

Many community organizations utilize the subcultures present in Somerville to economically develop the area. In fact, there have been several reports, such as one written by the Center for an Urban Future, which postulate the potential of immigrant small businesses to economically develop an area as resource to engender growth.<sup>xxxviii</sup> These organizations transform "expressions of culture" like the food businesses into "vehicles for further developing the urban tourism economy."<sup>xxxix</sup> It is important to note

that these growth coalitions are just beginning to develop the areas of Somerville; we are far from calling East Somerville “Salvadortown” or Magoun Square “Little Brazil.” However, growth coalitions’ programs celebrating the ethnic diversity of the area are beginning to brand Somerville and its neighborhoods as tourist destinations. By doing so, more people spend time and money in Somerville, causing more capital to inundate in the economy, developing the city.

The disconnect between the immigrant entrepreneurs and the organizations advocating for them lies within the intended audience of these promotions. Many of the tourist travel can come from the immigrant populations themselves, as seen in the case of Blanca’s, where most of Raúl’s customers are his friends from El Salvador. However, in reality, much of the tourism of the area is beginning to come through the hoards of Americans occupying Broadway as they eagerly accept their “foodie” status and taste the “immigrant city.” Immigrant entrepreneurs rely on their ethnic cohorts to maintain and grow their business, and use social capital tools to market themselves. A new population of customers enters their businesses when the growth coalitions of Somerville like East Somerville Main Streets, the Somerville Arts Council, and The Welcome Project create programs that incite Americans to visit the restaurants. More often than not, the Americans don’t become regular supporters of the immigrant entrepreneurs in Somerville, which suggests that the growth coalitions resources could be put to better use if they used their tools of promotion to target the various ethnic populations in Somerville.

# The Effects of Community Events on Ethnic Food Businesses

## *Branding a Community*

Growth coalitions such as the community organizations in Somerville are interested in economically developing the area. Because the city is composed of such a diverse community, many of these organizations have taken to utilizing and celebrating this diversity through establishing Somerville in terms of its cultural identities, such as the immigrant restaurants.

Entrenching a community in terms of its cultural diversity is by no means a new idea; in fact, in nearly every major city in the U.S. there is a Chinatown of some kind.<sup>xl</sup> The prominence of these ethnic neighborhoods is demonstrated in Boston; Boston has a Chinatown of its own, and there is also a famous section known for its Italian culture, known as the North End. These districts were originally simply residential areas with a specific immigrant population, but, as the ethnic community began to support itself with various goods and services, the communities became known for their cultural flavors. Somerville as a city is currently in the transitional phase between being a space with immigrants to being a place with an ethnic identity.

With the issue of branding community, one must consider the image or stereotype the area already has.<sup>xli</sup> East Somerville is the poorest area of the city, with the strongest immigrant and low-income populations. It has typically been seen as the “wrong” part of town, or the area where people are afraid to walk at night. Community organization efforts such as the Foodie Crawl and the YUM card attempt to overcome these assumptions that outsiders have, so as to develop the area economically and establish it as an attractive tourist destination.

It is significant that many of these efforts are food-related. As food is something cross-culturally shared, as well as the easiest way to understand and represent a culture, many community organizations have chosen to brand the area using food tourism. In doing so, as food is generally categorized by nationality, community organizations define Somerville by its ‘zones of ethnicity’ as much as by its distinct city squares.<sup>xlii</sup> Creating this space involves making it “a symbolic area with a pronounced an entrenched image shared by insiders and outsiders, an image based on the area’s rich history and use, especially as a tourism attraction,”<sup>xliii</sup> For Somerville, particularly East Somerville and Union Squares, the ‘entrenched image’ is that of the small but vibrant ethnic food restaurants. The brand is already apparent when hearing Spanish or Portuguese in the restaurants and on the streets, seeing the Brazilian or Salvadoran flags in the storefronts, and by the very nature of what the businesses sell: ethnic food. This brand is then reinforced through the programming of the Main Streets and similar organizations.<sup>xliv</sup> Through food tourism, such as enticing ‘foodies’ to the square through a one-time taste-testing event or through a restaurant discount to restaurants in the area, food tourism establishes these ‘zones of ethnicity’ form of branding a community through place promotion in terms of cultural identity.

These community events define sections of Somerville based on geographic location. In order to properly brand a community as ethnically diverse, the neighborhoods are sometimes assigned an ‘otherness’ associated with a designated flavor, such as the immigrant culture most prevalent. This distinction between the host country and the subculture within the community is made clear in the naming of events like the Foodie Crawl. This event invited “foodies,” which are almost exclusively people interested in

food other than their own culture's, with the overall intention of experiencing something different than their regular life within U.S. culture. Rachel Strutt has said that food tourism is "huge- not just here in Somerville but everywhere-everyone's a foodie now." This attitude of 'foodie' could leave other cultures exoticized. This raises other questions, such as the authenticity of this 'otherness' and the threat on cultural identity, which are outside the scope of this study. However, it is important to note that by creating these 'zones of ethnicity,' community organizations brand a city as culturally diverse and make the immigrant restaurants objects of the host culture's gaze.

### *Advantages of Cultural Diversity Efforts*

While thus far in my report I have taken a critical tone of cultural tourism in Somerville, it is worth recognizing that there are many ways in which forms of cultural tourism can be good for the restaurant owner. For example, by defining and asserting the neighborhoods of Somerville as culturally distinct, and by having certain community organizations only working with one half-mile neighborhood, the cultural tourism may serve to instill pride and community building within the neighborhood. Raúl said that even though he is critical of East Somerville Main Street's ability to help his business, he participates in the community events, because he likes feeling part of a community. Benjamín said that he would participate in the event again, because it was a great opportunity to meet new people and share his culture with others.

One significant advantage of the cultural diversity efforts is the potential increase in business. While the narrators in this study who participated in the Foodie Crawl in East Somerville were largely critical of its effectiveness, there are many other programs that

do support the businesses owners by bringing in more customers. One such event is the Hungry Tiger event in Union Square, hosted by the Somerville Arts Council. Rachel said that the businesses in the Union Plaza saw an increase in business of 25%-45%. Even though this increase is problematized by *who* is coming to these events and who will return to become regular customers, it is clear that the events have high participation rates, and that they can have a positive impact on the community.

The YUM card, the Foodie Crawl, and the Nibble and YUM blogs are other forms of cultural tourism that may be seen in a positive light when considering the fact that they highlight the diversity of the city and attempt to establish a tone of acceptance and celebration of immigrants in Somerville. Considering the history of immigrants in Boston as a predominantly oppressed people, this marks an important change in our nation's history. By bringing to light immigrant issues and concerns, community organizations and the forms of cultural tourism present the city as a welcoming environment for people of all ethnicities.

Benjamín of Maya Sol and Gauchao was the only one of my narrators who advertised to an American audience and thus tailored his business practice to Americans. Benjamín said that the Two for Tuesday event, which is a program that promotes the businesses of East Somerville by featuring certain menu items for a discount on Tuesdays, and the Foodie Crawl, helped his business and brought in more American customers. Maya Sol is an aesthetically pleasing restaurant advertising Mexican food, and both of these aspects contribute to an American audience. Benjamín's business practices are different than his colleagues in that he wishes to have customers from all over the world; as he wanted Americans to visit his restaurant, and because he had

already made efforts to reach out to the American public, East Somerville Main Street's programming efforts have been helpful for him.

The importance of these community organizations becomes apparent when analyzing Magoun Square. Magoun Square does not have a community organization advocating for its businesses and its development, although talks have begun to start one. Joe from Modelo Bakery and Lucia from Churrasco both mentioned that they had several issues with the construction on Medford street for the past few years and the consequent parking issues that have arisen. Yet, they felt that there was no one in the community with whom they could discuss their concerns. In contrast, each business owner I spoke with in East Somerville told me that one Carrie Dancy of the ESMS was constantly poking her head into their restaurants, making her presence known in the community.

Orlando told me that he thinks it is very important to participate in these community events, because it helps promote his business and gives people a chance to try his food. When I asked him what he thinks of ESMS, he said that they are only improving, especially with programs like the Foodie Crawl and Two for Tuesdays. He also said that ESMS is listening to the restaurant owners' own ideas and thinking about them in their programming, which could be a step toward resolving the disconnect in promotional techniques of social capital and cultural tourism.

Orlando also expressed how comfortable he feels talking to Carrie about other issues he is experiencing, like the problems that East Somerville has with parking. When thinking about Magoun Square, it is interesting to observe the lack of organization and community sentiment present within the neighborhood. Without an organization to mediate the concerns of the neighborhood to the city government, both Lucia and Joe felt

at a loss to change the community in which they run their businesses. Community organizations can therefore have an impact not only by economically developing the community, but also by highlighting the political challenges faced by these immigrant entrepreneurs.

### *Drawbacks to Cultural Programming*

Despite several advantages of cultural tourism, it is clear that some aspects of cultural tourism need to be modified. One concern comes from the way the Foodie Crawl itself was conducted. These business owners had to spend time and money making the samples and serving the “foodies,” instead of regular paying customers, resulting in a loss of business for the night yet a surplus of resources spent. Of the business owners I spoke with, they each saw maybe one or two repeat customers since the October 25<sup>th</sup> event. Many expressed concern over spending resources and not receiving any economic compensation for the 1,000 people who attended.

Of his new customers from the Foodie Crawl, Orlando said that they were all Americans. Orlando did say that he wished this could be different; he said that the participants in the Foodie Crawl were only American and Chinese, and that this doesn’t reflect Somerville’s true population. Orlando said he’d like to see more events targeted toward the Latinos in the community come out to these events; most of his regulars, most of whom are Latino, didn’t know that this program was happening. He thinks there needs to be a way to get more Latinos involved, because they make up a great portion of the population and his clientele base.



Raúl also expressed discontent with the Foodie Crawl. When I asked him about the Foodie Crawl, the first thing he told me was that he “didn’t like it.” He told me that his business couldn’t support the number of people who came, and also said that he didn’t like that he gave his cookies away without getting any sort of economic compensation. He said that his restaurant is more tailored to a Spanish client base, and all the Americans coming for one night didn’t improve his business. Overall, he told me that he isn’t sure if the Foodie Crawl helped his business or not.

Rachel Strutt of the Somerville Arts Council lauded the Foodie Crawl as a “huge success.” However, sheer number of tickets sold is not an accurate indication of its effectiveness. Because the Foodie Crawl didn’t finance the business’ products given away on the date of the event and didn’t end up targeting their respective ethnic cohorts, it didn’t successfully support the businesses by helping them develop their market economically.<sup>2</sup> While the Foodie Crawl by no means represents the efforts made as a whole by East Somerville Main Streets to promote the businesses to economically and socially develop the area, it is clear that the organization could be reassigning its efforts to better improve the way it supports the immigrant entrepreneurs.

As positive as the YUM restaurant card and the Nibble and YUM blogs can be in terms of highlighting cultural diversity in a supportive and accepting way, it is undeniable that these forms of cultural tourism target a primarily American audience, due to their

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<sup>2</sup> Author’s note: It is unfair to assume that the majority of ESMS’s programming efforts are created with the intended audience of Americans. Carrie Dancy noted in an interview that Somerstreets, an event in which various activities took place in closed streets, was attended heavily by the Latino population (about 50%). I cannot conclude that ESMS’s work doesn’t accurately support the businesses on Broadway in East Somerville, as there are many programming efforts outside the scope of this report. However, I will be focusing solely on the Foodie Crawl of ESMS and basing my conclusions on the information presented to me by the narrators of this report.

prevalence on the Internet. Targeting an American audience may not yield as many repeat customers as advertising to Somerville's ethnic communities, or even to Boston's ethnic communities, because, as I previously examined, many immigrant entrepreneurs target their ethnic clientele, and many immigrants wish to visit restaurants of their own ethnic cohorts.

The main drawback to the current forms of cultural tourism in Somerville lies within the intentions of its brand. Rachel Strutt, for example, wants Union Square to be "an arts-friendly district" and an "internationally friendly culinary area." Branding an image, such as Somerville as a culturally diverse area, rather than supporting the driving forces behind the area, the immigrant entrepreneurs, serves to cast aside the immigrant community, making them 'othered' and exoticized rather than celebrated and validated.

Many of the community organizations analyzed in this study are well aware of the concerns I have highlighted. East Somerville Main Streets' own report on the business district on Broadway acknowledges that most immigrant businesses serve their various ethnic cohorts by providing goods particular to that region, by speaking in Spanish or Portuguese, and by using word-of-mouth and radio stations as advertising.<sup>xlv</sup> If it is known that the customers of these businesses share an "ethnic affiliation" with the identity of the restaurant and the owner, then it would be most useful to utilize that information to inform the strategies of promoting the businesses.

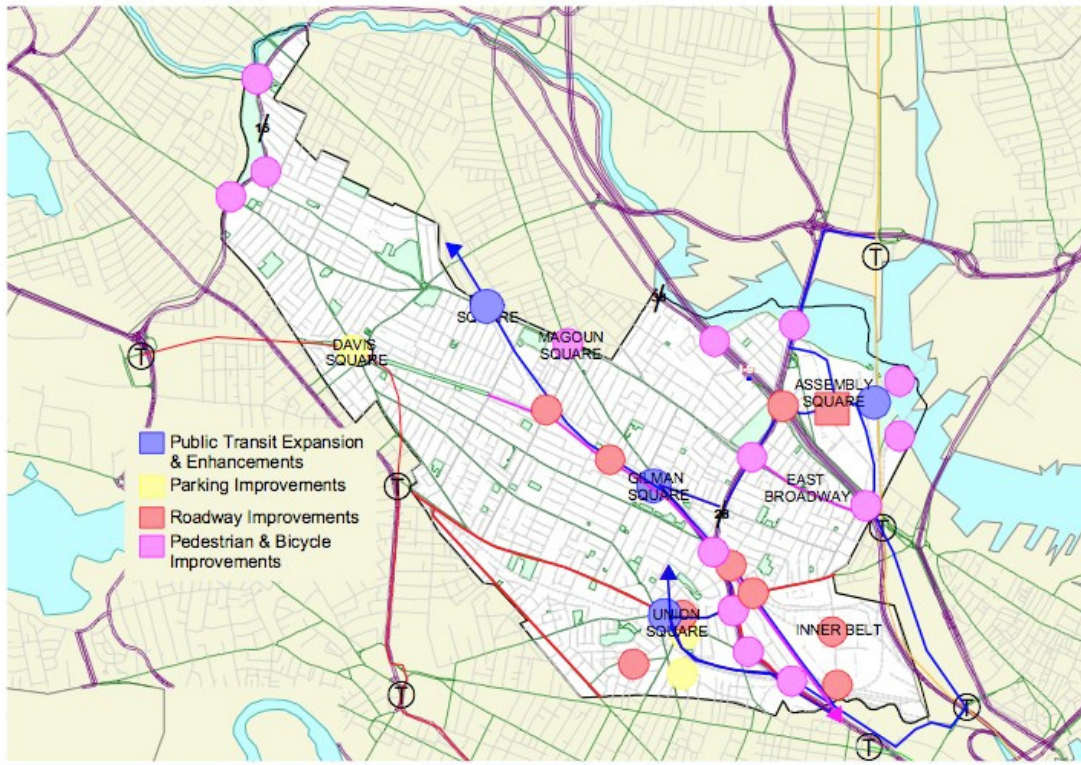
## The Future Effects of Cultural Tourism in Somerville

The potential ramifications of cultural tourism are amplified when considering future changes in the area. For example, accessibility is a major factor in branding a community as a tourist destination popular for its cultural expression. Ethnic neighborhoods need to be accessible by visitors in order for outsiders to be able to experience the area and want to come. A few major roadways surround the city itself; although they bring high volumes of traffic to the area, the government acknowledges that it “presents large barriers to the neighborhoods and commercial districts of the city.”<sup>xlvi</sup> While Davis Square is largely accessible through the Red Line T stop, the rest of Somerville is largely unreachable to the touring population. Somerville currently has fifteen bus lines that connect Somerville with other metropolitan areas, but only 30% of the residents use it.<sup>xlvii</sup> Even the Tufts University students living on the western edge of the city rarely venture past Ball Square, largely due to ignorance of the bus systems and the lack of a subway line.

This is soon to be remedied. Although consistently delayed (originally set to 2014, postponed to 2018), the Green Line subway of Boston is eventually going to be extended to Union Square, Ball Square, Lowell Street near Magoun Square and College Avenue at Tufts, among other locations in Somerville. Spearheaded by The Massachusetts Department of Transportation and the Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority, the extension aims to decrease automobile use and address transportation injustices.<sup>xlviii</sup> The notion to extend the Green Line came as early as 1920, but was put into motion in 2006 with consistent support by community organizations such as

Somerville Transportation Equity Partnership. A Public Advisory Group meets monthly to discuss the progress of these efforts, and is open to the public.<sup>xlix</sup>

After establishing a public transport system in Somerville, making the streets and public spaces more accessible to pedestrians and bicyclists is a top priority. Not only does the city wish to improve the East Somerville neighborhood, so that it isn't merely a long stretch of four-lane roadway, but they would also like to improve lighting, construct pedestrian/bike pathways throughout Somerville and further develop the streetscape of Magoun Square.<sup>l</sup> To make the area more bike and pedestrian-friendly, the government plans to implement the a Somerville Community Path, which will reconstruct the abandoned railroad paths of the city and serve to connect Somerville, Belmont, Arlington, Cambridge, and Boston.<sup>li</sup> By improving the infrastructure and geography of Somerville, the city is transforming itself into a more livable space.



Map demonstrating the various transportation development efforts planned by the City of Somerville, extracted from the Transport Executive Summary, <http://www.somervillema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/SCDP-6-Transportation.pdf> 5.

The future of Somerville rests within the hands of the developments of the transportation and cultural tourism industries. With the coming of the Green Line and developmental efforts to establish Somerville as a bike and pedestrian-friendly area, it is conceivable to assume that more people are going to be visiting Somerville. Similar to the Center for Urban Future's study of immigrant entrepreneurs in New York City, the increasing cost of rent prices in Somerville is an imposing threat upon Somerville's immigrant population.<sup>lii</sup> As Somerville becomes a more popular destination to visit, it will be a more popular place to live, especially with the increasing accessibility to Boston with the coming of the Green Line. This imposes a threat on the very futures of these

small, independently owned businesses in Somerville by the strong and formidable forces of gentrification.

Warren Goldstein Gelb, as Director of The Welcome Project and therefore as someone who has taken immigrant interests to heart, is very conscious of this threat. When talking about the coming of the Green Line, Warren told me that he didn't want to see what happened to Davis to happen in Union Square. He described Davis Square as a "tragedy." Despite its thriving business and activity, Davis has become the least diverse part of the city in Warren's 25 years in the area. He fears it will one day become the "Harvard" of Somerville, full of chain stores. He told me that the gentrification of the area was a very negative thing, citing spiraling housing prices that drove the low-income residents out of the area as a reason why immigrants left the area. Warren sees Union as the "up-and-coming" neighborhood, but one that he fears has the potential to turn into a Davis Square. When thinking about transit injustice, it is paradoxical that although Union Square is currently relatively inaccessible, bringing in the T stop would drive out the current residents, still excluding the same people. Warren told me that a good way to make it accessible to the people currently living there would be to create a transit-oriented development zone, which would change parking regulations and control rent prices within a small zone closest to the T stop. He also said that another way to prevent what happened in Davis from happening in Union will be to have non-profit community development organizations, such as the Somerville Community Corp, purchase land in transit areas and offer cheaper rent.

The irony exists when thinking about the long-term effects of cultural tourism. Cultural tourism is branding Somerville as a favorable place to visit and live. Rent prices

have already begun to increase with the expectation of the Green Line, as more people wish to move to and start businesses in the areas surrounding the T, for its access to a high volume of customers. Many of the existing immigrant businesses, unable to compete with rising rent prices, will be driven out of Somerville. With the increasing accessibility of Somerville to the exterior communities, cultural tourism may just be driving out the very businesses it aims to celebrate.

Each neighborhood is being subjected to increasing gentrification, and that because of the Red and Green lines coming into Somerville, the city is changing from its reputation as “Slummerville” into a destination for a lot of people. This gentrification and increased inaccessibility, coupled with the current cultural tourism efforts made in the community, put the future of these small immigrant-owned restaurant at risk. Warren said it best when he spoke about the ideal way to support the immigrants in the city:

“In general I’d like people to see the value that immigrants make and contribute in the city, but do it in such a way that everyone can stay and participate and not be dislocated by that success-that’s the catch-22.”

## Concluding Remarks

In this report I attempted to show the relationship between the immigrant entrepreneurs and the community organizations advocating for them. Given Somerville's demographic ethnic diversity, it is clear that entrepreneurs from ethnic communities have begun to represent the needs of their cohorts by providing services to them, such as Latin American-specific restaurants. I have shown that these small businesses, many of whom are very new, rely on various forms of social capital to maintain their business, and that they tailor to the Salvadoran and Brazilian populations in their business practices to attract their ethnic cohorts as customers.

Many non-profit organizations and governmental organizations have chosen to engage in this diversity so as to brand the community as a tourist attraction and subsequently economically develop the area. However, in the process of doing so, many events have served the brand of Somerville, rather than the driving forces behind the desired goal of what Somerville could be. By promoting to a predominantly American audience, the community organizations do not attract the same customers that the immigrant entrepreneurs promote to in their marketing efforts. Since these programming efforts are celebrating another culture, yet aren't celebrated by the culture itself, the events serve to 'other' the ethnic communities, making them the object of the American's gaze; a gaze that is unlikely to return as a regular customer.

Furthermore, I have shown that the use of ethnic identity to brand a community is intrinsic within the developmental strategies of the community organizations. It is unclear what the future of Somerville will hold if the current practices of cultural tourism



continue; with the coming of the Green Line into Union Square and on Lowell Street near Magoun, there will be a greater movement of people within the city of Boston, as Somerville begins to become included as part of Boston itself, rather than just the “greater Boston area.” The cultural tourism of the area, coupled with Green Line anxieties, may mean that more people begin to see Somerville as an attractive place not just to visit, but also to live. Rent prices have already been speculated as increasing in anticipation of this change; given that many of these ethnic food business are small and new endeavors, many may be driven out of their current locations, dislocated by the success of the very brand representing them.

This leaves the community organizations with a specific task. They need to aid in the development of the squares of Somerville so as to avoid mass gentrification of the area. By blending the techniques of social capital and cultural tourism, this task may be accomplished. I commend the community organizations for focusing on immigrants in the first place in much of their programming; throughout much of the history of the immigrant in Boston, or the U.S. in general, suppression has been a long-running current, so even having a consciousness of the immigrant entrepreneur’s needs is significant. If the community organizations wish to support the immigrant entrepreneurs, they would be best supporting their businesses economically by promoting their events to the ethnic population who already visits the restaurants.

Although marketing and advertizing tools are much more complex than what I have reported, this change could be as simple as advertizing on the Brazilian or Spanish radio stations or newspapers. The organizations also need to be committed to following up on their events with the business owners to improve the programs to better support

them. One such improvement that was reported to me was the fact that small business owners felt that they didn't have the economic resources to participate in the Foodie Crawl; if East Somerville Main Streets granted the businesses the money to supply the free samples for the event, then they wouldn't have ended up losing business for the evening.

Community organizations have a unique position in society; often times, they have enough power to share an audience with the government. Community organizations could also have a much greater role, not just as means to economically develop the area, but rather as a resource to address some of the real problems faced by immigrant entrepreneurs. Therefore, it should be their role to act as mediator between the immigrant entrepreneurs and the city government, so that each can understand the needs of the other.

One challenge that I feel the community organizations have the potential to address is the parking issue. With each business owner I spoke with, each had problems with the parking in Somerville, and orated a laundry list of negative implications of the lack of parking spaces, including the principal problem, which is that it deters customers from coming to the businesses. East Somerville Main Streets has recognized this problem; along with branding the community as “a business district with an international restaurant and food cluster,” it hopes to reconstruct the parking strategy so that new patrons outside the city may come and find safe and available parking.<sup>liii</sup> Although this may carry the risk of enticing more Americans and furthering gentrification, it is a necessary step toward allowing the current patrons to frequent the businesses more often, and may also engender *repeat* American customers, solving the issue with programming like the Foodie Crawl.

Another challenge that could be addressed is the language barrier; Lucia said that she has trouble communicating with city officials due to her doubt about her English speaking skills. This issue may be remedied by The Welcome Project's LIPS program, which trains bilingual college students to interpret at community events. If a LIPS student were to accompany Lucia, her questions may be better addressed and her anxieties resolved. Along similar lines, if the Somerville Arts Council were to partner with some of these immigrants in Rachel's pilot language exchange program, Intercambio, in which native English speakers are paired with English language learners, language barriers could be broken.

Not to say that the responsibility should be entirely upon the community organizations to be the voice for the immigrant entrepreneurs. Ideally, if not constrained by the limits of this semester, I would continue to conduct interviews of the immigrant restaurant owners and the community organizations. It may worthwhile to investigate forms of immigrant outreach to community organizations and city government, and study the tools they use to resolve their issues within the community. Or rather, study why these immigrant restaurant owners aren't using their voices to raise the concerns they have about their small business in Somerville.

I recognize that it may not be possible to resolve some of the issues I have raised in this report; however, I hope that I have stimulated dialogue and allowed for a greater consciousness of the immigrant restaurant owner's role in the Somerville community.

## Appendices

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*Links*

The Welcome Project: <http://www.welcomeproject.org/>

Somerville Arts Council: [www.somervilleartscouncil.org/](http://www.somervilleartscouncil.org/)

East Somerville Main Streets: <http://www.eastsomervillemainstreets.org/>

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