

Divergence and Unity:

*community development projects and immigrant identities in
Somerville*

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Preface

As is so often the case with stories, the account of my relationship with this research begins long before the project itself even came into existence. During the summer preceding the Urban Borderlands project, I worked for Somerville Local First. Somerville Local First (SLF) is a local nonprofit whose mission is to support and create a more sustainable local economy, primarily through partnership with locally owned and independently run businesses. My individual objectives for the summer aimed to increase the diversity, geographic and ethnic, between SLF member businesses. Most of my outreach visits to potential new members took place in East Somerville and Winter Hill. Many of these visits proved somewhat discouraging, leaving me feeling as though I had done little more than introduce SLF and its mission to a somewhat disinterested or preoccupied audience. By the end of the summer I found myself asking what good I had done for SLF, for the business owners I met, and for my community at large. If this type of activity had meant little, then what did that say about my previous three years in Somerville as an inactive citizen? These questions carried over into the school year, leading me to this specific research path. The opportunity for continued community investigation that Urban Borderlands afforded me has resolved many of these personal discomforts, and for that I am forever grateful.

Introduction

Somerville, long home to one of metro-Boston's most dynamically growing immigrant populations, is rapidly becoming more than the city at the end of the MBTA Red Line. Over the last two decades, "the immigrant city" of Somerville has become a destination spot known for its amazing ethnic diversity. Perhaps somewhat ironically, this process of increased awareness and appreciation for ethnic and cultural difference has also brought Somerville to the edges of rapid gentrification. Immigrant-owned businesses have witnessed this double-edged transformation first hand and must navigate the changing social landscape in whatever way seems most appropriate.

There are certain pathways of connection with which businesses may engage. Connections include social associations like connections to the City of Somerville, links to the greater Boston area, or support from a strong clientele. Connections may also include those of a more tangible type, such as access to public transportation, availability of ingredients, or the means by which to advertise and spread the word about business. Within each of these areas there are varying levels of connectedness, with the more connected businesses finding their establishments more stably planted in the context of Somerville. However, even the most connected businesses still find themselves dealing with the almost constant pressures of a transforming urban space.

Somerville is full of organizations that tie up economic development with ideas of culture, art, and ethnic diversity. Such organizations include but are not at all limited to: Union Square Main Streets, East Somerville Main Streets, Somerville Arts Council, Somerville Local First, and The Welcome Project. Somerville's extensive list of community initiatives and local nonprofits offers a new form of connection that hopes to prove advantageous along the road to Somerville's increasing commercial and cultural growth. Where do immigrant-owned restaurants locate themselves within the changing social landscape of Somerville? And what role do community organizations play in determining these identities? On what level might their visions for Somerville—past, present, and future—diverge from visions belonging to the very businesses implicated in community development projects? In a city on the edge of gentrification, a concept intimately tied up with ethnicity, immigrant business owners can offer powerful insights into where the gaps exist and what can be done about them.

The importance of these questions and concerns moves far beyond the scope of any scholarly conclusions. Something personal and urgent is happening in Somerville. As a student who has come to call both Tufts and Somerville home, I've become increasingly invested in the future of Somerville and the future of the immigrant-owned restaurants that I frequent. I can only begin to imagine what this future may mean to somebody who has worked to carve out a business in a foreign market and make a living off of it. While this project remains a scholarly endeavor, it's

important to remember that the changing social landscapes of Somerville affect more than just the abstract. Somerville would be little more than ghostly infrastructure without its inhabitants and visitors—people with unique viewpoints upon which I can only hope to shed some light.

Methodology

Because this project is specific to Somerville, the bulk of my research required direct involvement with the community. Over the course of a semester, September through October I conducted formal, semi-structured interviews with members of the Somerville community who could shed light upon the relationship between immigrant-owned restaurants and community organizations. In my first interview with Vinny Migliore, owner of Vinny's Ristorante, I sought to gain insights from somebody who is well-connected to Somerville, has been around to see the city change for over fifty years, and participates in three community initiatives: Welcome Project's YUM, East Somerville Main Streets, and Somerville Local First. My second interview, with Mimi Graney, executive director of Union Square Main Streets (USMS), came after my research topic had gained more specificity. I hoped that Mimi could provide me with the community organizer's viewpoint on development projects in Somerville. This interview was supplemented by any widely available literature put out by USMS, primarily from their online presence. My final two interviews, with Huseyin Akgun of Istanbul'lu and Delio Susi of Amelia's Kitchen, were conducted specifically because both of these restaurants operate in a square without any organization advocating for square-specific development. Out of these interviews I hoped to gain insight into what development projects might look like from the outside and what restaurant-owners might be looking for in a future community organization.

There is not an abundance of outside scholarship directly pertaining to this topic, and certainly there is even less scholarship relating to Somerville specifically. However, a few readings on key themes certainly informed my exploration of immigrant-owned restaurants and community developments organizations. In his book *The Philadelphia Barrio*, Frederick Wherry explores a concept critical to USMS and East Somerville Main Streets' work: branding. The branding of a city involves any active efforts aimed to create and promote a particular city "brand" that includes reputation, images, evocations, legacies, and "cultural narratives."¹ Somerville and its neighborhoods are currently going through a process of branding, particularly at the hands of organizations like USMS and ESMS. The branding process may shape the future of small businesses by determining what type of business "fits" the brand. Does the brand that community development projects promote for Somerville and its businesses match up with how immigrant restaurant owners view themselves within Somerville?

¹ Wherry, Frederick. (2011) *The Philadelphia Barrio: The Arts, Branding and Neighborhood Transformation*, University of Chicago Press, Chapter 1, "Culture at Work" and Chapter 4, "Ringling the Registers: Entrepreneurial Dreams."

Somerville: A Brief Historical Context

Settled in 1630 and officially established as a city in 1872, Somerville has since become the most densely populated community in New England.² At the time of the 2010 census, more than 75,000 people lived in the little more than 4 square miles that make up Somerville's geography³. Populations of mid-century European immigrants, middle-class professionals, young college students, blue-collar workers, and newly immigrated families all call Somerville home, due in part to the fact that Somerville lies only two miles north of Boston.⁴ More than a quarter of Somerville residents are foreign-born,⁵ with recently arrived immigrants hailing from countries such as Haiti, Nepal, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Brazil, and Peru.

The incredible diversity of Somerville does not stop with its people; traveling across the short east-west span of Somerville reveals a varied network of neighborhoods whose differences are as distinct as their names: Teele Square, Davis Square, Ball Square, Spring Hill, Union Square, Magoun Square, Winter Hill, East Somerville, and Assembly Square. As a general rule, as you move from west to east within the city, housing prices decrease, and thus an income gradient exists between West Somerville (Teele Square, Davis Square, etc) and East Somerville (Magoun Square,

² (2011) "About Somerville" *City Of Somerville*
<http://www.somervillema.gov/about-somerville>

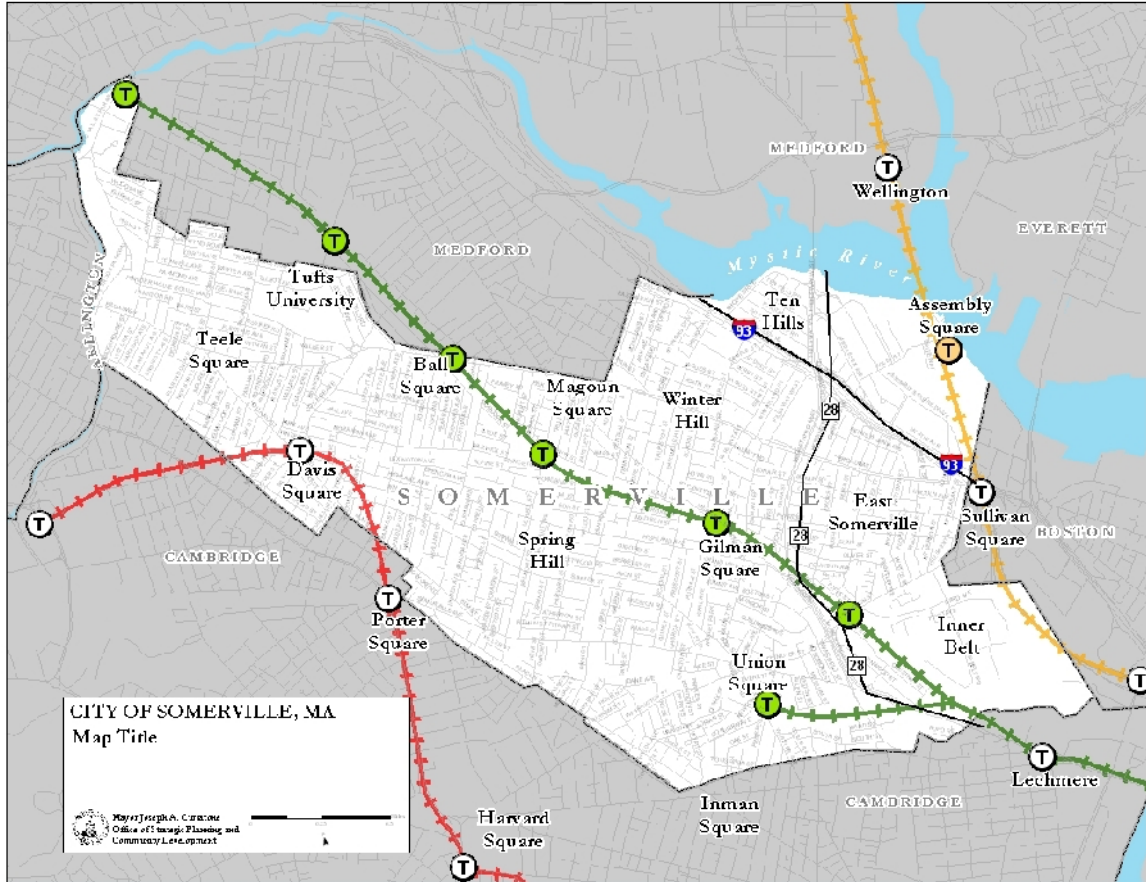
³ (2011) "About Somerville" *City Of Somerville*
<http://www.somervillema.gov/about-somerville>

⁴ (2011) "About Somerville" *City Of Somerville*
<http://www.somervillema.gov/about-somerville>

⁵ Smith, Anna. (2010) *Capital, Comunidad y Cultura: Understanding the Creation, Growth, and Survival of Somerville's Immigrant-Owned Restaurants*. Honors Thesis, Tufts University

Winter Hill). Because of this, certain areas of Somerville are more highly populated by immigrants in general, but no area is specific to any one ethnic group. All of these factors combined lead to the creation of a truly intercultural “immigrant city.”

Map of Somerville⁶



⁶ <http://www.somervillema.gov/departments/ospcd/squares-and-neighborhoods>

Narrators

Vinny Migliore - Vinny's Ristorante

Vincent (Vinny) Migliore was born in 1948 in Sicily, a large and semi-autonomous island off the coast of Italy. In September of 1955 Vinny and his immediate family immigrated to Boston's West End, an area with a large concentration of immigrants. By 1958, Vinny's family was forced from the West End as the city evicted people and razed buildings. His family, as well as many of his neighbors, headed toward the suburbs; by 1960 Vinny and his family ended up at their Somerville home on Windsor Road near Davis Square. After working at a produce market, Vinny opened up a variety store at 76 Broadway in 1969. He was 21 years old. After some amount of success, Vinny decided to utilize the empty space in his store to open a deli/grocery. With the rise of modern supermarkets, Vinny's variety store became smaller and smaller. Eventually, Vinny was left with a near-empty space. It was at this point in 1984 that Vinny decided to open a sit-down restaurant for lunches. In 1995 Vinny's Ristorante opened its doors to the dinner crowd, a decision that has stuck with the restaurant through to today.

Vinny's Ristorante is on an extremely commercial stretch of Broadway in the East Somerville/ Winter Hill area. Like most East Somerville establishments, Vinny's finds itself in the middle of a grab bag of businesses. There are Laundromats, liquor stores, restaurants, daycare centers, and convenience stores around Vinny's, all

owned by people of various ethnic origins. Trees lit with holiday lights line the half-mile stretch of Broadway that Vinny's calls home.

Inside, Vinny's is separated into two rooms: one for the delicatessen and to-go counter and another for a sit-down dining experience. Two counter workers prepare a number of cold and hot subs and ring up customers in the delicatessen area. The deli offers a grocery section that includes homemade pasta sauces, Italian meats, jars of olives, oil, chips, and bottled drinks. Further back lays the dimly lit restaurant area, decorated with signs in Italian, murals of a quaint seaside town, and dramatic red drapes.

Huseyin Akgun – Istanbul'lu

Huseyin Akgun was born and raised in Rize, a small city that sits on the Black Sea in the northeast part of Turkey. After finishing high school in Turkey and realizing that the political turmoil in Turkey would prevent him from going on to a university, Huseyin decided to emigrate from Turkey. In his adult life, Huseyin has lived in Switzerland, Germany, and Canada. In 1986 he came from Canada to the United States. After spending a few years connecting with fellow Boston-area Turks and drawing upon his previous experience cooking in restaurants, Huseyin started a pizza business in South Boston. His next venture was a similar shop in Brookline. After pizza, Huseyin decided to open up a sit-down restaurant focusing on Turkish food. Before ending up in Somerville, Akgun moved his restaurant from Beacon Hill

to Brighton and back to Brookline. Istanbul'lu opened in Teele Square, Somerville about a year and a half ago.

Located in the westernmost portion of Somerville a few minutes away from Davis Square, Teele Square is quite small. Restaurants compose the main places of business in Teele Square, including a couple of breakfast joints, a vegan café, a Mexican restaurant, and an Indian restaurant. Teele square is a quick walk from Davis and is serviced by two MBTA busses. Istanbul'lu, tucked just around the corner from the main crossroads of the square, serves homestyle Turkish cuisine. Istanbul'lu's walls are covered with Turkish paraphernalia such as musical instruments, tapestries, weapons, and photographs.

Delio Susi – Amelia's Kitchen

Delio Susi grew up in Pettorano sul Gizio, a city almost directly east of Rome. In 1961, when Delio was 10 years old, he immigrated to the North End in Boston with his mother and sister. After a fair deal of time in the North End, Delio married wife Amelia, with whom he would eventually relocate to Somerville. At the time of this move, Delio had been working for the Polaroid Corporation for 16 years. While hanging around Teele Square in 1995, Delio's sixteen year old son, Delio Jr., got wind of a restaurant space available for rent. With this news, Delio Sr. seized the opportunity to open a small sub shop named for his wife, Amelia. After four years of serving soda, Delio received the impetus he needed to transform Amelia's sub shop

into a small sit-down restaurant: a liquor license. Amelia's Kitchen has remained the same type of establishment since this permit arrived in 1999.

Like Istanbul'lu, Amelia's Kitchen is located in Teele Square. Directly in front of the restaurant is the physical "square," an open space at the intersection of three busy streets. Inside of the restaurant a mix of family photos, Italian ornamentation, and NYC paraphernalia decorates the brown, red, and cream furnishings. Amelia's chef cooks up a menu including gourmet pizzettes, pasta dishes, salads, entrees, and desert. Amelia's also offers a limited sampling of wines and liqueurs, as well as specials that change regularly depending upon available ingredients.

Mimi Graney – Union Square Main Streets

Mimi Graney became the executive director of Union Square Main Streets after serving as the director of Somerville Community Access Television (SCAT) from 1992 to 2000 and interim director/board member from 2000 to 2005. At the time, Union Square Main Streets (USMS) was a brand new organization. While she didn't have a background in any kind of urban planning, Mimi was familiar with nonprofit work. After living in "every Somerville zip code" since 1989, she had also become intimately familiar with the city.

Union Square Main Streets is a nonprofit organization modeled under the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Street movement. This national program

seeks to “revitalize downtown and neighborhood business districts by leveraging local assets - from historic, cultural, and architectural resources to local enterprises and community pride.”⁷ USMS came about in 2005 as a means of fostering economic and commercial growth in Union Square, a neighborhood in the Eastern half of Somerville. Mimi Graney stepped on board as the executive director of USMS in 2005 and has remained there ever since. Her offices can be found within the Design Annex, a USMS project that provides cooperative workspace for small businesses, freelancers, and solo practitioners

Aside from more developed Davis Square, Union Square is one of the only “squares” in Somerville with the kind of open public space that characterizes a town square. This area is full of restaurants whose owners run the gamut of diverse ethnic backgrounds. With cheaper rent than other more westerly areas of Somerville, Union Square has served as home to people of a lower income bracket. Within the past few years these cheap rents have attracted a younger crowd, bringing with them demand for yoga studios, alternative healing centers, farmers markets, and coffee shops. Thus, Union Square is not only a physical juncture of streets but has also become a crossroads of age, ethnicity, and identities. Union Square Main Streets seeks to put the unique cultural capital of Union Square toward creating a more vibrant and thriving commercial environment.

⁷ <http://www.preservationnation.org/main-street/about-main-street/>

Neighborhood Development and Fragmenting Identities

In examining the relationship between community development projects and immigrant-owned restaurants, it's important to take a look at how representatives from both sides identify with the city, both in relation to the greater-Boston area and from within Somerville. After all, no business or project operates within a vacuum devoid of external setting; business models and community development initiatives must hinge at least partially upon perceived context. Community organizations are particularly at the whim of identities, as their work deals directly with both abstract and concrete ideas of Somerville. However, the visions of Somerville belonging to both businesses and organizations are not easily separated, since the actions of community development organizations directly affect local business owners, and vice versa. If the developers' identifying connections and loyalties to Somerville do run along the same pathways as those belonging to the developed, then how successful will any project be at sustaining and supporting existing immigrant-owned restaurants?

When asked to sum up Somerville and its neighborhoods in a few words, Mimi Graney had a lot to say about identity. She notes that Somerville citizens on the whole identify strongly with the city and are extremely proud to be from this "hip," "innovative," and "funky" community. As she says, "Okay, we're gonna go and create our own thing here and have a sense of welcoming and letting everyone play here in

our own sandbox. And I think that we've got something to share with the rest of the state or country in terms of doing that." She also characterizes Somerville as more environmentally conscious than most cities. Mimi doesn't think that Somerville is the same "blue-collar working class community" that it used to be, due in part to the increasing loyalty of a young professional population. She says that this "yuppie" crowd may have lived in Somerville 20 years ago, but they certainly didn't desire to identify with the city, instead keeping their "eye on Boston" and living as "commuters." Mimi says this has changed over the last 15 years, with more of this crowd "owning" the city and taking pride in it. According to Mimi, the creation of a strong Somerville identity has been an almost insular process, with events, festivals, and projects looking inward for inspiration and participation, rather than relying upon the great pool of resources that is Boston. However successful Somerville has been in creating an identity outside the shadow of Boston, Mimi's responses hint toward how the large metropolis to the south remains influential on two levels. First, much of the programming within Somerville is based upon larger Boston initiatives. As one of the city's first large events, Somerville decided to create a smaller version of an existing Boston event, "First Night Boston." Union Square Main Streets itself was born from the success of existing Main Streets programs around Boston. Second, Boston retains an important geographic link to Somerville, physically connecting the city to a much wider audience. When asked what makes Union Square a unique physical space, Mimi responded, "We're incredibly close to downtown Boston."

- 1.
2. Mimi was able to distinctly describe each of Somerville's neighborhoods' reputations with little more than a few words. The Western portions of Somerville are wealthier and more likely to house people who work in downtown Boston. Within this, Davis Square is the "nightlife spot" and Ball Square is the "breakfast spot" and "little neighborhood place." Moving further East, Magoun Square still has a "strong blue-collar feeling to it." Mimi characterizes Winter Hill as "grimier" because of the pollution from Route 93. East Somerville makes Mimi think of a younger and more recently immigrated crowd. She went on to say the East Somerville seems a little "tougher" and more associated with a Latino community. Finally, Union square has a sort of "industrial artsy" flavor to it.
- 3.
4. When it comes to Somerville pride, immigrant restaurant owners are on the same page as the director of USMS, even if their pride stems from a source somewhat differently located. According to Delio Susi of Amelia's Kitchen, Somerville is "an unbelievable city," that "has never looked so good." Unafraid to declare his "love" of this city, Delio mentions—with a large degree of personal pride—the variety of accolades and awards Somerville has seen over the past decade. "It's the most walkable city in the United States. We just got that award," he says. Delio also feels that Somerville is a trendsetting city for other suburbs of Boston, "Most of the cities are changing. They're just following suit whatever other cities do because that's what the new generation is." He attributes much of the positive changes in Somerville to the city government, saying that Mayor Joe Curtatone has done an "outstanding job" at "getting things done." After having only been in Somerville for a year and a half, Huseyin Akgun of Istanbul'lu feels similarly. "So far, everything here is good...what I see is a nice town," he says. Again, much of what Huseyin sees as good about Somerville has to do with city programming. According to him, "The streets are clean. Everything is nice and organized...This is run well." Huseyin is no stranger to other Boston, having owned food businesses in five different Boston-area neighborhoods. The pride he feels for Somerville comes specifically from the comparisons he can draw between it and other Boston suburbs. As he states, "I lived in Newton, Brookline. There's a difference between towns... Compared to that? Oh my god. Day and night." Even Vinny Migliore's ties

to Somerville, particularly East Somerville, are strong. As he says, "This is the best area of Somerville...we're the closest thing to Boston." In an unrecorded conversation, Vinny added that he loves Somerville and loves helping out movements that try to foster the growth of even more Somerville pride.

- 5.
6. It's obvious that all of these immigrant restaurant owners identify strongly with Somerville, but they do so in a way slightly different from the ways in which Mimi Graney and USMS might connect to the city. First, in explaining the development and importance of a Somerville identity, Mimi focuses on the pride that comes from a consumer population, not from business owners. With regard to business owners, Mimi mentioned a growing pride in their own establishment and physical business space more so than any pride in the actual city of Somerville. Granted, this omission of restaurant owners from the formation of a city identity could simply come as the result of a particular kind of narrow questioning. Regardless, these restaurant owners take pride in Somerville not necessarily because it is "hip" or "funky." The only person for whom innovation and hipness may play into Somerville pride is Delio, who mentions awards that label the city as an "it" place to be. In fact, many responses disregarded this hipness as a negative aspect. Delio mentions that the hippest places in Davis have lost their "neighborhood feel" in favor of bars and nightlife, and Vinny says that, "Davis Square became one of the 12 hippest places in the United States...[but] it doesn't do nothing for me." Instead, most of their pride centers on city services that have to do with the basic maintenance of a clean and orderly city. Mimi stresses the somewhat "insular" aspect of Somerville pride, briefly mentioning its relation to Boston, but never really touches upon its place among other small cities and suburbs on the outskirts of Boston. However, the restaurant owners seem to connect to their city in a way that calls heavily upon Somerville's role as a leader for other cities.
- 7.
8. Citywide pride may indeed run high in Somerville, but when it came time to discuss the variety of neighborhoods and neighborhood-specific development projects within Somerville, reactions were decidedly different. The abstract and externally formed idea of Somerville as a city serves as a stronger determiner of identity than any realities within Somerville. Vinny says, "I hate Davis Square and I hated

living there," a sentiment echoed by each of the other restaurant owners. In response to the mention of square-by-square development projects like USMS and ESMS, Delio interjected, "See, I really don't like it that way. It should be the whole city but they just segregate squares...It's a city. It's not just Union Square and it's not just Davis Square." These feelings came up again and again in his interview, and were echoed by other restaurant owners.

9.

10. When asked whether or not Teele ought to have an organization or some kind of event programming specific to that square, Huseyin says, "I'm telling you, every town should be running like that." Delio Susi agrees, answering, "Absolutely." While he understands the state cap on liquor licenses, Huseyin still attributes his lack of success in obtaining one to development initiatives whose programming focuses on one particular area. He says, "That's why last time I was in and applied for the liquor license, there was a restaurant there from Union Square and they gave it to them... Let it be developed. But in the meantime you're gonna ignore the other side."

11.

12. Delio calls Teele square "the abandoned square" that gets left behind along with Magoun Square and Ball Square, other areas where "they don't do nothing." Aside from the desire for a focused Teele Square development initiative, Delio wishes that citywide programs would consider holding their events in Teele. As he suggests, "YUM in Teele Square...sometimes it's good to break up the monotony. Why can't we put a little twist in it," adding, "And then Davis Square will be crying." He goes on to say that city government no longer plays a key role in creating these kinds of programs, "Chamber of Commerce doesn't do much these days," and thus, without any organization pushing for development and programming specifically in Teele, "We can't say nothing."

2.

3. None of these narrators directly stated that development projects or any particular organization is to blame for these divisive and somewhat bitter sentiments. Even so, their reactions to the unequal distribution of development initiatives that come from community organizations remain clear. The existing differences and divisions within Somerville and between neighborhoods seem to be exacerbated by the very projects that attempt to promote and create a

stronger Somerville. Identities and loyalties are more fragmented than organizations like USMS might imagine or hope. When asked whether or not the great diversity between squares could prove to be dividing Somerville's citizens, Mimi Graney responded by referencing Somerville's strong identity as a whole city. This strength of Somerville identity is certainly true, but could be undermined by the kind of antagonism and splintered identities that development projects and programming create.

4.

Are square-by-square initiatives or citywide organizations with concentrated programming flawed models for creating and sustainable development? When it comes to creating a positive atmosphere and unified identity within the whole of Somerville, the simple answer is yes. These narrators hint that a solution to this embittered fragmentation of an otherwise strong, Somerville identity may exist in the formation of a citywide organization that engages with each of the unique areas of Somerville. However, people are able to sum up each neighborhood of Somerville in a few distinct words, there must be some rather obvious differences in business climate, socioeconomic status, and culture that might affect development projects. In a city so diverse, a one-size-fits-all model simply might not work. Additionally, rivalries and slight antagonism between squares may actually push the existing businesses in these "forgotten squares" not only toward a more competitive and successful business environment, but also toward creating their own area advocacy group from the bottom-up. The very slight beginnings of this type of grassroots organizing are evident in the fact that both Teele Square narrators have been busy talking with other business owners, and dissatisfaction is brewing.

Successes and Shortcomings in Programming for Development

Community development organizations and immigrant-owned restaurants certainly do not relate to the rest of Somerville in the exact same way. Nor does the existing dialogue between the two allow for accurate expression of the how identities and

loyalties on either side are formed and then either sustained or divided. Community development projects may unknowingly intensify the fragmentation of identity between immigrant restaurant owners in Somerville. However, this gap in understanding between the developers and the developed could be bridged by the use of appropriate programming that addresses immigrant restaurants' needs while meeting the organization's goals and visions for developing Somerville. Removed from more abstract issues of identity, does Union Square Main Streets, this report's case study, operate effectively on the ground? Where might there be gaps between what immigrant restaurant owners require or desire from these organizations and what they actually receive?

USMS came about just as Mayor Joe Curtatone took office. An international food festival organized by what was then the Union Square Task Force put Union Square's importance on the map for Curtatone. He elected to support the establishment new initiative, USMS, as an ongoing, community-led effort for developing Union Square's business district. As such, USMS is a bit different than other Main Streets programs. First, it didn't start at the grassroots, volunteer community level. Instead, initiatives have been staff organized and driven since the very beginning. In its seven-year existence, Mimi Graney has remained at the helm of USMS projects. Second, Massachusetts does not have a state-coordinating program for Main Streets Programs, and thus USMS does not have to answer to any larger national program model. On that same note, they do not receive any federal support or guidance.

The fact that USMS was created through existing channels of power (the city government) rather than by any sort of grassroots organizing brings up a few questions regarding their capacity to provide programming. USMS faced a disconnect from the very beginning since no small business owners, the targets of USMS's support and development, were involved in bringing the organization to life. To what extent was USMS a necessary or even welcome agent in determining Union Square's businesses' future? Perhaps USMS's beginnings mean nothing in any sort of current context, but it still remains possible that this initial gap between business owners and community organizers set the stage for a continued lack of communication between the two. Mimi herself mentions that people still ask what "her" plans for Union Square are, revealing a kind of staff ownership that she admits leaves her feeling somewhat uneasy.

Delio Susi admits that he wants very little for his business. However, the one thing Delio consistently mentions as the source of his discontent is the lack of event programming in Teele. According to him, other business owners in Teele feel similarly, and would like to experience the commercial benefits of buzz that a festival might generate. Delio is currently a part of the Welcome Project's YUM program and hopes that they will someday hold an event in Teele Square. Delio has clearly thought about the types of events that could happen in Teele, proposing to me a rather well-planned potential event to be hosted by The Welcome Project's YUM. Delio would also like to see promotion surround the great abundance and

diversity of restaurants in Teele Square. According to him, “There’s more restaurants here than any place else...you’ve got Indian, you got me, you got the vegan one, you got Istanbul’lu around the corner.” Delio says that it’s possible to convert this kind of cultural capital into economic growth through an event. Despite the fact that Delio focuses on the lack of Teele Square events and promotion on the part of citywide organizations like YUM, he remains a willing participant and fan of their general intention.

Huseyin Akgun would also like to see more events and promotion in Teele Square, but his hopes for the future focus more heavily on growing his relatively new business. He very recently signed up to be a participating restaurant in the Welcome Project’s YUM program. While he couldn’t recall the name of the organization or detail the specifics of the arrangement, he did bring up the fact that he would be offering food at a fair in April and that there would be some kind of discount associated with his restaurant. Regardless of the details, Huseyin definitely thinks that being a part of the YUM project will be helpful, especially in an economy where people are looking to maintain their lifestyle without going over budget. Along with this, Huseyin mentions the success of Groupons and the inability of a small restaurant like his to participate in such programs. Smaller community programs that offer savings incentives to potential customers are far more helpful in promoting business.

One of the biggest points Huseyin made about his restaurant was the importance of obtaining a liquor license. After spending a year applying, petitioning, and spending around 5,000 dollars trying to get a liquor license, it's still "the only thing...[he doesn't]...have." He also said that in order to obtain a license here you need money and, more importantly, social connections. Huseyin understands the federal cap on liquor licenses in Somerville, but would like to see some moves made to remove this quota. Once he gets a license, he'll be doing "much better." His other plans for the business are dependent upon acquiring this liquor license. He will wait and see what happens, but if he doesn't get one he will begin to look for another city where licenses are more easily obtained. Wrapped up with this is a sense that, for now, he is making a living off of working at the restaurant, not as a businessman. If he cannot make enough of a living here he will move. Provided that he does get a license, Huseyin would like to save money to eventually buy the building he rents now, expand his kitchen and seating areas, and stay in Somerville.

Vinny is already a part of East Somerville Main Streets, and is generally happy with its programming and hopeful for East Somerville's future. Vinny has only good things to say about owning a business in East Somerville. He recognizes that East Somerville's reputation with outsiders as "the ghetto of Somerville," but quickly dismisses the veracity of that reputation. When asked why he thinks East Somerville is, "the best area of Somerville," Vinny responds by lauding its proximity to Boston and Route One, MTA mechanical workers, and industrial areas. He declares that East Somerville will be the hottest area in Somerville. While he doesn't

directly attribute these positive changes to ESMS, they have indeed done a lot of work to rebrand East Somerville's "bad" reputation and turn it into an up-and-coming hot spot.

Were USMS's style of programming to be brought to Teele Square, many of Huseyin's and Delio's business appeals would indeed be met. First, USMS came about after a successful festival celebrating the diversity of food in Union Square. The organization was created as a way to sustain these types of buzzworthy events without exhausting city resources or other organizations. Today, USMS still puts on many relatively large and successful events, including the Fluff Festival. One of USMS's other projects has been a collaborative effort with Somerville Arts Council to take visitors on tours of the wide range of ethnic markets in Union. As Mimi says, "We're trying to create a cluster of being the place for authentic international food." Events and a focus on cuisine diversity are exactly what Delio is looking for.

The difficulty of obtaining a liquor license is not a problem that is under any development organization's capacity to control. Still, for a restaurant owner like Huseyin who believes that a key component in obtaining a liquor license is having the right social connections, it may be helpful for an organization like USMS to be in contact with restaurant owners and explain to them the process so they feel as though some well-connected individuals are on their side. While there's no programming directly relating to liquor licenses, USMS is working on creating channels to allow restaurant owners to invest more easily in their spaces. Mimi says

that one of the biggest changes Union Square has is the increase of local residents and community members opening businesses. These people, like Huseyin, are inherently more invested in the long-term success of the community since they live here. With increasing investments, particular in the physical business spaces, things are improving for future business owners as well. To sustain this type of investment, USMS campaigns to increase bank lending to small, local businesses. Huseyin would certainly benefit from this type of support.

Crucial to mention is the fact that these businesses' appeal are not necessarily indicative of those in Union Square, coming from the people that USMS aims to support. Additionally, these Teele Square businesses are relatively well established and stable restaurants that might not face the same sorts of obstacles that smaller, more vulnerable immigrant-owned restaurants face. It's difficult to look at these cases and make a blanket statement that USMS and other organizations are doing a successful job. Instead, we can say that the kinds of programming that these development organizations currently front in other areas would fill many of the gaps experienced by immigrant restaurant owners in a square without any development project or programming.

Conclusions

Through the voices of these four narrators, I hoped to explore the relationship and dialogue between community development organizations and immigrant-owned

restaurants, seeking to understand their identities and visions within a unique Somerville context. From this, it seems apparent that there exist more than a few gaps in how the developed and the developers connects to and view Somerville. However, most programming seems to truly be mediating between restaurant owners' needs and development projects' branding goals. Of course, the goal of development projects may not necessarily be to maintain existing, established businesses like the ones interviewed. This is often the case with smaller, less stable businesses whose lack of social, physical, and financial capital may prevent them from fitting in the newly branded business environment. Unfortunately, many of these businesses happen to be the ones owned by more recent immigrants, a population this report has not explored. Mimi says that these businesses face their biggest threat in the form of a shifting customer base as rents climb and the neighborhood changes, noting that one business in the area closed due to a change in national immigration policies. If the neighborhood "improves" and immigrant business owners can find cheaper rent closer to their customer base then they will move if there isn't a connection to Somerville. As Mimi says, some businesses will simply be unable to weather the changes that occur in the "lifecycle" of a city, "Some businesses are going to be able to grow and thrive in it and others are going to move elsewhere or close or do something else," adding that USMS must then attempt to support the strongest, most viable businesses that are able to be here and want to survive. But what does it mean for a small business to "want" to survive? Do any small businesses, whether successful or not, hope that they'll go under? These

questions only begin to hint at the expanse of research do be done in this one small “immigrant city.”

Given the time constraints of this project, it’s nearly impossible to have performed the kind of research comprehensive enough to allow for broad and straightforward conclusions. Granted, when dealing with very real people in a very real city, it seems like no amount of research could ever lead to conclusions that remain uncomplicated by the nuances of daily life. Instead, this project seeks only to illuminate a very small slice of existence in Somerville, a space where community development projects overlap with immigrant-owned restaurants.

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