IMAGINE HUMBOLDT
INITIATIVES FOR A THRIVING COMMUNITY

CHILD Care CENTER  SAFE PATHWAYS  PROMOTING PASEO
IMAGINE HUMBOLDT
INITIATIVES FOR A THRIVING COMMUNITY

PROMOTING PASEO
SHOWCASING LOCAL ASSETS FOR THE ECONOMIC AND
SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT OF HUMBOLDT PARK

ChicagoLAB 2016
Under the Direction of Dr. Ivis Garcia-Zambrana
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Project by University of Utah Students
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1. INTRODUCTION
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

HUMBOLDT PARK AND PASEO BORICUA

Located near downtown Chicago, Humboldt Park has been a center of Chicago’s Puerto Rican community for more than half a century, with the historic Paseo Boricua at its heart. Running along Division Street for the half-mile stretch between Western and California Avenues, the Paseo presents a striking image for visitors, with sixty-foot tall representations of the Puerto Rican flag spanning the street on each end.

The flags represent the claiming of a space, a community home, a tourist destination, and, for some, a defiant stand against encroaching gentrification and the threat of housing displacement.

This report represents a planning document prepared by students at the University of Utah for its Summer 2016 ChicagoLab, a Community Engaged Learning project that matches students with professionals and community partners on projects in the city. This year’s program focuses on the Humboldt Park neighborhood, and this report will detail work done in conjunction with the Division Street Business Development Association (DSBDA).
CHICAGOLAB

INTRODUCTION TO CHICAGOLAB

ChicagoLab is a six-week summer program that gives University of Utah students studying urban planning and architecture the opportunity to work on real projects in Chicago for a variety of clients and stakeholders. Focusing on different projects each year, ChicagoLab is administered by Archeworks, an education and design studio in downtown Chicago. Archeworks partners with design firms across the city to provide office space, lectures, tours, and studio critiques for student projects, and also matches students with professional mentors, giving each the opportunity to receive personal feedback.

The class is taught by Ivis Garcia Zambrona, PhD, Assistant Professor of City and Metropolitan Planning at the University of Utah, who also facilitated many of the community partnerships in Humboldt Park. The community focused projects, combined with lectures and design centered instruction from Archeworks, presents both planners and architects a unique opportunity to learn in a hands-on, interdisciplinary setting that draws on a broad variety of skills.

The ChicagoLab cohort for Summer 2016 consists of 13 students: two from the Master of Architecture program, two Architecture undergraduates, two from the Master of City and Metropolitan Planning program, and seven Urban Ecology undergraduates, one of whom is also studying Civil Engineering.
COMMUNITY PARTNER

DIVISION STREET BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION

ChicagoLab 2016 has worked with several partners within Humboldt Park, most of which are associated with Puerto Rican community organizations. This report focuses on students working with the DSBDA and its director, Eduardo Arrocho, to help develop projects that promote the Paseo and emphasize its character for both residents and visitors.

The DSBDA is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the “economic, social development and growth” of the neighborhood with the goal of “development without displacement.” It runs a number of projects on the Paseo, including a small business incubator space, a solar panel initiative, and support for entrepreneurs in the community.

Along with the DSBDA, we have received feedback from the Puerto Rican Cultural Center (PRCC), a grassroots activist organization, and the Puerto Rican Agenda, an association of neighborhood leaders who advocate policies that benefit Puerto Ricans locally and nationwide. Puerto Rican organizations in Humboldt Park are tightly networked and have relationships with each other and with Professor Zambrona, so the group has depended on their knowledge and feedback to shape our projects.
COMMUNITY ENGAGED LEARNING

The principle guiding ChicagoLab is Community Engaged Learning, which the University of Utah defines as “a form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunities intentionally designed to promote student learning and development.” We focused on an asset-based approach, emphasizing what the community has to offer rather than what it lacks. Assets include individual gifts and abilities, community organizations, and physical infrastructure. Focusing on assets means approaching the community not as a problem to solve, but a place that offers a tremendous amount that we can learn from and contribute to.

The Promoting Paseo group organized our Community Engaged Learning around two few key principles, which we’ve adapted from University and class guidelines:

EDUCATION

Education for ChicagoLab came from many sources, including readings, lectures, and documentaries on Puerto Rican history and grassroots activism in Chicago, as well as other relevant topics like Public Housing, gentrification, and design principles. The most important knowledge has been experiential, gained from spending time in the area and interacting with its members.

ENGAGEMENT AND RECIPROCITY

Engagement comes through experiential learning and requires that students communicate with partners as equals, and with humility. Reciprocity assumes a willingness to offer ideas and receive feedback, which we did through multiple iterations of the project.

We believe these principles enabled us to develop a deeper appreciation the value and complexity of community engagement, which is extremely useful knowledge in planning and related fields. It should be a key building block for future collaboration among students, the university, and communities in ChicagoLab.
2. SITE ANALYSIS
Humboldt Park is about a mile from downtown Chicago, bounded roughly by Pulaski Road to the West, Western Avenue to the East, North Avenue to the North, and Union Pacific railroad lines to the South. The neighborhood is not contiguous with Chicago’s official Humboldt Park community area, but includes parts of both the Humboldt Park and West Town community areas.

The neighborhood is accessible from downtown via the CTA Blue Line running southeast by northwest along Milwaukee Avenue, and there are also several bus lines that run through the area. In the center of Humboldt Park sits the eponymous 220-acre park, which features open areas, playgrounds, trails, a fitness center, and a large lagoon.
Humboldt Park History

Throughout Chicago history, successive waves of immigration saw Humboldt Park become a home for German, Scandinavian, Italian, and Polish communities. These groups, like many immigrants across the city, organized themselves into ethnic enclaves over time. But by the mid-20th century suburbanization and white flight saw many residents of European descent move out of the city.

In their place, Puerto Rican migrants, having been displaced from other parts of the city, began moving into Humboldt Park. Despite their status as American citizens after the 1917 Jones Act, Puerto Ricans had long faced poverty, discrimination, and hostility, and were often treated as outsiders by white residents of European descent. Puerto Rican children were separated from other students in schools, and in some cases Puerto Ricans were even barred from worshipping in local Catholic churches. In 1966, after years of simmering tensions within the community over government neglect and police mistreatment, a riot broke out after police shot and killed a Puerto Rican man. It lasted for three days, and in its wake the first Puerto Rican community organizing began, with demands for better treatment.
HUMBOLDT PARK HISTORY

and political representation. Some of those organizations have persisted through today, including the Puerto Rican Cultural Center and the Spanish Action Committee of Chicago.

In the ensuing decades Humboldt Park, particularly Division Street, became a focal point for Puerto Rican identity and pride. The street’s identity was affirmed in 1995 when a public art project consisting of two fifty-nine foot tall steel representations of the Puerto Rican flags was installed, one on each end of the newly christened Paseo Boricua: “Boricua” referring to the indigenous Taíno name for Puerto Rica, and “Paseo” meaning “promenade” or “way.” Today, the flags act as literal gateways to the Paseo, although rising property values and gentrification in surrounding neighborhoods have created concerns for some residents about the future of the neighborhood. Puerto Ricans are no longer the majority ethnic group in Humboldt Park, which has a mix of white, black, and Latino residents, the last group increasingly including Mexicans and other residents with non-Puerto Rican Latin American heritage. ChicagoLab partners like the PRCC and DSBDA continue to promote the Paseo as a uniquely Puerto Rican space while trying to encourage businesses and organizations that serve the community as a whole.

Section from the mural “Sea of Flags,” painted in 2004 to commemorate the annual Fiesta Boricua in Humboldt Park, a celebration of Puerto Rican history and culture.
DEMOGRAPHICS

Puerto Ricans as a whole comprise the second largest Latino population in the United States, with about 4.6 million Puerto Ricans in the country as of 2010, compared to 3.7 million in Puerto Rico. The island is an unincorporated American territory, so all its residents have American citizenship and passports, although individuals with residence in Puerto Rico cannot vote in national elections. Throughout its history Puerto Ricans have had to deal with the meaning of their place in America, with some seeking greater local autonomy and some advocating for statehood or independence. In recent years the territory’s economic troubles and debt crisis has led to increasing out-migration, which also puts stress on the broader Puerto Rican diaspora and those who maintain connections with the island.¹

The Chicago metro area had about 188,000 Puerto Rican residents in 2010, fifth highest in the country. About 55% of that number live in the city.² The Chicago 26th Ward, which covers the majority of Humboldt Park, has a population of around 53,000,³ about 28% Puerto Rican in 2015.⁴ Altogether the 26th Ward is 65% Hispanic, 20% white (non Hispanic), and about 12% black (non Hispanic).⁵

Although Puerto Ricans are not the majority ethnicity in Humboldt Park, the neighborhood maintains a strong Puerto Rican character, due in large part to its public art and large number of Puerto Rican focused organizations. Because ChicagoLab’s community partners are all strongly tied to those organizations, our work necessarily focuses on efforts that specifically benefit that community, although we believe our efforts can and should benefit the wider community as well.

¹ CNN, 2016
² Puerto Rican Agenda, 2011
³ WBEZ Chicago, 2016
⁴ DNA Chicago, 2013
⁵ NBC Chicago, 2015
COMMUNITY ASSETS

Humboldt Park contains a large number of community assets, which present opportunities we hope to promote. Grassroots organizations like the Puerto Rican Cultural Center run social services and community projects, including El Rescate, which offers housing assistance to LGBT youth, and Vida/SIDA, which focuses on HIV services. There are also other community organizations like the Spanish Action Committee of Chicago, the National Youth Advocate Program, and the Africaribe Cultural Center, which we did not work with directly. These kinds of associations present the opportunity to accomplish projects using existing networks that can mobilize and leverage their political connections rapidly and coordination.

Another asset is the National Museum of Puerto Rican Arts and Culture, which showcases local art, hosts events, and provides a space to celebrate Puerto Rican identity. The Paseo Boricua has over a dozen restaurants, and every year the neighborhood hosts festivals that draw in tens of thousands of visitors. Many visitors may not realize that Humboldt Park is also a hub for several medical campuses, with facilities near the Paseo. The hospitals could represent an opportunity to better integrate medical services with other community activities.

The Division Street Business Development Association, our community partner, provides marketing help for businesses in Humboldt Park and promotes the Paseo by offering tours, providing assistance for small business loan applications, and running classes for local entrepreneurs. Members of these organizations and services are represented in the Puerto Rican Agenda, which brings together community leaders to advocate on behalf of the Puerto Rican community.

Humboldt Park also has a number of physical assets, including murals and art, the park, the museum, and, a few blocks north of North Street, the 606 Bloomingdale trail, a recently opened public trail that runs along a formerly abandoned railway line.
The National Museum of Puerto Rican Arts and Culture, located just west of the Paseo in the park.
3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
LITERATURE REVIEW

In preparing for our project we relied heavily on data from the Puerto Rican Agenda, including its detailed demographic reports and comparative analyses of Puerto Ricans in Chicago and other cities. This information has been particularly helpful for understanding the relationship of Puerto Ricans within the broader world of Spanish speaking groups in the United States, including differences in housing, education, and migration patterns.

Our understanding of Humboldt Park’s history and politics has been strongly influenced by Rachel Rinaldo, whose 2002 ethnography of the PRCC introduced a framework of the “Space of Resistance” based on Henri Lefebvre’s concept of space as an “arena for social struggle” in which power relationships are continually negotiated among and between groups and ideologies. In this framework, space is not neutral field, but a place where ideologies shape and are shaped by the built environment.¹ That helps us conceptualize the importance for our community partners of preserving the Paseo as a uniquely Puerto Rican space, particularly in light of the history of conflict between the community and the city and white, non-Hispanic residents.

Concerns about gentrification are a significant driver of the desire to maintain a Puerto Rican space. In the past decade the neighborhood has seen an influx of new residents, rising median household incomes and property values, and a proliferation of chain businesses and other non-local shops, particularly East of Western Avenue.² Additionally, city projects like the 606 trail have been controversial—some see it as a driver of gentrification, designed for outsiders, while others talk about the necessity of claiming the trail with their presence rather than ceding it to others, which is one illustration of how the meaning of space is contested within and between communities.

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¹ Rinaldo, 2002
² Chicago Magazine, 2014
Our understanding is informed by the idea that the meaning of space is contested in a number of arenas including race, class, ideology, identity, and more. These arenas overlap and exist in conflict and harmony to varying degrees.

Pictured, counterclockwise: Fiesta Boricua Parade, heavily gentrified area in Wicker Park, homes near Humboldt Park, and the 606 Bloomingdale trail.
CASE STUDIES

Noche de Museo, Mexico City

In 2009, Mexico City’s Culture Department worked with museums in the city’s metropolitan area to organize “Noche de Museos” or “Night of Museums.” Once each week, museums open their doors from 7:00 to 10:00 p.m. with free admission and transit passes to allow people to visit the museum at night.

The museums and nearby streets are also illuminated with colorful light projections and lanterns to draw visitors and encourage activity. Many countries have implemented similar lighting projects, including Bolivia, Brazil, Argentina, Germany, and Thailand.

We explored how these ideas might be used in Humboldt Park, finding ways to allow people to claim the space at night and promote a fun, safe, and interactive environment along the Paseo.
Quebec City Winter Carnival

In the 1990s Quebec City began adding lights to the city in the late 1990s, and today the city enjoys a vibrant nightlife partly because of this, including an annual festival of lights, which one of our group members has experienced firsthand.

These lights draw thousands into the streets of Quebec City even on freezing winter nights, which could be an inspiration for Chicago’s harsh winters. It demonstrates that with some preparation even cold weather can’t deter active street life.
Maps and Bulletin Boards in Chicago

Our proposal for a community map kiosk, discussed in Chapter 5, drew heavily from fixtures in Chicago itself. The CTA system relies on large signs and maps to direct riders, and there are a large number of kiosks on public sidewalks downtown that show with maps and advertisements, which is common in the city and across the country in a wide variety of settings.

We looked at the placement and content of these kiosks and considered how they might be adapted for Humboldt Park. We specifically looked for ideas that could benefit both visitors and residents, and at designs that fit the neighborhood’s character.
Puerto Rican Culture

We wanted to ensure that our ideas drew from Puerto Rican culture whenever possible, so we looked at several specific aspects of it that could be used in conjunction with our proposals.

One cultural element is Vejigantes, characters from Puerto Rican folklore that are popularly represented by people wearing colorful costumes and masks with decorated “horns.”

We also looked at Puerto Rican symbols like the Cocoa Frog, the Three Kings, and the turrets of the San Juan fortress. We ultimately included some of these elements in our brochure proposal, and they can also be used as part of various events related to public lighting.
4. METHODS AND DESIGN PRINCIPLES
METHODS

ONSITE OBSERVATION

Along with research and literature review, much of our research involved walking in Humboldt Park and along the Paseo Boricua. We spent time observing and speaking with residents, documenting and photographing business storefronts, and comparing our observations with DSBDA documents and Google Maps to ensure the most current information. We also mapped murals near the Paseo and located information about each.

A useful point of comparison came from the area around our student apartment, located in the predominantly Mexican/Latino neighborhood Pilsen just a few miles south. Like Humboldt Park, Pilsen has assets like local businesses and organizations dedicated to neighborhood improvement, including The Restoration Project, a community group that has purchased and developed dozens of plots in the area to promote local ownership and provide housing and other resources for residents.
ENGAGEMENT

ARCHEWORKS

Throughout ChicagoLab we received periodic feedback from classmates and Archeworks staff, who helped us develop our conceptual approach and improve our designs and communication. The feedback included formal pinups and regular, short presentations, along with visualizing exercises like creating collages about Humboldt Park and its built environment.

COMMUNITY

Our formal community feedback was limited, but we took advantage of opportunities to speak with people informally wherever possible. We also presented an early version of the project at a meeting of the Puerto Rican Agenda and received feedback from attendees, which was tremendously helpful in developing concepts like a community map and neighborhood lighting.

COMMUNITY PARTNER

Our primary community partner, DSBDA Executive Director Eduardo Arrocho, was extremely generous providing time, comments, and suggestions as the project developed. We worked with Eduardo to review previous DSBDA marketing materials, including work done by other groups, and discussed where they succeeded and fell short. We also scheduled periodic meetings at the DSBDA to ensure our work aligned with its goals.

Selection from a visioning project exploring materials and transitions between buildings along the Paseo for Archeworks.

Visits to local business like bike shop/nonprofit West Town Bikes on Division Street helped us understand the neighborhood.
DESIGN PRINCIPLES

STRENGTHEN AND SHOWCASE IDENTITY

Our first design principle comes from our belief that the Paseo Boricua has a unique character that is worth preserving. Because addressing large-scale issues like gentrification is beyond the scope of our project, we attempted to focus on maintaining harmony with the design elements that best exemplify Humboldt Park. This means our proposals should emphasize the historic Puerto Rican character of the neighborhood while remaining accessible to visitors, and ensuring that our branding and messaging highlights the neighborhood’s cultural offerings.

One of the issues that we heard discussed was presence; that is, the act of claiming Paseo Boricua as a place where Puerto Rican community members want to spend time. This is related to our theoretical framework, and we tried to apply it concretely by developing ideas that encourage presence and street life.

PROMOTE COMMUNITY ASSETS

We believe that our efforts should benefit both the existing community and draw visitors who appreciate the neighborhood by emphasizing its uniqueness and inclusivity. This means providing resources that can introduce visitors to the neighborhood, help them locate events and activities, and give them reasons to return regularly. For residents, it’s important to provide reasons to be on the Paseo regularly as well, to make it a human space where interactions are easy and comfortable.

Part of that goal is to encourage street activity at night. Currently, the Paseo doesn’t have much of a night life, so we looked at ways to improve that and help people feel comfortable, safe, and interested in Humboldt Park after dark.
FACILITATE FUTURE IMPROVEMENTS

Because ChicagoLab is only six weeks long, we recognize that our ability to engage with the community and plan for projects is limited. Therefore, it’s important that all our work be as complete and comprehensive as possible while allowing projects to be implemented and improved by others in the future. Therefore, we’ve tried to ensure that our documents and plans are clean, easy to understand, and cohesive enough for future students or community partners to develop further after we leave.

An important goal was that our work fit with future Paseo projects, such as the proposed live-work Arts Building.
The Division Street Business Association has produced a number of documents to market the Paseo in the past, and we were asked to produce a new brochure that could be used by visitors and tourists.

We first created a custom map, which showed businesses, murals, cultural centers, museums, and nearby medical centers. Including the hospitals was part of a specific goal by the DSBDA to better integrate the medical sector with community branding efforts. We also mapped the park and the high school. This map was paired with a larger contextual map we also created to show Humboldt Park’s location within Chicago.

For other brochure content we highlighted a number of activities and events in Humboldt Park, including Bomba dancing, architecture, theater, food, and murals. The primary audience for the brochure is visitors and tourists, who we hope to guide through Humboldt Park. The final design can be updated and altered as needed in the future, and the document can be printed and placed by the DSBDA anywhere in the city.

We also created an alternative, eight-fold pocket version of the brochure with the same maps but some content removed.

Previous marketing brochure produced by the DSBDA.
Smaller eight-fold version of the brochure
One of Humboldt Park’s unique offerings is its collection of murals that reflect Puerto Rican identity and history. Many of these murals, usually painted by local artists, are right on the Paseo, and others are scattered throughout the neighborhood.

In Chicago, public murals are typically not protected by law, and they may be painted over or blocked by new development at any time. They also face wear and tear from the weather, and must be periodically retouched by artists, which can sometimes be a problem as the original artists age. In order to showcase, protect, and promote the murals in Humboldt Park, we propose several tactical urban measures in line with our research and design principles.

One simple way to create a curated feel is to light the murals at night. This strengthens the idea that the murals are protected, valuable works of public art that the community wants to showcase. Lighting draws attention to the art and also creates natural gathering places, which can help encourage activity at night and be improved on for special events and festivals. Lit murals might also become a centerpiece of events and evening tours conducted by the DSBDA.

MURAL LIGHTING
Murals along the Paseo with and without lighting effects. Simple studio lights mounted above the murals could create a dramatic effect along the street.
Another way to promote street life is using projected lights as a form of community art. Taking inspiration from Mexico City, Quebec, and many other cities across the world, we propose that Humboldt Park use projected lights, lanterns, and other light sources during events and special occasions to help develop a vibrant sense of community. These projections could range from simple multicolor lights to more elaborate works that “paint” entire walls. Local artists could be recruited to create works, and the community could even host festivals focused specifically around lighting. Cultural centers like the Puerto Rican Museum could be an optimal location for projected lights.

Source for images: http://www.cnn.com/2015/12/17/design/light-festivals-art-exhibitions/
COMMUNITY MAP

Our final recommendation is a street intervention that would benefit visitors and residents: a community map kiosk at each end of the Paseo. These maps could be placed near the flag sculptures, and would consist of both a map and a flexible bulletin board space to highlight upcoming events and promote businesses in Humboldt Park.

For the map we envision a design primarily targeted at visitors and tourists. This could be something simple, similar to the 606 trail map, or the map we’ve included in our brochure. It could also feature a more stylized “theme park” look, which local artists might be recruited to design. It should be able to be updated and reprinted periodically.

Community map site rendering. The sidewalk along the Paseo Boricua is wide enough to accommodate a public map kiosk comfortably near the flag statues.
Sketches of potential kiosk content. The space should be flexible enough for a variety of uses, which can be determined by the community or the DSBDA.
COMMUNITY MAP CONTENT

Alongside the map the rest of the kiosk space could be used to promote Humboldt Park and benefit residents in the neighborhood. This might mean advertising community associations, announcing yard sales, posting notices for public meetings, or allowing community members to post their own messages and artwork.

We don’t envision the space as something rigidly prescribed, but as something flexible enough to meet changing future needs. Allowing community members and businesses access to the space opens it up to more than just outsiders: it could be used by residents to communicate, organize, and claim the space for themselves.

Specific content for the map kiosk can vary depending on context and community needs, which can be determined as the project is implemented.

Image Sources: Wikipedia Commons
A simplified version of this Humboldt Park neighborhood map could be an ideal solution for a community map of the Paseo Boricua.
6. IMPLEMENTATION
We’ve structured our project to be modular, so while each proposal can work in tandem with the others it’s possible to implement any single one without affecting the others. The brochure can be printed on any scale, and the original design documents are editable for future use. Mural lighting can be implemented with simple studio or overhanging lights that project down on to the mural, and can be tested on a small scale to determine the optimal lighting placement. Local businesses could be solicited to provide electricity and rigging, which should be inexpensive. If the project proves successful, future efforts might include front-projected floodlights for certain murals. Ideally, any lighting projects could be implemented year round.

Projected lights and similar projects would require more effort, including equipment powerful enough to project bright and clear images. This would likely require testing on a small scale to determine the best placement, and we recommend beginning with simple multicolored lights and then progressing to more elaborate designs. Larger events and exhibitions would require multiple projectors and more experimentation on placement and logistics, which can be planned in detail as the concept is tested.

The most involved project will be the community map. Ideally the kiosk will be anchored in the sidewalk concrete, which would require city approval and possibly outside funding from the city or from grants in order to purchase the kiosk itself. Local politicians like the alderman might be enlisted to promote and further develop the project. Once the kiosk is installed the only recurring costs would be from updating content and occasional maintenance.

Finally, as with any project that affects the public domain it may be useful and necessary to get more public input to solicit ideas and feedback. This document could act as a starting point for that, and community groups and future students may be able to develop further ideas.
A graphical overview of the implementation procedures for each recommended project.
CONCLUSION

This report presents a series of interrelated projects that can be independently implemented to promote the Paseo Boricua. Taken as a whole we believe these could represent small but significant contributions to the character and culture of Humboldt Park.

The next steps towards implementing this plan begin with the DSBDA, which will choose how to best use this report. It can then work with other community groups to decide how to best proceed with lighting and public art recommendations. Finally, the community map will require approval and funding, so the individuals or groups who know the political process can determine which channels are best to present the idea, and what kinds of public input should be sought. If future students work in Humboldt Park they may be able to build on our work as well.

Humboldt Park is a genuinely unique and special place with strong community ties and a large number of assets that benefit its residents. We hope that our efforts will strengthen its best elements and provide inspiration for the future of the Paseo.
REFERENCES


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