

Chicago / Cultural heritage and gentrification: live-work spaces in a transit oriented neighborhood

CHICAGOLAB 2016 | May 16-June 23

College of Architecture + Planning



Archeworks



in collaboration with the
Puerto Rican Agenda



ABSTRACT

The CHICAGOLAB will focus on drafting proposals for affordable and sustainable development in the rapidly gentrifying community of Humboldt Park in Chicago. Besides a visioning plan, students will be able to work in two live-work spaces—one for artists and, another one, for teachers. These two buildings are located in Paseo Boricua, a business and entertainment district that is the key element of a broader community planning initiative to provide alternatives to challenge the on-going process of gentrification. For more than two decades, the Puerto Rican Agenda has sought to develop and execute a vision for the Humboldt Park area, where most Puerto Ricans in Chicago live. The overarching goal of this organization is the self-determination of the Puerto Rican community through the development of spatial anchors that re-produce their claims to space and cultural identity—allowing them to stay in place and employ innovative and sustainable practices for their collectively emancipation as a historically marginalized group in the city of Chicago. The Teacher’s Village project seeks to re-use a building that once housed two of the record 50+ Chicago Public Schools closed by Mayor Rahm Emanuel into housing for teachers working in local community schools, along with other educational and cultural uses. During this studio, participants will work closely with the Puerto Rican Agenda, a non-incorporated community organization.

CONTEXT

Chicago has been historically one of the American cities facing major problems of spatial segregation. Even though different aspects of the history of the city could help to understand the contested nature of Chicago this is a critical moment to consider alternative initiatives to promote spatial justice. By looking at the construction of the city’s identity and the process of continuous dialogue between history and current conditions it is possible to identify two aspects that have repeatedly been part of Chicago’s history and that have become part of its identity: segregation and mobilization. These two aspects have

continuously created tension between groups of individuals (often marginalized groups) and institutions shaping the contested geography of the city.

More recently, processes of urban redevelopment are adding important elements to the contested nature of Chicago. Areas traditionally occupied by minority groups are facing rapid processes of urban transformation that have triggered gentrification. One of the areas under pressure for redevelopment is Humboldt Park, where most Puerto Ricans in Chicago live. However, this is an organized community that has worked for about 20 years exploring different strategies to maintain their presence in the area and to push forward their own vision for the development of the area.

This year's CHICAGOLAB will focus on understanding the use material symbols as part of identity claims and practices of resistance of the Puerto Rican community of city. In this specific case, the mentality of resistance is created through the production of space, specifically the Paseo Boricua which for some groups of the Puerto Rican community represents a fight against colonization practices. This are practices of anti-colonialism and self-determination through if is the physical symbols and production of space. It aims is to understand how the interventions lead by the Puerto Rican Agenda have created and constructed alternative planning practices where community agents transform material symbols usually serving process of gentrification into elements of appropriation. In this way, community agents are proposes and alternative to reconcile how a symbol impacts your sense of space, to create narratives of belonging and identity. The convergence of a strategic location, recent interest from real estate agents, and a strong community organization makes Humboldt Park a unique case to study emancipatory narratives to contest gentrification and uneven development.

At the first Puerto Rican Agenda strategic planning retreat that Billy Ocasio (former Alderman of the 26th Ward) convened in 1993, Puerto Rican leaders came to the realization that they needed to establish a place once and for all, after being displaced by urban renewal projects from Lincoln Park and the Near North Side during the 1960s and 1970s and, more recently, from the West Town community area during the 1990s. A key idea that emerged from the retreat was the development of Paseo Boricua, a Puerto Rican themed business district on Division Street, Chicago. In order to demark Paseo Boricua in 1995, Ocasio and the Puerto Rican Agenda were able to install two gateways in the shape of a Puerto Rican flag, and put themselves on the map of the city—becoming the only officially designated Puerto Rican space in the United States.

THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Humboldt Park is located on the west side of Chicago, approximately 5 miles northwest from the Chicago Loop. The neighborhood colloquial boundaries include: Western Avenue to the east, Pulaski Road to the west, Armitage Avenue to the north, and Chicago Avenue to the south (see figure 1).¹ The neighborhood is named after one of its most prominent landmarks, a 107-acre city park.

¹ I thought about using the official definition from the Social Science Research Committee at University of Chicago (or Community Area 23); but soon we discovered that that definition did not include the Park and many of the organizations that the Puerto Rican community perceives as being part of Humboldt Park. Many of the Puerto Rican institutions in term of boundaries actually are located in West Town, which is Community Area 24. However, politically, these organizations like to be identified as part of the Humboldt Park community. Then, in this study the Humboldt Park community is defined by its identity (i.e. a sense of belonging or values shared).

Case Study Background – January 18

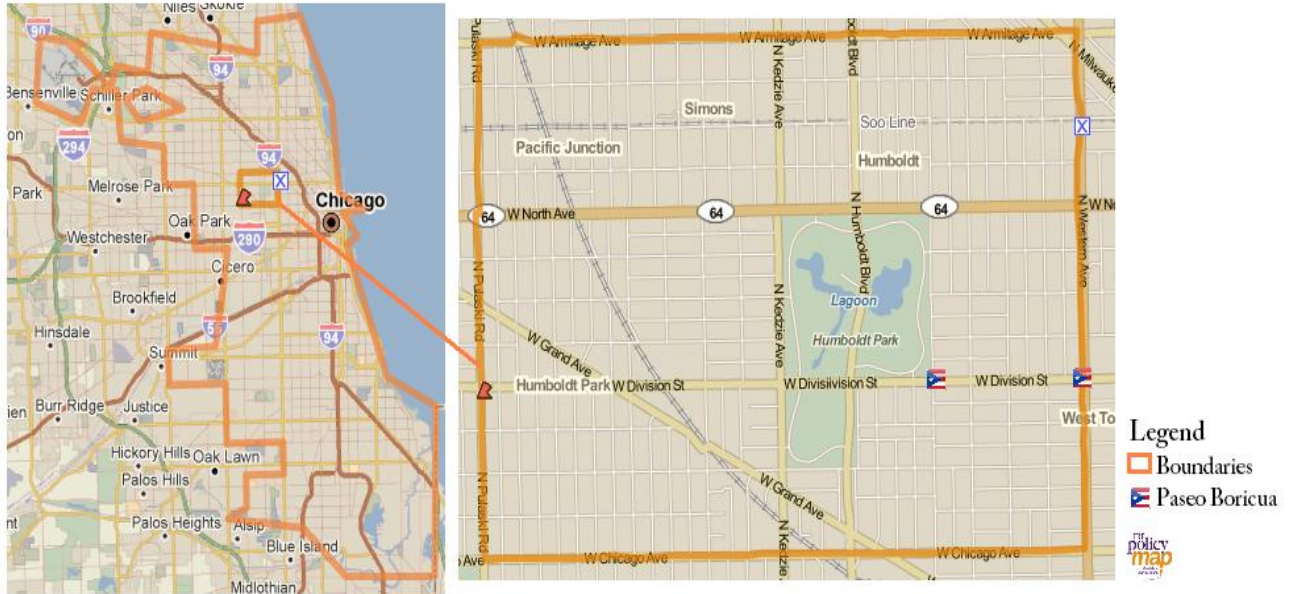


Figure 1 – Humboldt Park Map Locator

According to the U.S. Census American Community Survey 5-year estimates (ACS 2005-2009), of a total population of 71,802 in the study area, 58% are Latino (18,994 or 26% are Puerto Rican). Of the people living in this area between 2005 and 2009, 43% were white and 24% were black. Between 2000 and 2005-2009, the white population changed by 31%, the African American population by -3%, and the Latino population changed by -19% (see figure 2). According to the 2005-2009 ACS 5-year estimates, about 64% had an annual income of less than \$50,000, while about 36% make less than \$25,000 a year. In comparison, 44% of the people in the State of Illinois made less than \$50,000 and about 20% made less than \$25,000. Across the area, an estimated 36% of all households owned their home. According to the ACS, 7,868 renters in this area were cost burdened (paying more than 30% of their income towards rent). Of those renters, 8% were over the age of 65. Additionally, 56% of cost burdened renters earned less than \$20,000.

Figure 2 – Study site, racial and ethnic characteristics

Race	2000	2005 to 2009	Percent change 2000 to 2005-2009	Percent of Total Population in 2005-2009	Percent of State Population in 2005-2009 (Illinois)
White	23,643	31,012	31	43.19	71.89
African American	17,699	17,234	-3	24	14.67
Asian	721	874	21	1.22	4.21
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	24	27	13	0.04	0.03
American Indian or Alaskan Native	308	102	-67	0.14	0.18
Some Other Race	31,589	21,531	-32	29.99	7.39
Two or More Races	3,194	1,022	-68	1.42	1.63
Ethnicity	2000	2005 to 2009	Percent change 2000 to 2005-2009	Percent of Total Population in 2005-2009	Percent of State Population in 2005-2009 (Illinois)
Latino	51,019	41,132	-19	57.29	14.65

Source: American Community Survey

The community organization and background

The Puerto Rican Agenda is an unincorporated organization of Puerto Rican leaders that seek to influence policy for the advancement of the Puerto Rican community in Chicago. Over the past ten

years, the Agenda has sought to develop and execute a vision for the Humboldt Park Area, where most Puerto Ricans in Chicago live, and Paseo Boricua, a business and entertainment district on Division Street between California and Western.

The members of the Puerto Rican Agenda consist of the executive directors and senior leadership of agencies such as: Institute of Puerto Rican Arts and Culture, Batey Urbano, Vida Sida, Puerto Rican Cultural Center, Segundo Ruiz Belvis Cultural Center, ASPIRA, Cocineros Unidos de Humboldt Park, Hispanic Housing Development Corporation, La Casa Norte, YMCA, La Capilla del Barrio, Near Northwest Neighborhood Network, CO-OP Humboldt Park and Association House of Chicago, among others.

Other members of the business community are drawn from the Division Street Business Development Association, Puerto Rican Chamber of Commerce, small business owners, senior leadership of banking institutions. In addition there are various employees and administrators at the City of Chicago as well as, academics and educators in Pedro Albizu Campus High School, Roberto Clemente High School, DePaul, Northeastern Humboldt Park Vocational Education Center of Wright College, University and Illinois at Chicago and Illinois State. Puerto Rican elected officials also participate on occasion at The Agenda meetings.

Mission: The Agenda provides guidance, advice and as necessary, engagement in the development of programs and or actions intended to address areas of needs concerning programs, policies, and legislation affecting the Puerto Rican community in Chicago and more broadly the Humboldt Park neighborhood.

Organization’s history/purpose: The Puerto Rican Agenda is the only organization in the Chicago area dedicated to advocate on the issues affecting Puerto Ricans. This collective was established in September of 1998 by a group of Puerto Rican leader’s concerned about the lack of progress and stability of the Puerto Rican community in the areas of health, culture, education, housing, economic development, youth and human rights.

Recent Community Assessment

The Puerto Rican Agenda, with the technical support of the Nathalie P. Voorhees Center for Community Improvement at the College of Urban Planning and Public Policy, and the financial support of LISC, the Chicago Community Trust and the Institute for Research on Race and Public Policy at the University of Illinois at Chicago drafted a report titled [“60 Years of Migration: Puerto Ricans in Chicagoland”](#). This report focuses on the demographics and socio-economics of the Puerto Rican community, primarily within the Humboldt Park area. Based on a wealth of data, the report advocates for community action driven initiatives that include:

- **Health:** Supporting at federal, state, county, and city levels a current working group that is reviewing and renewing the Greater Humboldt Park Community of Wellness. Informing the community about the affordable housing act and health insurance options.
- **Culture:** Promoting the further development of Puerto Rican art and culture institutions—particularly the Institute of Puerto Rican Arts and Culture as the only national standing Puerto Rican museum in the United States—by including it in the framework of Illinois and Chicago tourism planning.
- **Education:** Support and obtain resources for the “Community as a Campus” underway with Chicago Public Schools. To preserve the long-term affordability of Illinois universities as well as City Colleges and vocational training institutions such as the Humboldt Park Vocational Education Center.

- **Economic Development:** Promoting and supporting the Paseo Boricua business district as a commercial corridor, particularly its restaurants, through initiatives such as state and city tourism efforts, small business improvement funding, marketing and media promotion opportunities. Establish a credit union committed, but not limited, to the Puerto Rican community as well as a community benefits agreement (CBA) with national and local financial institutions in order to assist all those who are unbanked and under-banked.
- **Housing:** Stopping displacement by advocating for funds for affordable housing preservation and expansion by promoting the efforts of Hispanic Housing, LUCHA, Bickerdike, La Casa Norte and the Spanish Housing Coalition for Housing. Additional solutions should include establishing programs that encourage homeownership and mitigate home foreclosures that are currently devastating families.
- **Youth:** Creating a youth employment program that will work with the local business community to create a set aside of 25% of all new employment created within Humboldt Park. Establishing a task force to build a “Community of Justice” based on principles of restorative justice on the northwest side of Chicago to address youth crime.

With the purpose of further developing these and other recommendations presented in the report, the Puerto Rican Agenda seeks to develop a plan for Paseo Boricua/Humboldt Park. This plan might address one or several of the seven committees of the Agenda—Health, Culture, Education, Youth, Economic Development, Housing and Human Rights—and it might include the development of strategies to be adopted by each committee through their respective community development channels, as well as a time-frame and possible sources of funding. In addition, the plan will generate recommendations to local and state politicians, as well as other stakeholders, to outline the steps necessary to improve opportunities for Puerto Ricans and other low-income residents living in Humboldt Park.

THE SITE

Paseo Boricua is the most densely commercialized Puerto Rican business district in the United States and is located on the West Side of Chicago, Illinois. This space serves as the epicenter of Puerto Rican Chicago and is often described as the Puerto Rican’s “pedacito de patria” (a small piece of the motherland). Constructed of steel and made to arch over the entryway and exit of Paseo Boricua, the two large artistic representations of Puerto Rican flags function as the gateway for either side of the 6 block corridor of Puerto Rican businesses, restaurants and non-profit organizations.

The waving flags, designed by the architectural firm DeStefano and Partners and built by Chicago Ornamental Iron Co., each weigh about 45 tons and rise up 56 feet into the air, while spanning the 59 feet across the width of Division Street (Tribune 1995). The flags mark the boundaries to Paseo Boricua that extends for an entire mile; the business district running from Artesian Avenue, in the east and Mozart Avenue to the west. Paseo Boricua includes a Puerto Rican walk of fame, resembling the Hollywood Walk of Fame in Los Angeles, California and features the names of distinguished Puerto Ricans like Lucecita Benitez, Tito Puente, El Gran Combo, Andy Montañez, Chucho Valdés, Calle 13 and many others. The area has many street murals that date back from the 1980s, painted by Puerto Rican and non-Puerto Rican artists. Street banners showcase the three heritage pillars of Puerto Ricans: the sun (indigenous), “vegigante” or carnival mask (African) and “garita” or watch tower (Spanish).

As part of a sidewalk beautification project, 78 large pots were placed, each decorated with paintings of one of the 78 town flags of the Puerto Rican island. The strip has about 16 small plazas with stone tables and benches for public use, to wait for the bus, play dominoes or simply chat with a neighbor. In addition, some of the building façades of affordable housing projects like La Estancia Apartments and Teresa Roldán Senior Apartments have been built to look like the architecture of Old San Juan—with pastel colors, wrought-iron balconies and tile-roofed buildings. Supermercado La Municipal is made to resemble a Spanish fortress in San Juan. Many businesses are named after rather rural towns in Puerto

Rico such as Yauco, Rincón, Jayuya and others. The flags of Paseo Boricua make the area the only officially recognized Puerto Rican community area in the United States. Figure 3 shows all the Puerto Rican themed restaurants, organizations, affordable housing projects and so on along Paseo Boricua.

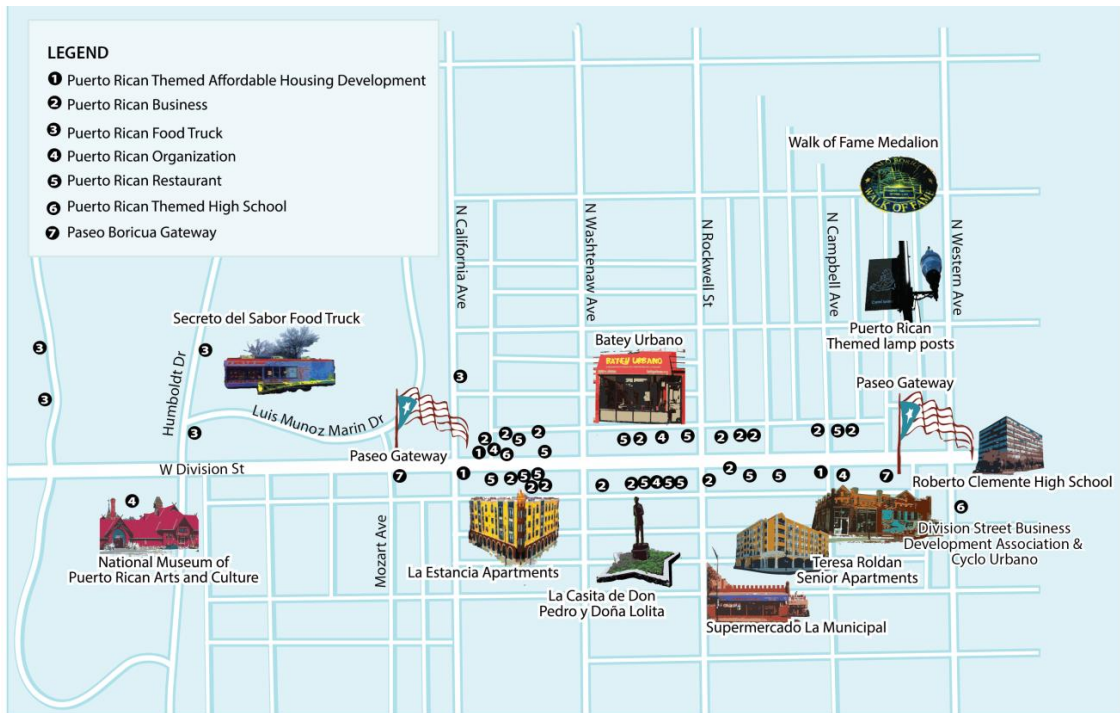


Figure 3. Paseo Boricua Commercial District

Defining a project:

Monthly Puerto Rican Agenda meetings based on strategic planning sessions held in 2003 and 2007 resulted in the following accomplishments that support the organization’s mission and purpose:

- **Health:** Envisioned and help developed the Greater Humboldt Park Community of Wellness, including the Diabetes Empowerment Center and the Block-by-Block diabetes initiative.
- **Culture:** Established in the fall of 2008 the first Puerto Rican Museum in the US: the Institute of Puerto Rican Arts and Culture. Secured the Humboldt Park stables building with a long-term lease from Chicago Park District. Obtained \$10 million from the Park District to restore the exterior of the Humboldt Park stables. Raised \$7.5 million in state and local funding to complete the first phase of the interior restoration. In 2012 IPRAC was recognized as one of Chicago’s Museums In The Park, and was added to the Chicago Park District’s annual budget, which will generate revenue of \$250,000 annually.
- **Education:** Directly advocated at the state level for the Humboldt Park Vocational Center to receive an allocation of \$6.2 million for expansion purposes.
- **Economic Development:** Envisioned Paseo Boricua and successfully acquired \$2.5 million in city funds for the installation of the two metal Puerto Rican flags and other streetscape improvements.
- **Housing:** Over 200 units of affordable housing have been created in the Humboldt Park area through the Agenda’s advocacy and direct collaboration with LUCHA, the Hispanic Housing Development Corporation, Bickerdike, among other housing organizations.
- **Youth:** Established Batey Urbano as way for youth to express and empower themselves.

Community organization partnership interest

The Agenda would be particular interested in foster partnerships with academic institutions that provide help developing:

- The former Von Humboldt and Du Prey elementary school ([closed by the Chicago Public School last year](#)) into an educational center that has a teachers' village as its centerpiece (housing for teachers and a tutoring center) (see figure 4).
- The [Paseo Boricua Arts Building](#) (Figure 5). The Puerto Rican Cultural center purchased the old Ashland Sausage building with the help of Alderman Maldonado and Belmont Bank. They need to put together a more complete plan to make project come to fruition.
- There are many satellite projects that we are working on or have a vision of, but are not recorded in a plan. We need technical assistance making a plan that articulates all of those visions and the additional ones that might come from a community charette hosted by the Summer Studio. As an organization the Agenda is able to mobilize a great number of community members, politicians and executive directors of organizations.



Figure 4 - Von Humboldt and Du Prey elementary school

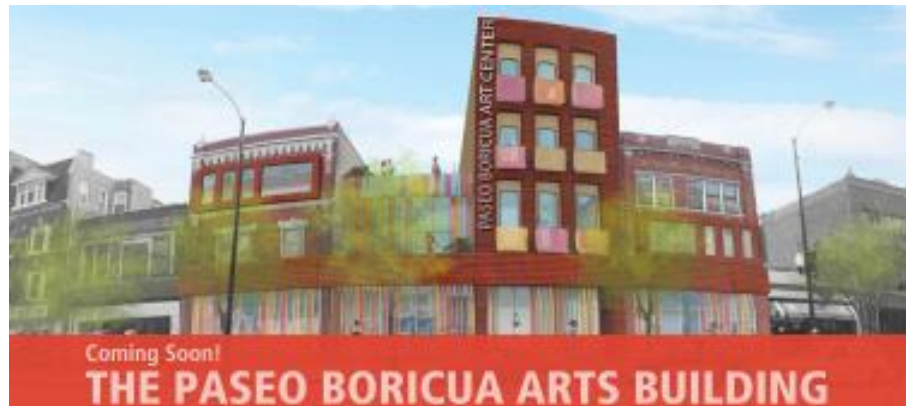


Figure 5 - Paseo Boricua Arts Building