

THE IMPACT OF IMMIGRANTS ON THE SENSE OF COMMUNITY

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This study investigated the sense of community among residents in the Spanish city of Malaga and the relationship between the components of the sense of community and the quality of life. Given that the phenomenon of immigration is a fact of city life, the authors examine how such coexistence could affect the sense of community and the quality of life as perceived by the residents in different city neighborhoods. The study was conducted in an urban context; 1,600 residents were included in the sample. The sense of community is measured using six dimensions: connection, belonging, support, safety, empowerment, and participation.

The results indicate that there are significant differences between most of the components of the sense of community. These results also prove that the increase of the sense of community and quality of life in the residents living with immigrants in the same block of apartments is related to an increase in the contact with immigrants. Implications of the study are described and directions for future research discussed. © 2009 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

INTRODUCTION

The sense of community (SOC) has been explored by a variety of community psychologists. According to Sarason (1974) the psychological sense of community may be defined as “the sense that one belongs in and is meaningfully part of a larger collectivity; ... the sense that there is a network of and structure to relationships...” (p. 41). This author points out that the basic ingredients of the sense of community are as follows: the perception of being similar to other community members; recognition of the interdependence between members of the community in question; the desire to maintain

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such interdependence, that is, behaving with others as we expect them to behave with us; and the feeling that one is part of a stable superior social structure on which one depends.

This is the most widely accepted use of the term; thus, the author places the psychological sense of community at the intersection of the individual and the collective, the psychological and social. The concept was subsequently widely studied and clarified by several authors (e.g., Chavis, 1983; Chavis, Hogge, McMillan, & Wandersman, 1986; Chavis & Pretty, 1999; McMillan & Chavis, 1986) for whom the sense of community involves the sense of belonging, membership, and personal involvement. It also involves the reciprocal influence between the individual and the community: integration and the satisfaction of needs, and connection and emotional involvement.

At present, studies are being conducted to investigate the components of this construct. There has even been considerable disagreement over whether SOC is a unidimensional or multidimensional construct. Although evidence seems to be in favor of a multidimensional construct, the exact factor structure of SOC has not been confirmed. In general, a review of the literature indicates that the concept of community is complex and that it is related to the objective aspects of the physical environment and the subjective aspects of social interaction (Bishop, Chertok, & Jason, 1997; Chipuer & Pretty, 1999; Davidson & Cotter, 1986; Long & Perkins, 2003; Obst & White, 2004; Peterson, Speer, & Hughey, 2006; Peterson, Speer, & McMillan, 2008; Tartaglia, 2006).

Other variables of psychosocial relevance to the central concept of the sense of community have been investigated, such as the perception of the environment and structure of the neighborhoods (Prezza & Schrujjer, 2001; Talen, 1999), environmental stressors (Bachrach & Zautra, 1985), social participation (Colombo, Mosso, & De Piccoli, 2001), labor integration (Arcidiacono, Sommantico, & Procentese, 2001), social disorganization (Cantillon, Davidson, & Schweitzer, 2003), social identity (Arcidiacono & Procentese, 2005; Obst, Smith, & Zinkiewicz, 2002), and social integration (Farrell, Aubry, & Coulombe, 2004) among others.

Studies investigating the association between the sense of community and quality of life (Schweitzer, Rosenbaum, Campos, & Gardi, 2002) indicate a strong positive relationship between the former and satisfaction with the quality of life when there is more social interaction in a block and people are more interested in the life and well-being of their neighbors. Crowman, Ferrari, and Liao-Troth (2004) also found a relationship between the sense of community and social support networks. These networks and the sense of community are the best predictors of happiness and satisfaction with life. When the factors influencing the quality of life of an urban neighborhood were studied, it was found that the quality of life and sense of community were positively related to how many neighbors are known, satisfaction with the composition of the neighborhood, positively assessing the fact of knowing each other, and satisfaction with homes and green spaces in the neighborhood (Foruria, Mitchell, Jones, Tadlock, Weakly, & McDonald, 2004). The sense of community is also related to a longer period of residence in the community, more social competence and coping ability, greater academic competence, and greater satisfaction with life (Chipuer & Pretty, 1999).

Quality of life is one of the variables widely studied in relation to the sense of community making the assessment of this relationship an aim of the present study. Lifestyle in the neighborhood and the type of neighborhood itself have an impact on the sense of community. The transformations and changes occurring in the

environment of the neighborhood influence the residents' sense of community. We are currently living in a period of significant transformations in the lifestyle and characteristics of the population. A phenomenon that is especially contributing to this is an immigrant population settling in specific city neighborhoods. Thus, several studies have investigated these environments in relation to the sense of community because this facilitates relationships, identity, social organization, and adaptation to new situations (Bishop, Colquhoun, & Jonson, 2006; Cantillón et al., 2003; Fisher & Sonn, 2002; Malone & Dooley, 2006; Sonn, 2002; Sonn & Fisher, 1996).

Current migrations have given rise to a great variety of profiles and settlement models. Immigrants tend to congregate in a few geographical areas. Thus, the perception that local residents have of immigrants can vary considerably according to how near or far they live from them; for some it is an everyday fact of life, whereas for others encountering immigrants is an unusual and infrequent event. Thus, it is relevant to study the relationships that the residents have with immigrants in the environment where they live, what causes reactions between the residents living alongside immigrants, the problems of living together that appear in the block of flats, and how residents assess the immigrants they know personally. Analyzing the sense of community among these groups is important given that this is an element that potentially strengthens social integration and quality of life. Therefore, a specific aim of this study is to analyze this phenomenon in relation to the sense of community among the residents who live in this situation.

Conducting this study in a natural context—such as an urban neighborhood—should lead to a deeper understanding of the city in relation to several aspects of the residents' everyday life regarding the sense of community, quality of life, and relationships with immigrants. Knowledge concerning this situation is basic to understanding and anticipating the unwanted effects of immigration and should enable developing specific intervention strategies suited to the needs of the residents and intercultural coexistence.

Migratory movements have become a subject of great interest worldwide due to their striking impact both in the countries of origin and the host countries. Most immigration studies define immigrants as people who move from one country to another or from one region to another, which is sufficiently far away and for long enough to involve living in and carrying out the activities of daily life there. We could add that this change involves great effort and psychological and social adjustment by the people who decide to migrate and that their presence will also have an impact on the host culture. Although an immigrant is any person who is born in one country and moves his or her residency to another, the term is normally reserved for those people who move to another country with the intention to build a better life, seek new opportunities, or flee from a difficult political situation in their country of origin (Criado, 2000).

According to González and Requena (2005), Spain has undergone a steady increase in immigrants during the last decade. From 2000 to the present, Spain has become a priority host country for African, Latin American, Asian, and East European immigration.

This study investigated the sense of community among residents in Malaga city (Spain) and the relationship between the components of the sense of community and the quality of life. Given that the phenomenon of immigration is a fact of city life, we examine how such coexistence could affect the sense of community and the quality of life as perceived by the residents in different city neighborhoods. Thus, we decided to

investigate the sense of community among residents living alongside immigrants in the same block compared to those who do not and studied this in relation to the quality of life.

METHOD

Participants

The study was conducted in an urban context. In line with the research aims, neighborhoods were selected taking into account the differences between them at the socioeconomic level, their geographical position, resources, neighborhood organization, and type of population. In relation to neighborhood organization and the type of population, the neighborhoods with a low number of immigrants or none were included, and others with a high concentration. Most immigrants concentrate in neighborhoods with the lowest socioeconomic levels and fewest resources, whereas the presence of immigrants is very limited or null in city neighborhoods with higher socioeconomic levels and more resources. Thus, we had to take into account the distribution of neighborhoods within the city. Malaga city is divided into 10 municipal districts, which served as a reference to locate and select the loci of greater relevance to this study.

Some of the loci representative of each district were selected taking into account the enormous diversity existing in each district. We included those with average values regarding their socioeconomic and environmental characteristics as well as those occupying extreme positions.

Three neighborhoods with average and extreme values were selected from each district to guarantee that the analyzed variables were the most representative possible; 1600 residents were included in the sample. The subjects were selected using random route sampling, which is appropriate to this type of research. In each neighborhood, routes were randomly selected from a map indicating streets, buildings, squares, houses, junctions, etc. At the end of the process, there were 960 and 616 valid interviews with women and men, respectively. Their mean age was 39 years (range 16 to 91 years) with a mean duration of residence of 17 years.

Variables and Instruments

We used the Sense of Community Survey: This scale was created to measure the SOC that existed on residential face blocks within an urban community. The scale was created by the SOC in Lansing Neighborhoods Project team (Crew, Kim, & Schweitzer, 1999; Schweitzer, Kim, & Mackin, 1999) to assess the sense of community among the different households in several blocks of flats. This scale measures the sense of community by asking the residents about their relationship with the neighbors on the block.

The sense of community is measured using six dimensions: connection, belonging, support, safety, empowerment, and participation (Schweitzer et al., 2002) as follows:

- **Connection:** Measures the degree to which neighbors think they know, socialize with, feel connected to, and trust each other.

- **Belonging:** Measures whether neighbors think of their block as a community, feel committed to the block's future, and whether they feel they belong on the block.
- **Support:** Measures the degree to which neighbors perceive themselves helping each other out and watching out for each other.
- **Participation:** Measures the degree to which neighbors believe they participate in organized block Activities.
- **Empowerment:** Measures whether neighbors feel that they are working together to create solutions to problems, are able to get things done on the block, and have a voice regarding important community issues.
- **Safety:** Measures whether neighbors believe that the block is safe to walk at night and whether it is a safe place to live.

The questions were presented as a Likert scale: 1 = *Strongly disagree or definitely not true*; 2 = *Disagree or not true*; 3 = *Neutral*; 4 = *Agree or true*; 5 = *Strongly agree or definitely true*. The questionnaire also allows us to assess the perceived quality of life on a scale from 1 to 5, which includes four questions on the quality of life on the block and satisfaction with life in general.

The psychometric properties of the scale were examined using the LISREL 8.20 and PRELIS 2 computer programs (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993). Unweighted least squares (ULS) estimates of model parameters were obtained. The indexes of this questionnaire indicate a good model fit—Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) = .97 and Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = .97. These indexes range between 0 and 1, where 1 represents the best fit and values less than .90 indicate a poor model fit. The root mean square error (RMSE) and root mean residual (RMR) were also calculated. These range between 0 and 1, where 0 indicates a perfect fit and values higher than .08 indicate a bad model fit. In the present study these were .052 and .052, respectively. Table 1 shows the results of the measurement model indicating that the items of all the dimensions have a medium-high factor loading. Multiple correlations for each item may be interpreted as reliability indexes (Gómez-Benito, 1986). The values for the items are good.

The following questions were included to assess the influence of immigrants on the sense of community: “How racially/ethnically diverse is this block?” (3 = *Very diverse*; 2 = *Somewhat diverse*; 1 = *Not at all diverse*); “What is your feeling about the level of racial/ethnic diversity on this block?” (3 = *Too much*; 2 = *Just about right*; 1 = *Too little*); “How are race relations on this block?” (3 = *Positive response, Generally good*; 2 = *Neutral response, Neither positive nor negative*; 1 = *Negative response, Generally poor*). “Do race relations affect the sense of community on this block? (Yes/No/Don't Know), if yes, “How is sense of community affected?” (3 = *Positively*; 2 = *Neutrally*; 1 = *Negatively*); “How would increasing the racial/ethnic diversity impact the sense of community on this block?” (3 = *Sense of community would increase*; 2 = *Sense of community would stay the same*; 1 = *Sense of community would decrease*). In addition, the residents who gave a positive response to the question, “Are there any immigrants on your block?” had to know the origin of the immigrants to be included in the category of residents living with immigrants, in line with the following classification: 1 = African; 2 = Latin; 3 = East European; 4 = Asian.

This scale—called the impact of immigrants on the sense of community scale—was also analyzed using the LISREL 8.20 and PRELIS 2 computer programs. Unweighted least squares estimates of model parameters were obtained. In this case, the factor

Table 1. Standardized Coefficients and R² for the Measurement Model of the Sense of Community Survey

	R ²	Connection	Participation	Safety	Support	Belonging	Empowerment	Quality of life
People on this block know each other.	0.33	0.58						
People on this block socialize with each other.	0.46	0.68						
People talk to each other about community problems on this block.	0.34	0.58						
People on this block feel connected to each other.	0.58	0.76						
People on this block don't trust each other.	0.22	0.47						
People on this block feel isolated from each other.	0.28	0.53	0.47					
People on this block participate in social activities (e.g., pot luck meals, group garage sales, etc.).	0.22							
People on this block never do things together to improve the block.	0.14		0.38					
People on this block participate in community improvement activities (e.g., community clean-ups, flower planting, etc.).	0.33		0.58					
People on this block participate in the curbside recycling program.	0.12		0.35					
It is fairly safe to walk on this block at night.	0.09			0.30				
The people on this block make it a safer place to live.	0.65			0.81				
People on this block take care of each others' plants, kids, pets.	0.29				0.54			
When someone on this block has a problem, [it's hard to get help from neighbors.	0.25				0.50			
People on this block would give rides to each other if needed.	0.34				0.59			
People on this block watch out for each other.	0.60				0.77			
People who live on this block think of themselves as a community.	0.44					0.66		
A feeling of community spirit exists among the residents on this block.	0.53					0.73		
Residents don't care about the block's future.	0.18					0.43		
People on this block feel they belong here.	0.38					0.62		
If faced with a problem on this block, residents would be unable to create a solution.	0.18						0.43	
People on this block have a voice regarding important community issues.	0.38						0.62	
Together, people on this block can persuade the city to respond to their needs and concerns.	0.21						0.46	
How would you rate the quality of life on this block?	0.24							0.49
How much do you like living on this block?	0.81							0.90
How much do you like living in this neighborhood?	0.68							0.82
How happy are you with your life overall?	0.18							0.43

loadings were 0.75, 0.88, 0.88, and 0.82, respectively, for the four items. Its reliability indexes were also very high: 0.56, 0.77, 0.78, and 0.68.

Procedure

The geographical boundaries of each selected neighborhood were determined and random route sampling was used to establish the areas, streets, sides of the street, etc., composing the sample in each neighborhood. When designing the study, only Spanish residents (those born in Spain) were included, whereas immigrants who were resident, but belonged to one of the listed categories (i.e., Latin, African, Asian, East European) were excluded from the sample. Given that the phenomenon of immigration is quite recent in Spain, there are very few second-generation immigrants born in Spain; thus, the present study did not address this phenomenon. To administer the questionnaire, postcards were designed and sent to the residents briefly describing the study, the people conducting it, and requesting their cooperation. A telephone number was also provided if they had any questions about the study. The interviewers who already knew where the residents they had to interview lived delivered the postcards and arranged a day for the interview. Each interviewer carried accreditation provided by those responsible for the study authorizing them to conduct the interview. The sense of community was assessed in all the selected neighborhoods using the sense of community questionnaire. In addition, the residents living with immigrants in each neighborhood were assessed as well as those who said they did not live with immigrants. The residents who stated they lived with immigrants in their block had to be able to identify their origin according to the four indicated categories: African, Latin, East European, and Asian.

This allowed us to compare the different groups in relation to the sense of community and quality of life perceived by residents living alongside immigrants on the block or those not living with immigrants. The results of this comparison are presented below.

RESULTS

Multivariate analysis of variance showed significant differences between the two groups, $F(7, 1583) = 2.97, p = .004$, in relation to the question "Are there any immigrants living in your block?" as an intersubject factor, with two levels of response, "yes" ($N = 518$) or "no" ($N = 1073$), using the scores obtained from the sense of community and quality of life questionnaire as dependent variables. Table 2 shows the results. Individual comparisons for each of the dimensions of the sense of community indicate that the residents who have immigrants in their block are less connected than those without immigrants, $F(1, 1589) = 11.19, p = .001$. That is, the people who live with immigrants on their block relate less, know each other less, speak less to each other, feel more distant, and feel more isolated from the others.

The difference between the two groups regarding involvement, $F(1, 1589) = 4.52, p = .034$, is slightly less marked. Nevertheless, there is less participation in social activities and care of the environment and the neighbors do little together to improve this.

The sense of belonging, $F(1, 1589) = 6.72, p = .010$, and perceived social support, $F(1, 1589) = 11.37, p = .001$, are also greater among those who do not live with immigrants. These types of residents function as a neighborhood community, have a stronger feeling of closeness, are more concerned about the future of the block, have a stronger feeling of belonging to the place, and support and provide more help to each other than residents who live with immigrants.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of the Components of the Sense of Community Based on the Presence or Absence of Immigrants in the Interviewees' Block

	<i>Immigrants living in their block</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Connection	Yes	3.42	.77
	No	3.55	.70
Participation	Yes	2.98	.74
	No	3.06	.73
Belonging	Yes	3.48	.78
	No	3.58	.75
Support	Yes	3.36	.82
	No	3.51	.80
Empowerment	Yes	3.31	.75
	No	3.38	.77
Safety	Yes	3.39	.97
	No	3.46	.89
Quality of life	Yes	3.72	.61
	No	3.83	.57

Table 3. Correlations Between the Impact of Immigrants on the Sense of Community and the Components of the Sense of Community and the Residents' Quality of Life

	<i>Impact of immigrants on the sense of community</i>
Connection	.13(*)
Participation	.17(*)
Belonging	.15(*)
Support	.14(*)
Empowerment	.15(*)
Safety	.18(*)
Quality of life	.19(*)

*The correlation is significant at 0.01 (bilateral).

There were no significant differences between the two groups in relation to the last two dimensions of the sense of community, $F(1, 1589) = 2.38$, $p = .123$ for empowerment and $F(1, 1589) = 1.89$, $p = .169$ for safety, although in both cases the pattern described above is reproduced. The number of those who say no immigrants live in their block is above average. Finally, the most significant finding, $F(1, 1589) = 12.98$, $p < .001$, concerns the variable referring to the quality of life reported by the interviewees; this average was less among those living with immigrants on their block.

Table 3 shows the correlations between the impact of immigrants on the sense of community variable and the sense of community and quality of life dimensions. Obviously, in this case, the results refer exclusively to the people who said that immigrants lived on their block. As the table shows, there is a statistically significant positive correlation between immigrants and the sense of community dimensions, the highest being those relating to participation and security. If there are more immigrants living on the block, then there is greater resident participation in making the block a safe place to live. An increase in the number of immigrants living on the block also increases the residents' perceived quality of life.

DISCUSSION

The results indicate that there are significant differences between most of the components of the sense of community. When the sense of community and quality of life of residents who live with immigrants on their block is compared to those who do not, the latter perceive more connection between neighbors, participate in more social activities, have a stronger sense of belonging, and perceive more social support than the former. These differences are clearer when the quality of life is assessed; once again, the residents who do not live with immigrants perceive greater quality of life. On the other hand, the findings are striking when only the sense of community and quality of life of the residents who live with immigrants are analyzed. In this case, an increased sense of community and quality of life is associated with increased contacts with immigrants. Specifically, all the components of the sense of community—connection, involvement, belonging, social support, empowerment, and safety—increase significantly, especially safety on the block and involvement among neighbors participating in group activities.

These findings are in line with those of a larger study entitled the “Sense of Community Project in Lansing, Michigan” led by John Schweitzer (Schweitzer et al., 2002). Residents on 46 blocks were administered a questionnaire aimed at measuring their sense of community. Most survey respondents believed that diversity on the block did not negatively affect the sense of community on the block. Those who lived on the block at the time expressed a high comfort level regarding residential racial and ethnic diversity. The surveys indicated a high level of satisfaction regarding race relations on the block and expressed a universalistic ethic in relation to racial and ethnic diversity among their neighbors. The findings of this study suggest that residents are comfortable with residential ethnic and racial diversity.

In the same line, studies on sense of community by Chavis and Wandersman (1990) and Perkins, Florin, Rich, Wandersman, and Chavis (1990), conducted on blocks with residents of different races, ethnic background, and socioeconomic status, indicated a causal relationship regarding the sense of community, given that the increase in the sense of community precedes the increase in involvement and sense of individual and group power in relation to living on the block.

The study by Brodsky (1996), which was conducted with African American women in a neighborhood with a high risk of crime in Washington, D.C., found that physical and emotional safety is a key characteristic of the sense of community. The creation of ways to become involved in the neighborhood such as participating in school and neighborhood associations, and the creation of neighborhood self-help groups represented an important intervention because they help create the social fabric that promotes the sense of community.

The diversity of cultures that currently live alongside each other indicates an important change in current society and the quality of life of its citizens. A basic consideration is to understand how the social and psychological dynamics between various cultures adapt to the same context, how the different social traditions are incorporated, and how the sense of belonging to the place or sense of community is shared (Liem, 2000).

The present study investigated how people from different cultures (residents and immigrants) living with each other influence the sense of community and how the sense of community is related positively to the quality of life.

The findings show that the components of the sense of community (connection, involvement, social support, etc.) manifest differently depending on the relationship

the residents have with the immigrants, and that the sense of community is positively related to the quality of life.

There were significant differences between residents living with immigrants on the block and those not living with immigrants regarding the variable quality of life; this was greater when residents do not live with immigrants. Quality of life strongly correlates with the sense of community; that is, the greater the sense of belonging to the block the greater the perceived quality of life among the residents.

The residents' sense of community is affected differently depending on the presence or absence of immigrants living on the block. The residents living with immigrants on the same block had a weaker sense of community than those without immigrants on their block.

The findings concerning residents who live with immigrants are striking, given that correlations between the sense of community and quality of life are very high. In general, as the presence of immigrants increases on the block most of the components of the sense of community and the residents' perceived quality of life increase.

These findings are relevant to planning suitable social interventions to facilitate immigrant integration through the sense of community. The presence of immigrants on the block positively influences the residents living with them when compared to other residents who also have immigrants on their block. Significant differences appear when the number of immigrants on the block increases in relation to the sense of community and the quality of life.

As mentioned, the sense of community is complex and may refer to the nearest environment (block, house, etc.) or to ones further away (neighborhood, city, etc.). This study has focussed on the nearer environment—the block as the unit of analysis—allowing us to investigate social interaction and the deeper patterns of coexistence between residents and immigrants. The findings show that the presence of immigrants has a different influence on the residents depending on the degree of proximity and interaction. We consider it important to create intervention strategies to facilitate intercultural relationships between immigrants and residents. This idea gains more force when we only focus on the residents living with immigrants given that successful coexistence improves the sense of community and the perceived quality of life on the block.

The differences in the sense of community and quality of life between the residents who live with immigrants and those who do not may be explained by the fact that the latter have not needed to change or adapt to such a new type of situation. On the other hand, the presence of immigrants involves developing new strategies of social interaction; the immigrants tend to congregate in specific city neighborhoods, where they change the social and economic composition of the area, involving sharing the same resources, particularly when living on the same block. However, the data show that successful coexistence between residents and immigrants improves all the components of the sense of community, the patterns of interaction that increase connection, perceived social support, security, participation, empowerment, and the sense of belonging that facilitate intercultural integration and increase quality of life. Thus, a significant finding is that the sense of community is an element that strengthens social interaction and the quality of life. Increased positive interaction with immigrants increases the residents' sense of community and quality of life. Thus, it is important to implement social policies that develop interventions that promote mediation in intercultural relations as a way to avoid conflict and facilitate social integration. In addition, the development of intervention strategies that improve the

components of the sense of community such as participation, social support, or empowerment, among others would promote social integration and patterns of intercultural coexistence. Future research should investigate the needs of immigrants living alongside residents and study how the sense of community develops in this population and the effect it has on coexistence and intercultural integration.

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