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**Multi-Ethnic Third Place:
Community Garden Center in Wilshire Neighborhood of Los Angeles**

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ABSTRACT

Many different ethnic groups have moved to United States and built their own ethnic enclaves and neighborhoods. In recent years, some newer ethnic communities are facing social conflicts due to overlapping ethnic boundaries and competing ethnic identities.

The objective of the design portion of the thesis is to explore a series of urban design and architectural strategies using the concept of “Third place” introduced by an urban sociologist, Ray Oldenburg. The project introduces community garden as a cross-cultural buffer space in the multi-ethnic neighborhood in Los Angeles and provides negotiating stage for better public community life.

The community garden, retail shops, and wide range of housing options allow people to meet, share, and negotiate on neutral ground for every ethnic groups in the Wilshire neighborhood. The whole facility addresses to re-tighten community bond on many levels and offers to have people’s own “third place” in their lives.

PREFACE

The departure point of my thesis is an article in the New York Times, tells about social conflict mainly between Korean and Bangladesh communities in a multi-ethnic neighborhood in Wilshire district, Los Angeles. These two groups were fighting over the official recognition of the area as their own ethnic enclaves, fighting over whether the area should be called “Koreatown” or “Little Bangladesh” (NYTime.com).

The middle of the Wilshire neighborhood has never been officially recognized but is well known as a “Koreatown” for long time because of the high concentration of Korean American people and Korean related businesses. In late 2006, a committee of local Bangladeshis submitted an application to name about 50 square blocks, popularly considered as “Koreatown”, as “Little Bangladesh” for better representation of the ethnically diverse neighborhood. As a response to the application by the Bangladesh community group in Wilshire, the Korean American community groups also filed an application to recognize the same area as “Koreatown,” claiming the area has been both a social and a business hub for the Korean Community in Los Angeles.

The city accepted the application by Bangladeshis after long discussion with local community groups in 2010, and “Little Bangladesh” street signage were put up at the corner of 3rd Street and New Hampshire Avenue. These issues relating to overlapping ethnic community boundaries and cross-ethnic tension have been noticed recently in United States.

In addition to the New York Times article, ethnic boundary issues between recent immigrants and native Japanese in my home country, Japan, helped me choose this topic as my thesis. Although there have been many people immigrating to Japan since the mid-19th century, when Japanese government opened the country to the world, Japan is island a racially homogeneous island nation. Unlike the United States, Japan is still getting used to accepting immigrants. The tension between expanding Chinatown and surrounding existing Japanese businesses in Tokyo caught my attention and made me realize that issues around multi-ethnicity will be a large problem in Japan in the near

future as well. I hope the findings of my thesis help to address similar cross-ethnic tensions in ethnic enclaves in Japan.

The objective of this thesis is to explore a series of strategies using the concept of “third space” within a multi-ethnic neighborhood while testifying whether a cross-cultural buffer threshold can be a shared negotiating stage for co-existing ethnic groups and tightening community bonds as a whole,

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Chapter 1: Literature Review

Introduction

Definition of Terms

Ethnicity

Ethnic quality or relating to a sizable group of people sharing a common and distinctive racial, national, religious, linguistic, or cultural heritage (American Heritage English Dictionary).

Cross-cultural

(Sociology) involving or bridging the differences between cultures (Collins English Dictionary).

Ethnoburb

Ethnoburbs are suburban ethnic clusters of residential areas and business districts in large American metropolitan areas.

Ethnic Communities in United States

The development of ethnic communities in the United States first started in XXX century and it has been wide spread since then. It is a natural move for newly arrived immigrants to build an ethnic enclave to live closer to each other for their social networking and mutual assistance.

Ethnic communities were initially concentrated in metropolitan areas, however as time has passed, some of ethnic groups started to create communities within suburbs to seek a better living environment and more space. These types of ethnic communities are sometimes called ethno-burbs.

Other ethnic communities have been transformed into tourist attractions. Little Italy in New York City and Chinatown in San Francisco clearly distinguish themselves

from surroundings by high concentration of ethnic-related businesses and signage on the streets.

As each ethnic community takes over available land and turns it into their own ethnic enclaves, cross-ethnic tension between ethnic groups has been noticed. It is a relatively new issue because it used to be a conflict between whites and non-whites.

The major causes of social conflicts in ethnically complex neighborhoods are the physical overlapping of their boundaries and a lack of communication and understanding among the ethnic groups. Recent immigrant groups in particular have a higher language barrier, thus it takes time before they become able to communicate with surrounding locals.

Cross-Cultural Design

“Business is global.

People are different.

Communication means survival.” (Steiner and Hass, Introduction VIII)

People tend to believe that the arts will be accepted regardless of cultural background, but in reality, any kind of perception is constructed through the viewer’s culturally specific common sense. It is important to recognize cultural difference, but isolating one culture from another does not help to understand them any better.

“With the fierce trend to ‘protect’ cultures comes the misguided notion that civilizations best maintain their integrity when isolated and spared contamination. A broad view of history suggests just the opposite: societies prosper when they intermingle, when ideas and knowledge are transferred in the exciting dance of cultural cross-pollination” (Steiner and Hass, Introduction VIII).

Although Steiner and Hass warn of the possibilities of misunderstanding among dramatic ranges of different cultures, they express excitement about what the cross-cultural design would bring. It is a result of integration of traditions without losing the meaning of the original state. This concept reflects the idea of “third space” in which

different community groups gather and build a collectively shared community without losing individual identities.

Third Places

“Third Place” is a social concept introduced by sociologist, Ray Oldenburg. He introduced the term “third place” in his book “*The Great Good Place*”.

What would be the image of public life in US cities now? Paris has sidewalk café. There are lively night markets on streets in Hong Kong. Siena has its famous piazza del campo, which accommodates a special horse event. Oldenburg warns us lack of informal public life and the trend of disproportionate emphasis on privacy in our daily lives. “The third place is a generic designation for a great variety of public places that host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realm of home and work.” (Oldenburg, 4-16).

A full range of human activities takes place in the “third place” regardless of people’s age, sex, race, and social status and any kind of people’s background. This kind of space can be found in any neighborhood café and bar, beauty salon, and many places where people meet and interact.

Oldenburg claims that the lack of public gathering place leads to a collapse of community bonds. According to his categorization, the first place is home, the second place is work, and the third place is where people meet with others, not your family and not your co-workers.

If you are an engineer who works for a construction company, people with similar knowledge and educational background probably surround you at your work environment. Home is similar in that sense. Your family members probably share a similar mentality and lifestyle as they have shared traditions and customs over a long period of time. Because we are more used to “sameness” in our first and second place, and less tolerant to “difference” that exist in the realm of informal casual public life. The third place is a vital stage where a wide range of people gathers and expands their perspectives on neutral ground.

When implementing ideas and materializing the concept of the third place, knowing actual surveys and records of how people utilize space is necessary. “*The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*” by William H. White demonstrates what urban amenities attract people to use space. For instance, White video recorded plazas and open spaces in New York City to examine multiple criteria; occupancy load by time, alone or groups, location of people, activity types, etc. The book gives a straightforward explanation and recommendation to attract people in an urban setting.

Community Garden: Nature, Culture, and Community

Eight Merits of Community Garden

- #1 Enrich people’s life in a city with nature
- #2 Create opportunity of encounter and conversation
- #3 Improve appearance of surrounding neighborhood
- #4 Teach us the importance of learning
- #5 Contribute to global and city environment
- #6 Secure sustainable food
- #7 Important base for natural disasters (Evacuation area/ Information exchange)
- #8 Unite people to work together for better community

A Community Garden in the United States can be a shared garden, planters in the backyard of apartments, or even wild plants in empty lots. Then what is the difference between public space like parks and community gardens? The distinct difference would be the level of local engagement to the site. While the city takes care and maintains parks, local residents take their own responsibilities for the space in community gardens. Active engagement by locals and collaborative work process of residents and professionals create and develop community gardens.

Community gardens have been playing an important role while US urban planning has transformed since modern times. People who do not own land started to cultivate small and unused open space between buildings. “Community gardening” is

different from farming; it is a cultural activity through nature and also social activity to re-create neighborhood living environment.

What is “Community Garden”?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A green space shared by public • Place for opportunity to involve with local community • Place for social education to learn global environment and community subject • Community development through neighborhood gardening • Grass roots activity for community regeneration
Background Factor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rise of awareness for environment • A measure for aging society • Anxiety about lack of unity within community • Reflection on complicated urban infrastructure • Understanding of international / multi-cultural society
Basic Ideology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of better appearance / views • Protection for natural resources / promotion for self-sufficiency • Secure safe and nutritious food • Creation of hands-on recreational experience • Creation of social cooperation / coproduction • Improve social accessibility
Major Garden Types	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Typical lot-type garden within public facilities (Parks, Botanical gardens, etc.) • Themed garden (Art, Herb, Dye garden) • Educational garden targeted to youth (School garden, and outdoor classroom) • Rehabilitation / Social welfare garden for socially disadvantaged people (Special needs garden, Rehabilitation garden)
Popular Projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth Garden Project • Kids Garden Project • Homeless Garden Project • Ethnic Garden Project • Therapeutic Garden Project
Appeal points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wide open for public without advantaged knowledge and skill • Flexible for location and use • Participants can manage and administrate the site • Human interaction through working • Increase awareness in community development and environment

Figure 1. Summary of Community Garden. (Author).

Community Garden Case Study

“Any piece of land gardened by a group of people. It can be urban, suburban, or rural. It can grow flowers, vegetables or community. It can be one community plot, or can be many individual plots. It can be at a school, hospital, or in a neighborhood.”

(The American Community Gardening Association)

Danny Woo International District Community Garden, Seattle, WA, USA

The Danny Woo International District Community Garden in Seattle, Washington is a great example of a community garden in urban ethnic neighborhood (Figure 2). It was constructed predominantly for immigrant Asian elders in order to make them feel connected to nature, and allow them to grow the food they missed from their home countries (Hou, Johnson, and Lawson, 2009). The 5 feet by 10 feet plots are full of Asian vegetables such as green onions, bok choy, daikon, herbs and more. Gardening provides a healthy wellbeing to participants through not only physical exercise but also through connecting social ties within the International District (Hou, Johnson, and Lawson, 2009). The sense of ownership and responsibility over garden ties gardeners to their living community and provides significance of existence in the public realm.

The 1.5 acre of garden space includes community gathering space, tool sheds, view point, pig roast pit, and recent design/built addition of terraced seating. The variety of public events and workshops brings not only gardeners but also other community members in the International District. Although language and cultural barriers have remained in the Danny Woo International District Community Garden, a garden manager and many volunteers help to maintain the garden's condition and smooth the communication among gardeners (Hou, Johnson, and Lawson, 2009).

The one of the reasons why Danny Woo International District Community Garden has been widely accepted and utilized is because it has multiple functions other than simply gardening. A variety of public amenities help to add a sense of commonplace within the garden and also adjacent Kobe Terrace Park and surrounding historic neighborhood attracts a large number of the locals and tourists as well.



Figure 2. View of Denny Woo Community Garden, Seattle (Author).

Conclusion

- More and more people are beginning to see the community garden as an invaluable addition to the urban landscape.
- Setting a common activity is a great way to gather and tie people in casual environment.
- A strategic integration of nature and public space is crucial to create casual third place in which people build their relationship

Chapter 2: Community Garden Center in Wilshire Neighborhood, LA

Concept: Meet, Share, and Negotiate

The Wilshire Community Garden Center is both urban design and architectural manifestations addressing overlapping ethnic communities in Los Angeles, CA.

Where a community garden creates threshold between Korean community, Bangladesh community, and many other ethnic community groups by fostering communication and promoting better understandings and relationships, a community garden center spatially gives form to build better neighborhood and public life. By putting together all components and residents of the neighborhood onto a single site within a multi-ethnic neighborhood, users are able to share time and space with variety of range of people who won't engage in their everyday lives.

The Wilshire Community Garden Center acts as a connection point where people meet regardless of their age, background, and intent. It has three main goals: to provide place to meet, share, and negotiate for the people of Wilshire neighborhood, specifically those living in the part where different ethnic community boundaries overlap.

Place: Wilshire Neighborhood, Los Angeles, CA

The project site is located at southeast corner of West 3rd Street and South Vermont Avenue of Wilshire Center neighborhood. The neighborhood is situated about one and half miles west of downtown Los Angeles (Figure 3). It encompasses four and a half acres and is generally bounded by W 3rd Street on the north, W 4th Street on the south, S Westmoreland Avenue on the east, and S Vermont Avenue on the west (Figure 4).

The neighborhood comprises many ethnic groups; White 23%, Hispanic/Latino 41%, Asian 23%, Black 8%, Other 3% (City of Los Angeles – Department of City

Planning 2009), however the Korean community group seems to be the dominant one due to their long history of establishment in this area (Figure 5,6). Also, Korean immigrants were commonly middle to upper middle social class in their home country, therefore they typically had higher education and money (Keil, 1998). These conditions allowed them to establish their ethnic community much faster and stronger compare to other immigrant groups in Los Angeles (Light and Bonacich, 1988).

Although the city of Los Angeles has never set an official boundary, this neighborhood has been widely recognized as Koreatown due to strong Korean community presence such as Korean Youth Community Center, Korean Chamber of Commerce, and many more Korean related businesses.

“Little Bangladesh” has been recognized within mid-Wilshire neighborhood along 3rd Street from New Hampshire Avenue to Alexandria since 2010. Although the Bangladesh population comprises only a small percentage according to 2010 census, the Bangladesh Unity Federation of Los Angeles claims that the Bangladesh community has been rapidly growing over the years. Immigration from Bangladesh in the United States has raised dramatically rate of 471% from 1990 to 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau). Many of them moved to metropolitan areas such as New York City and Los Angeles for seeking better job opportunity and low cost of living.

The area is one of the densest neighborhoods with 22,695 persons per square mile, and the population is still growing today. More than 75 percent of the land is dedicated to residential use and about 15 percent is used for commercial purposes. There is a major commercial zone on Wilshire Street that is recognized as regional center and attracts many people even from far outside the neighborhood (City of Los Angeles – Department of City Planning, 2009). The Metro’s Red and Purple lines run through the neighborhood and provide easy public access to the area, although use of cars remains very heavy (Figure 7).

Contrary to the density of the Wilshire Neighborhood, public recreational open space is only 1.3 percent of total land uses in the area (City of Los Angeles – Department of City Planning, 2009). Only three community gardens exist with the Wilshire Neighborhood boundary (Francis Avenue Community Garden, Rose wood

Community Garden, and Yamazaki Memorial Community Garden). This is out of balance considering the number of people who live and work in this neighborhood.

Rite Aid, Ralphs Grocery store, bowling alley and an abandoned site, which used to be a motel currently occupy the total of four and a half acre of proposed project site. The building structures are only one or two stories high and they set back at least two hundred feet from each sidewalk to accommodate enough parking spaces for their customers. The Shatto Recreation Center is sited at adjacent to Rite Aid and providing one of the few public outdoor recreational spaces such as tennis courts, baseball field, and gymnasium for local community members (Figure 8,9,10).

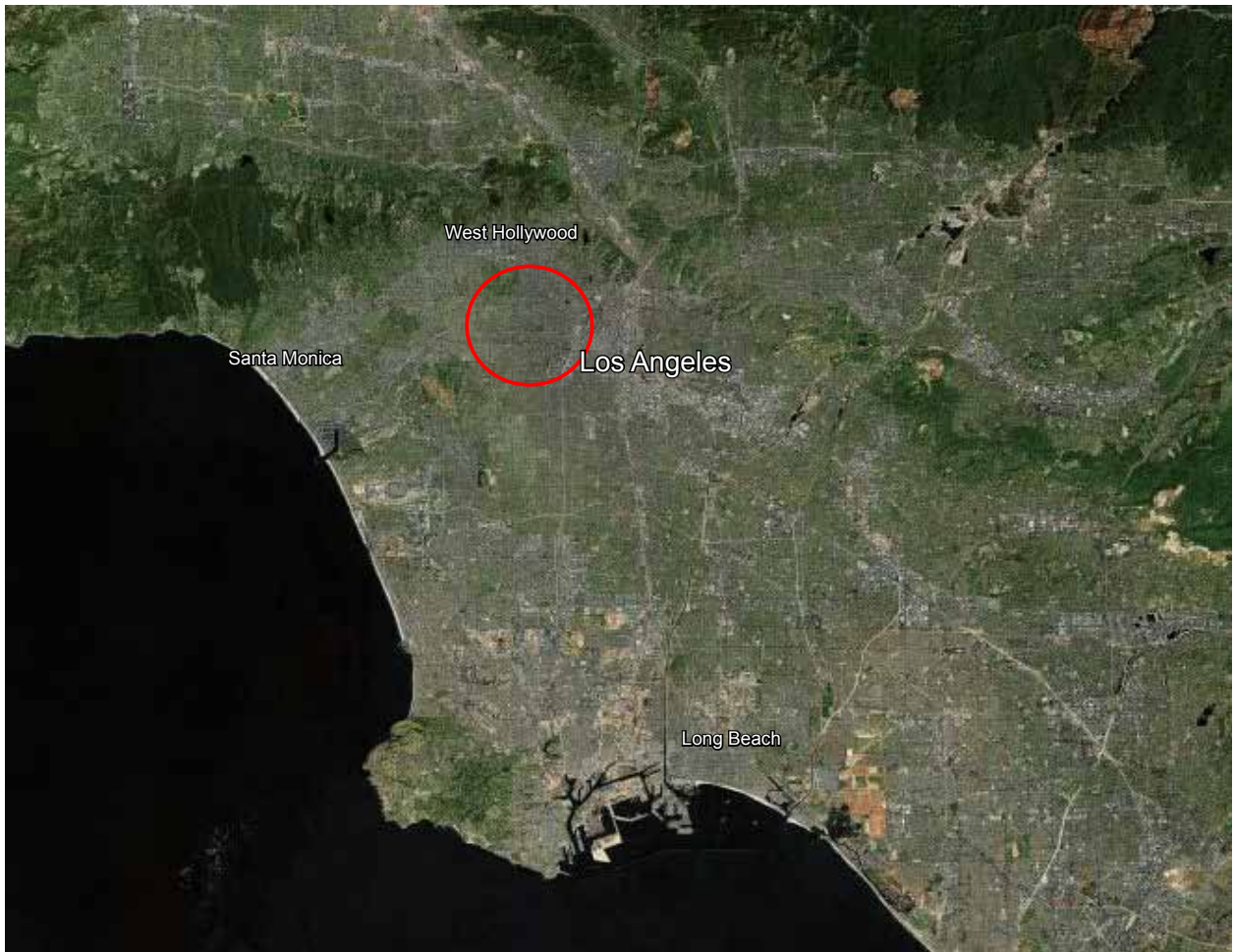


Figure 3. Vicinity Map. (Author).

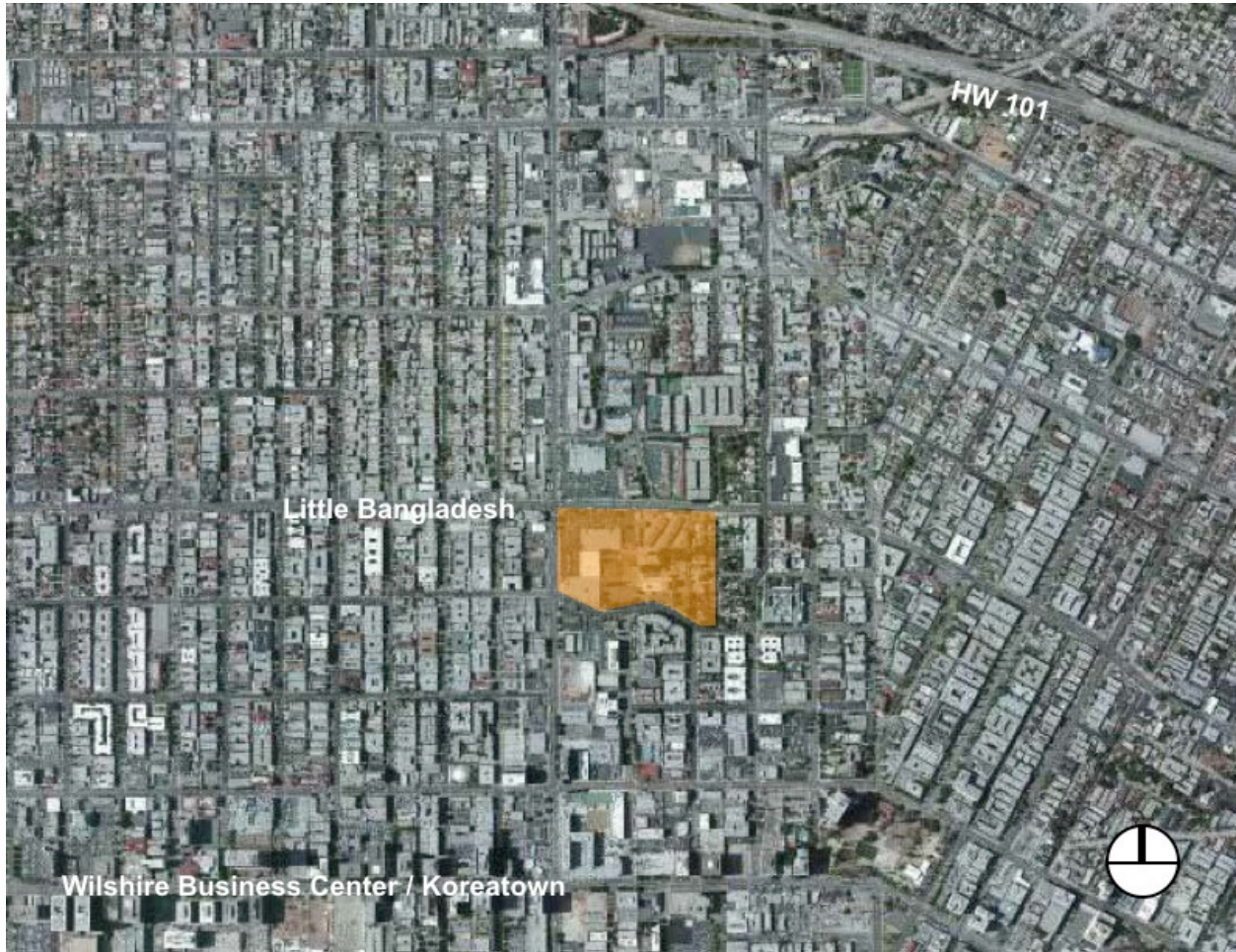


Figure 4. Proposed Project Site within Wilshire Neighborhood. (Author).

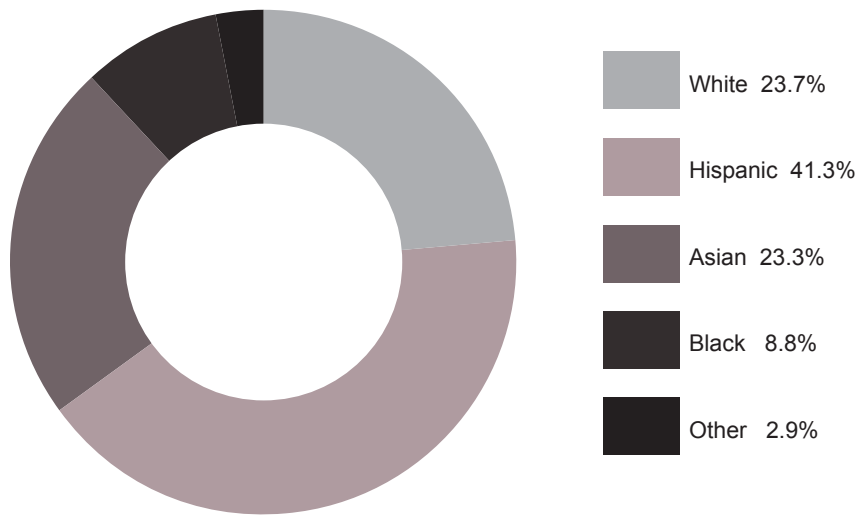


Figure 5. Ethnic Race in the Wilshire Neighborhood. (City of Los Angeles – Department of City Planning, 2009).

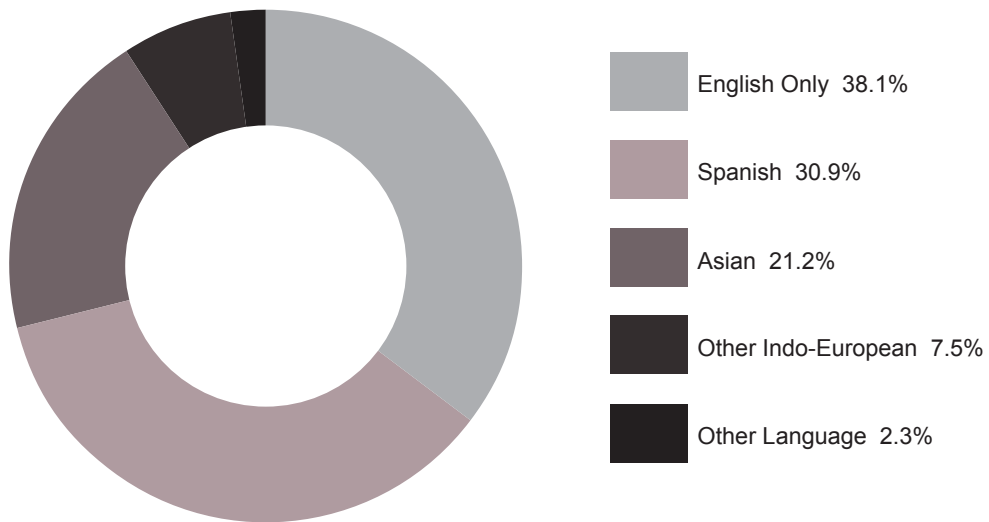


Figure 6. Language Spoken at Home in the Wilshire Neighborhood. (City of Los Angeles – Department of City Planning, 2009).

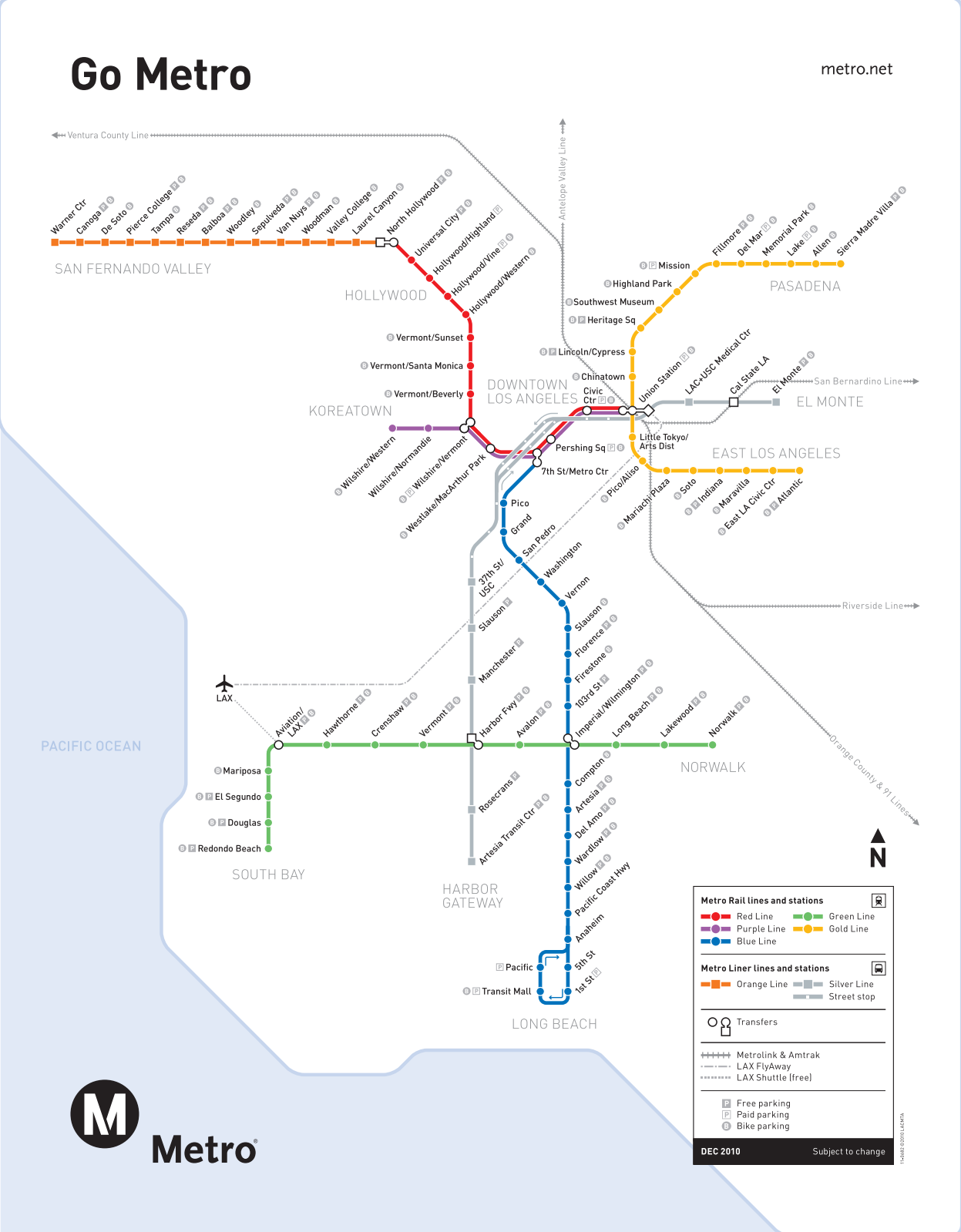
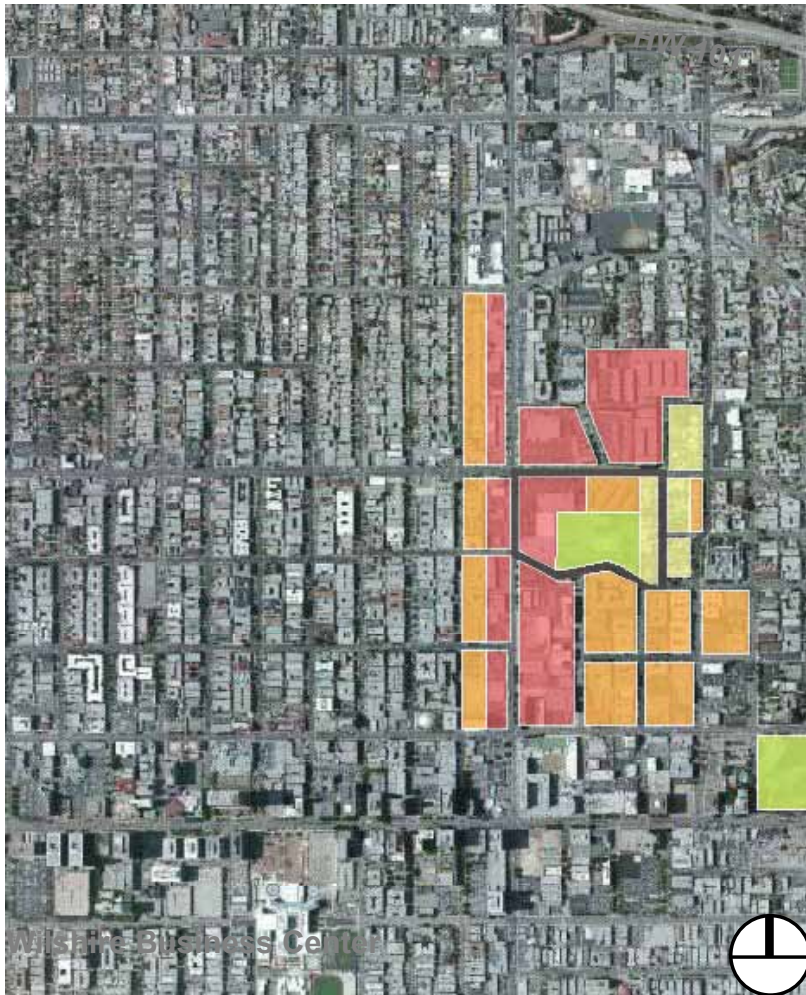


Figure 7. Metro Map of Los Angeles. (<http://www.metro.net/around/maps>).



Figure 8. View of Existing Shatto Recreational Center. (Author).



ZONING MAP

- C2 Neighborhood Business (35 feet)
- R4 Unlimited Residence (130 feet)
- R1 Single-Family Residence (35 feet)
- OS Open Space (35 feet)

Figure 9. Zoning Map of Surrounding Site (Author).



Figure 10. Existing Condition of the Proposed Project Site. (Author).

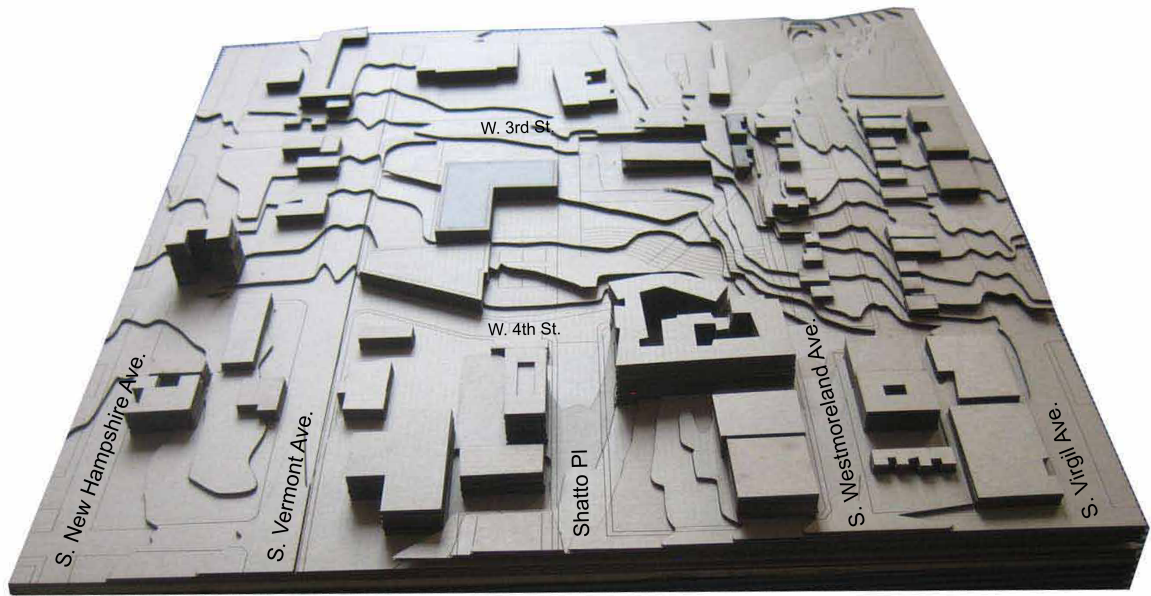


Figure 11. Physical Model of Site. (Author).

Program: Shop, Garden, Live

The architectural program is organized by the existing buildings/use and newly introduced activities that take place under the broad categories of shop, garden, and living. (Figure 12,13).

The core missions of the proposed programs are (1) providing a better and interactive public place for multiple ethnic groups; (2) to tighten the relationships between the people and the nature; and (3) strengthen the sense of place and identity of community as a whole.

Shopping: Includes all the existing retail stores – Rite Aid and Ralph’s grocery store, as well as new stores such as a restaurant and shops on the corner of S Vermont Ave. and W 3rd St. The retail stores in the Wilshire Community Garden Center will attract an average of 5000 people per day, which requires ample parking space corresponding LA’s vehicular culture. Shops and restaurants attracts variety of people regardless to their background, and it act as a hub where people gather from different directions.

Gardening: Includes garden plots for community members to grow their own food, landscaping, and compost system on the site. gardening is an act of direct interaction with nature. People’s everyday urban city life is separated from nature, but creative activities such as growing food and flower would bring a realization of landscape and help to re-bond human and nature (Thwaites, 2000).

Living: A variety of housing arrangements will be included to promote a mutual understanding among wide range of residents. The final project will have a total of 200 units and accommodates about 420 residents.

All of these programs in the Wilshire Community Garden Center promote Informal debate and exchanging perspectives. It essential part of finding common ground and

community ties that help to establish sense of community and community culture (United States. Environmental Protection Agency. Office of Policy, 2002).

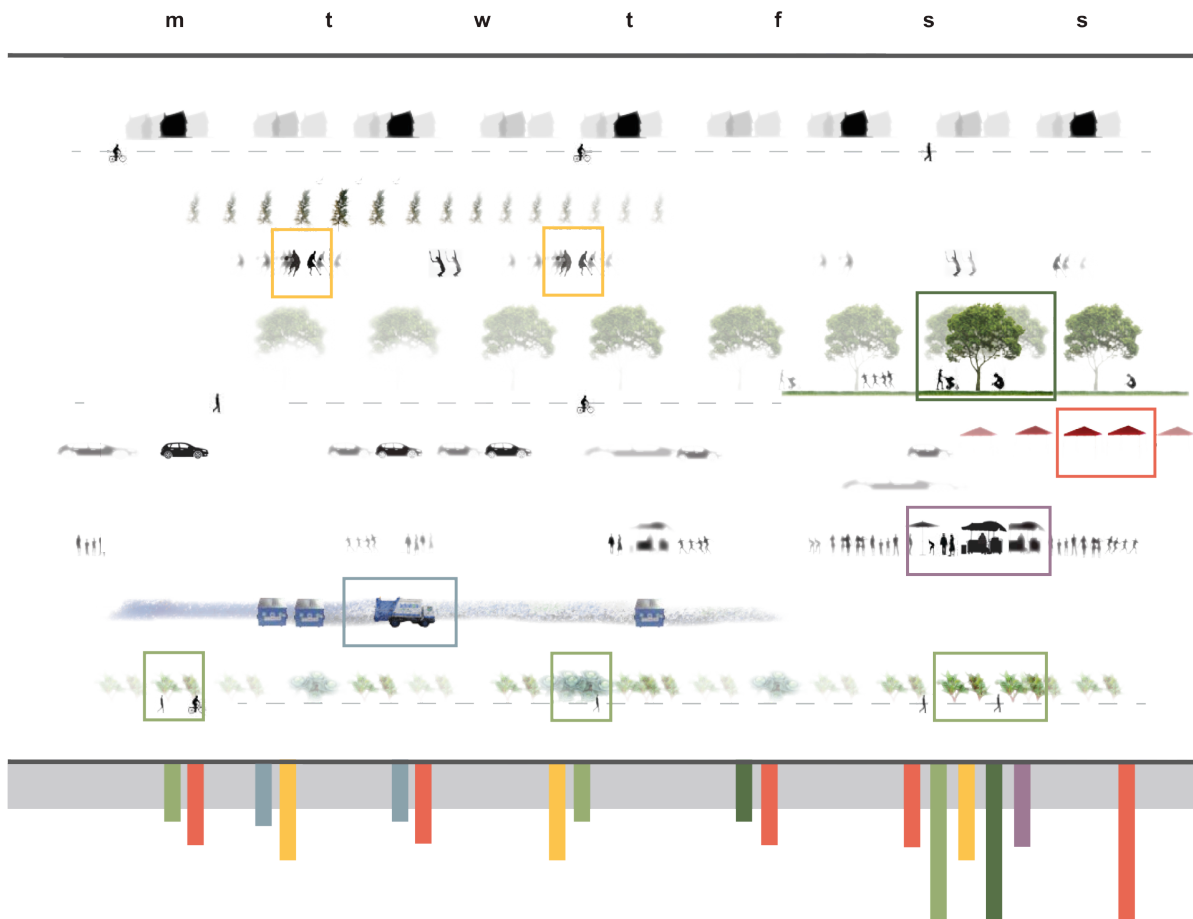


Figure 12. Diagram of Proposed Programs. (Author).

Program Space	Size (SF)	Occupant Load
Existing Retail	58,000	5,000 Customers per day
New Retail	12,000	500 Customers per day
Public Parking	60,000	200 Stalls
Existing Bowling Alley	35,000	500 Customers per day
Athletic Space	21,000	100 Visitors per day
Community Space	16,000	50 Visitors per day
Recycling Center	8,000	50 Visitors per day
Affordable Housing	320,000	420 Residents
Private Parking	80,000	250 Stalls
Community Garden	10,000	100 Plots
Compost	1,000	
Open Space	130,000	50 Visitors
Plaza	10,000	50 - 200 Visitors

Figure 13. Proposed Program List. (Author)

Design: Implementing the “Third Place”

The two main targeted goals

1. Social Life (Event space / Retail shop / Farmers Market / Housing Option)
Intensification of human interaction – High transparency/ Open plan layout
Activate human traffic – Human scale retails, Housing
Strengthen sense of community and membership –collaborative process
(Figure 14)
2. Environment (Community Garden / Recreation Space)
Reinforce sense of place – Local plants
Improve neighborhood appearance / livability / walkability – Green building,
Sustainable design – Maximum use of existing building structure
(Figure 15)



Figure 14. Community Information Board (Author).



Figure 15. View of Community Garden (Author).

APPENDIX

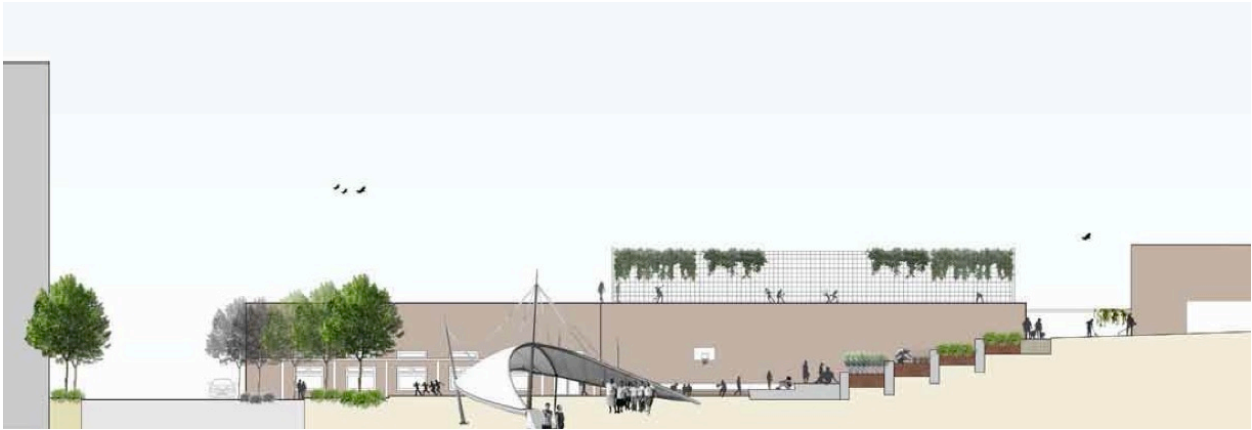


Figure 16. Wilshire Community Garden Center_Garden Section



Figure 17. Wilshire Community Garden Center_Residential Tower Section

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