

Architecture of Belonging:  
A Multicultural Sanctuary Center for South Park

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Abstract

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The South Park neighborhood in the city of Seattle is home to a rich and vibrant Latino and immigrant community. Yet the neighborhood lacks a multicultural center—a place where these residents can feel protected and safe—to support these groups.

This thesis argues that architecture can play a role in creating a sense of belonging and refuge for people seeking sanctuary. The design of a multicultural sanctuary center seeks to demonstrate how design can empower the Latino community of South Park. The project uplifts both the local residents and vulnerable groups by dedicating spaces to fit the needs of the community. The thesis embraces the inherent dichotomy of belonging wherein exclusive and inclusive ideas work together in the design of gathering and of protection.

In today's society where immigrant communities are under increasing threat, an architecture of belonging that fosters strength in community is critically important. The resulting project demonstrates that architecture of belonging is a physical experience and a social construct that can provide a place of refuge and safety and a voice for the marginalized in today's society.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude by recognizing a number of individuals who contributed to the making of this thesis and who have supported me in my educational trajectory.

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A special thanks to my family. Thank you for your patience, understanding, and endless support given throughout the duration of my studies. To my brother, Jonatan Barrera, thank you for always cheering me up. To my older brother, Luis Barrera, thank you for ensuring my technology needs were met throughout my studies. Words cannot express how grateful I am to my mother and father, Dr. Reyna Aguila and Luis Barrera, for all the sacrifices that you have made on my behalf. Mom, you are my foundation. Familia Barrera Aguila, los quiero mucho. !Sí se pudo!



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“At some point, architecture lost its mission to change society. It is largely because architecture has become a tool of capital. But I believe that, limited as it may be, architecture still has a power to propose something to society, or has some role to play in society. The expectation for such a potential is the primary motivation for me to design architecture.”

*Toyo Ito: Forces of Nature*



# PART ONE

## Introduction

*¿Donde está la gente? Seattle's Latinos, where are they?*

The city of Seattle is shaped by 106<sup>1</sup> distinctive neighborhoods with rich historical and cultural backgrounds that give rise to unique identities for their residents and tourists alike. These neighborhoods also reflect Seattle's history as a segregated city. Many minorities were prevented from living and working in certain areas due to discriminatory real estate practices where people of color were refused loans through redlining practices<sup>2</sup> and restrictive covenants on property deeds. These legal and economic restrictions created a concentration of minorities in certain districts over others.<sup>3</sup> This is particularly true of the Central District and Rainier Valley neighborhoods<sup>3</sup> where these practices made the neighborhoods culturally and ethnically diverse since these were the only neighborhoods people of color were allowed to reside in (*figure 1.1*).<sup>4</sup>

Since 1968, these discriminatory practices have ceased to exist in the legal sense. However, if one drives through Seattle, the legacy of these social barriers remain: the most ethnically diverse neighborhoods continue to thrive in the southern parts of the city. Beacon Hill and International District are characterized as being predominantly Asian neighborhoods; Rainier Valley and Central District are predominantly black neighborhoods (*figure 1.2*).<sup>5</sup> Minorities continue to reside in these areas either out of familiarity or as the lasting product of past segregation. Many individuals may choose to live in these neighborhoods due to social reasons like connection to family and friends, or economic reasons due to the lack of resources to move. The resulting neighborhoods have strong identities that at

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1 "Seattle City Clerk's Geographic Indexing Atlas," City of Seattle, 2018, accessed April 25, 2018, <http://clerk.ci.seattle.wa.us/~public/nmaps/neiglist.htm>.

2 "Seattle Segregation Maps," Seattle Civil Rights & Labor History, 2017, accessed April 25, 2018, [http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/segregation\\_maps.htm](http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/segregation_maps.htm).

3 "Redlining in Seattle," Seattle Municipal Archives, 2018, accessed April 25, 2018, <https://www.seattle.gov/cityarchives/exhibits-and-education/online-exhibits/redlining-in-seattle>.

4 Jamala Henderson, "Why Is Seattle so Racially Segregated?" *KUOW News and Information*, September 20, 2016, accessed April 2018, <https://kuow.org/stories/why-seattle-so-racially-segregated/>.

5 "Seattle Segregation Maps."

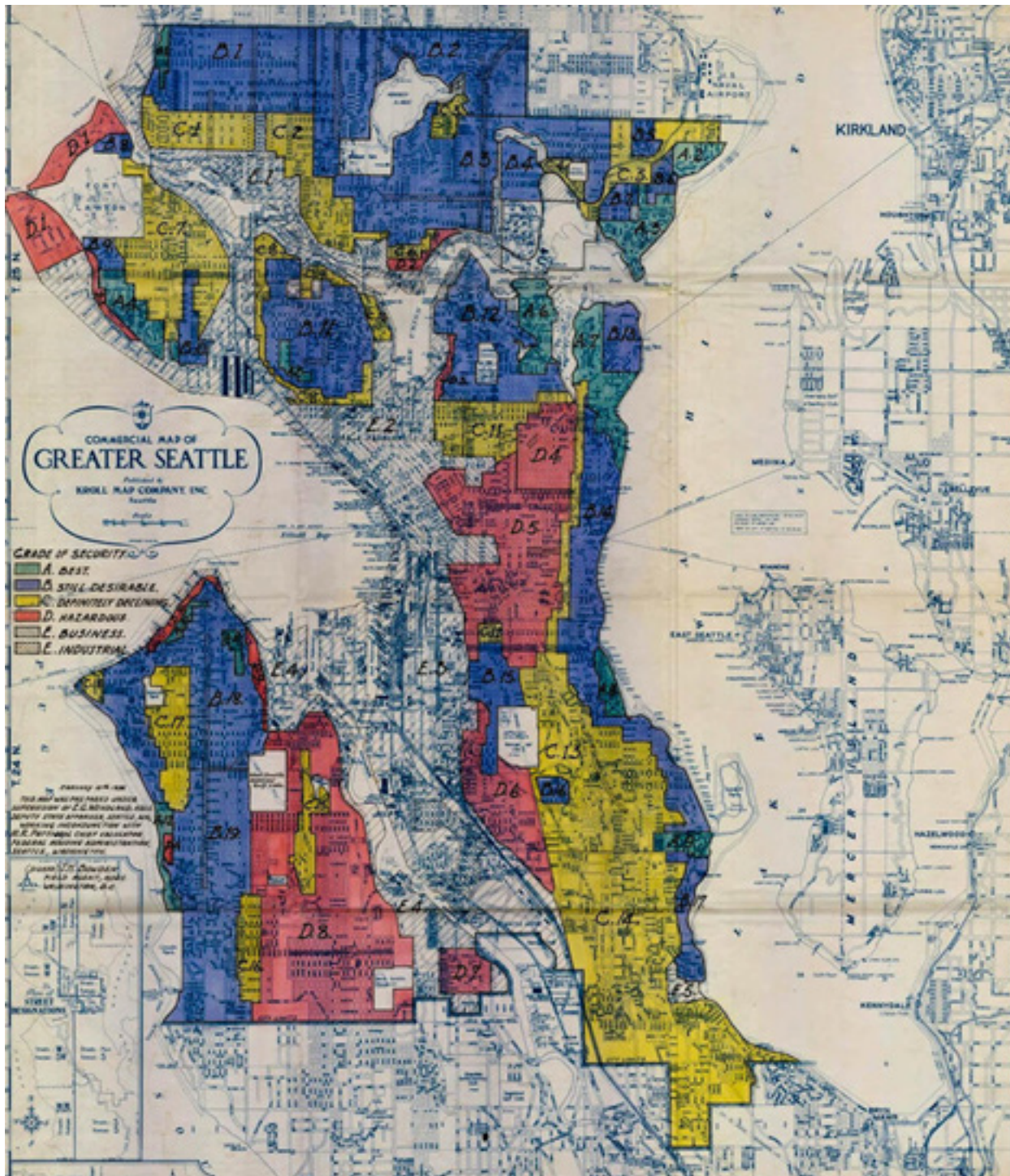


Figure 1.1 1936 Map used by banks to prevent residents of color from accessing loans to buy homes.  
 Source: KUOW News and Information

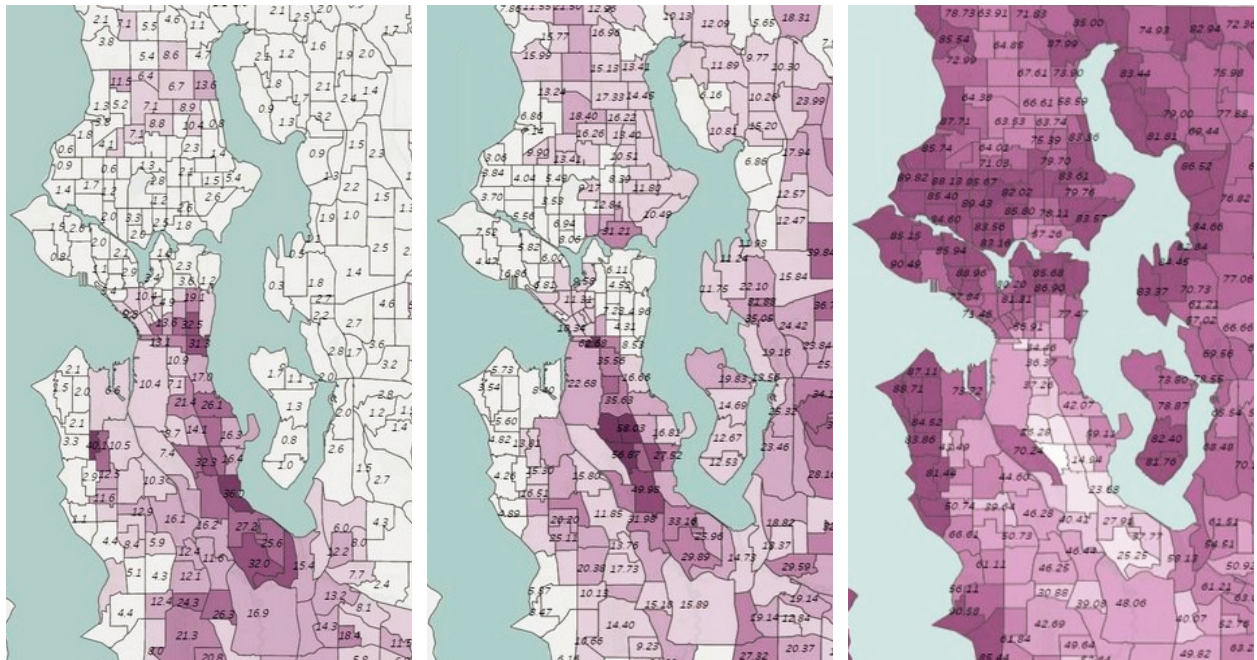


Figure 1.2 African American (left), Asian American and Pacific Islander (center), and Caucasian (right) Percent Population for 2010 by census tract. Dark areas mean higher percent population.  
Source: Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project

times have been witness to inequity at political, economic and planning levels. Regardless of the lack of official governmental support, many of these communities have continued to thrive as examples of authentic places that foster a sense of belonging for their residents.

In its physical form and social use, the built environment serves as a way to gauge a neighborhood's identity. From restaurants to corner stores to salons, buildings are often demarcated by signage and activities that are representative of distinctive countries, ethnicities and races. For example, Rainier Avenue illustrates the diversity of South Seattle: with the exception of the recently gentrified

Columbia City neighborhood, the businesses along Rainier showcase African, African American, Latino and Asian businesses. This concentration of communities might be in part due to past discriminatory practices which has made the areas more affordable and less attractive to high end developers. However, by maintaining services that residents can identify with, individuals have been able to continue to form connections with their communities.

The history of Latinos in Seattle is relatively scarce as this minority group has not been rooted to a specific geographic area. While there are no clearly defined historic Latino districts in Seattle, the Delridge, White Center, Burien,

and South Park neighborhoods are known for having services catering to this community.<sup>6</sup> The presence of Latino restaurants and corner groceries has helped many Latinos identify with these neighborhoods. However, South Park is currently the only neighborhood in Seattle where Latinos form a high percentage of the population.<sup>7</sup>

This strong presence of Latino residents and businesses has resulted in South Park being perceived as a predominantly Latino neighborhood even though it lacks a cultural center (*figure 1.3*). While the mark of this community is evident in the demographics and built fabric, identity and place formation go beyond demographic measures or the built environment. To feel a true sense of belonging, this community needs spaces that generate interaction between its residents while promoting a feeling of safety and refuge. Architecture can help to foster these kinds of connections that are often organic and cannot be prescribed.

Although this neighborhood has historically been neglected by city authorities and real

estate developers, the potential of South Park continues to grow as more businesses have taken interest in its affordable real estate.<sup>8</sup> But residents typically distrust any improvement projects in the neighborhood, even if they claim to serve the existing Latino population. This resistance is related not only to the real and perceived fear of gentrification, but also to the notion that outsiders do not understand the community and its needs.

As South Park attracts new interest, potential development raises the question of the role architects and planners should play in this type of neighborhood. While built improvements have the potential to be positive for marginalized communities, they can also serve as a catalyst for gentrification and displacement. The specific needs of ethnic groups must be understood by encouraging communities to be involved in the design process. Many recent developments in Seattle neighborhoods have lacked sensitivity and have threatened to push marginalized communities out. These speculative projects have the potential to destroy the rich vibrant character of the neighborhood that has made the

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6 "Overview of South Park, Seattle, Washington (Neighborhood)," Statistical Atlas, 2015, accessed April 25, 2018, <https://statisticalatlas.com/neighborhood/Washington/Seattle/South-Park/Overview>.

7 "Overview of South Park, Seattle, Washington (Neighborhood)."

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8 Sara Bernard, "The Changing City: On the Eve of Commercial Expansion, South Park Prepares," *Seattle Weekly*, September 6, 2017, accessed May 2018, <http://www.seattleweekly.com/news/on-the-eve-of-a-commercial-expansion-south-park-prepares/>.

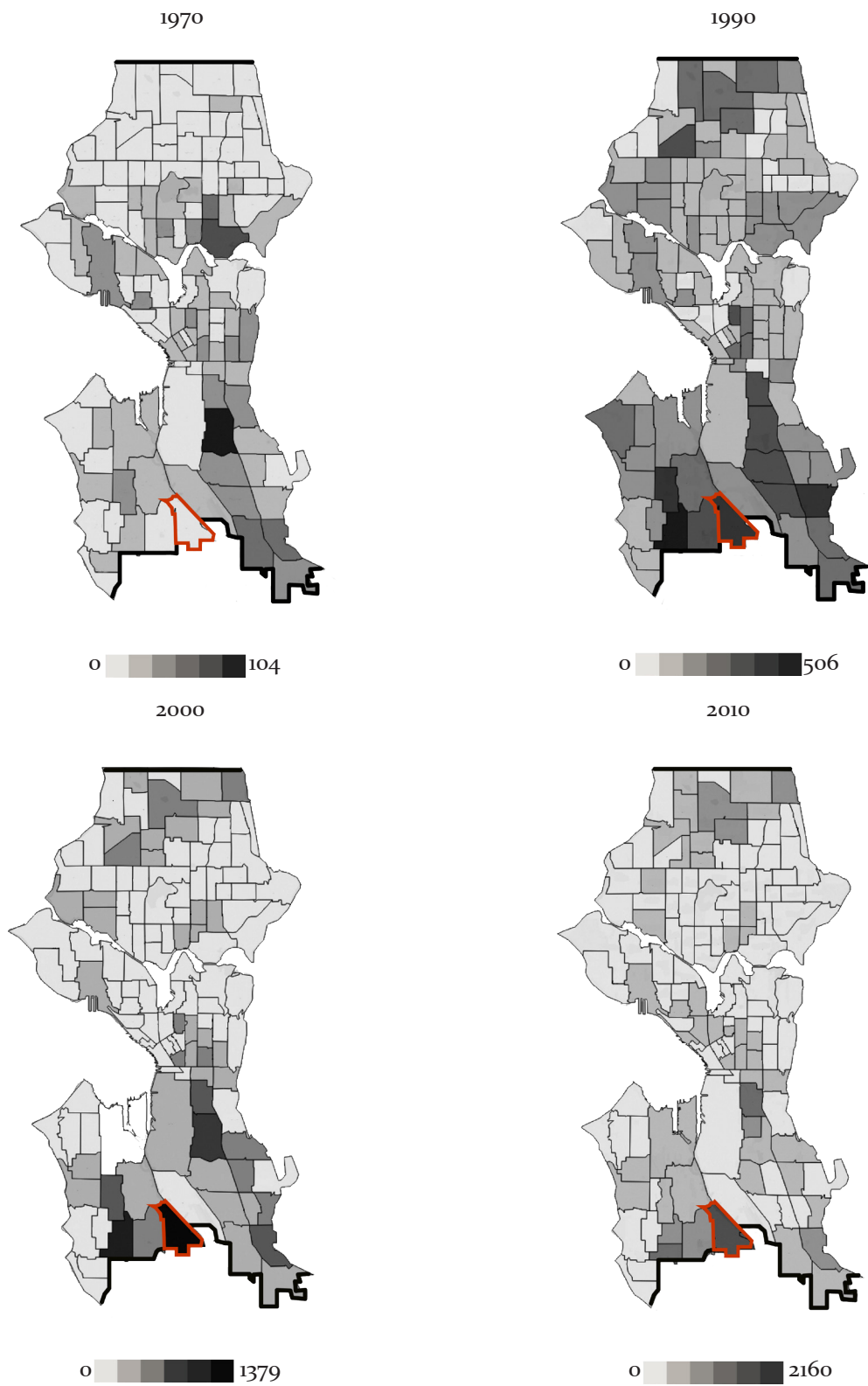


Figure 1.3

Latino tract populations through the years. South Park is highlighted in red. Total King County Latino population: 1970 - 3,282; 1990 - 44,266; 2000 - data unavailable; 2010 - 172,378

Source: Data and adapted maps from the Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project site.

area desirable in the first place. The necessity for community projects that encourage placemaking requires more than architectural knowledge to design spaces that emphasize belonging and a sense of identity.

Home to a vulnerable population that includes many immigrants, the neighborhood of South Park is diverse. This thesis will investigate the role architecture can play in a marginalized community to create a sense of belonging and refuge through the design of a sanctuary space and multicultural center. The research will focus on addressing the following issues:

- I. South Park's history as an underserved neighborhood and the current threat of gentrification and resulting loss of identity.
- II. The role of architecture in creating a sense of belonging and safety with a focus on sanctuary spaces for a vulnerable community.

The goal is to develop a better understanding of the role architecture can play in vulnerable, underrepresented communities like South Park that lack advocacy and are more vulnerable to decline. The design will promote multicultural interaction and, simultaneously, will provide refuge and support for those who need it. This sense of belonging can strengthen

communities through collaboration and formation of leadership—thus a center can serve as a community tool for self-advocacy and organization. For the purposes of this thesis, sanctuary is defined as: i. a place of refuge and safety; ii. a place where a person feels privacy and protection from danger; iii. a place that serves as marker for the presence of the marginalized.

The methodology for the thesis begins with the analysis of the history of South Park using demographic information and feedback from current South Park leaders and residents to gain a deeper understanding of the community. The literature review describes the current situation in South Park, including gentrification and the lack of a cultural center. The thesis then explores the relationship between architecture and belonging in order to understand the potential of a built intervention to reinforce the sense of community that exists but has been diminished by recent developments. The idea of sanctuary spaces plays a vital role in the development of this project in order to understand the nuances of refuge spaces for the vulnerable communities existing at South Park. As a result, the typology of refuge and safe spaces is studied in order to gain insight on architectural language used to reinforce the idea of belonging and sanctuary. The case studies of the Samuel E. Kelly Ethnic

Cultural Center and the Constitución Cultural (Endnotes)

Center will be referenced for insight on vital formal and programmatic components for community-oriented projects. Projects by Luis Barragán are used as precedents to study modern Latin American architecture.

South Park is home to a large population of immigrants that has historically been, and continue to be, a vulnerable population. Architecture can play an important role in creating a sense of belonging and refuge for making all people feel welcome and safe. Currently facilities for Latino residents are found outside the neighborhood, with El Centro de la Raza located in Beacon Hill and La CASA Latina in Central District. South Park has potential to be a district for Latino culture to flourish and for Latinos to be represented in the urban fabric of Seattle. The design of a cultural sanctuary center will promote multicultural interactions while serving as a sanctuary space for immigrants, empowering Latinos in South Park and the Seattle Latino community as a whole.

<sup>1</sup> According to the report “Redlining and Disinvestment in Central Seattle: How the Banks are Destroying our Neighborhoods”, redlining is defined as “the practice by banks and other lending institutions of refusing home loans or requiring higher interest rates and larger down payments to otherwise credit worthy people because they happen to live in a certain area.” These areas in Seattle happen to be in the Central Area and Rainier Valley. Maps were outlined green, blue, yellow and red to indicate descriptions of grades that the Federal Housing Administration gave to neighborhoods. Minorities were only allowed to rent and buy in neighborhoods outlined in red. Forcing them to live in these areas, minorities were segregated. Even if a family or individual could afford to buy outside these neighborhoods, banks and other societal systems did not allow them to. Families and individuals who chose to buy in the redlined areas were given mortgages with higher interests, regardless of their credit history.

Alexis C. Madrigal, “The Racist Housing Policy that Made Your Neighborhood,” *The Atlantic*, May 22, 2014, accessed May 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2014/05/the-racist-housing-policy-that-made-your-neighborhood/371439/>.



Seattle's Latino immigrant population lacks representation in the built fabric of the city as a whole, and particularly in the South Park neighborhood. Urban planners and architects need to be culturally competent in designing interventions for this marginalized group, which requires an understanding of the history of the community as a place. This chapter begins with an examination of the history of Latinos in South Park in order to understand the origins of the community that currently thrives there. The study of the existing typology of community spaces provides insight into ethnic cultural centers and safe spaces that encourage inclusion and empowerment of vulnerable communities. Subsequently, the literature review examines the link between architecture and belonging both as a physical experience and as a social construct.

The interconnections between these sections lead to a better understanding of the role of architecture in the formation of place and identity, expressed in the project proposal of an inclusive and safe cultural center for this marginalized community.

## Literature Review

### **LATINO COMMUNITIES: THE SOUTH PARK NEIGHBORHOOD**

#### *Latino History in Washington State and Seattle*

Spanish expeditions arrived in the Pacific Northwest in 1774, bringing the first people of Hispanic descent in the form of Mexican crew members.<sup>1</sup> Thus, Spain lay claim to the region two years before the United States signed the Declaration of Independence. Names like the Strait of Juan de Fuca, Port Angeles, and the San Juan Islands reflect the Spanish influence on the area. Spanish authority over the region dwindled in the late eighteenth century and ended with the signing of the Adams-

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<sup>1</sup> Gonzalo Guzman, "Latino History of Washington State," HistoryLink.org Online Encyclopedia of Washington State History, August 27, 2006, accessed May 2018, <http://historylink.org/File/7901>.

Onis Treaty with the United States in 1819.

Mexicans have continued to be the predominant Latino group residing in the region. They proved vital in the transportation system of the mining economy in the nineteenth century by serving as skilled mule packers.<sup>2</sup> Mexicans and other Latino groups were also essential to the agricultural development of Washington State: many Latinos immigrated to the United States in the twentieth century fleeing persecution and seeking a better life. Settling in Eastern Washington, they became farm workers who continue to play an important role in the agricultural production of the state to the present day.

Following World War II, some rural Latinos began moving to the Puget Sound area looking for employment opportunities in the post-war economy.<sup>3</sup> But very few minorities were recorded as living in the Seattle area by 1960 when the census reported a total of 254 Hispanics in King County. By 1970 this number had increased to 3,282—about .28% of the overall population.<sup>4</sup> These small numbers illustrate the level of

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Past Forward NW Cultural Services, *Seattle Latino Cultural Heritage Guide* (Seattle, WA: Visit Seattle, 2016), 2016, accessed May 2018, <http://www.visitseattle.org/things-to-do/arts-culture/cultural-heritage/latino/>.

<sup>4</sup> “Seattle/ King County: Mapping Race 1940-2010,” Seattle Civil Rights & Labor History, 2017, accessed April 25, 2018, [http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/maps\\_race\\_seattle.htm](http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/maps_race_seattle.htm).

isolation experienced by the Latino and Chicano community in Seattle at this time. Around the mid 1970s, Latinos and other minorities began moving into South Park as the neighborhood lost real estate value and became affordable for these communities (*figure 1.3*).

#### *Centers Providing Services to Latinos in Seattle*

The presence of the Latino community continued to grow in Seattle as evidenced by the rise of Chicano and Latino political activism. Protests for civil rights and strikes by farm workers in the 1960s and 70s brought about changes for Latinos. Many churches in Seattle actively participated in the Sanctuary Movement of the 1980s protecting immigrants and refugees.<sup>5</sup> The presence of two institutions in Seattle that focus on providing services to Latinos, CASA Latina and El Centro de la Raza, reflect these efforts of the past.

El Centro de la Raza, or “The Center for the People of All Races,” was established in 1972 by Latinos. It is located in Beacon Hill, next to Plaza Roberto Maestas and the Beacon Hill light rail station. The mission of the center is to be a home for “all people who are interested in continuing the struggle for a better world by serving, educating, defending and organizing

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<sup>5</sup> Past Forward NW Cultural Services, *Seattle Latino Cultural Heritage Guide*.

each other and our people to build [a] ‘beloved community.’”<sup>6</sup> Although its mission is to defend all marginalized populations, El Centro is first and foremost “a gathering place...for the largely invisible Latino community,”<sup>7</sup>empowering members to be “fully participating members of society” through their services and programs.<sup>8</sup>

CASA Latina is an immigrant worker rights organization that was founded in 1994 in the Central District. The “CASA” in CASA Latina stands for “Centro de Ayuda Solidaria a los Amigos” which translates into “Center for Help in Solidarity with Friends.” This organization was established to support the large numbers of Latino workers arriving in Seattle in 1994, its stated mission to empower “low-wage Latino immigrants to move from economic insecurity to economic prosperity and to lift their voices to take action around public policy issues that affect them.”<sup>9</sup> Since 2014, the resource center has been affiliated with Washington State Labor Council and the Martin Luther King County Labor Council.<sup>10</sup>

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6 “History & Evolution,” *El Centro de la Raza* (2017), <http://elcentrodelaraza.org/about-us>

7 Ibid.

8 “About Us,” El Centro De La Raza, 2017, accessed April 2018, <http://elcentrodelaraza.org/about-us>.

9 “About Casa Latina,” CASA Latina, 2012, accessed April 2018, <https://casa-latina.org/about-us>.

10 “CASA Latina Records, 1989-2015,” Archives West, 2018, accessed April 2018, <http://archiveswest.orbiscascade.org/ark:/80444/xv93518#overview>.

El Centro de la Raza and CASA Latina each focus, in some way, on the empowerment of the Latino community. These organizations focus on advocacy, on education and the building of leadership. Although located in diverse communities—Central District and Beacon Hill—they serve a transitory clientele since the majority of the Latino population does not live nearby. Neighborhoods where Latino presence is predominant, such as South Park and Burien, lack centers that offer the services offered at El Centro and CASA Latina.

### *History of South Park*

South Park holds the highest concentrated population of Latinos of all the neighborhoods in Seattle. The area has a young population, with 30% of the residents being under 18 years old, and a high percentage of non-citizen residents (21.6%) (*figure 2.1 and 2.2*).<sup>11</sup> South Park is considered to be a blighted neighborhood due to its crumbling infrastructure. The current status of the neighborhood reflects the history of neglect over time. But South Park’s history is one of economic growth as well as decline. The economic growth of this neighborhood has been

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11 “Overview of South Park, Seattle, Washington (Neighborhood),” Statistical Atlas, 2015, accessed April 25, 2018, <https://statisticalatlas.com/neighborhood/Washington/Seattle/South-Park/Overview>.

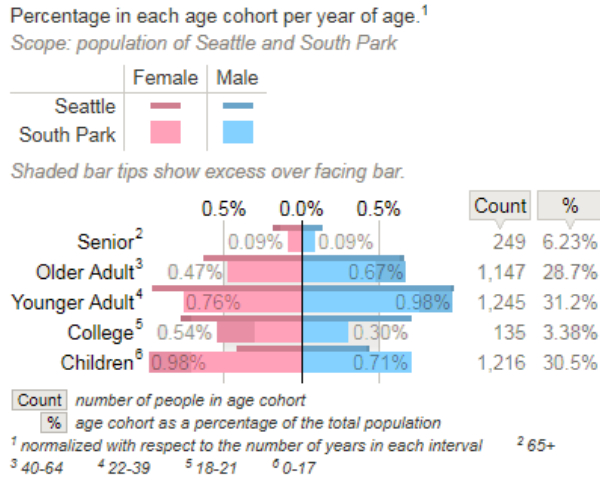


Figure 2.1  
Age and sex distribution in South Park compared to Seattle.  
Source: StatisticalAtlas.com

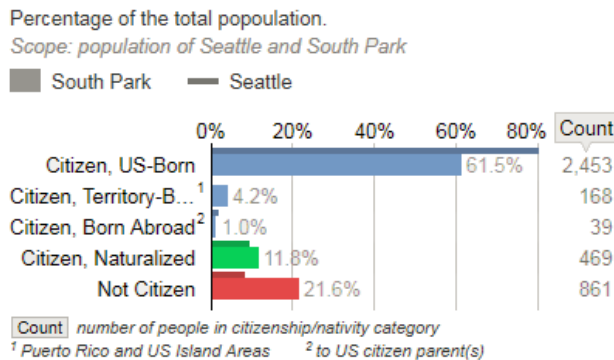


Figure 2.2  
Citizenship and national origin in South Park in comparison to Seattle.  
Source: StatisticalAtlas.com

South Park is situated to the west of the Duwamish River. It was home to the native Duwamish people until 1851, when white settlers made claim on the land.<sup>12</sup> These settlers cleared

the land and took advantage of the rich soil for farming. In 1889 South Park was platted as a town. A trolley line by the Grant Street Electric Railway crossed the Duwamish River “over a wooden drawbridge” connecting South Park to Seattle.<sup>13</sup> The annexation of South Park to Seattle in 1907 was driven by the need to access safe drinking water, sewage control and electrical utilities.<sup>14</sup> In the beginning of the twentieth century, Italian and Japanese immigrants moved to South Park and began farming the land. The produce from South Park was often transported to Seattle for sale at Pike Place Market.<sup>15</sup>

The neighborhood underwent dramatic changes with the rechanneling of the Duwamish River beginning in 1913 (figure 2.3). By 1920 the river was a “straight, deep channel that would accept ocean-going ships and barges,”<sup>16</sup> and its wetlands were filled to create “useful land.”<sup>17</sup> In 1936 Boeing Airplane Company settled near the area and began building and testing airplanes.<sup>18</sup> During World War II, Boeing attracted thousands

South Park is situated to the west of the Duwamish River. It was home to the native Duwamish people until 1851, when white settlers made claim on the land.<sup>12</sup> These settlers cleared

12 David Wilma, “Seattle Neighborhoods: South Park,” HistoryLink.org Online Encyclopedia of Washington State History, February 16, 2001, accessed May 2018, <http://historylink.org/File/2985>.

13 Ibid.

14 “South Park,” Seattle Municipal Archives, 2018, accessed May 2018, <https://www.seattle.gov/cityarchives/exhibits-and-education/online-exhibits/annexed-cities/south-park>.

15 Wilma, “Seattle Neighborhoods: South Park.”

16 Ibid.

17 Seattle Parks Foundation, *South Park Green Space Vision Plan* (Seattle, WA: Seattle Parks Foundation, 2014), 3-6.

18 Ibid.

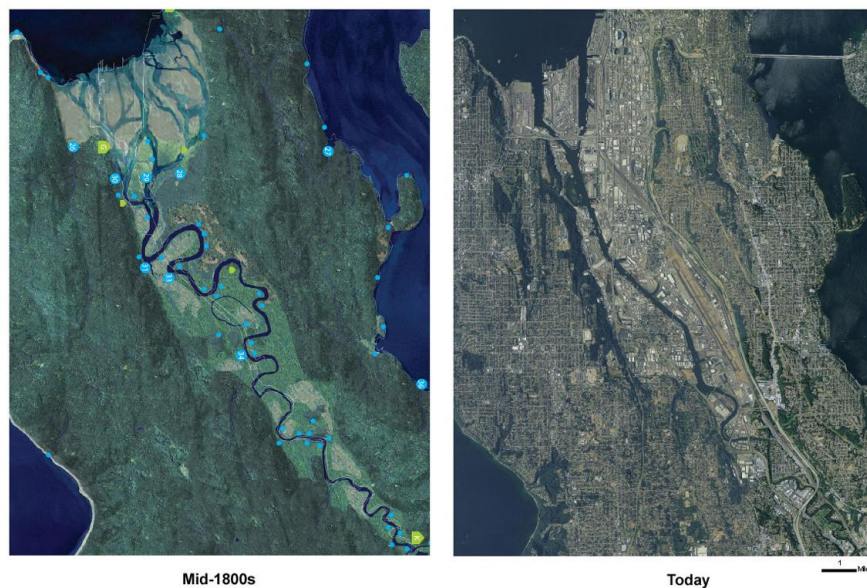


Figure 2.3 South Seattle in the mid-1800s and today. The Duwamish River has been straightened.  
Source: The Waterlines Project

of workers to the area, creating a shortage in housing.<sup>19</sup> Industry began to overtake the area, supplanting the fertile land for farming. In 1956 the Seattle city council rezoned the area as “transition to industrial;” and in the mid 1960s it was rezoned as “industrial.” After protests by residents, the zoning was changed to “low-density residential.”<sup>20</sup> Around the same time, Highway 99 was rerouted through South Park, effectively dividing and isolating the neighborhood.<sup>21</sup> Latino immigrants began to move into South Park in the 1970s as neighborhood properties deteriorated and lost value.

<sup>19</sup> Wilma, “Seattle Neighborhoods: South Park.”

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Seattle Parks Foundation, *South Park Green Space Vision Plan*.

### *South Park Today*

Present day South Park faces many challenges as result of past government policies. Yet the Duwamish River continues to have a strong presence in the identity of the neighborhood. While essential to the industrial growth of South Park, the river has been polluted by industrial byproducts. As a Superfund site it poses a threat to the health of the residents. Studies show that people living in neighborhoods along the Duwamish River, like South Park, have shorter expected life spans of 73.3 years compared to the King County average of 81.5 years. Life expectancy for Laurelhurst, a more affluent community, is 86.4 years—13 years more than South Park

residents.<sup>22</sup> But the Duwamish River is not the sole contributor to the unhealthy conditions of South Park; its proximity to Boeing field, Highway 99 and SR-509 means residents are exposed to noise and air pollution and dangerous toxins from runoffs.

South Park has been declining since the twentieth century as industries settled in the region as evidenced in the rise in crime in the neighborhood. But its designation as a Residential Urban Village in 2015 shows that the city recognizes its potential (*figure 2.7*). Underrepresented communities that often lack economic resources, reside in South Park out of necessity. The predominance of industrial zoning and high criminal activity has depreciated property values and rent prices but enabled vulnerable people to settle here. As the only neighborhood that is affordable to them, many different groups have made South Park their home.

In addition to the large Hispanic population of 42.3%, the neighborhood is also home to a moderate sized Asian population of 12% according to 2015 data.<sup>23</sup> Current projections place the Hispanic population at 38.44%

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22 Linn Gould and BJ Cummings, *Duwamish Valley Health Impacts Analysis* (Seattle, WA: Just Healthy Action and Duwamish River Cleanup Coalition/Technical Advisory Group, 2013), 38.

23 “Overview of South Park, Seattle, Washington (Neighborhood),” Statistical Atlas.

reflecting slow displacement due to gentrification (*figure 2.6*).<sup>24</sup> While the distribution of race and ethnicities in South Park reflects the diversity of the neighborhood, the statistics on the national origins of residents shows that a large portion falls under the non-citizen category (21.6%). This wide category can include permanent residents, refugees and undocumented individuals. While the majority of the foreign-born population in South Park is made up of Mexicans (60.4%), Vietnamese (15.2%) and Cambodian (7%) groups are also present (*figure 2.4*).<sup>25</sup> These statistics attest to the current diversity in South Park but also poignantly reveals the vulnerability of the immigrant population.

This vulnerability is amplified by statistics that show South Park has a high population of children compared to other neighborhoods with majority of the youth being of Hispanic descent. Alarming 28.5% of the neighborhood population over twenty-five years and older lacks a high school diploma—that percentage includes more than half of the Hispanic population (*figure 2.5*). This disparity in educational opportunities illustrates the need for a center where youth programs can work to improve graduation rates

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24 “King County and Seattle Population Statistics,” SimplyAnalytics, 2018, accessed October 2018, <https://simplyanalytics.com/>.

25 “Overview of South Park, Seattle, Washington (Neighborhood),” Statistical Atlas.

and even lower crime rates through community involvement. The proposed multicultural center can also provide opportunities for adults to expand their educational background and form closer ties to the neighborhood.

South Park’s current infrastructure, including parks and community center, are deteriorating and underused. A survey led by the Seattle Parks Foundation in 2014 revealed that majority of the South Park residents want improvements to the community center, playgrounds and parks including better lighting and infrastructure, and more community programs and events.<sup>26</sup> Some local efforts to improve South Park are visible in the built fabric today, especially on 14<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Nevertheless, these improvements may be too late as the neighborhood faces increasing gentrification; the current population may not be able to enjoy future improvements as they experience displacement. In the past five years South Park’s median home price has tripled and rents have jumped 60 percent, resulting in business owners and residents alike being priced out of the area.<sup>27</sup> However, some individuals

<sup>26</sup> Seattle Parks Foundation, *South Park Green Space Vision Plan*.

<sup>27</sup> Sara Bernard, “The Changing City: On the Eve of Commercial Expansion, South Park Prepares,” *Seattle Weekly*, September 6, 2017, accessed April 25, 2018, <http://www.seattleweekly.com/news/on-the-eve-of-a-commercial-expansion-south-park-prepares/>.

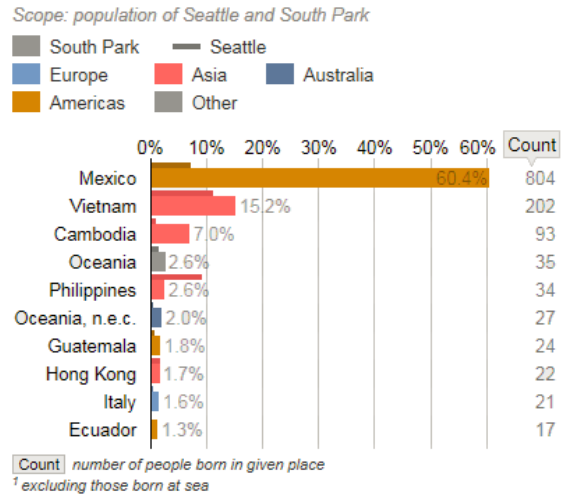


Figure 2.4  
Percent of foreign-born population in Seattle and South Park.

Source: StatisticalAtlas.com

Highest level of education among people aged 25 years and older.

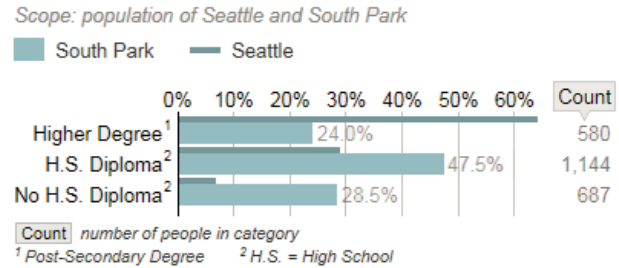


Figure 2.5  
Highest level of education attained among people 25 years and older.

Source: StatisticalAtlas.com

and groups like the South Park Neighborhood Association (SPNA) are fighting to prevent displacement of the current community.

In 2012 the Neighborhood Association identified action items that included youth development, community engagement and public safety, and improvements to “the appearance and image

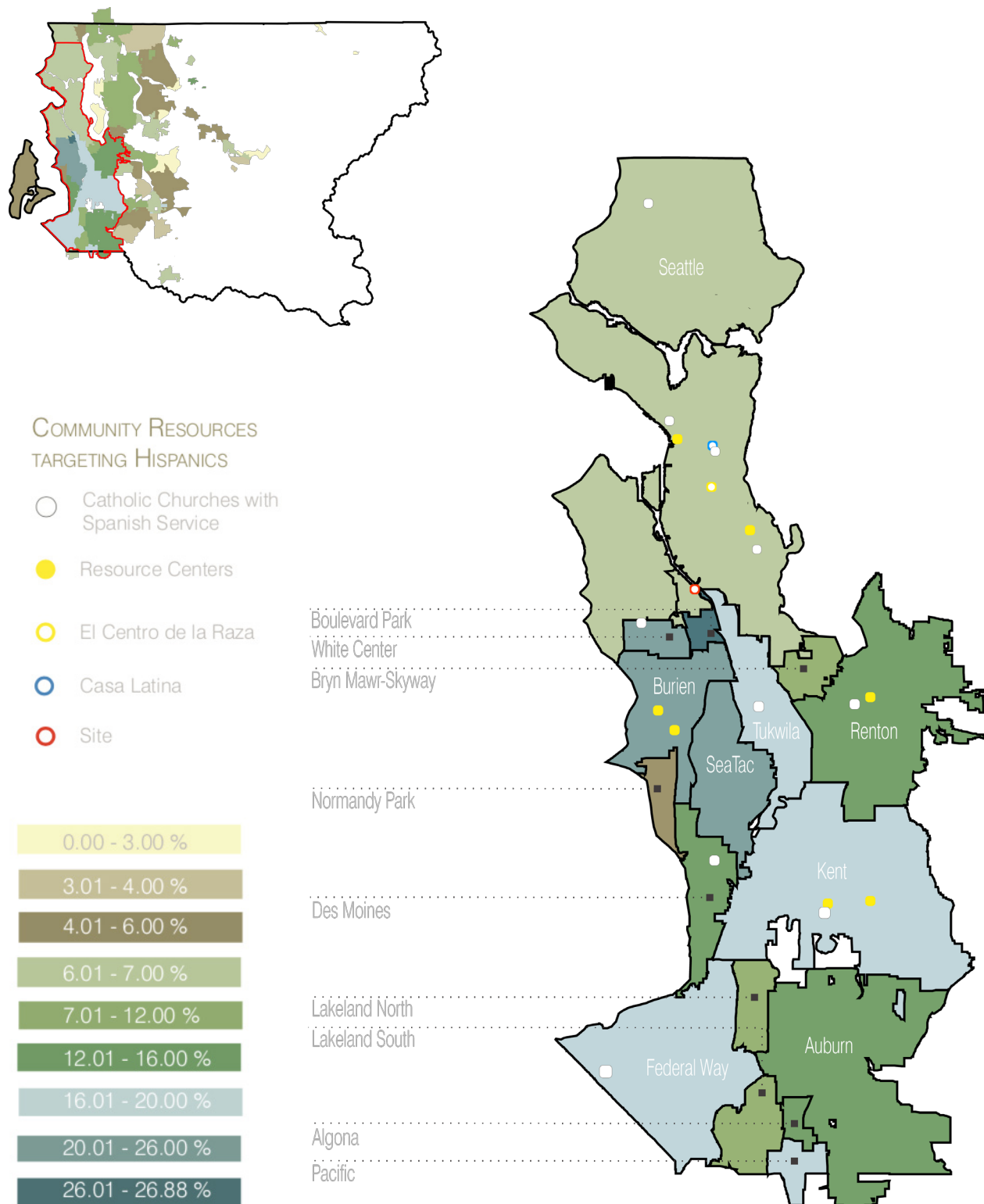


Figure 2.6 a. Hispanic percent population per south King County city. Map displays community resources that target the Hispanic community. There are about 47,863 people who identify as Hispanic in Seattle. Source: Map by Stefanie Barrera Aguila with data from SimplyAnalytics.

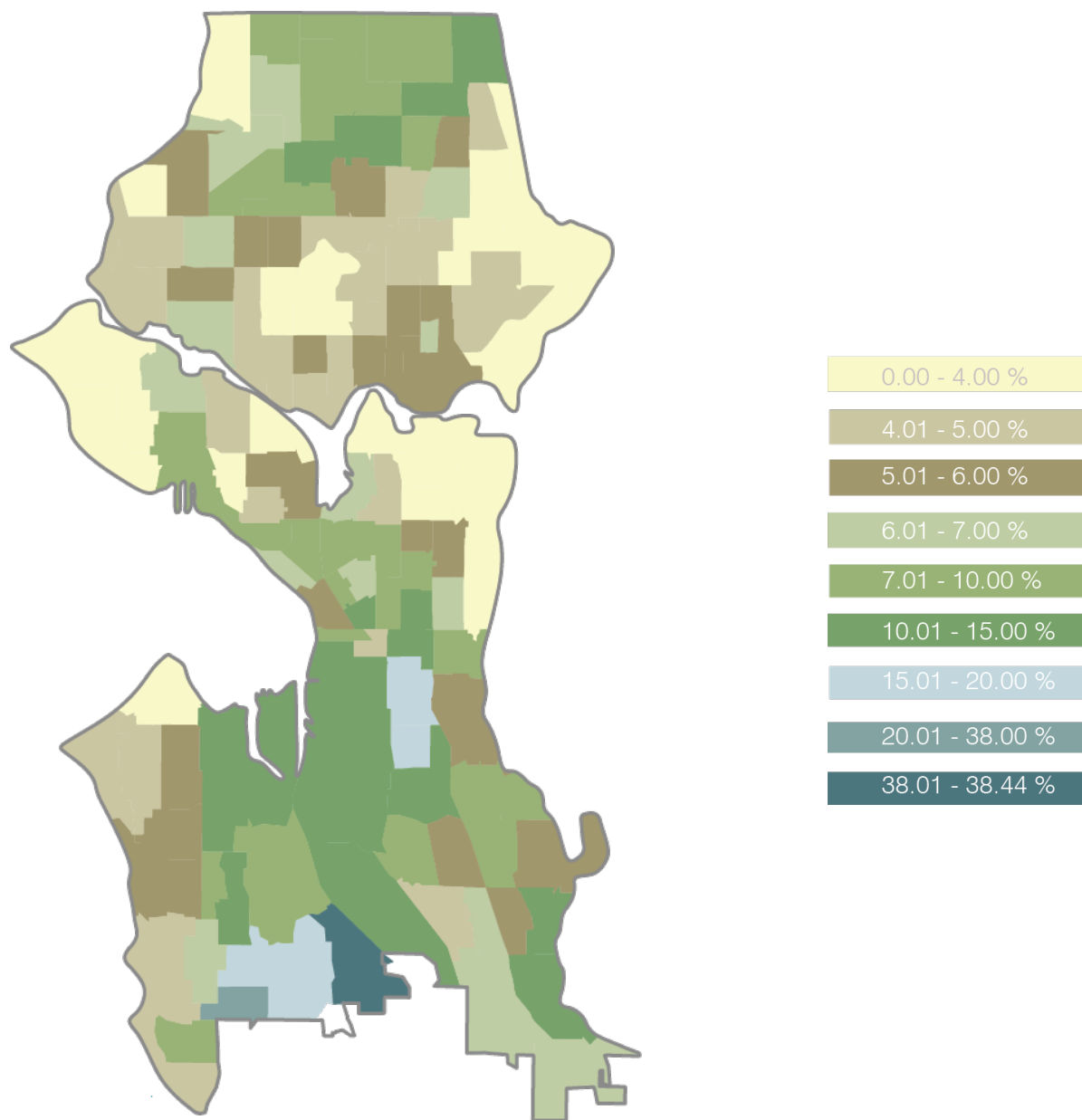


Figure 2.6 b. Hispanic percent population per census tract in Seattle. There are about 1,683 people (38.44% of the South Park neighborhood) who identify as Hispanic in South Park. Source: Map by Stefanie Barrera Aguila with data from SimplyAnalytics.



of South Park.”<sup>28</sup> This thesis recognizes that the character of the built infrastructure of the neighborhood is critical to its revitalization. In order for the community to thrive, it is of utmost importance that South Park have its own cultural center where adults, youth and seniors can gather to participate in meetings and programs and forge a sense of belonging.

### **ARCHITECTURE OF BELONGING**

Architecture can be a powerful tool for underserved communities because built projects have the potential not just to house social programs that empower them but also to represent their strength to the outside world. Too often neighborhoods like South Park lack the funds to improve existing infrastructure, let alone build new projects. But this thesis argues that it is critical for underserved disadvantaged groups to have a voice in the development of their built environment so that their identity of the community is reflected in the built fabric of the neighborhood. Finding themselves to be overlooked and excluded from the everyday spaces of the city, minorities seek for a sense of belonging. “Belonging” here is defined as the feeling of acceptance and attachment resulting

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28 “Current Action Items,” All About South Park, 2012, accessed April 2018, <http://allaboutsouthpark.com/envision/current-action-items/>.

from a shared cultural or experiential identity.<sup>29</sup>

The question of identity in architecture is a complicated topic in which discussion often tends to focus on the visual appearance of the built, physical form. But it is imperative to acknowledge the sociological and psychological attributes of architecture to understand how people make sense of place and how they identify with it. Architect and theorist, Neil Leach, theorizes on the topic of architecture and identity. He states:

Culture is constituted not by a system of objects alone, but by a discourse that imbues these objects with meaning. Cultural identity, therefore, emerges as a complex field of operations that engages with — but is not defined by — cultural artifacts such as architecture.<sup>30</sup>

In other words, architecture not only gives shape to meaningful spaces but also serves as a blank canvas for meaning to be developed. Leach furthers this argument by touching on Pierre Bourdieu’s ideas on architecture and culture noting:

[Architecture] can be understood as a type of ‘objectivated cultural capital.’ Its value lies dormant and in permanent

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29 Karyn Hall, Ph.D., “Create a Sense of Belonging,” *Psychology Today*, March 24, 2014, accessed April 20, 2018, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/pieces-mind/201403/create-sense-belonging>.

30 Neil Leach, “Belonging,” *AA Files*, 49, Spring 2003, 1, <https://neilleach.wordpress.com/publications/articles/>.

potential, but it has to be reactivated by social practices which will, as it were, 'revive' it. In this respect, architecture belongs to the same category as other cultural objects... Just as words can be understood by the manner in which they are used, so buildings can be grasped by the manner in which they are perceived — by the narratives of use in which they are inscribed.<sup>31</sup>

The argument thus is that the experience of architectural space is very much dependent on the way it is activated through use, perception and association.

Expanding on the topic of identity in architecture, Leach draws from theories in gender politics. He presents the idea that, if identity is performed like a "film script," then the space (architecture) where performance has taken place is the "film set." He further argues that numerous performances in the "film set" renders the space non-neutral because "it derives its meaning from the activities that have taken place there. Memories of associated activities haunt physical space like a ghost."<sup>32</sup> Spaces therefore gain meaning through the practices that take place there; so that meaning cannot be prescribed or designed. Leach observes that this explains why the simple inclusion of art from a particular community is not enough to create meaning in a place. Art can

represent an event at a given time, but space is dynamic, generating meaning and character through the different activities it supports.<sup>33</sup> The meaning of architectural space is thus reliant on the ephemeral—the creation of memories that go beyond the physical characteristics of the built environment. Cultural identity in architecture goes beyond the built form.

An architecture of belonging requires that its user identify with the space. However, Leach makes it clear that while architecture can give shape to the built environments, it cannot prescribe meaning. Meaning is a social construct reinforced by actions, spatial practices and the formation of memories. Leach explains:

Repetition of certain spatial practices amounts to a kind of overcoming the alienation of abstract space, and a means of inscribing the self in the environment. Repetition leads to a normalisation and consequent familiarisation. When acted out within a particular context it may lead to an associative sense of belonging that effectively materializes this process of identification.<sup>34</sup>

It is in the repetition of these human activities, that a sense of connection can be formed with one's surroundings.

But although "belonging" may appear to be inclusive at first glance, it is essential to

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31 Ibid., 2.

32 Ibid., 7-8.

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33 Ibid., 8.

34 Ibid., 10.

acknowledge the irony that for inclusivity to exist, exclusion must as well. Leach observes that “belonging” implies alienation from others in order to feel a sense of shared experiences. The dynamic interplay between these opposing concepts offers potential for in-depth exploration of how these concepts can manifest in the built form of an architecture of belonging.

### *Safe Architecture—Sanctuary Spaces*

Sanctuary spaces similarly embody inclusivity and exclusivity but at the more intimate scale of protecting individuals seeking refuge. To protect vulnerable groups, spaces must carefully separate the public realm from the private realm. The design of a multicultural center provides a possible typology that illustrates an architecture of belonging through the creation of a sanctuary space for the underserved populations existing in South Park. It is necessary to first demonstrate the relevance of the sanctuary concept to the project’s target population by briefly reviewing the history of Sanctuary Movements within the United States.

The Sanctuary Movement began in 1980 as result of an increase in the flow of Salvadoran refugees fleeing the Salvadoran Civil War. Many of the refugees asked for asylum from the United States, yet many were turned away due

to harsh immigration policies targeting Central Americans.<sup>35</sup> However in some cities, like Seattle, church congregations and individuals stepped in to offer shelter and food to asylum seekers, often hiding refugees in church basements and safehouses.<sup>36</sup> The movement was effective in protecting a vulnerable population that would have otherwise been deported back to El Salvador to face certain death. The current political climate today has unleashed a new sanctuary movement. Many mosques, churches, synagogues and temples have stepped up to provide sanctuary to those who are in need. Colleges and cities have also declared themselves sanctuaries. It is important to note that while these spaces may be labeled “sanctuary” by well-meaning groups, this status is not recognized by the federal government and has no legal meaning in the United States. The label “sanctuary” is simply a title, a symbolic gesture.

The problem with “sanctuary” in the architecture profession is that it is often recognized as an architectural space, but its definition is often vague. Undoubtedly, places of worship have stood as sanctuaries since ancient times. However, these buildings reflect the typology of

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35 Sophie Pirie, “The Origins of a Political Trial: The Sanctuary Movement and Political Justice,” *Yale Journal of Law and the Humanities*, 1990, 382.

36 *Ibid.*, 382.



Figure 2.8 Sanctuary seeker inside Umstead Park United Church of Christ. Architecture can explore ways to improve this user’s experience during stressful times.  
Source: Religious News Service photo, Yonat Shimron, USA Today.

their respective religion and, while they may have offered to protect vulnerable groups through history, they have done so in existing spaces designated for other purposes (*figure 2.8*). There is no obvious precedent of sanctuary typology that defines the physical characteristics of such a space. The notion of a “sanctuary,” beyond being a humane movement remains, for the most part, symbolic in nature.

While the idea of a sanctuary space may be symbolic, people continue to seek refuge in places of worship, schools and healthcare facilities. These types of buildings are considered to be “sensitive locations” by the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).<sup>37</sup>

<sup>37</sup> “FAQ on Sensitive Locations and Courthouse Arrests,” U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 2018, accessed May 2018, <https://www.ice.gov/ero/enforcement/sensitive-loc>.

According to the Department of Homeland Security this means enforcement actions by ICE cannot “occur or be focused on sensitive locations...to ensure that people seeking to participate in activities or utilize services provided at any service location are free to do so, without fear or hesitation.”<sup>38</sup> The key point is the recognition of the sanctity of these spaces by the Department of Homeland Security even though they have the legal right to enter any building with a warrant (*figure 2.9*).<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Concerning South Park, it is important to note that, while the neighborhood currently has a community and a neighborhood center, neither center is considered a sensitive location: the existing centers are open to the public—anyone can walk into these spaces. Moreover, these spaces are funded and generally controlled by a governmental authority that often deters immigrants from using them. Neither of these buildings provide sanctuary spaces that welcome, yet protect, individuals and families seeking refuge.



Churches



Schools



Health Facilities



Retail Stores



Factories



Warehouses

Figure 2.9  
Immigration raids: sensitive locations. Retail stores, factories and warehouses are common targets for ICE raids.  
Source: Stefanie Barrera Aguila

South Park, home to Latinos and immigrants, lacks a multicultural center that can embody this elusive idea of sanctuary in a visible way. This may be made manifest in the acts of workers within the building knowing the rights of immigrants and refusing to let ICE into the premises without a warrant. But also in offering refuge to people threatened for other reasons— domestic violence victims or families and individuals in need of emergency housing. A multicultural center providing resources and services directed towards the Latino community but managed by non-profits, preferably by local leaders, could be a much-needed addition to the neighborhood: a project by the community and for the community.

## Precedent Analysis

The Samuel E. Kelly Ethnic Cultural Center, the Habitat for Orphan Girls and the Constitución Cultural Center, are three precedents that address the idea of architecture of belonging through the design of safe spaces.

### *The Samuel E. Kelly Ethnic Cultural Center*

Designed by Rolluda Architects, the Samuel E. Kelly Ethnic Cultural Center was built in 2013 on the University of Washington campus. As part of the Office of Minority Affairs & Diversity at the university, the center provides numerous resources for minority students including safe spaces for students to meet.<sup>40</sup> While the building is relatively new, the Ethnic Cultural Center (ECC) has existed since 1972; by 2001 the ECC was termed “a home away from home” by many students of color (*figure 2.10*).<sup>41</sup>

The process of designing the new building involved the ECC community, with many student leaders contributing to the development of the design. The building contains administrative offices, conference rooms, community rooms,

<sup>40</sup> “Samuel E. Kelly Ethnic Cultural Center,” University of Washington, 2018, accessed April 2018, <http://depts.washington.edu/ecc/>.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

a performing arts studio, open and closed gathering spaces, and a wellness room. There are also rooms dedicated to each of the races and groups embodied in the student body such as: the Leadership without Borders, Asian, Black, Chicano, Native, and Pacific Islander rooms. The layout of the program encourages community interaction by placing the main stairs in the middle of the building so that users have to walk by each other to access their spaces. The lower floor is designed to allow for after-hour events to take place—when the top two floors are inaccessible to outside visitors. Additionally, the inclusion of a performing arts studio on the lower level was a priority in the design to give space for students to celebrate their culture. This building expresses the idea of diversity also in the reuse of some of the materials from the previous ECC building, including twenty-two historic murals,<sup>42</sup> which held sentimental meaning for University of Washington students.

In 2016 and 2017, the center placed signs on the front doors stating the building's status as a sanctuary space for University of Washington students. The ECC is currently working to update these, and other, signs. An interview with Magdalena Fonseca, Interim Director for the ECC, confirmed that these signs were effective

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42 Ibid.

in creating a sense of safety for undocumented students. Fonseca pointed out that the ECC's goal is for students to be their true selves in the space, the only space on campus where minority students are the majority.<sup>43</sup> In its location within the University of Washington campus, this project already exists within an exclusive community. The existence of the ECC creates a further sense of protection within an already protected space thus creating a stronger sense of sanctuary.

#### *Habitat for Orphan Girls*

The Habitat for Orphan Girls was designed by ZAV Architects in Khansar, Iran. Built in 2014, this project is home to orphan Muslim girls between seven and sixteen years old.<sup>44</sup> The building is an example of introverted architecture wherein an interior courtyard space is protected by roof overhangs and every child gains a sense of privacy.<sup>45</sup> Simultaneously, this project empowers building occupants by providing shared public spaces and using moveable materials in the form of balcony 'Hijabs' for the girls to change their environments as they choose.

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43 Magdalena Fonseca, "The Ethnic Cultural Center," interview by author, May 2, 2018.

44 India Block, "ZAV Architects Completes Home with Veiled Balconies for Orphaned Iranian Girls," Dezeen, August 16, 2018, accessed October 2018, <https://www.dezeen.com/2018/08/16/zav-architects-habitat-orphan-girls-khansar-iran-architecture/>.

45 Ibid.

The first floor of this project holds large programmatic spaces including a computer lab, a creation area, a kitchen and a dining space.

The second and third floor hold individualized living spaces, as well as small areas for groups to congregate. Restrooms, showers and kitchenettes are planned separate from the rooms. The fourth floor houses a library.<sup>46</sup>

This project looks inward to protect vulnerable children. It balances exclusion and inclusion ideas and provides space for social well-being. The Habitat for Orphan Girls is representative of a dwelling typology that provides security and a sense of belonging to the inhabitants through ownership and the creation of personal space.

### *Constitución Cultural Center*

Designed by ELEMENTAL, a firm founded by Alejandro Aravena, the Constitución Cultural Center was built in 2015 in Constitución, Chile. The project is part of the Sustainable Reconstruction Plan for the city of Constitución after the 2010 Chilean earthquake and tsunami.<sup>47</sup>

The project is simple in form and layout, and

yet gives flexibility and freedom of use to the community to express themselves within the space.

To enter the building, users have to walk through large wooden piers which provide a sense of protection to an otherwise exposed storefront. A double height space welcomes the user with spaces for gathering. A single staircase leads to a spine-like corridor containing a small conference room, and office space.

This building is representative of a project built quickly to restore a sense of identity to the town of Constitución after a disaster. The layout helps control the movements of the user but simultaneously allows for various experiences. The large wooden piers give the impression of solidity; the large double height space is open and welcoming; the single staircase to the back program excludes and gives privacy. This project uses layering both horizontally and vertically to set up a dialogue between inclusivity and exclusivity.

## **Conclusion**

Through its history and to the present day, the neighborhood of South Park has been home to a vulnerable population. Even though the neighborhood has the highest concentration of

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<sup>46</sup> "Habitat for Orphan Girls / ZAV Architects," ArchDaily, January 25, 2018, accessed October 2018, <https://www.archdaily.com/887653/habitat-for-orphan-girls-zav-architects/> ISSN 0719-8884.

<sup>47</sup> Elemental, "Centro Cultural De Constitución," Elemental, 2018, accessed October 2018, <http://www.elementalchile.cl/projects/centro-cultural-de-constitucion/>.

Latinos, it lacks a multicultural center where the community can come together to collaborate and advocate. The thesis proposes the design of a multicultural center in South Park as an expression of an architecture of belonging with a focus on sanctuary for a vulnerable population. In the aim of strengthening the identity of the South Park community, architecture will act as a stage, where meaning is dependent on the activities associated with the space. Simultaneously, the building will enable this marginalized population to inscribe themselves in their environment by overcoming alienation and making their presence known. Balancing the dichotomy of inclusivity and exclusivity, the facility will provide spaces of sanctuary and gathering. The proposed design seeks to show how an architecture of belonging can empower the South Park Latino community in Seattle.

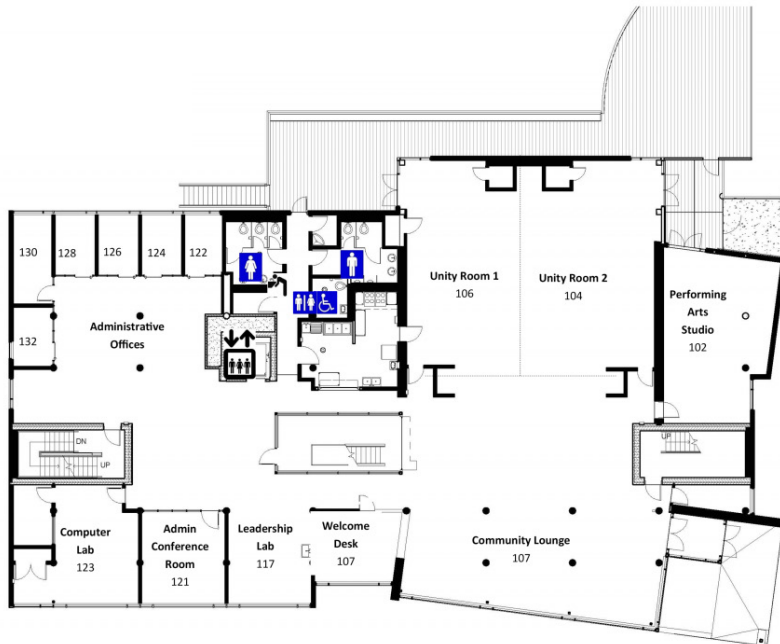
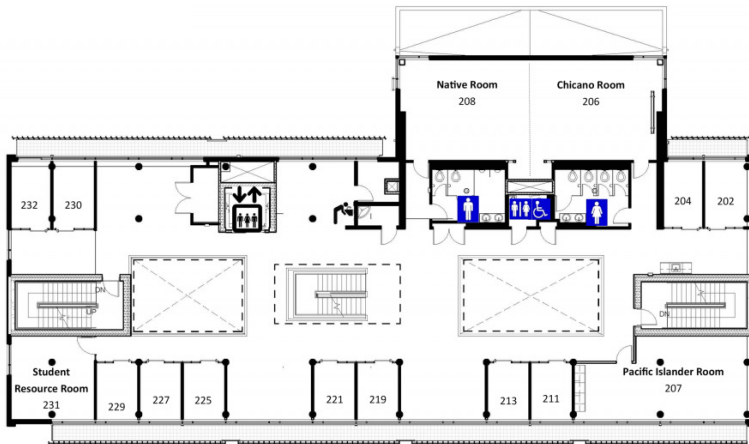


Figure 2.10

The Samuel E. Kelly Ethnic Cultural Center. Plans 1-3.

Source: The Samuel E. Kelly Ethnic Cultural Center, University of Washington and Rolluda Architects

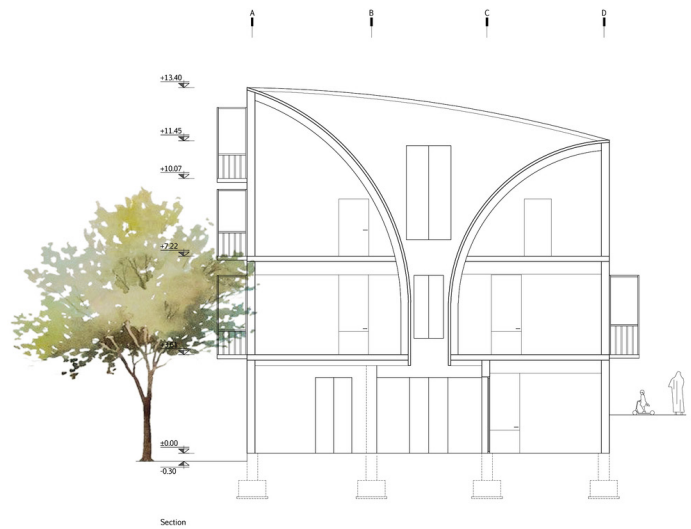
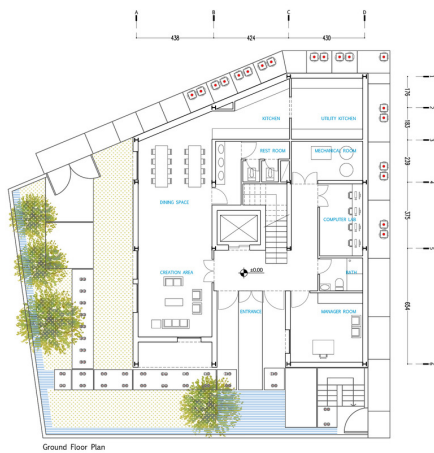
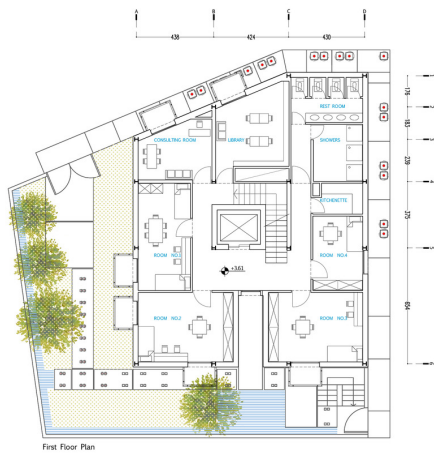
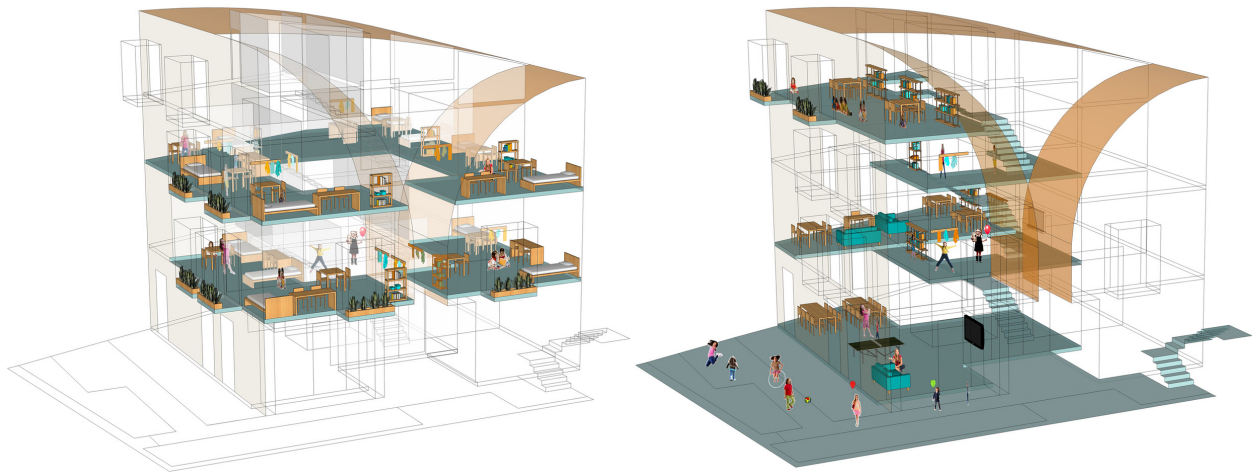
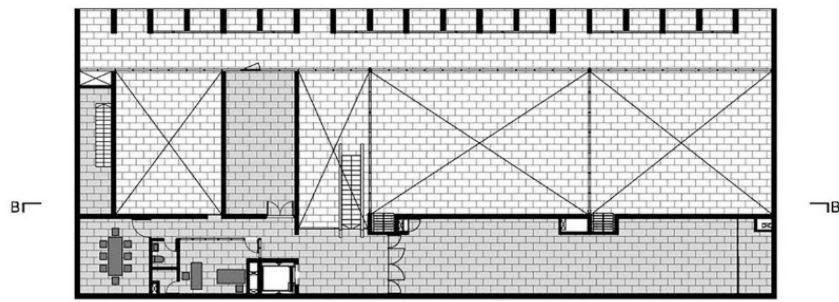


Figure 2.11 Habitat for Orphan Girls by ZAV Architects. Ground and first floor plans of four. Source: ArchDaily.



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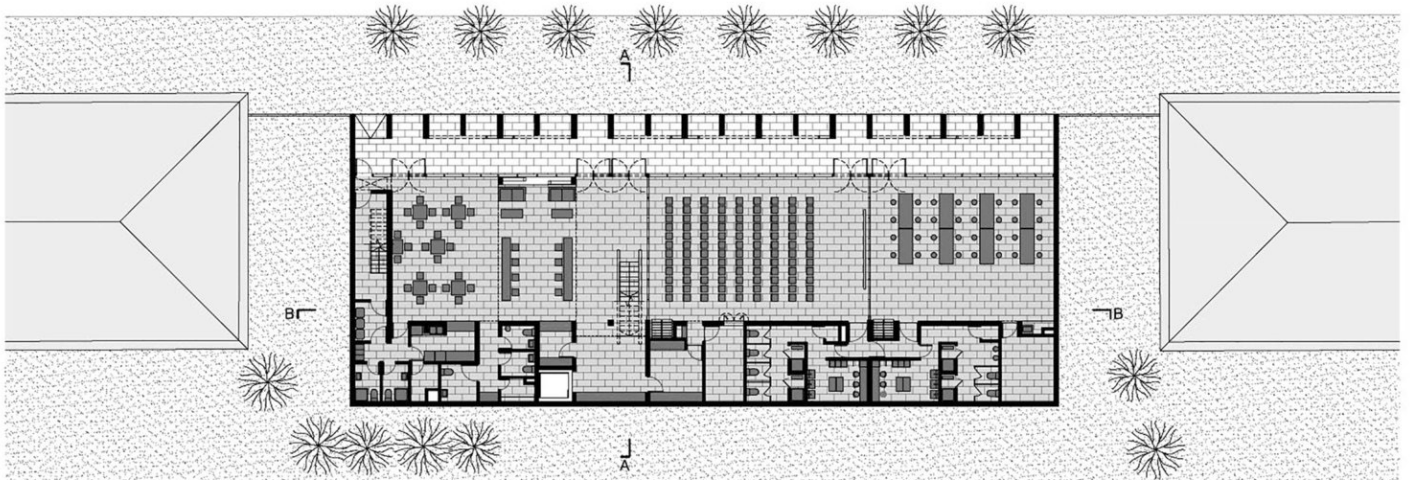


Figure 2.12 Constitution Cultural Center by ELEMENTAL  
Source: ArchDaily.



## Goals and Objectives

This thesis seeks to investigate how architecture can be used to create a sense of belonging in the South Park neighborhood of Seattle. It looks specifically to develop a multicultural sanctuary center that serves the needs of underrepresented communities existing in South Park. Since the neighborhood lacks a physical and social center, the proposed facility will enable multicultural interaction between community members, providing both a place for gathering and of refuge.

The methodology of this thesis prioritizes community engagement with South Park residents and leaders to understand the needs of the community. This engagement with the community will directly shape the program for the project. Studying precedents of existing cultural centers will provide a greater understanding of programmatic needs for a multicultural center in South Park.

## Site Selection and Analysis

The South Park neighborhood (*figure 3.1*) was chosen for its diverse yet vulnerable population, as well for its failing infrastructure. The proposal to develop a multicultural sanctuary center is a reaction to the lack of a physical cultural center in the neighborhood. The city of Seattle already has El Centro de la Raza and CASA Latina, but it takes an average of twenty minutes to reach CASA Latina and El Centro de la Raza by car with no traffic. It takes an average of 40 minutes to reach these centers by public transportation. Establishing a multicultural center in South Park would not only help the local Latino and immigrant community thrive, but other nearby Latino communities would also benefit including Delridge, White Center, Burien, Highline, Tukwila and Des Moines. In the present day, many Latinos in South King County are starting to view South Park as the center for Latino events; CASA Latina and El Centro de la Raza are losing relevance as more Latinos continue to be



Figure 3.1 Current map of South Park.  
Source: Stefanie Barrera Aguila and Google Maps.



Site

South Park Plaza

South Park Community Center

South Park Branch Library

Sea Mar Community Care Center

Concord International School

Marra-Desimone Park



Figure 3.2 South Park Community Center panorama.  
Source: Stefanie Barrera Aguila.

displaced from Seattle neighborhoods.<sup>1</sup>

Currently, South Park has the South Park Community Center built in 1987, and the South Park Neighborhood Center, originally built in 1919 to serve as a fire house.<sup>2</sup> The South Park Community Center (*figure 3.2*) serves the community by staging annual events and offering amenities to practice sports. It is the only park in South Park with a playground for the public. The South Park Neighborhood Center (*figure 3.3*) is the closest to a cultural center for the community. It currently houses the South Park Information and Resource Center, the Providence Regina House Food/Clothing Bank and the South Park Senior Program. The space is too small for the

current needs of the community and, with these three organizations, the building is filled beyond capacity. This project will use the current South Park Neighborhood Center location as the site of the proposed Multicultural Sanctuary Center. Located in a residential area, the site has a medium amount of foot traffic, meaning it is connected to the neighborhood but, at the same time, is located in an area that is removed from the main commercial center.

#### **SITE STATUS**

The site is located at the southwest corner of the intersection of 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue S & S Southern Street. The property is owned by the City of Seattle and is formed by two land parcels totaling 15,000 square feet in area; more than half of the current site is dedicated to parking. Although the site is home to three community programs, the current building could benefit from a large

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<sup>1</sup> Duwamish Valley Affordable Housing Coalition, “South Park Recommendations,” interview by author, October 2, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> “About the Center,” All About South Park, 2012, accessed May 2018, <http://allaboutsouthpark.com/neighborhood-association/neighborhood-center/>.



Figure 3.3 South Park Neighborhood Center panorama.  
Source: Stefanie Barrera Aguila.

site intervention to better meet the needs of the community.

#### *Historical Landmark?*

This century old building is a historical, one-story, brick structure. However, it is not a historically designated landmark and thus is not protected by historic legislation. The original structure has been substantially altered, undergoing major interior and exterior changes on its southern façade when it was remodeled in 1980.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, looking closely at pictures of the original building (*figure 3.4*), changes to the garage door are evident, further proving that this building is unlikely to achieve historical landmark status. Although it can be argued that replacing this building is a loss of architectural history,

it is important to note that South Park leaders indicated that there is a disconnect between the building and the community because Latino residents do not identify with this architecture. By replacing the current building with one that



Figure 3.4 Historic image of South Park Neighborhood Center.  
Source: Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation.

3 Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, Historic Property Report 343774, by Artifacts Consulting, Inc (2011), accessed October 2018, <https://fortress.wa.gov/dahp/wisaardp3/>.

better reflects the identity of the neighborhood, the project physically illustrates empowerment by letting the community finally write their own history through the built environment.

*Improvement Possibilities for Building*

Numerous visits to the current building provide evidence of the need for more programmed space. The following inadequacies of the current space were noted during visits to the site (*figure 3.5*):

- i. Children do not have a designated play space. Due to the lack of space, the children use the hallway for play.
- ii. Office spaces are very small. Workers often bump chairs and cannot move freely without having to ask another co-worker to move.

iii. When the food bank is in effect, a line runs through the building. This means children in the daycare share the hallway with individuals waiting in line.

iv. There is no controlled entry or exit. Doors are left open during hours of operation.

v. The building is old. Doors do not close. The floor is deteriorating. The basement and attic are deemed uninhabitable by building managers.

The building is used by South Park residents, but it fails to meet the needs of the community. Besides being a government building, community members and organizations have no permanent place here: if they cannot afford event and space fees, workshops and meetings are moved to other neighborhoods. The community deserves a project with a strong foundation, that individuals



Figure 3.5 Interior condition of the South Park Neighborhood Center. The corridor is the area where children stay while their parents attend workshops.  
Source: Stefanie Barrera Aguila.

and groups can permanently call their home.

## SITE CONTEXT

The South Park neighborhood is very small and isolated. Surrounded by industrial zoning in all directions, there are only three main thoroughfares into the neighborhood, South Cloverdale Street, 14<sup>th</sup> Avenue South and West Marginal Way South. Two bus routes service the neighborhood: Route 132 connects the residents to Burien and downtown Seattle; and Route 60 connects residents to Westwood Village in West Seattle, Beacon Hill and Broadway (*figure 3.6*). Most residents rely on these thoroughfares and bus routes to obtain access to resources unavailable in the neighborhood. But the neighborhood does have a public library (South Park Branch Library), an elementary school (Concord International School), a series of small parks, and health clinics.

In context, the site is located in a single-family residential neighborhood. Less than a block north of the site is an area zoned for industrial use. A block further north is the Duwamish Waterway Park. The Duwamish River runs north and east of the site. Three blocks southwest is the South Park Community Center and Playground. South Cloverdale Street is four blocks south and 14<sup>th</sup> Avenue South in conjunction with the South

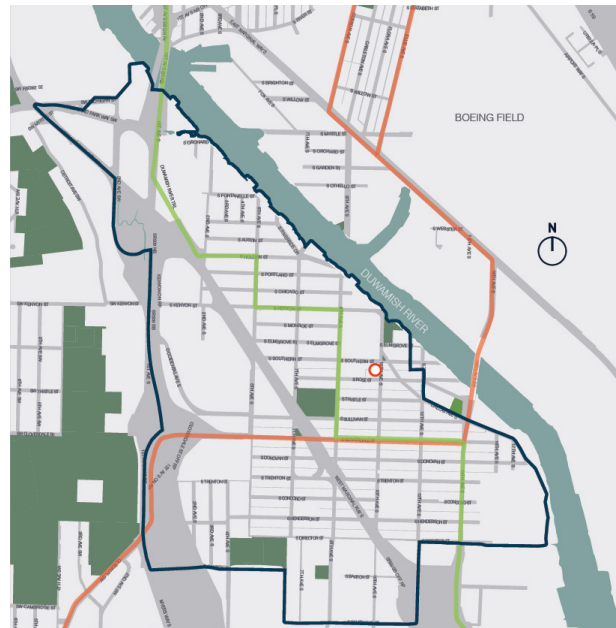


Figure 3.6  
Bus routes servicing South Park. Site is demarcated in red.  
Route 132 is green. Route 60 is orange.  
Source: Stefanie Barrera Aguila.

Park Bridge are three blocks southeast (*figure 3.1*). The closest bus stop to route 132 is a block west from the site, on 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue South. These services are within walking distance from the proposed site, thus illustrating the intertwined nature of the site with the rest of the neighborhood.

## SITE ANALYSIS

The proposed multicultural center sits at a quiet residential corner in order to provide maximum visibility from the north and east. Directly diagonally from the site is a triangular green island. Trees provide shade and protection of the inside space where two benches sit (*figure 3.7*). South of the site is an alley condition that



Figure 3.7 View of the site from the triangular green island.  
Source: Stefanie Barrera Aguila.



Figure 3.8 View of the alley adjacent to the site.  
Source: Stefanie Barrera Aguila.

continues straight then turns south connecting to South Rose Street (*figure 3.8*). The topography is relatively flat making access to the site straightforward. The majority of the nearby houses are single story with small back yards. Pedestrian and vehicle traffic are slow through the 10<sup>th</sup> Ave S and S Southern St intersection. Traffic is faster on Dallas Avenue S –the road east from the triangle. On-site parking will not be necessary since plenty of street parking is available throughout the day. Overall, the site conditions set up an atmosphere of community as illustrated by the residential character of the neighborhood.

## Program of Spaces

The program for this thesis stems from community outreach efforts, field observations and programmatic surveys of existing cultural centers.

### PROGRAMMATIC SURVEYS

Three buildings were surveyed to understand the program requirements of cultural centers: CASA Latina in the Central District and the Samuel E. Kelly Ethnic Cultural Center on the University of Washington campus, and the Habitat for Orphan

Girls in Khansar, Iran.

Designed by Johnston Architects, CASA Latina offers a set of program spaces, including a protected plaza space, ESL classrooms, retail space and a workers' center complete with a hiring hall. These programs are distributed among three buildings. The plaza space is elevated from the street and is formed by the negative space between the buildings. The hiring hall faces out toward this hidden plaza space providing a dignified and safe space for workers to meet employers for the first time (*figure 3.9*). Retail space activates the sidewalk with an artist space that often showcases Latin American artwork.

As stated previously, the Ethnic Cultural Center provides administration offices, conference rooms, community rooms, a performance arts studio, open and closed gathering spaces and rooms dedicated to each of the races embodied in the University of Washington student body. The program is organized so that large public and administrative spaces are located on the ground floor. Rooms designated for specific student groups are found on the top floors.

The Habitat for Orphan Girls provides a computer lab, a library, a creation area, a large kitchen and dining space, as well as private dwellings, small public areas, and a counseling



Figure 3.9 View from back alley towards plaza space in the CASA Latina project.  
Source: Stefanie Barrera Aguila.

space. The large public spaces in this project are found on the ground floor while private dwellings and programs are situated on the top floors. All three precedents showcase a programmatic hierarchy where public and private programs are separated to control access. This separation in program emphasizes spaces that require special architectural treatment to fit the well-being needs of the user.

**EMERGENCY SANCTUARY DWELLINGS**

Emergency sanctuary dwellings are a unique and important component of this project. While the project is primarily a sanctuary for the South Park community, the emergency sanctuary dwellings are included specifically to address the needs of undocumented individuals, domestic violence

victims, and other vulnerable groups.

Latinos are currently the focus group in immigration policy. Increase in deportations of individuals without criminal records by the Immigration Customs Enforcement and the uncertainty of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program for DREAMers has incited fear and panic throughout community. Immigrants, in particular undocumented immigrants, experience isolation, depression, fears of detention and deportation, and trauma of separation from family and loved ones.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> American Psychological Association, “Undocumented Americans: What Is It like to Grow up as an Undocumented Youth in America?” American Psychological Association, 2018, accessed October 2018, <https://www.apa.org/topics/immigration/undocumented-video.aspx>.

This project includes emergency dwelling spaces to house individuals seeking sanctuary while they await resolution of their legal cases. Instead of isolating these individuals, including sanctuary dwellings in the project's program effectively brings the community to them. Community advocates provide social and legal support, the community of the center provides protection, and the architecture provides physical sanctuary. The overall driving idea is to create a sanctuary for the community of South Park, that includes highly vulnerable groups like immigrants.

## **COMMUNITY OUTREACH**

Meetings with South Park community leaders representing the Duwamish Valley Affordable Housing Coalition (DVAHC) and the South Park Information and Resource Center (SPIARC) allowed for a better understanding of the current community needs. The author sat through three meetings with these groups' leaders in order to better understand community priorities. During these meetings, South Park leaders, Analia Bertoni and Rosario Maria Medina described the current needs of Latinos in the neighborhood. While low-income housing is a high priority for residents, spaces for Latino community groups are highly desired, including spaces

for teens, childcare, and spaces for gathering.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, Bertoni noted that of the two established childcare centers in the area neither have an indoor or outdoor space for children to play in.<sup>6</sup> When asked about their vision for South Park, SPIARC and DVAHC leaders noted that artisanal spaces and murals would reflect the identity of the Latino community and innovative greenspaces would improve the character of the community since there are very few parks in the area.

A persistent theme in this discussion was community engagement and outreach. SPIARC, DVAHC and other groups hold workshops on topics such as homeownership, educational opportunities, and money management. To schedule this involves great organization since childcare is needed on-site and there is limited space available for programming. Rosario Medina envisions spaces throughout South Park, but in particular at the new South Park Plaza, where community members can grow their businesses during events such as farmers markets and festivals.

It is clear that South Park needs an appropriate childcare space. Children form a high percentage

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5 Duwamish Valley Affordable Housing Coalition, "South Park Recommendations."

6 Ibid.

of the neighborhood population<sup>7</sup> and youth spaces are vital for community success. The community wishes to see artisanal spaces for greater culture visibility and to foster a greater sense of identity. Finally, spaces for community meetings, workshops and vocational training benefit the community to encourage economic growth, and to foster future generations of community leaders.

### **FIELD OBSERVATIONS**

In addition to the spatial needs listed by South Park leaders, the neighborhood also lacks other important community support spaces. These places include conference rooms, office space for leaders and community advocates, counseling rooms, a performing arts studio, English Language Learners and computer classrooms, and a large community and kitchen space. Information gathered on the needs of the community are reflected in the final design. The final program for this project is listed in figure 4.5.

## **Conclusion**

The South Park Multicultural Sanctuary Center has the potential to foster a sense of identity and connection to the neighborhood both through its programmatic elements and its architecture. Programmatic design in existing cultural centers demonstrates the inherent complexity in designing an architecture of belonging in which inclusionary and exclusionary concepts must coexist. This dialogue between inclusion and exclusion is a key aspect in how the final design will develop, especially as relationships to the larger neighborhood are explored.

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7 In 2010, children made up 30.5% of the total population according to “Overview of South Park, Seattle, Washington (Neighborhood),” Statistical Atlas, 2015, accessed April 25, 2018, <https://statisticalatlas.com/neighborhood/Washington/Seattle/South-Park/Overview>.



Figure 4.1

Rendering: the beginnings of a festival.

Source: Stefanie Barrera Aguila.

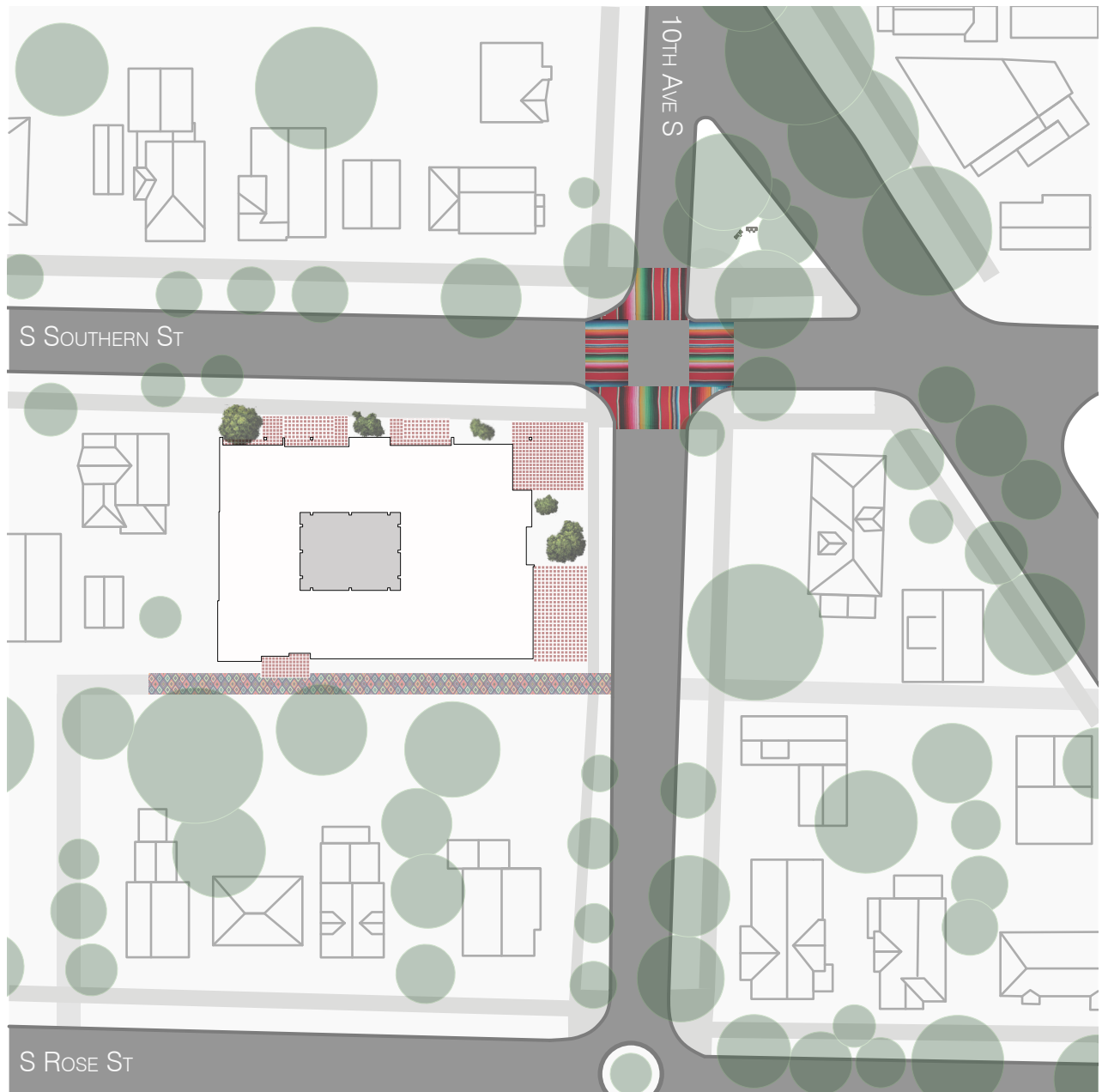


Figure 4.2 Site plan. Scale: 1/64" = 1' -0"  
Source: Stefanie Barrera Aguila.

## PART FOUR

### Design Response

The design of the Multicultural Sanctuary Center focuses on the development of spatial language that mediates between inclusivity and exclusivity in order to support the idea of belonging. The design assumes that there are four main user groups—the general public, regular community members, on-site workers, and sanctuary seekers.

### Site Design

The project implements administrative conditional use zoning in the existing single-family zone.<sup>1</sup> This allows the project to extend beyond the set single-family lot coverage and take advantage of the corner condition and the adjacent alley—permitting activation of the northern, eastern and southern sides of the building. Additionally, the project responds to the surrounding residential character by limiting its height to two stories above ground.

The proposed design uses two existing site elements to engage with the greater community: the green triangular lot located diagonally from the building and the alley adjacent to the south. It is envisioned that this open green space will be used for events that engage the outside neighborhood, such as farmers markets or festivals (*figure 4.1*). This space can serve as a gathering spot during events; musicians can perform there with the surrounding trees helping to create a separate sanctuary. To reinforce this relationship, crosswalks are painted to express serape<sup>2</sup> colors. Similarly, the alley is activated by serving as an exterior space for smaller events. The alley is decorated with Mexican *papel picado*-like banners and lights. The ground is treated to look like *alfombras de aserrin*,<sup>3</sup> with a design that draws the user into the alley (*figure 4.2*).

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on Administrative Conditional Use please visit [Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections, Land Use](#).

<sup>2</sup> Serape: “A blanketlike shawl or wrap, often of brightly colored wool, as worn in Latin America.” “Serape,” *Dictionary.com*, 2018, accessed December 2018, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/serape>.

<sup>3</sup> Traditional sawdust carpets that are created by the community to decorate streets during the Holy Week. Author knowledge.

## Strength in Visibility

People are the soul of architecture, without people a place loses meaning—even the most carefully designed architecture without users is useless. The design concept is informed by Neil Leach’s place theory, “just as words can be understood by the manner in which they are used, so buildings can be grasped by the manner in which they are perceived—by the narratives of use in which they are inscribed.”<sup>4</sup>

Contrasting ideas of inclusivity and exclusivity reinforce an architecture of belonging by implying a sense of protection. However, protection typically implies introversion and defensiveness. Paradoxically, this project argues that protection emanates from openness rather than introversion. This is especially relevant today when the Department of Homeland Security’s stance on sensitive locations are considered. Essentially, the more presence the building has on the neighborhood, the more protected it is since ICE generally avoids controversy by carrying out apprehensions in unpolitical locations.

The relationship of the project to the rest of South Park community and the city of Seattle as a sanctuary center is guided by visibility.

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<sup>4</sup> Neil Leach, “Belonging,” *AA Files*, Spring 2003, 2, <https://neilleach.wordpress.com/publications/articles/>.

The project relies heavily on community engagement to provide sanctuary: the more community presence and the more attention, the more protection it embodies. Instead of looking inwardly, the building serves as a beacon in the South Park neighborhood. Similar to the DREAMers’ slogan, “undocumented, unapologetic, and unafraid” the project proudly reveals its identity and announces its presence to the surrounding areas.

## Massing and Program

A center courtyard space drives the overall massing of the project. A tree sits in this space, providing a private sanctuary space only accessible to those inside the building. This courtyard space is sunken a story below ground. Since the project sits in close proximity to the Duwamish River, there is concern regarding the water level for below grade construction. The project’s underground foundation uses the slurry wall construction method to protect against water. The room required for the tree roots results in crawl spaces below floor zero (*figure 4.3*).

The sunken courtyard space is the heart of this project. Circulation around the courtyard celebrates the community tree and compels users to interact with others at every level. The 30’ by

40' courtyard space effectively brings light into the middle of the building and into the lower floor. The upper south portion of the building is carved out to further bring light into the center space essentially making the southern side of the building facing the alley only one story high. This allows the building to take advantage of the southern sun as much as possible. The building's service core lies on the southwest corner of the site in order to connect to the alley. The upper eastern side of the building is carved out to break up the scale of the building from 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Similarly, the northern and eastern façades on the main level are carved out to visually differentiate programming. The roof is divided into three sections that are all differentiated in height to vertically break up the scale of the

project from the exterior. These raised sections allow for clerestories under the raised roofs and emphasize the location of the emergency sanctuary dwelling program housed beneath (figure 4.4).

Programmatically, the building is divided into three main areas: private, public and semi-public. The project shows hierarchy of program in section rather than simply in plan form to control entrances and to strengthen the experiential sanctuary quality of the project. Dedicating a floor to each—public, semi-public and private program—gives ownership to the users to shape their experience in accordance to the activities around them rather than containing each program experience to a room

Figure 4.3 Multicultural Sanctuary Center section.  
Source: Stefanie Barrera Aguila.



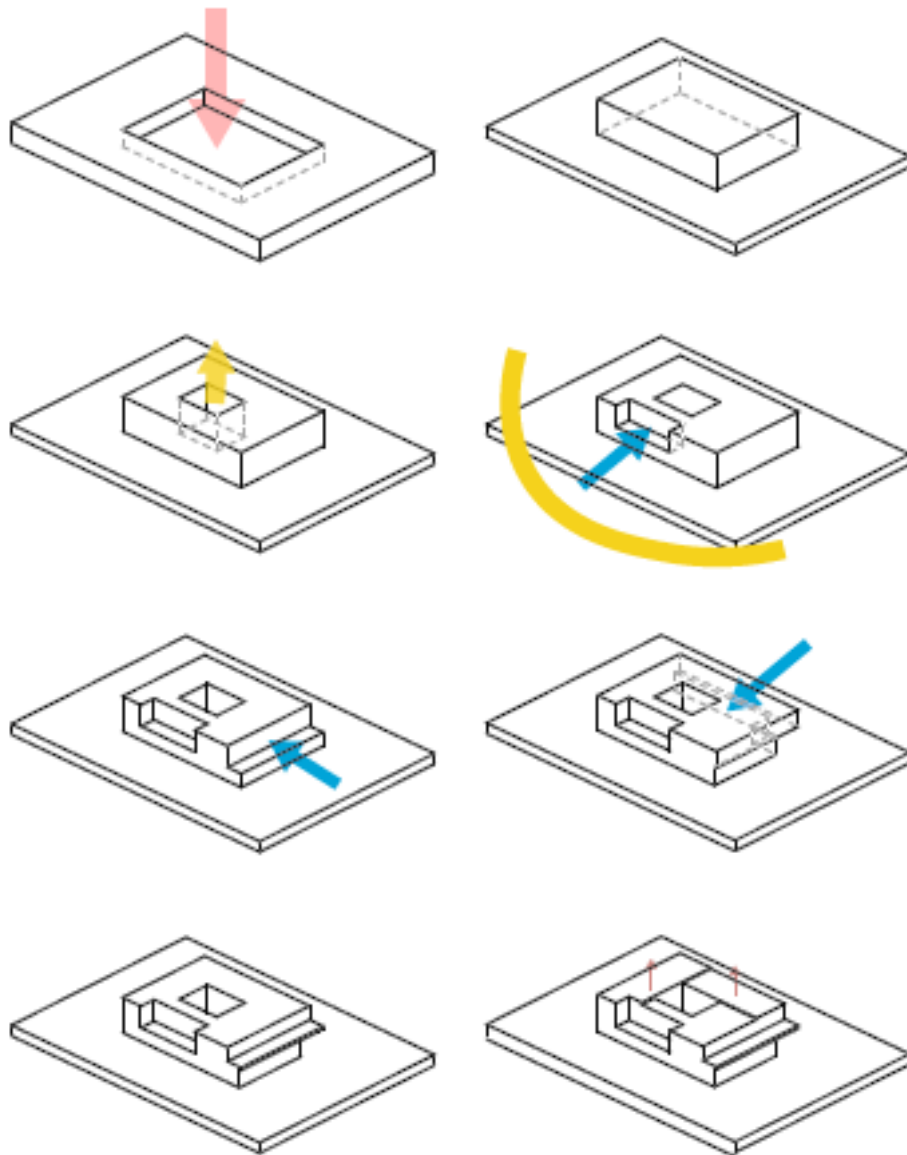
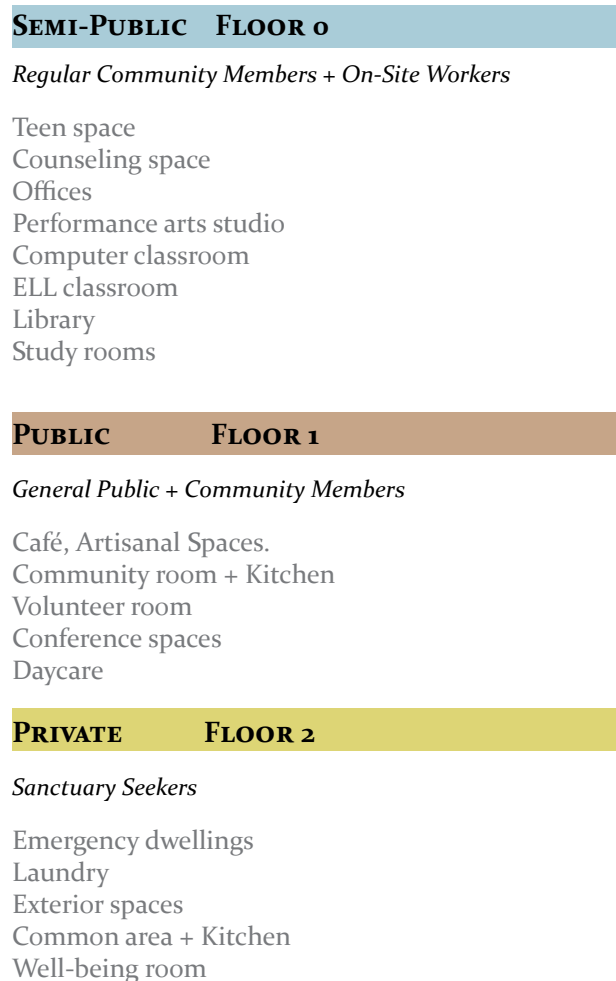


Figure 4.4

Project massing.  
Source: Stefanie Barrera Aguila.

or small area. Hierarchy in section allows each floor to have a unique experience for the user that can translate from room to room as the user circumambulates. Diagrammatically, floor zero (semi-public), holds offices and educational programming; floor one (public) holds the community room, daycare, café and conference spaces; floor two (private) holds the emergency sanctuary dwellings as well as a private common area and two exterior spaces. For more detail please see figure 4.5 and 4.6.

Figure 4.5 Program overview



The second floor is the most restrictive area. This floor provides ample amounts of exterior space because many of the individuals housed here might not be able to step outside the building. Providing usable exterior space gives individuals the option to be outside without stepping outside and without walls. Eight emergency dwellings are available for single individuals or families. The dwellings provide individual beds, kitchens and bathrooms to give control over to the individual. If sanctuary seekers wish to socialize with others, they have the option to use the common area on their floor, or to visit other floors. An office for a medical professional is provided as need arise.

By prioritizing programs in section, the project controls access and echoes similar treatment of space previously examined in the program precedent studies, the Ethnic Cultural Center and the Habitat for Orphan Girls, where the main floor is dedicated to a more general audience.

## Circulation and Access Control

The Multicultural Sanctuary Center is designed to bring attention onto itself for both identification for the community and for protection from prosecution protection. The layout of the building accomplishes this through community engagement and the activation of exterior spaces.

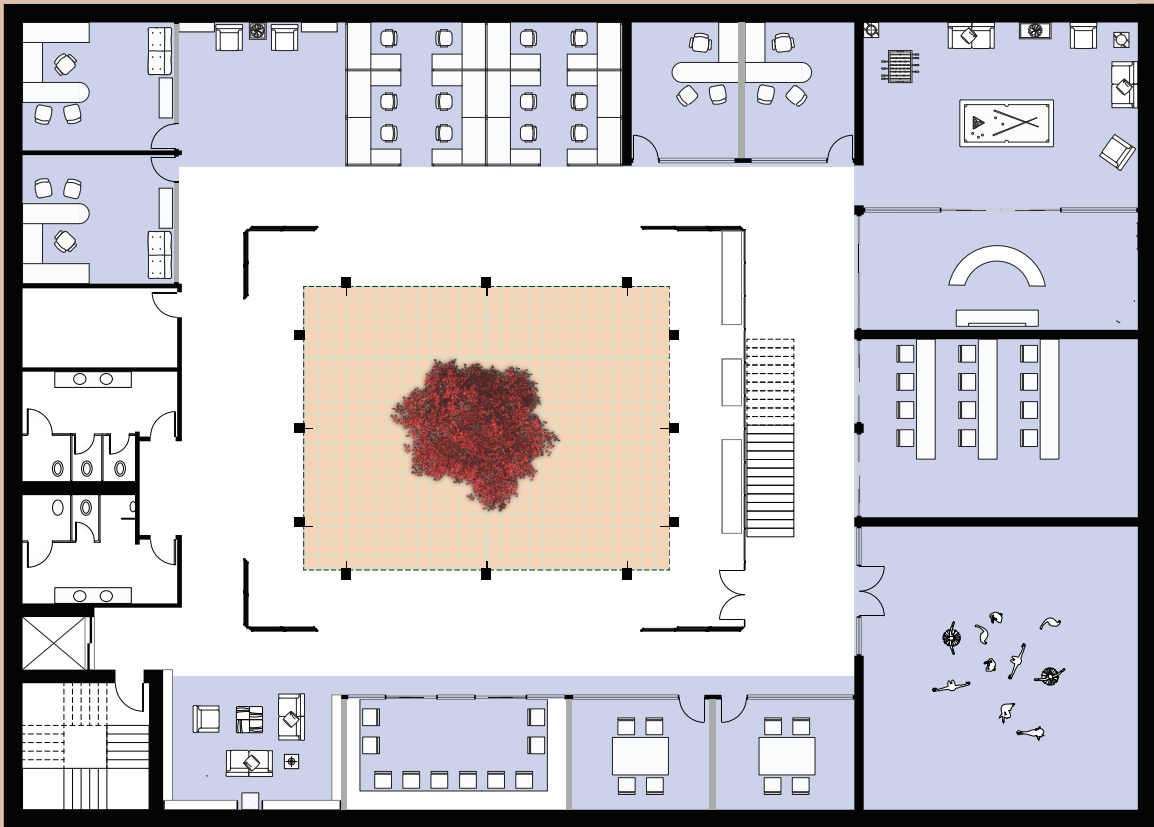
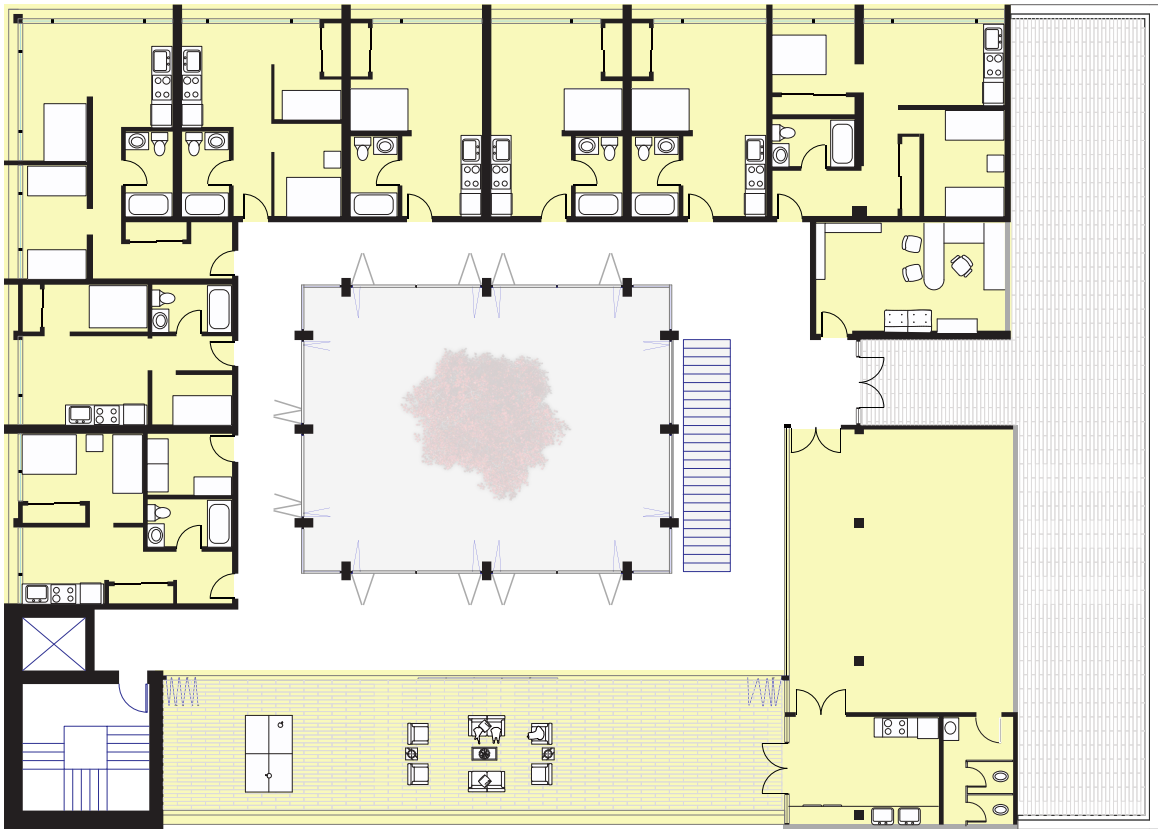


Figure 4.6

Project plans 0-2.

Source: Stefanie Barrera Aguila.





## ACCESS CONTROL

The floor on the street level is transparent to activate the street. The main entrance is on the northeastern corner of the building (*figure 4.7*). This specific location places the entrance in dialogue with the existing green triangle diagonally from the site. The main entry way serves as an access control point. A window allows the front desk to speak to people entering the building before they are permitted to enter. Furthermore, the front desk sits directly in front of the main staircases which permits building managers and users to be attentive to the movements of individuals. This visibility is important since the main floor contains the most public programming. Both staircases lead to areas that require greater restriction: the private and semi-public floors. An additional detail in controlling building access is the inclusion of a volunteer room. Because undocumented immigrants and domestic violence victims may not be able to answer the door for their own protection,<sup>5</sup> a trained volunteer with direct access to the main entrance stays in the building overnight.

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5 Yonat Shimron, "Resisting Trump, Churches Give Sanctuary to Immigrants Facing Deportation," *USA Today*, November 29, 2017, accessed November 2018, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2017/11/29/resisting-trump-churches-give-sanctuary-immigrants-facing-deportation/904889001/>.



Figure 4.7 Entrance of building vignette.  
Source: Stefanie Barrera Aguila.

To the north, each of the program spaces have their own separate entrances. The café (vocational program space) and the artisanal space have the ability to open completely to the exterior with the use of glass garage doors. Access to the building interior is controlled programmatically as well as by providing one entry point into the main circulation space. To the east, the community room is only accessible from the interior. However, during large events the room can be opened out to the community through large folding screens and glass walls. The east and north sides of the buildings activate the street through flexible entry points that flow into outdoor living rooms when users spill into the adjacent sidewalks. All the rooms facing the alley have moveable wood screens (*figure 4.8*). A private back entry is located in the alley to allow for a less conspicuous entrance into the building. This entry leads to the elevator and emergency stairs which permits someone who is seeking



Figure 4.8 Exterior rendering: alley perspective.  
Source: Stefanie Barrera Aguila.

sanctuary to be dropped off directly in front of the door with minimum exposure.

## CIRCULATION

The building circulation takes place in the center around the central courtyard. At the same time that visitors move mainly around the courtyard space, pockets of activity are found throughout the project for relief. This arrangement effectively strengthens the idea of community by fostering interaction among the users. Walking around the center space mirrors the act of circumambulation which brings a sense

of sacredness to the center of the project. This experience is further accentuated by the natural lighting conditions resulting from the carving out of the center space. The project physically protects the circulation, by bringing it into the center of the building.

## CULTURE

In its formal language project looked to Latin American architecture to ensure Latino community members could personally relate to the design. The inclusion of a courtyard space and emphasis on color and light stemmed from

careful study of Latino vernacular architecture in particular the work of Luis Barragán.

### *Vernacular*

A patio space is an important element in many Latin American homes because it allows communities to socialize in a more private setting. Patios are usually open to the sky, include greenery and are paved. South Park community leaders hope future projects in the neighborhood use innovative greenspaces and architectural styles that reflect Latin American culture. This project—whose heart is found in the patio space—makes use of a courtyard to: i. physically and symbolically bring light and attention into the center of the project; ii. provide innovative use of greenery; iii. celebrate Latin American vernacular architecture; and iv. implement an interior courtyard space for social events or the daily use of the daycare.

Luis Barragán (1902-1988) is a well-known Mexican architect known for his use of color, light and shadow, and form.<sup>6</sup> In order to evoke emotions in the user, his designs use bright colors, evocative of traditional Latin American architecture in conjunction with flat planes and

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6 Megan Sveiven, “AD Classics: AD Classics: Casa Barragan / Luis Barragan,” ArchDaily, January 10, 2011, accessed December 2018, <https://www.archdaily.com/102599/ad-classics-casa-barragan-luis-barragan/> ISSN 0719-8884.

screens<sup>7</sup> to treat light. His works, in particular Capilla de las Capuchinas<sup>8</sup> and Casa Gilardi,<sup>9</sup> serve as examples for modern Latin American architecture whose experiential quality are highly evocative. The Multicultural Sanctuary Center drew from Barragán’s work to understand the treatment of light. The use of screens throughout the project developed after studying his treatment of space through the application of color and screens.

## **Design Strategies for Human Behavior**

*Sanctuary: a place of refuge and safety; a space where people feel comfortable and where their whole humanity is acknowledged through a sense of belonging.*

Design strategies were implemented to spatially and programmatically design a space that addresses an individual’s psychological needs.

The design strategies used by Mahlum Architects

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7 Karine Duque, “Clásicos De Arquitectura: Capilla De Las Capuchinas / Luis Barragán,” ArchDaily, November 14, 2012, accessed December 2018, <https://www.plataformaarquitectura.cl/cl/02-207404/clasicos-de-arquitectura-capilla-de-las-capuchinas-luis-barragan> ISSN 0719-8914.

8 Ibid.

9 Karina Duque, “Clásicos De Arquitectura: Casa Gilardi / Luis Barragán,” ArchDaily, November 21, 2018, accessed December 2018, <https://www.plataformaarquitectura.cl/cl/02-123630/clasicos-de-arquitectura-casa-gilardi-luis-barragan> ISSN 0719-8914.

Figure 4.9 Design strategies by Mahlum Architects.

Strategy <sup>a</sup>	Implementation
Varied levels of access for public areas	Circulation and multiple entry points into the building
Visual access throughout the building	Circulation and transparency
Wayfinding	Floor coloring
Ability to retreat from large group situations	Pocket spaces and individualized dwellings, screens
Flexibility in communal spaces	Ability to close and open up community spaces.
Daylight and views to nature	Patio, tree, and general openness to the exterior.

for domestic violence shelters (*figure 4.9*) were adapted into the Multicultural Sanctuary Center

The following design strategies from their study were used to form a psychologically assuring architecture.

a. Color as wayfinding

The polished concrete floors are stained. Floor 0 is stained blue to signify patience (water), floor 1 is stained earthy red to signify stability (earth), and floor 2 is stained yellow to signify optimism (sun).<sup>10</sup>

b. Prospect and refuge

Psychologically, humans feel secure “in darker spaces with lower ceiling (refuge) that are adjacent to more brightly lit spaces with higher ceilings (prospect).”<sup>11</sup> Circulation

throughout the building is bright (prospect), and the majority of the adjacent rooms have wooden drop ceilings to add warmth to the space (refuge).

c. Light

Light and darkness were used as a guiding force because “light draws the individual forward.”<sup>12</sup> In the lower level, the user is drawn into the light as they move inwards towards the patio/circulation. This relationship is reversed on floor 1 and 2: users are drawn into the light as they move outwards, towards the exterior (*figure 4.10*).

d. Flexibility

All three floors have large flexible rooms (floor 0: performing arts studio, floor 1: community room with kitchen, floor 2: sanctuary commons with kitchen). Throughout the

<sup>10</sup> Sally Augustin, *Place Advantage: Applied Psychology for Interior Architecture* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2009), 129.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

building there are moveable glass walls that allow for the opening and closing of spaces. This allows for users to have ownership of their space and it shows the dynamic nature of the project.

e. Layering

Protection is acquired through layering of materials by controlling visibility. The patio space is internal, protected by the community and the surrounding program. The project also uses materials, screens and moveable glass walls and windows, that can be manipulated to provide privacy or openness.

f. Structure

The concrete structure reinforces harmony and ritual through rhythm. The material rhythm of the beams and columns leads the individual through the space visually and provides a sense of order and comfort (*figure 4.12*).<sup>13</sup>

g. Art

The project makes use of the pocket spaces and white walls to showcase community art. The wooden screen pattern adds a dynamic

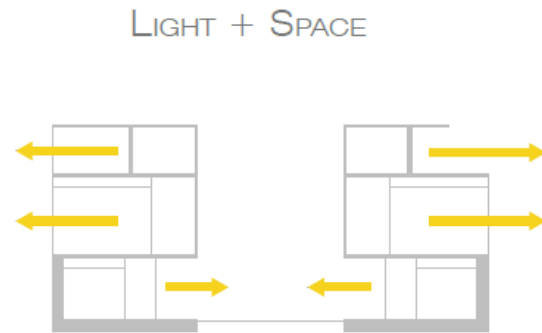


Figure 4.10 Light usage in space  
Source: Stefanie Barrera Aguila.

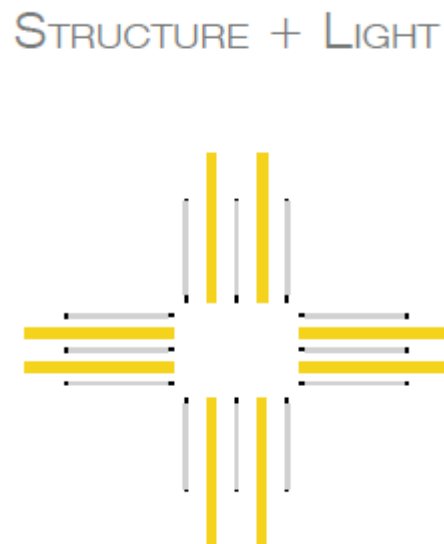


Figure 4.11 Structure.  
Source: Stefanie Barrera Aguila.

13 Ibid., 59.

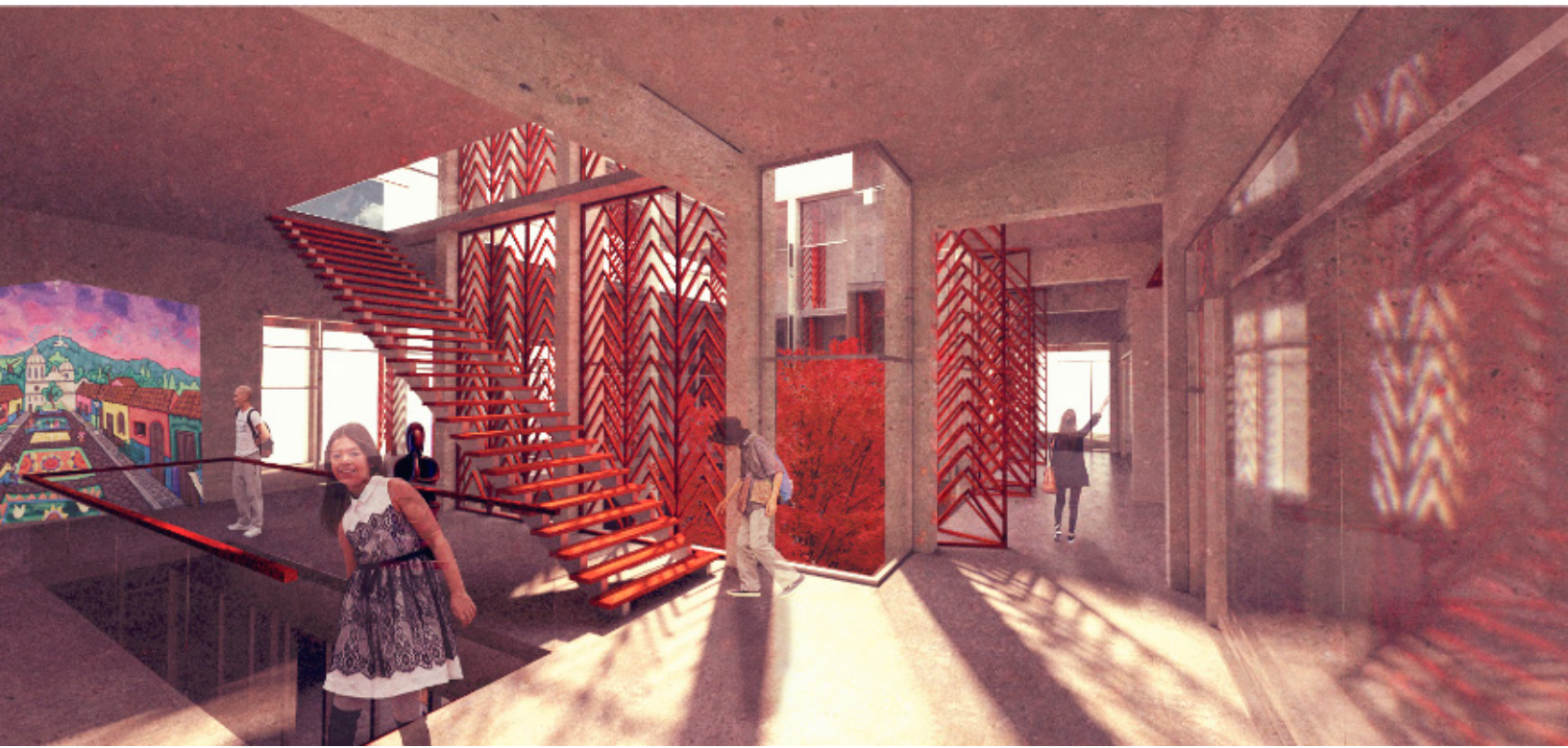


Figure 4.12 Space flexibility and screens.  
Source: Stefanie Barrera Aguila.

character to the space and their mobility makes them resemble impromptu sculptures.

#### h. Vegetation

The maple tree is native to the Pacific Northwest. The change in leaf color through the seasons gives life to the courtyard. Greenery throughout the project provides stress relief and serves as a way to encourage social interaction and well-being.<sup>14</sup>

### **The floor grounds, the screens lift, the sky guides.**

Rather than applying bright colors to walls like Barragán, the project focuses on the floors. Moveable wooden screens act as control devices for light, sight lines and privacy. The interior patio illustrates the dichotomy of this project where visibility, privacy and protection go hand in hand with architecture of belonging.

By utilizing design strategies that seek to provide comfort to the user, the project addresses concern for visibility, flexibility, protection and cultural representation. This way, the design of

the Multicultural Sanctuary Center for South Park physically and spiritually empowers the community and the individual forward.

(Footnotes)

<sup>1</sup> Vanessa Quirk, "The 8 Things Domestic Violence Shelters Can Teach Us About Secure School Design," ArchDaily, January 31, 2013, accessed October 2018, <https://www.archdaily.com/326114/the-8-things-domestic-violence-shelters-can-teach-us-about-secure-school-design/> ISSN 0719-8884.

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<sup>14</sup> Abigail Abrams, "What Green Spaces and Nature Can Do to Your Mood," Time, August 7, 2017, accessed December 2018, <http://time.com/4881665/green-spaces-nature-happiness/>.



# PART FIVE

## Conclusions

The displacement of the Latino community throughout Seattle is changing the character of the city. As this process continues, South Park may be the last neighborhood with a large Latino community. The neighborhood desperately needs a multicultural center to promote the identity of the community and to provide much needed support services. Moreover, the current political climate around immigration and the prosecution of marginalized groups calls for greater awareness to areas that architecture has failed to address and can improve on. Humans need physical and psychological sanctuaries. Architecture can contribute to both realms by providing spaces that offer a sense of belonging.

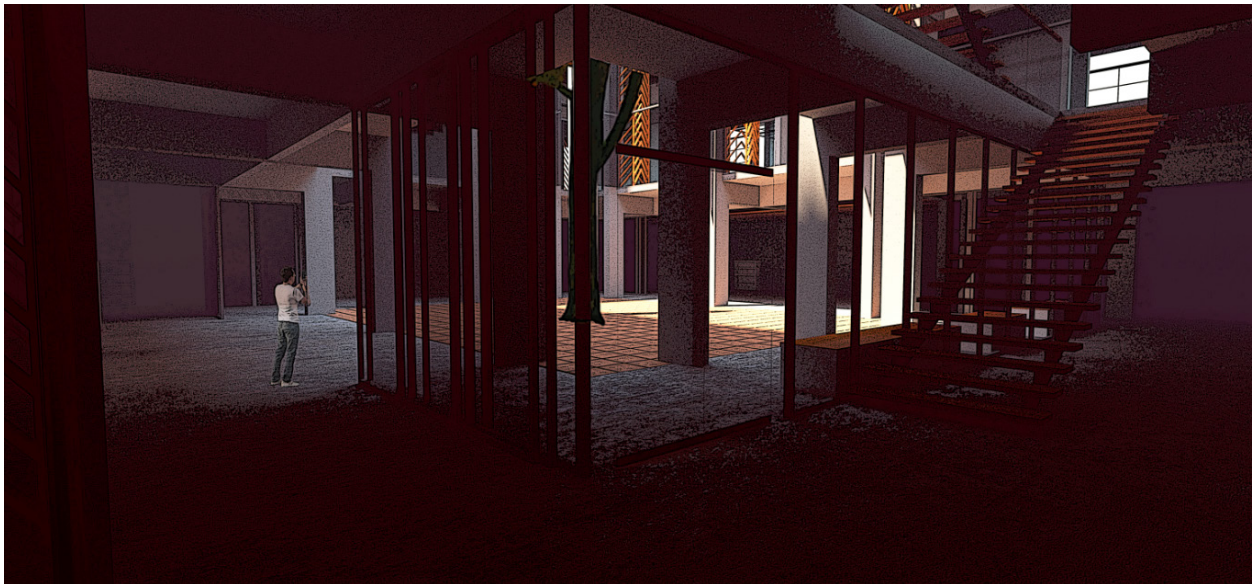
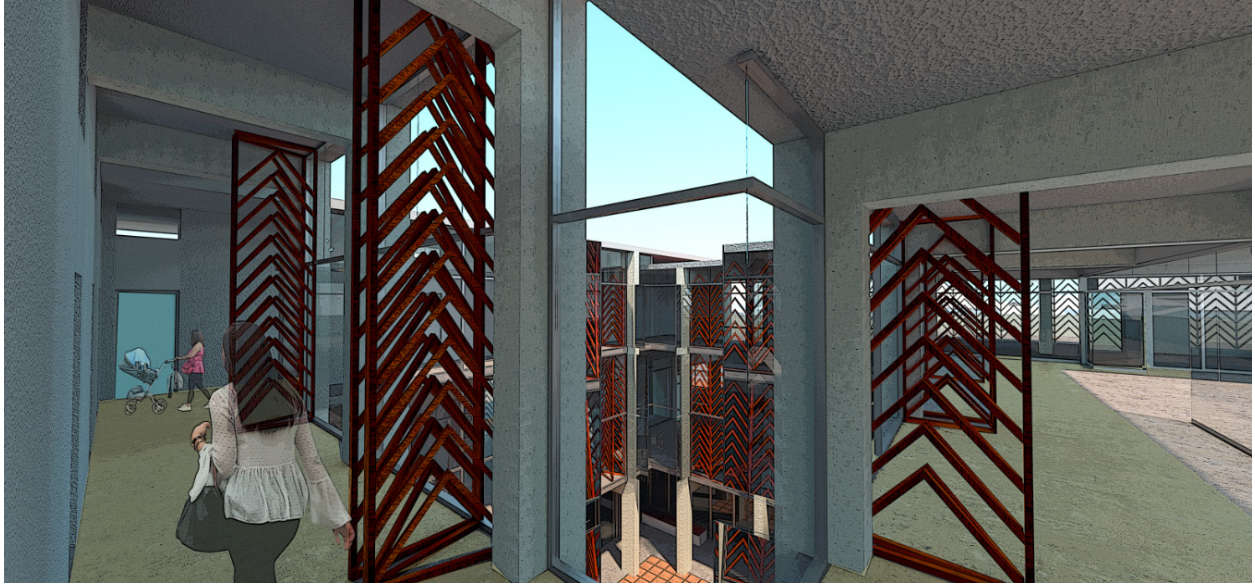
The project calls for detailed light studies and greater community input for greater realism. Additionally, the project could benefit from a larger site since the chosen site limited the design to some extent. Because every buildable space in South Park is occupied, this would imply acquiring and redeveloping existing real estate or taking advantage of an operating version of the King County Brownfields Program.<sup>1</sup>

This thesis investigation begins to address the ways in which architecture can facilitate a better relationship with and answer the needs of a vulnerable community. The process of understanding the issue a community faces is lengthy but necessary; ensuring that the community has a voice in the design adds complexity and significance to the design process. Most times, those in need simply need a space to call their own but architecture can be used to make the space more meaningful for the community. It should be the architect's ethical responsibility to ensure architecture is used as a social tool to take a stance against inequalities and provide for all.

Figure 5.1      Vignettes of interior spaces.  
Source: Stefanie Barrera Aguila.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on King County Brownfields Program please visit [King County Solid Waste Division, Brownfields](#).



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