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Ethnic diversity and Suburban Social cohesion

The proposed presentation discusses the conceptual underpinnings of a research projects just initiated on suburban inter and intra-ethnic interactions in a city near Chicago. The discussion is framed in terms of observations often made in social science studies on suburban living. One observation concerns the low social cohesiveness of suburbs: suburbs residents are often characterized as having little social contact with each other. Yet, while their social cohesion is considered low, interactions do occur. Focusing on the nature and frequency of such interactions, as self-reported by residents and corroborated by ethnographic observations, the ongoing research aims to compare contacts among Latinos and non-Latino residents in the distinctive residential settings of a solid middle class city. Other recent social science observations concern emerging reconfiguration of residential and racial balances of the country, when the majority of the national population now resides in suburbs and a majority of the country's population made up by groups of European ancestry is being replaced by the aggregate of groups of other racial and ethnic characteristics, e.g. people of color (Gans 2001). The significant recent growth of Latino households in the city in questions seems to reflect such residential and demographic trends. The residential proximity of previously excluded groups once was expected to enhance interactions opportunities with mainstream populations and thus the integration of previously excluded groups (Gordon 1964; Alba and Nee 2009). Yet, given the ostensible low level of interaction among suburban neighbors such outcome cannot be readily assumed (Iceland 2011). In fact, it is said that while the residential patterns reflect greater racial diversification, segregation has not diminished for most (Frey 2015). Moreover, closely related to the gentrification of central cities, suburban poverty increases. Therefore, the need to gain an informed sense of the nature and extent of the interactions not only among groups (inter-ethnic) but even the members within groups (intra-ethnic) surfaces in light of possible dynamics of new demographic balances. The enumerated observations are used to examine possible conceptualizations of the links uniting the residents of increasingly diversified cities.