Social Exclusivity in the Hardscape

Mapping Gentrification Amongst American Planning Association's List of "Great Neighborhoods"

CONTEXT

Every year the American Planning Association releases a list of "Great Places in America". This award is given to five neighborhoods, streets, and public spaces across the country that are demonstrate the gold standard of urban planning and design as outlaid by the APA. However, the true quality of the planning of these neighborhoods has been under scrutiny as they tend to exhibit trends of gentrification, social exclusivity, and loss of racial and socio-economic diversity.

This project uses US Census data from 1990 and 2014 to map the social exclusivity trends of four winners of the "Great Neighborhoods" competition. By measuring demographic shift, the maps help visually analyze whether or not the "Great Neighborhoods" are in fact socially exclusive spaces. In this project, social exclusivity is defined as a neighborhood trait that encompasses a loss racial diversity as it experiences a rise in average educational attainment level and median household income.

METHODOLOGY

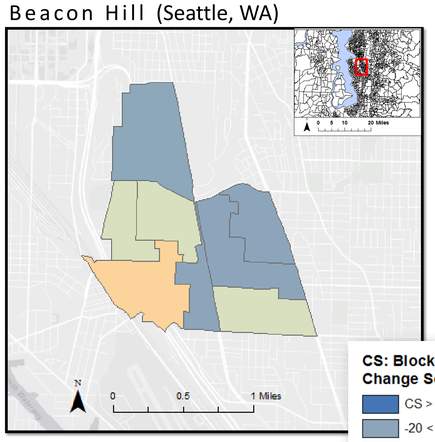
Three major data sources were used in the creation of these maps: the 1990 US Decennial Census, the 2010-2014 American Community Survey (5-year-estimate), and US Census TIGER products. The unit of analysis was the block group, thus all the census data had to be available at the block group level. Census data was compared between 2014 and 1990 to catch a relatively long time range. The four demographic categories included: White population, Black population, residents with Bachelor's degrees, and median household income. The median household income was adjusted from the census provided 1989 dollars to 2014 dollars using an inflation calculator.

To quantify a qualitative metric such as "social exclusivity", percent changes were averaged to create a "Change Score". Using Excel, the percent changes in each category were added depending on their category and then divided by 4 to create the "Change Score". The Change Scores were then joined to their corresponding block group in ArcGIS using the join and relates tool. Thus, the Change Score maps represent an average of combined individual percent changes for every category in each neighborhood.

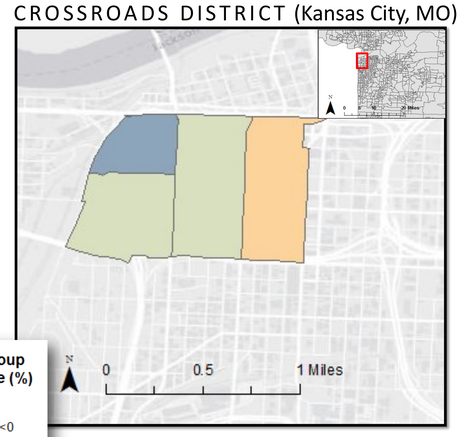
Change Score = (% change White population - % change Black population + % change residents with Bachelor's degrees + % change median household income) / 4

Social Exclusivity Change by Block Group

Beacon Hill (Seattle, WA)

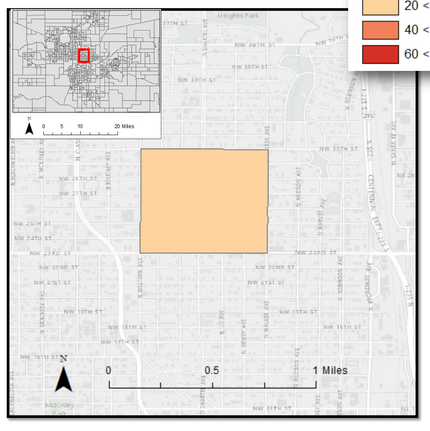


CROSSROADS DISTRICT (Kansas City, MO)

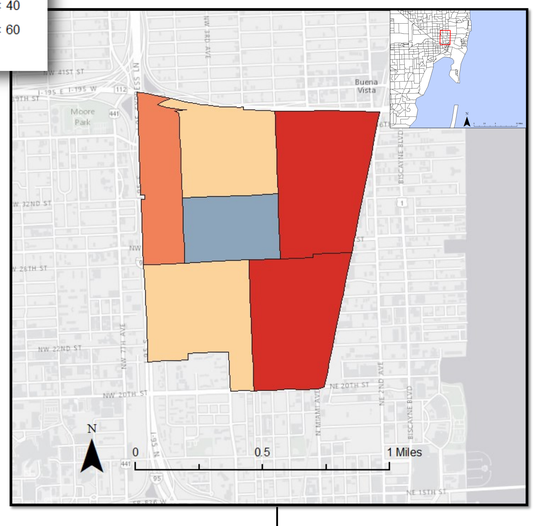


CS: Block Group Change Score (%)
- CS > -20
- -20 < CS <0
- 0 < CS < 20
- 20 < CS < 40
- 40 < CS < 60
- 60 < CS

THE PASEO (Oklahoma City, OK)

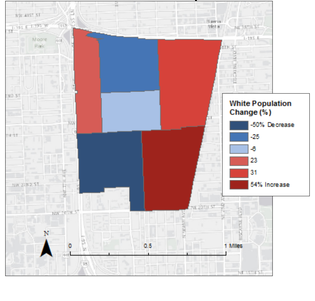


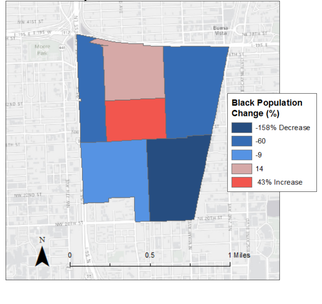
WYNWOOD (Miami, FL)

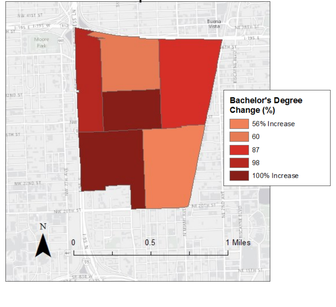


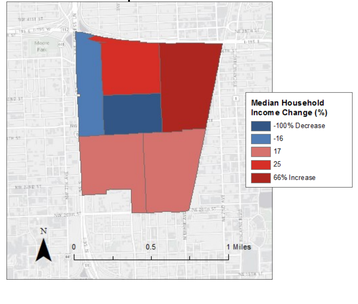
Understanding the maps: Each block group was given a Change Score (CS), which represents the overall percentage change of social exclusivity. For example, if a block group has a CS of 37, then it has experienced a 37% increase of social exclusivity between 1990 and 2014. If it has a CS of –12 then it has become 12% more social exclusive .

Four Category Maps That Comprise the Final Change Score









RESULTS

Results are summarized in the tables and graphs. By applying the Change Score to each block group, it was found that each neighborhood experienced an overall socially exclusive shift. Though 7/19 of the total number of block groups tested did in fact demonstrate increasing, on average the neighborhoods exhibited signs of overall White population increase, Black population decrease, increase in the number of residents with Bachelor's degrees, and increase in median household income. The block groups did not experience homogeneous change. In other words, some block groups actually became more socially inclusive since 1990. It was also found that the White population increased less than half as much as the Black population decreased. There were also very large jumps in the number of Bachelor degrees as well as median household income across the four neighborhoods.

Neighborhood	CS Score
Wynwood	32% Loss of Social Diversity
Crossroads Arts District	7% Loss of Social Diversity
The Paseo	37% Loss of Social Diversity
Beacon Hill	6% Loss of Social Diversity

Category	Overall Change
White Population	35% Increase
Black Population	82% Decrease
Residents with Bachelor Degrees	36% Increase
Median Household Income	17% Increase

IMPLICATIONS

The results of this project point to a greater paradox in conventional urban planning. They expose the correlation between quality urban planning and a loss of affordability and resulting social diversity of inner city neighborhoods. This project provides supplemental evidence to the larger discussion surrounding the disparity in American planning. The American Planning Association holds weight and power in the national accepted narrative of quality urban planning. Therefore, the APA should create a new guideline requiring the neighborhood to have demonstrated successful efforts in maintaining social, economic, and racial diversity while exhibiting quality planning such as multimodal transportation and environmental protection. Furthermore, it is important to note that this project represents only one perspective on the national trend of rising levels of urban demographic shift. This perspective fails to include "grey sources", or personal experiences and narratives that should be given space and voice in urban development processes. It also represents an oversimplified racial binary, including demographic shift of only White and Black populations. More comprehensive analysis should include more metrics including racial and socioeconomic factors. Finally, the neighborhoods all encompass relatively small spatial areas, only around 1 square mile each. This gives the researcher little to compare the data to.

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Data Sources: 1990 US Decennial Census, 2014 ACS 5-Year-Estimate, US Census Bureau, Google Maps
Projected Coordinate Systems (all Meters):
Wynwood: NAD_1983_2011_StatePlane_Florida_East
Crossroads: NAD_1983_2011_StatePlane_Missouri_West
Beacon Hill: NAD_1983_2011_StatePlane_Washington_North
The Paseo: NAD_1983_2011_StatePlane_Oaklahoma_North