

# You Scratch My Back: Good Practices of Diversity Advantage

By Phil Wood

There's an old country and western song of no great merit, except that it offers the following rousing chorus:

*If we knew then what we know now  
We could have turned the world upside down  
We were reckless, young and proud  
We had the whole thing figured out  
We never saw the writing on the wall  
Even though we thought we knew it all  
Oh my friend, if we knew then, what we know now<sup>1</sup>*

It might be an epitaph for the mood of hubris which pervaded the developed world during the early years of this century. We honoured our finance and business chiefs with the title of 'masters of the universe' so absolute seemed their understanding and control of the market and the global economic system. There was nothing, it seemed, that we could not achieve through the application of science, reason, technology and will. And our pride was not limited to our mastery of finance, for had we not also solved the other great conundrums of the world – how to live together in cities, how to stay healthy and provide all the food and resources we would need. It seemed as if there was nothing that the Western Man (and it was usually a man) could not put his mind to and not solve or improve.

But in 2007 it all came crashing down. Like Ozymandias, the financial masters of the universe proved to have feet of clay. And it caused us to question those other areas of expertise in which we had places such faith, be it science, medicine, city planning and architecture and so on. Hopefully it created some humility in the developed world and realisation that we do not have all the answers. A recognition, perhaps, that there are alternative ways

of living and thriving to the inflexibility of rational choice theory and the unsustainability of Fordist production and Taylorist managerialism. An inkling maybe that there are people outside the so-called developed world who might bring insights into different or even better ways of living a good life.

When the developed world encounters such outsiders it likes to put them in a box marked 'immigrant'. Sometimes it welcomes them for the labour power they bring, and at other times, for political expediency, it shuns them. But what it rarely does is ask itself 'what might we learn from these people?' What wisdom might they have which is the equal or even (heaven forbid) superior to our own? The question is rarely asked so it is unsurprising that our media and knowledge networks rarely contain any stories of 'immigrant advantage'. Yes, of course we hear more and more about the 'diversity dividend' but this is corralled into a narrow sub-sector of our imaginations concerned with the management and profitability of certain kinds of organisations. Beyond that... nothing. The remainder of the field is left vacant, to be commanded by those who warn of a diversity deficit or threat – and there are many of those at the moment.

So this paper is an attempt to redress the balance a little. But more than that it is a hope that in my telling you of a few remarkable people and insights, it might trigger in you the reader a spark of recognition that such things are not actually so few and far between after all. This is an attempt to open a new field of classification of small and large social innovations into which we can all contribute our experiences. My belief is that the examples given below are not so rare and unusual as they may seem. We simply haven't

had a way of recognising and accounting them in the past. That must change.

## Rest and Thrive – the Mexican Quarantine

*I felt like I didn't matter. I felt like they weren't interested in me after I had my baby. My husband said, 'of course they are not interested. You've had your baby'. No-one pays attention to the fact you've had major surgery. They would have paid more attention if you had had your appendix out.<sup>2</sup>*

This American woman had recently given birth and discovered to her shock that her culture, which apparently so reveres childbirth, can actually be rather cruel and negligent when it really matters. The consequence, with growing regularity, can be postpartum depression.

But there is another way: *"It's about food, about sex, about rest"* says Evelyn, a 34-year-old Dominican immigrant living in Boston. She recently gave birth and is explaining the Latin American custom called *la cuarentena* which helped her through. It's a 40-day postnatal period during which mothers are encouraged to shut out the normal stresses and strains of life and concentrate upon recovering from labour and bonding with their babies. As rest is the priority, a revolving group of friends and relatives take



care of household chores, as well as preparing food, the more nutritious and simple the better. Finally, the father must suspend any carnal desires and hopefully share in the tending of his spouse.

It's perhaps no surprise to find that in catholic Latin America, where motherhood is revered above almost anywhere else, such customs have not only persisted but have been carried over by migrants to their new homes. But why should it be of any consequence in the fast-paced societies of the developed world? Surely it will rapidly die out once people are removed from the immediate contexts of their villages and extended families. Well apparently not, and the reason may be because it continues to work, even when adapted, and it can be seen as a distinct improvement upon the so-called scientific ideas adopted in the West.

Research finds that between 50% and 85% of new mother can experience some form of the 'baby blues' whilst between 15% and 25% may suffer post-partum depression including psychosis. However, when researchers looked at mothers of Latin American migrant background living in the United States they found almost no incidence of depression, and started to wonder why. They found that in particular women from the Chiapas region of Mexico and rural Guatemala showed no adverse symptoms. Digging deeper they found that these families, who originated from some of the poorest of regions, and arrived to no discernable advantage in their new homes, were thriving through childbirth. Epidemiologists found that these babies were 10% less likely to die in the postnatal period than those born to non-Hispanic, white American women.<sup>3</sup> This 'Latino Paradox' has now been noted many times over the last 25 years and it has also been recognised that in many areas of health beyond childbirth, that Latino migrants are out-performing the host population, regardless of income bracket.

Of course one can't say with blanket certainty that *la cuarentena* will always be effective, and there is even some suggestion that if the 40 days of care are monopolised by the mother-in-law then it may have a negative effect upon the mother<sup>4</sup>. According to Claudia Kolker, in her book *The Immigrant Advantage*<sup>5</sup>, it works best for women who are

confident and have a number of trusting family and non-familial relationship. *La cuarentena* should be a confinement – but not a solitary one.

Inevitably, as migrants are absorbed into host societies, the ties of family and home customs will weaken and so to maintain its efficacy *la cuarentena* will have to adapt. There are signs that this is happening through the growth of the Doula movement, a network of non-medical people who assist mothers and families in the post-childbirth period. Clearly, there has been no equivalent migration of Central American women to Europe (with the minor exception of Spain) so it is not possible to say whether the phenomenon might be repeated here. However, researchers in Britain have found that babies of mothers from the Indian sub-continent have substantially less chance of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) in comparison to White British babies. Several reasons are offered including the use of alcohol and cigarettes, but the researchers also suggest that “South Asian families prioritise close proximity, breast feeding and maternal behaviours congruent with infant health and low SIDS risk as normal cultural practice”.<sup>6</sup>

## Diversity and the Bottom Line

*The fact that all my colleagues come from different backgrounds and cultures is crucial in the realm of ideas. The engineering of a concept is a lot easier because each person shows a different emotion as to what's being presented. This means the Germans may react one way, while the English or Irish say this is junk. Maybe the Turkish lady likes it, but the Sri Lankan doesn't.*<sup>7</sup>

So says Edgar van Ommen, who was at the time managing director of Sony's Berlin operation. He admits it's not always easy when you recruit diverse teams of people into high pressure roles demanding constant innovation and inventiveness. These are passionate people who will argue their corner, but he knows that for those managers with the courage and skill to ride out these storms, the prize can be remarkable new ideas and products.

This is the classic understanding of diversity advantage in which high performing companies operating in knowledge-rich markets and overcome cultural barriers to recruit diverse talent from across the world, and hothouse it to engineer creative 'explosions'. It's a model that has served Silicon Valley well and now many imitators too.

But there are other ways of doing it. In Copenhagen the city government and business chiefs seek the economic diversity dividends too, but they see it within the broader context of social and cultural integration. Human Shojaee, Director of the Association for New Danes says that:

*Diversity has the potential for economic growth and increased productivity because diverse teams have better problem solving skills. Diverse teams have less absenteeism and also higher employee satisfaction and loyalty.*

But he knows that to achieve the full potential of the economic diversity dividend it must be rooted in a sympathetic city environment:

*Diversity also makes a more open-minded city. It offers a variety of possibilities and experiences for citizens that makes it attractive to stay and live in Copenhagen.*<sup>8</sup>

Under the banner of "Engage in Copenhagen", the city is collaborating with the Association of New Danes and Innoversity Copenhagen to recruit private companies in the new program: INNOGROWTH via Diversity. 30 private companies have been engaged to undertake an investigation of how diversity can be used as a way of increasing innovation and productivity within the organization. Copenhagen is making an effort to involve stakeholders from all over the city to engage in the city's diversity and view it as a strength not an obstacle. The challenge is to make people realize that recruiting more diverse employees can be a way out of the current economic crisis.

One such company is Vopium, a high-growth technology firm at the leading edge of internet telecommunications and a rival to Skype. It was founded by Tanveer Sharif, a new Dane of Pakistani extraction and is managed by an ethnically mixed

team. Tanveer's conceptual breakthrough arose when he realised how difficult it was for his mother in Denmark to communicate with her relatives in Pakistan. Vopium now offers a cheap and simple way for people to communicate over limitless distance, and over a million people in 49 countries have installed the software. Also his cultural connections with South Asia enabled him to attract an investment package of \$16.5 million from the Indian investor Raghuvinder Kataria.

But another feature of the Danish approach is to demonstrate that the diversity advantage is not limited to the sexier high-tech end of the business world.

Take ISS a Danish facilities management company. It was founded in 1901 to provide security and expanded into cleaning and other aspects of running premises, with a current annual turnover of over €10

billion and over half a million employees around the world. ISS has made a particular point of recruiting diverse teams to deliver its cleaning and facilities management services.

PwC conducted a study of how these diverse teams perform within ISS's Danish operation, and found that they earn 3.7 percentage points more for the company than non-diverse teams. With a turnover 495 million euros this produced almost €35 million in extra earnings. Furthermore, the Danish government's Agency for Research and Innovation has published a report demonstrating that diversity within an organization enhances the chances of it being innovative by up to 30%.<sup>9</sup>

So even at the apparently mundane and low-skill end of the market there are rich rewards for those prepared to seek the diversity advantage.



Figure 1 One of ISS's facilities management teams

### Care is more than a Commodity

With all the talk of immigration limited to whether or not they are an economic boon, it is easy to forget that there are sometimes things that are even more important than money. To quote the NYPD's Detective Kojak: *Who loves ya baby?*

Kobota-san, the owner of a largish nursing home for elderly people in urban Japan, talks about the reasons she employs Filipino women in her organisation:

*The Filipinos I have met are really good at communication. If you want me to give you my opinion of the Japanese now they are like robots. That is why the Filipinas are so good at caring. They have love towards the family. Their love is their starting point. They look*

*after other families' elderly as they would look after their own.<sup>10</sup>*

I heard a similar sentiment from Kumiko Sakamoto who runs the Aidensha organisation in Suzuka City<sup>11</sup>. She assists migrants of Filipino, Indonesian and South American background with the language and other skills they need to prepare themselves for building long-term professional careers in the burgeoning Japanese care industry. She could have said that what these migrants bring which is of such value to the Japanese is their 'affective capital', but she put it more succinctly:

*Many Japanese people have forgotten the feeling of human warmth. My ladies bring them cuddles.<sup>12</sup>*



Figure 2 Trainee care workers at Aidensha

After decades of growth, the Japanese population has peaked and now Japan is staring down the barrel of an alarmingly steep demographic decline, accompanied by a rapid ageing of the population. The Japanese Health Ministry estimates the nation's total population will fall by 25% from 127.8 million in 2005, to 95.2 million by 2050. Japan's elderly population, aged 65 or older, comprised 20% of the nation's population in 2006, a percentage that is forecast to increase to 38% by 2055.<sup>13</sup> So not only is Japan facing a massive growth in the need for care workers, and a decline in working age Japanese but, as Kubiko and Sakamoto testify, many Japanese are just not cut out to give the kind of care that people really need and want – whereas people of other cultural backgrounds are.

Some might observe that Japan has sometimes had a less-than-healthy interest in the 'services' available from the females of neighbouring lands. During the war Japan forcibly abducted hundreds of thousands of 'comfort women' to give sexual services to the army. In more recent years there has been a common practice of Filipino women entering Japan to work in the 'entertainment industry' (often a euphemism for prostitution); as well as large numbers who have become mail-order brides for single Japanese men. Such practices have been severely curtailed since 2005 when Japan, under pressure from the USA, reformed its Immigration Act. Whilst Japan is far from alone in bearing responsibility for people-trafficking, it is perhaps most interesting for the way it has responded, under the severe influence of its demographic crisis.

Since 2005 Japan has signed Economic Partnership Agreements with the Philippines and Indonesia opening up new and better regulated routes for economic migration, closing the door on hostesses and opening it to trained and qualified workers, particularly nurses. This has enabled the growth of a highly-regulated social care system at a time when indigenous labour shortage were encouraging policy-makers to turn to ever more extreme solutions such as the mass-production of 'care robots'.<sup>14</sup>

But as we have already seen, not only are many Japanese uneasy with the prospect of being cared for by automatons, but also dislike the increasingly robotic demeanour which regulation and economics imposes upon many Japanese care workers. Foreign workers seem to be able to retain their warmth and humanity and this is a quality of enormous attraction in Japan at the moment. The media is now full of stories about how the younger generation of Japanese are in danger of moving towards more solitary lives of sexual abstinence and of alienation from the corporeal in favour of the virtual<sup>15</sup>.

So whilst on the face of it, the growth in migrant care workers in Japan might seem rather commonplace in the wider context of global migration, in the current Japanese circumstance this is clearly a story of diversity advantage.

As another care home manager Nagata-san comments, Japan has operated on a national myth of self-reliance and an ability to overcome every obstacle through ingenuity and hard work, but *“the time has come to ask others to come and help”*. And this is not simply a question of numbers of bodies and economics, as it is usually expressed in the West, but of a deeper more existential hole that needs to be filled. The Japanese talk of *omoiyari* (compassion) and *yasashisa* (kindness to others) as being at the heart of their relationship with foreign care workers.

Of course the bad old ways and attitudes of the past will not die overnight, and there is still much which is one-sided and exploitative about Japan’s relationship with migrant workers, there is no doubt that a more fundamental change is at play. And somehow it feels much more heartfelt and honest than the insistence in many parts of the west that migration is no more than a financial transaction. Even so Sakamoto-san is well aware of the wider opportunities that are presented to Japan by opening up to the wider world:

*We recognise that from the efforts of one group of people, we can form connections and cooperate with people from all walks of life and from all different parts of the world. To that end, we should treat the advancement of interculturalism as an important thing for Japanese society<sup>16</sup>.*

### **So who's the big cheese around here?**

There’s nothing as Italian as Parmesan is there? Except perhaps Mozzarella. As such the EU has awarded these famous cheese brands the Protected Designation of Origin and Protected Geographical Indication to acknowledge that they are products which are pure, unadulterated, of the highest quality and irrevocably linked with the Italian terrain with which they have always been associated. The designations are based upon the ‘where’ and the ‘how’ of food production but they don’t have anything to say about the ‘who’. Which is fortunate, as they are increasingly less reliant upon the handiwork of Italians for their creation but, rather, of a group of people originating from the Punjab in India.

*“We certainly owe it to the Sikhs for keeping the business of cheese alive”*, says Aldo Cavagnoli, director general of the gigantic Latteria Sorsenia factory which processes the milk of 200 farms, the majority of them run and staffed by Sikhs.

The first Sikhs came in response to Italy’s generous asylum laws after the suppression of the Punjabi uprising by the Indian government in the 1980s. This was just at the time that Italians were starting to leave the food production industries that have given the world such popular and resonant brands.

The mayor of Pessina Cremones Dalido Malaggi echoes Cavognoli, saying the Sikhs *“saved an economy that would have gone to the dogs”*.<sup>17</sup>

Food is a complex matter because it is deeply connected with issues of local and national identity, not least in Italy. In 2009 the city of Lucca issued a ban on the sale of kebabs and other ‘foreign foods’ on its streets. The then Italian minister of agriculture applauded the decision as a legitimate defence of Italian culture. Others responded that key components of Italian cuisine such as pasta and tomatoes came from as far away as China and Peru, but Zaia was adamant that there was something which made them intrinsically Italian.

No-one has recorded the views of Signor Zaia upon the role that Sikhs have played in rescuing the intrinsic Italian-ness of Parmigiano-Reggiano, but one must assume that he would be grateful. Which all makes it rather unfortunate that fellow politicians of his Liga Nord party have strongly resisted the opening of Sikh gurdwara temples in towns which they control, and have also argued against the national recognition of Sikhism as a legitimate religion.

Meanwhile the Sikh have quietly continued to get on with on with the business of rescuing north Italian food production, now also playing an important role in such iconic brands as Parma ham and Lambrusco wine.<sup>18</sup>

Every culture has some traditions it would like to keep and others it lets go. Often when a treasured tradition is faced with threat, it is easy to pin the blame upon outside forces – and the easiest scapegoat is the migrant. But Italian cheese is threatened by

tendencies within the Italians themselves, and it has needed the intervention of outsiders to stabilise an

ancient tradition which almost slipped through their fingers.



Figure 3 Dilbagh Singh and family at their milking parlour in Cremona

### Saving the Village

Not too far away from the Sikh milking parlours of Lombardy lies a small community in the suburbs of Turin. The majority of the people living there are migrants too, yet they needed to cross no international border nor learn a new language. That is because they all came from a small village in the impoverished south of Italy to find work in Turin's booming industries. The place they left behind is called Riace which might by now have been consigned to the growing list of abandoned and dead villages in Calabria. But Riace lives and is thriving thanks to foreign immigrants, and the actions of one remarkable man.

Mayor Domenico Lucano first encountered refugees when a group of desperate Kurds tumbled out of a ramshackle boat onto a beach near Riace. Since then the region (and the nearby island of Lampedusa) have become inseparable from heart-rending images of

people making the risky sea journey from north Africa in search of a new life. Sadly we have also seen many of them warehoused into prison-like detention centres, and of thugs and mafia gangs terrorising those who try to make a living in the local fruit-picking industry.

But Lucano thought there must be a better way. If migration had brought Riace to the brink of extinction, then maybe it could bring it back from it too. He looked at Riace's empty houses, ateliers and shops and decided they needed people in them, and it didn't matter whether they were Calabrian or Eritrean, Syrian or Nigerian. By creatively re-using the government funds which are used to sustain refugees whilst they waste time in the camps, he has enabled many migrants to train in new skills or to develop those they already have. The village now buzzes with artisans such as the Afghan women who is taking up the regional craft of glass-making or the Nigerian

embroiderer who has learned skills passed down from local nuns. They receive €800 a month from the Italian state to support them in their activities. The village has even created its own currency (or tokens whose value is linked to the Euro), with pictures of Gandhi, Che Guevara and Martin Luther King, which migrants can use whilst they wait for Italy's turgid bureaucracy to respond to the need for subsidy.

We should be under no rose-coloured illusion about Riace. It is still very much a work in progress and many of the refugees who arrive there are merely

sojourners with a longer-term ambition of moving to northern Europe. And the sustainability of the local economy still rests heavily upon subsidy. But 200 new people have chosen to make it their permanent residence and the place where they want to start a family and a business and, in the context of Italy's chronically shrinking Mezzogiorno, this is remarkable. It represents a confident alternative to both the hand-wringing impotence and aggressive fortress mentality, which have become Europe's default positions in regards to migration of late.



Figure 4 Riace by Vincent Capman, Riva Press

### Saving your Money

The Global Financial Crisis of 2007/8 made everyone starkly aware that the economic system that had sustained the developed world for decades was not only inherently very risky but might prove to be wholly unsustainable. In particular it warned us that growth sustained by enormous levels of corporate and personal debt can trigger calamitous repercussions across the system. Between 1995 and 2007, the overall stock of household debt in the EU expanded almost three times, while in countries with significant real-estate expansion, such as in Ireland or Spain, the debt expanded as much as six-fold.

One of the most worrying outcomes of the crisis is that large numbers of Europeans are living under the shadow of massive private debt, and are currently being kept out of personal bankruptcy by government subsidy of the banks and of interest rates, and in 2012 the average European's stock of personal debt exceeded their total disposable income. In certain countries this ratio of debt to disposable income was alarmingly high such as Denmark (264%), Ireland (179%), Sweden (175%) the UK (165%) and the Netherlands (159%). Also, in Britain, Italy or Greece, the stock of credit card debt increased more than five times during the ten years before the crisis.<sup>19</sup>



Meanwhile, if the banks or credits card companies threaten to foreclose on people, there are always lenders of last resort in the form of usurers, both legal and illegal. Since the crisis there has been an enormous growth in usury, or what is otherwise known as the 'payday lending industry', particularly in the UK. Wonga, the aggressive market leader, reported profits of £84M in 2012, which it achieves by making its 1.25 million lenders liable to an annual percentage rate for of up to 5,853% interest!

Only 14 of the EU Member States have any form of ceiling to cap such rates and usury does not even figure as a concept in the criminal and/or the civil codes of seven states.<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile, no-one knows, or dares to ask, what misery is now being caused by the utterly illegal but very widespread activities of 'loan sharks' in Europe's poorer neighbourhoods. In short, protection for individuals is patchy at best.

All of which might lead one to ponder that if there were other more reliable and less extortionate forms of money-lending available then it might be doing the citizens of Europe a considerable service. Immigrants are people who know times of great financial strain and uncertainty, as well as the experience of being excluded from mainstream financial services. So it should come as no surprise that in many immigrant communities you will find arrangements designed to enable both the collective and the individual to thrive. Known as *Hui* by the Vietnamese, *Ekub* by Ethiopians, *Susu* by Ghanaians and *Tontine* by South Asians these loan clubs operate on the basis that each member pays a regular sum and then each in turn has the chance to withdraw a large amount for some personal need. Traditionally it has been the best way to save for the purchase of a house or a business but it also reinforces bonds of trust and loyalty within communities who don't feel secure within their environment. Although most of it goes on beneath the radar, national tax authorities have tended to turn a blind eye so long as no-one charges interest or makes a profit.

These Rotating Savings and Credit Association (ROSCA) or money pools are held together by a complex web of peer group pressure and a delight in social interaction.<sup>21</sup> Their success relies on the maintenance of shame and fear of loss-of-face to

ensure everyone continues to pay in and pay back. Some might say that it is the loss of shame that has enabled first the recent bank scandals and then the rise of companies like Wonga in the mainstream economy.

Of course wherever money changes hands there is always the potential of crime and immigrant loan clubs have not been immune, with several scandals around the world, but these pale into insignificance beside the scams that have emerged within the mainstream banking industry of late. However, it should be noted that one of the most celebrated and honourable banks in the world – Grameen – was launched by Muhammed Yunus with a loan from a tradition revolving fund. In Britain the attempts by Irish and Caribbean immigrants to create loan clubs in the 1960s has led to a large and active Credit Union sector.<sup>22</sup>

There is no reason why such clubs should be limited to people of a single ethnicity or an immigrant background. Surely at a time when millions of Europeans face the threat of house repossession or of rapacious commercial lenders, there is something to be learnt from the immigrants who so successfully built an alternative structure.

## There Goes the Neighbourhood

The way we live together says a lot about us. For centuries most Europeans and Americans lived in tight-knit rural or urban communities with work, school, shops and leisure activities all close at hand. But, with mass production, rising prosperity and the motor car it became possible for people live at greater distance from things – and from each other. The suburb and eventually urban sprawl was born, and all manner of social and personal ills are now being laid at its door. We are now apparently less sociable than in the past; more susceptible to 'diseases of affluence' such as obesity and diabetes; and of greater anxieties and fears about strangers and each other. Such lifestyles are also much less sustainable in an age of finite resources of energy, clean air and raw materials.

Politicians and urban planners are lately picking up on a message first articulated by Jane Jacobs over 50

years ago - that close-knit but diverse neighbourhoods built to a walkable scale and with lots of intimate public space are what suit we humans best.<sup>23</sup> Jacobs inspired the now-burgeoning movement of 'new urbanism' and 'smart growth' with architects and urban designers dreaming up ever more clever and attractive alternatives.<sup>24</sup>

However, you could argue that what the urbanism profession has had to painfully and expensively relearn over past decades is something that many immigrant communities never forgot – the art of living together. Almost unnoticed, and sometime disdained, immigrants have discretely shaped some of the least desirable parts of Western cities – because that's all that was left to them when the hosts upped-sticks and left – and made them into something new (but based upon something very old).

The best-articulated example of this phenomenon is coming to be known as 'Latino Urbanism' and can be seen in an increasing number of American cities. According to architect James Rojas, its key distinguishing features are the practice of street vending, sidewalks used as plazas, making fences into points of social interaction, and the use of murals and other forms of DIY activity to individualise buildings or to tell cultural stories about the neighbourhood.<sup>25</sup>

So whereas traditional American households might have a long lawn or a car-parking space leading up to their door – thus creating a gulf over which it is difficult to create social contact, the Latino alternative would bring the social space all the way down to the sidewalk, by creating a porch or a stoop, and filling the space with points of interest or conversation-starters (see pictures overleaf).

Mario Chavez-Marquez lives in the downtown district of Santa Ana, California, a place which was dying in

the 1990s but which has now been revived by Latino urban dwelling. He says:

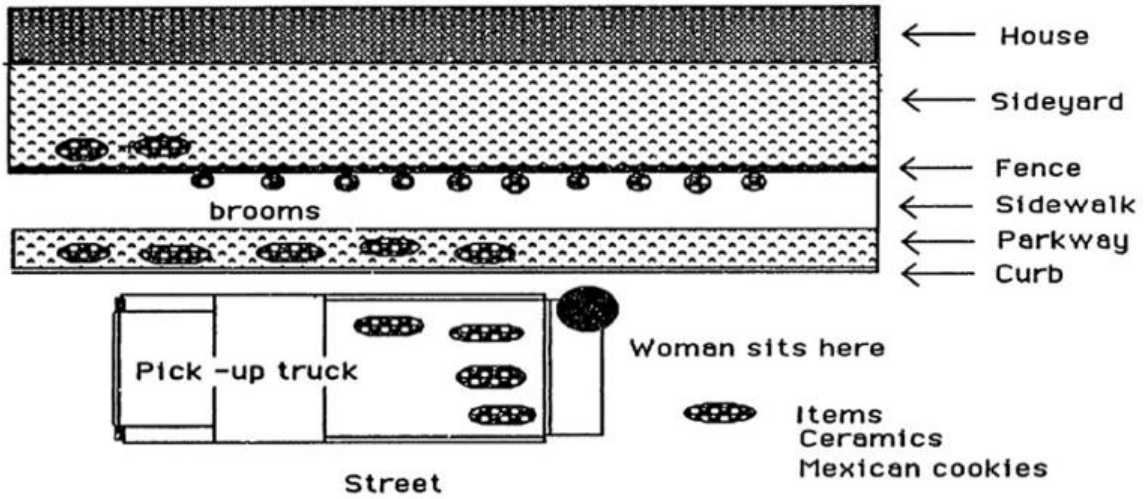
*I grew up in Mexico. We had a traditional urban square and plaza where everything is happening. To me it made sense to move to the center, closer to my job. Now I can walk to the supermarket.*

His wife Karyn grew up in a mainly white suburb of Chicago but is now happy to walk only two blocks to her job as a social worker. In their spare time they run a gallery from their home which exhibits art works directly onto the street.

Because it doesn't always follow the uniform dictates of town planning codes, Latino urban sensibility can sometimes come into conflict with the authorities. But in California and Texas in particular the lifestyle is becoming so prevalent that it is asking serious questions of the underlying principles of Western rationalist planning practice. As Dowell Myers, a demographer at the University of Southern California observes:

*Who's to say Latino new urbanism should be just for Latinos? Maybe it's a general mode for the whole region.*<sup>26</sup>

Maybe indeed. As anthropologist Dean Saitta points out it would be wrong to assume that such tendencies are limited to the Latino community resident in the United States<sup>27</sup>. There are many new forms of 'syncretic vernacular' springing up to reflect not only the diversity of our communities but also the ingenuity of the human spirit to reject the uniformity and inhospitableness of the standardized urban rationalism imposed upon us over the last few decades.



### Shifting Threshold

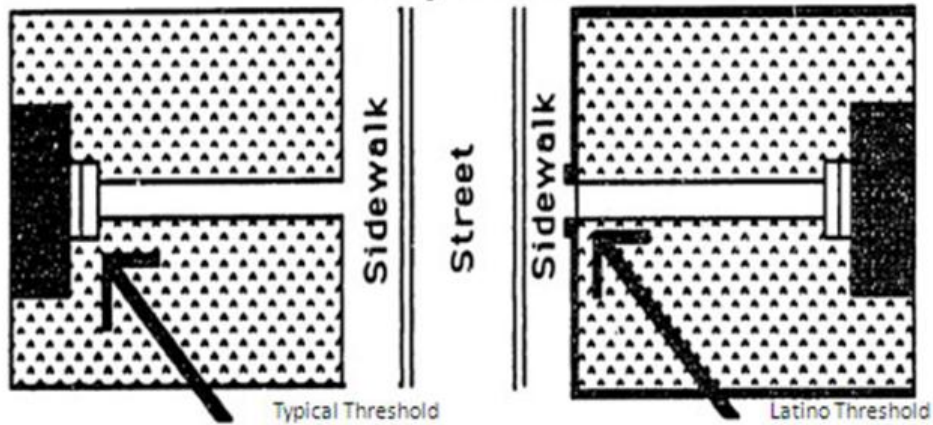


Figure 5 Configurations of Latino Urbanism according to James Rojas

## Happy Families

Do not make the mistake of assuming that this is only of relevance to the minority because we may be seeing here true examples of diversity advantage. In other words many minorities are acting as urban pioneers on behalf of the majority by experimenting with new lifestyles which are better suited to current realities. For example, the dominant form of dwelling in the minds of public planners and commercial developers alike is still designed and built with the nuclear family in mind. But the husband, wife and two kids scenario may already be history. Right under our noses there is now a serious return of the *multi-generational family* with kids, parents and grandparents all sharing the same roof. In the US, over half the population is now living in such households, compared to only a quarter in 1970.<sup>28</sup> This is partly out of necessity with costs for private childcare and elderly care becoming prohibitive, and with young adults unable to find work or a place of their own, it makes financial sense for families to club together. But it is also argued that the separation of generations was merely an aberration of the Baby Boomers and that the multi- household will revert to being our default:

*(The Boomers') system breaks down with the onslaught of their retirement... We are just now starting to understand the substantial fiscal and psychological costs of separating the generations into so-called single family homes.*<sup>29</sup>



Once again there are many immigrant and minority families for whom this is no surprise at all – it is proven to be the thing that has always worked best



for them.<sup>30</sup> Claudia Kolker argues that when Jamaican and other West Indian migrants arrived in the United States they lived with their extended family both as a survival tool, but also with a loftier economic goal. House ownership was their priority and, through pooling resources, fully 60% have achieved that goal, which is significantly higher than other immigrant groups. Kolker asked Jamaican sociologist David Cort the obvious question:

*How do adults live parents or siblings without driving each other crazy?*

He answered

*A lot of it has to do with a framework of helping each other that is brought over from the home country. Americans think of kids as adults at twenty one. But for Jamaicans adulthood starts earlier. By the time they're college age, kids are partners in a longer-term strategy to pool expenses and get as much education as possible. Children learn deferred gratification".*

Kolker argues that in order to make it work, Jamaicans have had to learn the art of compromise.

Maybe that's something we could all do with more of.

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**31/12/13**

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## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> 'What We Know Now' by Restless Heart. Lyrics © Warner/Chappell Music inc.
- <sup>2</sup> Recent mother quoted by Kathleen Wendall-Tuckett in *How Other Cultures Prevent Postpartum Depression: Social Structures That Protect New Mothers' Mental Health*. Accessed at [http://www.uppitysciencechick.com/how\\_other\\_cultures.pdf](http://www.uppitysciencechick.com/how_other_cultures.pdf)
- <sup>3</sup> Hummer, R et al (2007) *Paradox Found (Again): Infant Mortality Among the Mexican-Origin Population in the United States*. *Demography* 44/3, pp 441-457.
- <sup>4</sup> Waugh, L (2011) *Beliefs associated with Mexican immigrant families' practice of la cuarentena during postpartum recovery*. *Journal of Obstetrics Gynecology & Neonatal Nursing*, 40/6, pp 732-41.
- <sup>5</sup> Kolker, C (2011) 'How to Mother a Mother: The Mexican Cuarentena', in *The Immigrant Advantage*. New York, Free Press.
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- <sup>9</sup> Download the report (in Danish) at <http://www.dk.issworld.com/da-DK/samfundsansvar/vores-medarbejdere/mangfoldighed/Mangfoldighed-bundlinjen>
- <sup>10</sup> Lopez, Mario (2012) *Reconstituting the affective labour of Filipinos as care workers in Japan*. *Global Networks*, 12/2, pp 252-268.
- <sup>11</sup> <http://aidenenglish.wix.com/english>
- <sup>12</sup> From an interview with the author
- <sup>13</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aging\\_of\\_Japan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aging_of_Japan)
- <sup>14</sup> Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has allocated 2.39bn yen in the 2013 budget to develop robots to help with care: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-24949081>
- <sup>15</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/dec/27/japan-men-sexless-love>
- <sup>16</sup> From an interview with the author
- <sup>17</sup> See New York Times *In Italian Heartland, Indians Keep the Cheese Coming* <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/08/world/europe/08iht-italy08.html?pagewanted=all>
- <sup>18</sup> See also *Curry Parmesan: Sikhs rescue Italy's famous cheese* <http://www.sikhnet.com/video/curry-parmesan-sikhs-rescue-italys-famous-cheese>
- <sup>19</sup> Chmelar, A (2013) *Household Debt and the European Crisis*. Paper presented at the ECRI Conference, 16 May 2013 organised by the European Credit Research Institute and the Centre for European Policy Studies
- <sup>20</sup> iff/ZEW (2010): *Study on interest rate restrictions in the EU*. Final Report for the EU Commission DG Internal Market and Services, Project No. ETD/2009/IM/H3/87, Brussels/Hamburg/Mannheim.
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- <sup>24</sup> For example the Council for European Urbanism <http://www.ceunet.org/> and Project for Public Space <http://www.pps.org/>
- <sup>25</sup> *Out Of The Enclave: Latinos Adapt, And Adapt To, The American City* by Josh Stephens. <http://www.planetizen.com/node/35091>
- <sup>26</sup> 'New urbanism' embraces Latinos By Haya El Nasser, USA TODAY. [http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/nation/2005-02-15-latinos-usat\\_x.htm](http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/nation/2005-02-15-latinos-usat_x.htm)
- <sup>27</sup> <http://www.interculturalurbanism.com/?p=343>
- <sup>28</sup> *The Return of the Multi-Generational Family Household*. Pew Research Center. (2010) <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2010/03/18/the-return-of-the-multi-generational-family-household/>
- <sup>29</sup> Niederhaus, S & Graham, J (2007) *Together Again: A Creative Guide to Successful Multigenerational Living*. Plymouth. Rowman & Littlefield.
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