

# TAMBAYAN PUBLIC SPACES IN SUBURBIA FROM FILIPINO-CANADIAN PERSPECTIVES

/tam. 'ba.jan/ [Filipino] "a place for hanging out"

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## ABOUT THE RESEARCH

Suburban public spaces are important resources that allow people to exercise, partake in recreational activities, and socialize. However, research has shown that public park design is heavily influenced by European culture. Thus, public parks can sometimes alienate users who may come from other cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Moreover, in suburban Canada, research suggests ethnic populations are excluded from planning decisions, resulting in tensions stemming from incompatible uses and space usage that attracts municipal opposition. This research aimed to understand how immigrants from one of Canada's largest ethnic minorities, Filipinos, use and appreciate public spaces in suburban Canada through a focus group and key informant interviews. Two suburban neighbourhoods with high concentrations of Filipino residents were selected as study sites. The neighbourhoods selected are Lawrence Heights in Toronto and The Maples in Winnipeg. Two youth settlement caseworkers served as key informants in Toronto, while three first-generation Filipino-Canadians shared their thoughts through a focus group in Winnipeg. The focus group and interviews revealed how public spaces played an important role in how Filipino immigrants adjusted to life in Canada. This research uncovered an important finding that Filipino immigrants' perspectives on public spaces are shaped by their cultural expectations and social norms. Among the Filipinos interviewed, personal connections to a specific space play an important role in determining the 'publicness' of spaces.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Why are many Filipino immigrants selecting suburban neighbourhoods over urban centres?
2. What places do Filipinos consider to be public spaces? How are these spaces used by Filipinos and what improvements, if any, can they suggest to better suit their needs?
3. How can the findings from this study help diverse neighbourhoods become more inclusive?

## KEY FINDINGS

**The presence of large Filipino communities in suburbs like the Maples and Lawrence Heights attracts newcomers.** Conversations in both neighbourhood revealed that the presence of Filipino communities in both areas is an attractive draw for would-be residents.

### **Community needs take precedence over personal needs in public spaces**

When asked "what improvements can they suggest to make public spaces better suit their needs?" respondents in Toronto and Winnipeg both expressed concern for seniors in their area. Considering that none of the study participants are seniors, this is an interesting finding which reflects their concern for the vulnerable populations in the area.

### **Private ownership of a space does not influence their perception on whether a place is public or private.**

Perceived public spaces ranged from community/publicly-owned spaces such as community centres, basketball courts, and parks, to privately owned places like malls, ice cream shops, cafes, among others.

### **Tambayans are considered as "happy places" by some and "safe spaces" by others**

The results from the focus group in Winnipeg and the key informant interviews in Toronto revealed how tambayans affect their ability to socialize and interact with the broader Canadian society. In Lawrence Heights, settlement caseworkers reported how tambayans were seen as safe spaces by the immigrant youth. Gathering in these spaces became coping mechanism that created communities of affirmation, care, and belonging. Similarly, in the Maples, respondents shared feelings of happiness when they were asked to describe the tambayans in their area. Additionally, the Maples respondents said tambayans played an important role in helping them make friends and adjust to life in Canada.

### **Defining public spaces in diverse neighbourhoods**

Findings from this research indicate how difficult it is to define public spaces. Additionally, this research indicates how people's understanding of public places can be reimaged by inviting new forms and uses based on ideas shared by ethnic populations. Additionally, the study reflects how adding parks as default public spaces in diverse areas may not be the best and most practical use of public spaces.

## CONCLUSION

This research sheds light on why people's understanding of public spaces. The research critically examined how public spaces do not reflect the needs of Filipino immigrants. The research aims to start a conversation in how public spaces can be reimaged by inviting new forms and uses for these spaces. Adding parks as default public spaces in areas with populations with different understanding and appreciation of public spaces may not be the best use and practical use of that space. The conversations with Filipino immigrants in Winnipeg and caseworkers in Toronto demonstrate the importance and complexity of public spaces for immigrants. Without actually having ownership of these spaces, the youth in Toronto and the respondents in Winnipeg were still able to carve spaces in a foreign land as their own by making personal connections to these spaces.

