

# Cultural Networks and Neighborhood Development: The relationship between grassroots artists, community formation and urban development

**AYURG** | Social Sciences and Journalism (SSJ) | *Tags: Interviews; Fieldwork*

*This cover page is meant to focus your reading of the sample proposal, summarizing important aspects of proposal writing that the author did well, or could have improved on. **Review the following sections before reading the sample.** The proposal is also annotated throughout to highlight key elements of the proposal's structure and content.*



Proposal Strengths	Areas for Improvement
The location being studied was explicitly justified through reviewing past work that has been done in similar places, and by showing how the study location connects to the research question.	
Proposal demonstrates a clear gap in knowledge and justifies why it should be filled through the proposed research.	
The methods are framed around spaces where the author has a demonstrable proof of contact, and it also identifies further spaces that would help to explore the research aims. Author also addresses access to these spaces.	The relationship between art, gentrification, and urban change is mentioned, but it is not clear why this relationship is important. Including a sentence about the relationship would show the importance of this project more broadly.
The two methods mentioned are justified individually in terms of how they help to answer the research question.	



Other Key Features to Take Note Of
If you are proposing a study that is a continuation from previous work, you must focus the proposal on how your new study will build upon what was established by your work and other's work.
The URG committee cannot fund speculative work, meaning, the researcher needs to demonstrate clear goals and a specific plan for the places and people they plan to study. Things can change on the ground, and many methods allow for a researcher to have flexibility to change based on what is found. This flexibility is a core part of any type of research, but in a proposal, you have to put forth a plausible plan of action, even if it might be adjusted slightly when things happen "on the ground".
AYURG proposals require IRB submission at time of application; you will need to enter the IRB number during the application process. Please see the Human Subjects Research section of our website for additional details.
All Academic Year URGs require a budget. There is no required format; however, we do provide a template on our website. The scope of the proposal should focus on what the funding covers.

Local artistic spaces and producers contribute to creating narratives of place and patterns of urban development, investment, and neighborhood attention. Ample research has shown a relationship between art, gentrification, and urban change. However, little research has scrutinized the dynamics between grassroots artistic spaces and practices and urban development. I plan to study the overlapping do-it-yourself (DIY) and Latinx oriented artistic networks in the Chicago neighborhood of Pilsen. As a culturally vibrant Latinx neighborhood undergoing gentrification pressures for multiple decades, Pilsen serves as an ideal site to study the relationship between art and urban change. By focusing on DIY and Latinx art spaces, I will research how smaller, grassroots art organizations understand their role in the neighborhood and articulate their goals and artistic practices in connection to urban development. I will use ethnographic methods, including participant observation in art spaces and in-depth interviews with artists to investigate the local art scene. This project will serve as my senior thesis in sociology, build on summer research I conducted with a SURG in Pilsen and expand my research experience in preparation for pursuing a Ph.D. in sociology.

I have strategically selected to study the community of Pilsen, a historically Mexican-American, working class neighborhood that has been undergoing gentrification since the end of the 20th century. I spent the summer of 2017 investigating how the visual environment of Pilsen serves as a manifestation of contesting identities and competing interpretations of neighborhood space with a SURG. During that investigation, I learned that Pilsen contains an array of social actors and cultural stakeholders in the form of artistic networks who cooperate in the shared interest of producing art (Becker 1982). I identified and classified cultural stakeholders into five artistic networks, two of which being DIY and Latinx networks. Working at a grassroots level, these two networks have the most limited access to economic and institutional resources, yet significantly contributed to the local art scene and participated in community organizing.

Local art infrastructure has been shown to have an influential role in shaping patterns of urban development and community composition. In New York and Chicago at the end of the 20th century, the growing status of art, artists and artistic spaces contributed to the transformation of working class spaces into middle class locales. (Lloyd 2010; Osman 2011; Zukin 1988). Local art infrastructure can also influence neighborhoods when art and ethnic traditions, festivals and symbols create narratives of place that influence the types and extent of investment neighborhoods receive. (Hwang and Sampson 2014; Wherry 2011). Different neighborhood stakeholders use local culture to advance their own agendas. Business owners use art to promote economic revitalization and promote branding and events to gain capital (Chen et al. 2016; Wherry 2011). State and local governments look to the art world to provide service sector jobs, political support, donations, and tax deductions (Zukin 1988). Residents and communities use art as social and cultural capital, to provide entertainment, education, unity and self-expression (Davila 2012; Seifert & Stern 2017). Through these mechanisms, local art and culture can empower and/or disenfranchise residents and artists (Gram 2012).

Despite the myriad roles of art in urban contexts, local, grassroots artists and spaces are often excluded from discussions about urban sociology, development, and urban policy (Fine et al. 2016; Davila 2012). Urban sociology has focused on “growth machine” politics and descriptions of urban poverty, rather than bottom-up empowerment processes (Fine et al. 2016). Art funding favors larger organizations located in the urban core rather than local arts infrastructure (Center for Cultural Innovation 2016; Davila 2012; Seifert & Stern 2017; Zukin 1988). Research often associates artists with institutional actors, thus failing to take into account the full range of “cultural creatives” contributing to the local cultural scenes (Davila 2012; Lloyd 2010; Wherry 2011). In small minority communities, the social, personal and political implications of artistic activities are often neglected when studies emphasize the economic impact of art (Davila 2012). More research is needed to understand how grassroots art influences local art scenes, urban development and community organizing. I wonder, how do the practices and actions of grassroots DIY and Latinx artists relate to characteristics of the

Great introduction section. Acts as an abstract/movie trailer to describe broad topic and narrowed focus of the project.

Shows how current project builds on past work.

Location is justified in the context of the research questions

Uses more than own past work for background evidence.

Identifies gap(s) in knowledge

Justifies why gap should be filled

neighborhood and the neighborhood's urban political economy? By studying DIY and Latinx art networks, I plan to reinsert neighborhood level art producers, ethnic-cultural activities and spaces into discussions about urban systems.

To empirically answer my research question, I have strategically selected eight DIY and Latinx art spaces for my total sample, and one DIY space and one Latinx art space as in-depth case studies. I selected the DIY space AMFM and the Latinx art space Pilsen Outpost as case studies because they are representative of and organizing centers within the DIY and Latinx art networks. Case studies will allow me to investigate how each organization structures its artistic practice and describes and understands its role in the neighborhood. The additional six art spaces will serve to contextualize the work of AMFM and Pilsen Outpost within a network of similar organizations. I am conducting background information on the eight art spaces using the websites of artistic groups and newspapers to understand their development, scope and publicity. The bulk of my research will focus on ethnographic methods. Ethnography will allow me to analyze the actions of grassroots artists and how they engage with the neighborhood. Almost all selected sites host public art events and post their art on social media. I will be a participant observer at art events hosted by DIY and Latinx artists. Such events include monthly First Friday Art Walks anchored at Pilsen Outpost, gallery openings, AMFM open mics, and special events hosted during the course of the study. At these events, I will keep track of what type of art is presented, where and in what type of space the event occurs, who attends the event, whose work is presented, how the work is presented and any agenda the event seems to have related to neighborhood development. For additional access, I will contact the artists that lead each site by phone/email to arrange to visit the spaces.

I will also conduct in-depth, semi-formal interviews with one DIY and Latinx artist from the six supplementary art spaces and three artists from AMFM and Pilsen Outpost. Interviews will allow me to understand artists' practices, roles in the neighborhood and ideas about community development. I have already conducted some preliminary interviews and, through a snowball sample, collected the contact information of all the artists in my sample. All qualitative data will be thematically coded based on how artists describe their practices, goals, opinions about the neighborhood and ideas about community. This will reveal patterns about how grassroots artists articulate their goals and practices, and engage with the local community and art scene. Additionally, all qualitative data will be supplemented with quantitative data from the University of Illinois Great Cities Institute and census data, which provides demographic characteristics of the neighborhood since 1980. The use of quantitative data will allow me to contextualize the work of local artists within the social and material conditions of the neighborhood. My conclusions will be based on my observations on the structure of art spaces, how artists talk about their work and roles within the context of the neighborhood's development.

I have experience in Pilsen, conducting research and a background in urban and cultural sociology, making this an appropriate research project for me to pursue. As a sociology major, I have taken classes on sociological research methods, and completed a SURG project and a sociology project studying spatial interactions in a local library. I have experience conducting research as a Leopold Fellow in the history department for three years. Professor Gary Alan Fine will guide my research as my thesis advisor. This project also coincides with my enrollment in the sociology thesis seminar with Professor Anthony Chen. I am well positioned to begin the project as, during the summer, I made appropriate contacts within the neighborhood and researched background information on the timing and location of art events. This research project will serve as my senior thesis in sociology and prepare me as I plan to pursue a Ph.D. in sociology.

You don't have to say you are going to pursue a Ph.D. if that is not true for you, but talking about where this research will take you is necessary. The committee is funding both a project and a person, so they want to see why this research matters within your future goals. You only need a sentence or two for future goals.

Justifies case study methodology

Gives two specific examples of strong contacts to illustrate what the work will look like

Justifies ethnography methodology

Addresses access to locations/people

Shows how different types of data that are collected will be complementary in answering the research questions

Specific description of analysis

Mentions previous funding sources by name and additional faculty support

**Appendix:**

**Works cited:**

Becker, Howard. 1982. *Art Worlds*. United States: University of California Press.

Chen, X., Kasnitz, P., & Zukin, S. 2016. *Global cities, local streets: everyday diversity from New York to Shanghai*. New York: Routledge.

Dávila, A. M. 2012. *Culture works: space, value, and mobility across the neoliberal Americas*. New York: New York University Press.

Fine, G. A., Hunter, M., & Loughran, K. (2016). "Urban Spaces, City Cultures and Collective Memoires." In Anna-Lisa Tota and Trever Hagan, Routledge International Handbook of Memory Studies. New York: Routledge.

Gram, D. 2012. *Producing local color: art networks in ethnic Chicago*. United States: University of Chicago Press.

Hwang, J., & Sampson, R. (2014). *Divergent pathways of gentrification: racial inequality and the social order of renewal in Chicago neighborhoods*. *American Sociological Review*, 79(4), 726-751.

Lloyd, R. D. 2010. *Neo-Bohemia: art and commerce in the postindustrial city*. London: Routledge.

National Endowment for the Arts. 2016. *Creativity connects: trends and conditions affecting U.S. artists*. Center for Cultural Innovation.

Osman, S. (2011). *The invention of brownstone Brooklyn: gentrification and the search for authenticity in postwar New York*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

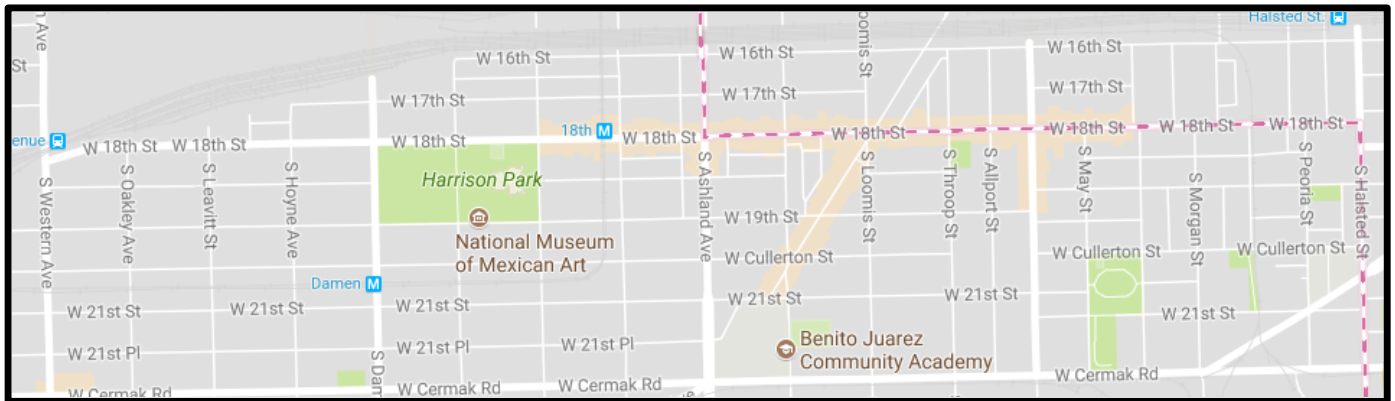
Seifert, S., Stern, M. (2017). *The social wellbeing of New York City's neighborhoods: the contribution of culture and the arts*. *The Social Wellbeing in New York City (2016-16)*. 1.

Wherry, F. F. 2011. *The Philadelphia Barrio: the arts, branding and neighborhood transformation*. United States: University of Chicago Press.

Zukin, S. 1988. *Loft living: culture and capital in urban change*. London: Radius.

**Map:**

My research will focus on the area of Pilsen between South Western Avenue to the East, Halsted Street to the West, 16<sup>th</sup> Street to the North and Cermak Road to the South. This area encompasses the official Chicago Arts District in the Eastern edge of the neighborhood, the less gentrified Western half of the neighborhood, the main commercial corridor along 18<sup>th</sup> Street and the main industrial corridor along Cermak Road.



**Budget:**

Type	Cost	Notes
Materials	\$50	Includes skype credits to record phone calls and physical materials such as notebooks and printing
Entry fees	\$200	Includes entry fees into art and community events
Transportation	\$300	Includes transportation costs to travel between Evanston and Pilsen
Interviews	\$450	Includes cost of goods such as coffee in order to conduct interviews in public locations in the neighborhood and cost of transcription help

## AYURG Application (Fall 2017): Sociology

### Interview Questions:

#### All Artists:

- How would you describe your space and/or practice?
- When did you start working in the art world?
- When did you start working in Pilsen?
  - o Why do you work in Pilsen?
  - o How long have you worked here?
- What is you/your organization's mission? What do you hope to accomplish?
- How do you aim to accomplish these goals?
- How are you/your organization funded?
- How would you describe the community at your art space? The others artists, the people that work here, visitors etc.
  - o How would you like this community to grow and/or change?
- How would you describe the community of Pilsen?
- What role do you believe art plays in Pilsen?
- What other art organizations do you work with in Pilsen/Chicago/Nationally/Globally?
- Does your organization interact with the neighborhood of Pilsen? If so, how?
- Do you host events? If so, please describe them.
  - o Who usually attends these events?
- Do you feel as if you/your organization is successful in Pilsen?
  - o Why or why not?
  - o What would make it more or less successful?
- How do you hope your art is perceived? How to you try to make that perception a reality?
- What are your greatest accomplishments since working in Pilsen?
- What are the biggest obstacles to your/your organization's artistic practice and mission?
- What are your future goals?

#### DIY:

- Explain what it means to be a DIY space?
- Why do you identify as DIY?
- What do you see as the role of DIY spaces?
- What are the advantages of being a DIY space?
- What are the disadvantages of being a DIY space?

#### Latinx:

- What role does your culture play in your artistic practice?
- Do you try to incorporate cultural elements into your artistic practice? If so, how and why?
- What role do you think culture plays in the local community?
- What role does art play in your culture?

#### Supplementary Artists:

- Are you familiar with the work of Pilsen Outpost and/or AMFM?
  - o How would you describe their work?
  - o Do you feel it influences your own practice? If so, how?
  - o Do you feel as if it influences the local art scene? If so, how?
- How is your art space connected to Pilsen Outpost and/or AMFM?
- What role do you think Pilsen Outpost and/or AMFM play in the neighborhood?

#### Case Study Artists:

- How do you relate to other art spaces in the neighborhood?
- How would you describe your role in the local art scene? In relation to other art spaces?

**\*\*Contact details have been removed for the purposes of this sample grant, but were included in the submission**

**List of contact people and organizations:**

- Case Studies:
  - AMFM
    - Gallery and artistic co-working space
    - [First Name, Last Name]  
916-XXX-XXXX  
[info@contactname.com](mailto:info@contactname.com)
  - Pilsen Outpost
    - Gallery and art store hosting community events
    - [First name, Last Name]  
630-XXX-XXXX  
[emailaddress@gmail.com](mailto:emailaddress@gmail.com)
- Supplementary Organizations:
  - Dojo
    - Underground performance space
    - [First name, last name]  
[Skype user name] (skype)  
[emailaddress@gmail.com](mailto:emailaddress@gmail.com)
  - Revolutionary Lemonade Stand
    - Activist business selling hand-made artistic items
    - 773.XXX-XXXX  
[emailaddress@gmail.com](mailto:emailaddress@gmail.com)
  - Bodymilk
    - Cassette label
    - [First name, Last name]  
[emailaddress@gmail.com](mailto:emailaddress@gmail.com)
  - CAPA
    - Art education and engagement organization
    - [First name, Last Name]  
773-XXX-XXXX  
emailaddress@gmail.com
  - Plus Gallery
    - Gallery and community space
    - [First Name, Last Name]  
312-XXX-XXXX  
[emailaddress@plusgallerychicago.com](mailto:emailaddress@plusgallerychicago.com)
  - Tonantzin
    - Community arts and cultural gallery shop
    - 312-XXX-XXXX  
[emailaddress@gmail.com](mailto:emailaddress@gmail.com)

**Currently Scheduled Events:\***

- Art First Friday Gallery Openings, first Friday of every month, Pilsen Outpost
- AMFM Juice open mics, third Thursday of every month
- Plus Gallery Artist Appreciation, Reflection and Launch Party, November 3<sup>rd</sup>
- The Dojo Presents: DIY Townhall + Let's Make a Plan, November 12<sup>th</sup>
- The Dojo Presents: Queendom Come, November 18<sup>th</sup>
- Bodymilk Fat Pigeon Tape Release, November

\*Most events are posted on a shorter term notice