

# EVIDENCE BRIEF

## Tao Po!: Spatial Workings of a Filipino Immigrant Hub

Joyce-Collingwood is a multicultural neighbourhood that many of Vancouver's immigrants call home. Most notably, its clustering of Filipino-run businesses, Filipino-majority Catholic church, and disproportionate share of the Filipino population make it Vancouver's unofficial 'Filipino hub.' Despite its significance to the local community, the neighbourhood is facing a controversial redevelopment plan<sup>1</sup> intended to capitalize on its prime location along the SkyTrain's Expo line. To address residents' concerns about community disruption, planners have integrated childcare centres, immigration services, and community spaces into the plan. Nonetheless, locals worry these amendments are inadequate to retain the life and character of their community. These continued concerns speak to a need to understand this immigrant neighbourhood beyond the mere presence of businesses and services.

These concerns prompt further investigation into what makes an immigrant community function and feel appropriate for its locals. This project engages with Filipino residents and regulars of Joyce-Collingwood to understand how local community spaces facilitate belonging. In this project, I aim to gain deeper insight into the meaning of the neighbourhood to the community, especially across generations. What structural elements create a thriving immigrant-friendly space? More recently, Filipino chain restaurants such as Jollibee have also been popularized. How does the atmosphere at Joyce-Collingwood compare? Overall, I hope these insights can illuminate a path toward culturally-sensitive community planning.

### METHODOLOGY

Eight 60-minute semi-structured interviews were carried out with neighbourhood residents and regulars. All participants identified themselves as Filipino. The sample included three first-generation, two 1.5-generation (individuals who immigrated before early adolescence), and three second-generation immigrants. Recruitment consisted of a mix of posterizing around the neighbourhood businesses and streets and online social media postings in relevant online groups (Joyce neighbourhood groups, Filipino association pages, etc.) Interview questions covered participants' personal histories with the neighbourhood, their regular routines in the neighbourhood, and comparing their experiences in the Joyce-Collingwood neighbourhood and other local Filipino spaces. These 'other' spaces include Filipino chain restaurants, isolated businesses, or churches.

### KEY FINDINGS

- **Authenticity versus "sanitation"** Filipino chain restaurants have become increasingly popular and prevalent in North America. However, interviewees still describe a much more authentic and deeply personal connection to Joyce-Collingwood. The neighbourhood's small local businesses, childhood snacks, and home-cooked dishes contrast with the more "sanitised" Filipino representation they otherwise notice.
- **Authenticity beyond businesses.** The presence of Filipino business alone does not make a Filipino neighbourhood as perceived by local Filipino Canadians. Bustling street life, the experience of sitting in a small cafeteria-style family-run eatery for lunch after church, and the presence of families and seniors on the sidewalks all contribute to the more 'intangible' aspects of 'authenticity' beyond having cultural businesses. Participants note that this population is directly attracted by affordable housing, goods, and services.

- **Appeal across internal division.** Some participants describe feeling connected to Joyce-Collingwood despite not even coming from the same cultural or class backgrounds common to the area's Filipino residents and businesses. Specifically, the businesses are reminiscent of eateries familiar among the working class or students in the Philippines. In this way, the neighbourhood of Joyce-Collingwood arises as a unique symbol of Filipino-Canadian identity that unites an otherwise highly diverse and dispersed immigrant community.
- **Adapting appeal across generations** First-generation respondents report actively seeking out the neighbourhood to buy groceries, build their networks, or find resources and information that become vital in their settlement process. In comparison, second-generation respondents do not seek out the space as actively but nonetheless feel a sense of connection to it and associate it with positive family memories. Some refer to it colloquially as Vancouver's own 'Filipinotown.'
- **Access patterns regular interactions.** Thanks to its SkyTrain station and bus loop, locals pass the area frequently enough for it to become a widely-known place within the community. For newcomers who rely on commuting Joyce-Collingwood is an attractive 'meet-up' spot for friends or 'drop-by' spot for errands. This easy access enables regular contact with the Filipino community that protects against homesickness or loneliness.

## POLICY AND PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS

The story of Joyce-Collingwood's Filipino community calls for a re-evaluation of how city planners conceptualize immigrant neighbourhoods for cultural protection and community planning. Although Filipinos do not make up the majority of Joyce-Collingwood residents in gross numbers, the Canadian census indicates that it houses a disproportionate concentration of Filipinos relative to the rest of the city. For dispersed populations like Filipino Vancouverites, these concentrated hubs of resources and cultural products are vital resource-pooling and social gathering points. Recent changes in residential patterns and integration may make traditional all-inclusive definitions 'immigrant neighbourhoods' where the majority of the immigrant population and businesses are housed in one place (e.g., Chinatowns) less prevalent. In turn, we may expect to see more immigrant 'hubs' like Joyce-Collingwood that are statistically invisible, but are colloquially recognized as 'hubs' by their respective communities.<sup>2</sup>

Additionally this study shows that cultural spaces are far more complex than businesses alone. Rather, they are sustained by adjacent neighbourhood context such as authenticity enabled by affordability, cross-community appeal, and easy access. These neighbourhood features create a routine rhythm that integrates cultural space into daily life. This way, all Filipino Vancouverites from homesick newcomers to Canadian-born Filipinos, can appreciate Joyce-Collingwood as a powerful and steady symbol of who they are.

## THE RESEARCHERS

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## REFERENCES

- 1 City of Vancouver. (2024). Joyce-Collingwood Station Precint Plan (pp. 1-73). City of Vancouver.  
<https://vancouver.ca/files/cov/joyce-collingwood-station-precinct-plan.pdf>
- 2 Vertovec, S., Hiebert, D., Gamlen, A., & Spoonley, P. (n.d.). Superdiversity. <https://superdiv.mmg.mpg.de/#vancouver-national?bubble;filter>Total%20population?map;variables:3,3;mode:traditional?tree;year:2012;category:Humanitarian?sankey;year:1991?dashboard;filters:99,99,99,99,99>